

Nitap Wiguaq:

Personal Stories and Recommendations from Homeless Aboriginal Youth in New Brunswick

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Introduction

Within the pages of this report are the narratives of 63 homeless Aboriginal youth interviewed over the course of two years in New Brunswick[1]. Each one of these 63 youth participated in the project so that you could hear their story. As researchers, we wish you could have sat with us through each interview, to hear the youth tell their stories as they told them. These are 63 people that we will never forget and neither should you. Throughout this project their stories simultaneously sadden and fill us with hope, but also a great sense of pride and responsibility, knowing it was our job to help share their stories with as many people as possible. For many of them their youth years are spent, the system failed them and as a result they spent their precious youth as homeless Aboriginals. Despite this, for the most part, they view their futures as bright, and they want to help make future Aboriginal youth lives even brighter.

We begin the report[2] with a quote from a letter one of the youth participants wrote to us.

> "To Whom It May Concern; I am writing you this letter to tell you about my experience with homelessness. First of all, I would like to say that my life is beautiful."

[1] The first interview was conducted in early December of 2015.

[2] See: *Nitap Wiguag: Engaging Urban Aboriginal Youth in Addressing Homelessness*

These are not a group of people who are “defeated”, “hopeless”, “unambitious”, or “pessimistic”, as they are often framed. Despite the horrible events of this particular participants life, he still has a positive outlook. That is the outlook we all should have as we read this report and go back out into the world and work to make changes to end Aboriginal youth homelessness in New Brunswick.

The project was broken down into two phases. In the first phase and subsequent report, the focus was on the southern portion of the province[3]. Forty-three Aboriginal youth were interviewed, and from those interviews the phase one report was written. We discovered that there existed a potential for drastically different sets of barriers, supports, and challenges that homeless Aboriginal youth may face in the northern part of the province (hereinafter “the north”) versus their southern counterparts. While many of the issues facing homeless Aboriginal youth in the north are the same as those in the south, the research associated with this report confirmed that the way those issues affect the youth are sometimes different. Furthermore, further inquiry was required because the topic of Aboriginal youth homelessness in New Brunswick was such an unexplored area.

This report has incorporated the findings of the phase one report in order to better serve the reader. One significant difference between the phase 1 and phase 2 reports is that this report will be one of the guiding documents for a stakeholder group formed to address Aboriginal youth homelessness in New Brunswick.

[3] Mainly Fredericton, Saint John, and Moncton.

Therefore, while it will report the findings of the research associated with phase two, it will also attempt to give the participants in the stakeholder group all the information available in order to accomplish their goals.

Throughout it is our goal to not only highlight the systemic deficits that Aboriginal youth face in their experiences of homelessness, but also to do so through hearing their stories, told on their terms. It is important in a post Truth and Reconciliation[4] world to demand that Aboriginals tell their own stories. In fact, Aboriginal quality of life can only be improved on Aboriginal people's own terms[5] and thus giving them a platform from which to share their experiences of youth homelessness became one of the primary concerns of this report.

It is important to remember when reading this report that it is the product of over 80 hours of interviews. It was impossible to include all the findings in this report, but this is just the beginning, more research must follow. Homelessness for Aboriginals is a multi-intersectional site, where a number of issues that plague Aboriginal communities in Canada coalesce. As such this makes it an incredibly complex issue. Trying to understand how issues involving Child and Family Services

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[4] Truth and Reconciliation Canada. *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future: Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*. Winnipeg: Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015.

[5] Walker, R. C., & Barcham, M. (2010). Indigenous-inclusive Citizenship: The City and Social Housing in Canada, New Zealand, and Australia. *Environment and Planning A,* 42(2), 314-331.

affect Aboriginal in Canada can be difficult enough. Aboriginal youth homelessness can be understanding how Child and Family Services, the criminal justice system, the Aboriginal housing crisis, racism in the education system, etc. all interact together resulting in a homeless Aboriginal youth. Stating this is not meant to be discouraging, there are many things that can be done within each area that can help solve this problem.

Methodology

This section will outline any conceptual definitions the project used as well as the methods used. First, it is important at this point to tell the reader who the researchers are. Phase I of the study was conducted by both Roy Stewart and Colin Hitchcock. Roy was born in Fredericton, New Brunswick. His father was Wolastoqiyik. Roy has a Bachelor of Arts with honours in Sociology from St. Thomas University and a *Juris Doctorate* from UNB in Fredericton. Roy is currently articling at Burchells LLP in Halifax, Nova Scotia. For Phase II of the project, research was conducted solely by Colin Hitchcock. Colin was born in Fredericton, New Brunswick and received a Bachelor of Arts with honours in Anthropology from St. Thomas University in 2013 and a *Juris Doctorate* from UNB in Fredericton. Colin's wife is Wolastoqiyik from St. Mary's First Nation and they have three children together.

The main concern of this project was determining the supports, barriers, and challenges homeless Aboriginal youth face. The first phase of the study focused on

the southern region on the province, namely Fredericton, Saint John, and Moncton, where 43 homeless Aboriginal youth shared their stories with the researchers. Phase 2 picked up where phase 1 left off, moving north and looking at the lived experiences of homeless Aboriginal youth living in or from the northern part of the province, including Woodstock, Perth Andover, Edmundston, Dalhousie, Campbellton, Bathurst, and Miramichi.

Methodologically, phase 2 of the project remained unchanged. Two primary methods where offered, the research circle and the one-on-one interview. In phase 2 no participants opted for the research circle, while in phase 1, 32 participants opted to participate in one of three research circles. It was recognized that given the broad range of backgrounds the participants had, some participants might not be comfortable with participating in a research circle. The alternative method to the research circle, and the method chosen by all of the participants in phase 2 and 11 participants in phase 1, was the one-on-one interview. For both the interviews and the research circles the same interview schedule was used, and with the exception of some minor changes, the interview schedule remained unchanged between phase 1 and phase 2 of the project[6].

At this point it is helpful for the reader to familiarize themselves with a number of central concepts as they relate to the project. "Youth", "homeless", "Aboriginal", and

[6] See Appendix A

"urban" were the four most important to this project and also required the most elaboration due to their contested and/or fluid meanings.

Youth

The first concept is "youth". Youth is a highly contextual term; its meaning can change given the purpose of a study, or the agency, service, program, or institution one is dealing with. As the goal of this study was to determine the supports, challenges, and barriers Aboriginal youth face in their experiences of homelessness, it was decided not to limit the definition of youth. For example, if the purpose of the study were to evaluate the supports, challenges, and barriers to youth who are involved with Child Protection Services in some capacity, the obvious election would be to limit the definition to the definition of youth under the *Family Services Act*[7]. In broadening the definition, a minimum-maximum approach was taken, where the minimum age associated with "youth" in the literature was paired with the maximum age associated with "youth" from the literature. What this produced was an age range of 12 years of age to 30 years of age.

The arguments for including persons up to 30 years of age within the definition of youth arose out of the fact that some youth programs in Canada are designed for, and accommodate people up to 30 years of age[8]. The lower end of the spectrum has

[7] *Family Services Act,* SNB 1980, c F-2.2

[8] Kelly, K., & Caputo, T. *(2007*). Health and Street/Homeless Youth. *Journal of Health Psychology*, 12(5), 726-736.

its origin in the current legal regime in Canada. The *Criminal Code of Canada*[9] marks the distinction between childhood/preadolescence and youth by excluding from criminal liability those under 12, while conversely, the *Youth Criminal Justice Act* deems youths over 12 years of age as liable for their actions. Furthermore, many "youth" services and programs are made available to youth for the first time at age 12. Another theoretical approach to the issue of defining "youth" has been looking at how life stages are as much about psychological processes as they are biological, and are intrinsically linked to symbolic social acts as well[10]. Cote[11], in describing what he refers to as "youthhood", or the second half of the twenties, explains how the quest for identity and the lifestyle of young people represent a "cultural lifestyle" which can be applied to age groups other than the 17-25-year-old age group, in his opinion the age group of 25-30.

The main benefit to using this expanded youthhood range was that it had the potential to increase participation and thus by extension provide access to a greater number of experiences. The core of this project is experiential and thus the greater number of narratives the better for research purposes. This project is not statistics

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[9] *Criminal Code*, RSC 1985, c C-46.

[10] Elder, Glen H., Monica Kirkpatrick Johnson and Robert Crosnoe. 2005. "The Emergence and Development of Life Course Theory." p. 3-19 in *Handbook of the Life Course*, edited by Jeylan Mortimer and Michael J. Shanahan: Springer.

[11] Coté, J. 2006. "Emerging Adulthood as an Institutionalized Moratorium: Risks and Benefits to Identify Formation." in *Emerging Adults in America: Coming of Age in the 21st Century*. J. Arnett and J. Tanner, American Psychological Association.

based and thus we had greater freedom in this area. Furthermore, utilizing an expanded age range also ensured that there would be no gaps in the research, especially given the broad range of services and programs individuals who are homeless may encounter between the ages of 12-30.

Homeless

This definition proved to be the most problematic, causing a number of issues that will be discussed later in the report. The first thing that comes to mind for many when confronted with the term "homeless" is the image of a person living on the street without shelter. Unfortunately, "homeless" is a far more complex and broadly encompassing term. The definition of "homeless" as used by the Canadian Homelessness Research Network (CHRN) includes four distinct categories: 1) Unsheltered, 2) Emergency Sheltered, 3) Provisionally Accommodated, and 4) At Risk of Homelessness. For the purposes of this study we used the CHRN's categories of homelessness[12].

The CHRN definition of "homelessness" takes into account the fluidity of the experience for many individuals, and this is particularly relevant for Aboriginal youth experiencing homelessness. Homelessness is not a static state but a fluctuating experience, where one's shelter circumstances and options may shift and

[12] Canadian Homelessness Research Network. (2012). Canadian Definition of Homelessness. Toronto: Homeless Hub. Retrieved online January 05, 2016, at: http://www.homelesshub.ca/CHRNhomelessdefinition/

change dramatically, and with frequency[13]. It was important for the purposes of this study, given its focus on experiential data, to have the broadest definition of homelessness possible in order to not exclude the experiences of potential participants.

Aboriginal

The term Aboriginal is a blanket term most commonly used to refer to Indigenous peoples whose ancestors lived in what is today Canada. Historically in Canada, "Indian" was used in place of the term "Aboriginal". Today it is often used to directly reference First Nations, Métis, Inuit peoples, and non-status Indians[14]. The spectrum of Aboriginal identity in Canada is wide and complex and it was beyond the scope of this report to attempt to delineate it. Aboriginal is the most inclusive general term in the Canadian context and thus it was best suited, more so than any other term, to gather the broadest set of backgrounds which in turn was conducive to the reports goals of having strong comparative data.

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13 Ibid.

14 In *Daniels v Canada* (2016 SCC 12), the Supreme Court of Canada held that when used in s. 91(24) of the Constitution, 'Indians' was intended to include the Métis and non-status Indians. Prior to *Daniels*, non-status Indians were still considered Aboriginal peoples, but they were not captured under s.91(24) of the *Constitutional Act 1867* and thus the Federal government did not have exclusive legislative jurisdiction over them.

Urban

The focus of this project was on gathering the experiences of homeless Aboriginal youth in the urban centers of New Brunswick. According to Statistics Canada who use the term "population centre", urban is defined as an area with a population of at least 1,000 and a density of 400 or more people per square kilometer.[15] While many Aboriginal people transition between the rural and urban, for the purposes of this project we qualified an Aboriginal youth as "urban" if they made regular use of the urban landscape. This could include accessing services or programs, or regular occupation, etc. The urban areas we chose to conduct research out of were Fredericton, Saint John, Moncton, Woodstock, Perth Andover, Edmundston, Dalhousie, Campbellton, Bathurst, and Miramichi. Below is a chart comparing total population of each center with their respective Aboriginal population[16].

City	**Total Population**	**Aboriginal Population**
Fredericton	93,080	3,455
Saint John	125,005	2,545
Moncton	135,520	2,435
Bathurst	32,820	1,070
Campbellton	17,280	2,125

[15] *Statistics Canada, "From Urban Areas to Population Centres": http://www.statcan.gc.ca/eng/subjects/standard/sgc/notice/sgc-06*

[16] National Household Survey: http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/nhs-enm/2011/as-sa/fogs-spg/Pages/CMACASelector.cfm?lang=E&level=3#PR13

Edmundston	21,070	410
Miramichi	27,910	1,330
Dalhousie	3,512	No Info
Woodstock	5,254	No Info
Perth Andover	1,778	No Info

One-on-one Interviews

For the Northern part of the project, 20 one-on-one interviews were conducted with Aboriginal youth who are homeless, or who have experienced homelessness. The Southern part of the project saw a total of 43 youth participate, although the project area in the south had a total population over three times the size of the north. That being said a number of barriers arose throughout the research that limited the researcher's ability to make contact with potential participants and they are discussed below.

The interviews were conducted using an interview schedule[17], but remained relatively free flowing, allowing space for the youth to contribute what they wanted, and to tell their story their own way. As a part of each interview, the participants were asked to complete a standard information form[18].

[17] See appendix A.
[18] See appendix B.

Some of the trends revealed in the standard information form in the northern part of the project mirrored those from the southern part of the project, while others diverged. Place of origin within the north mirrored the south, where 90% or 18 of the 20 youth participants original community was a reserve[19], compared to 95% in the south. Whereas the sex of participants diverged, in the north, 50% were male, in the south, 65% were male. The age range in the north of the youth participants spanned 14-30, with the average age being 23, while in the south, the age range of the youth participants spanned 16-30, with the average age being 24. All participants throughout the research identified as heterosexual.

The education levels attained by participants varied greatly. Below, in figure 1 & 2 are two charts, one representing the spread of education levels attained by all participants, the other comparing phase 1 and phase 2 education levels.

[19] Being from a reserve community has no bearing on being either a status or non-status Aboriginal.

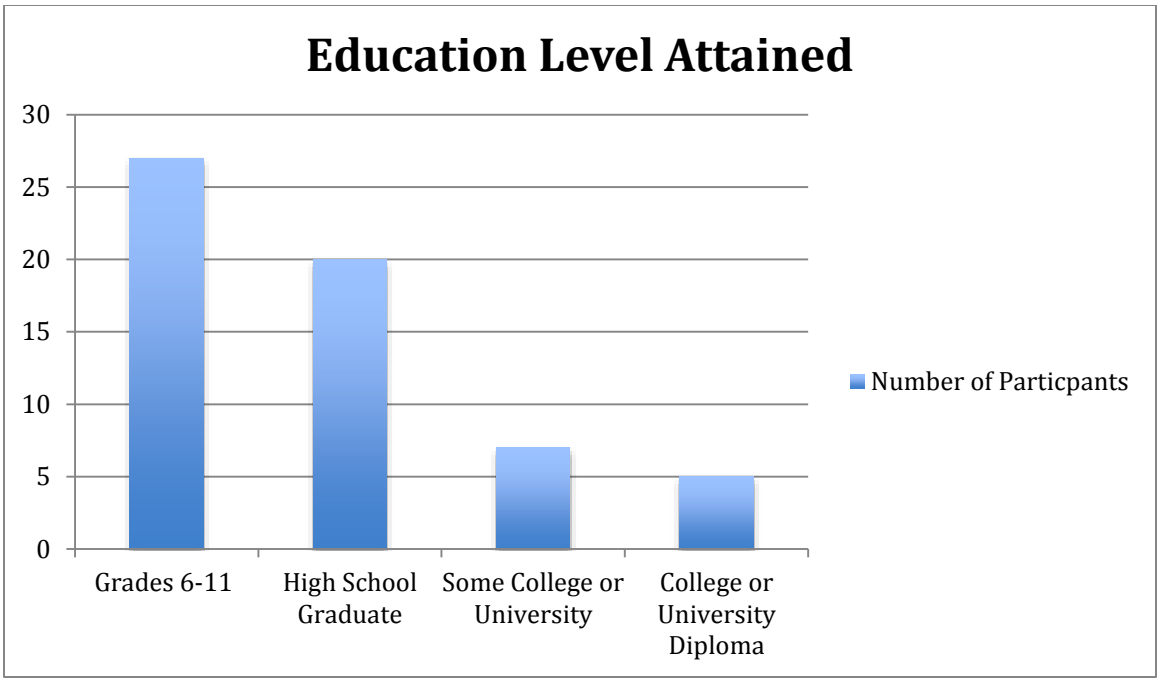


Figure 1

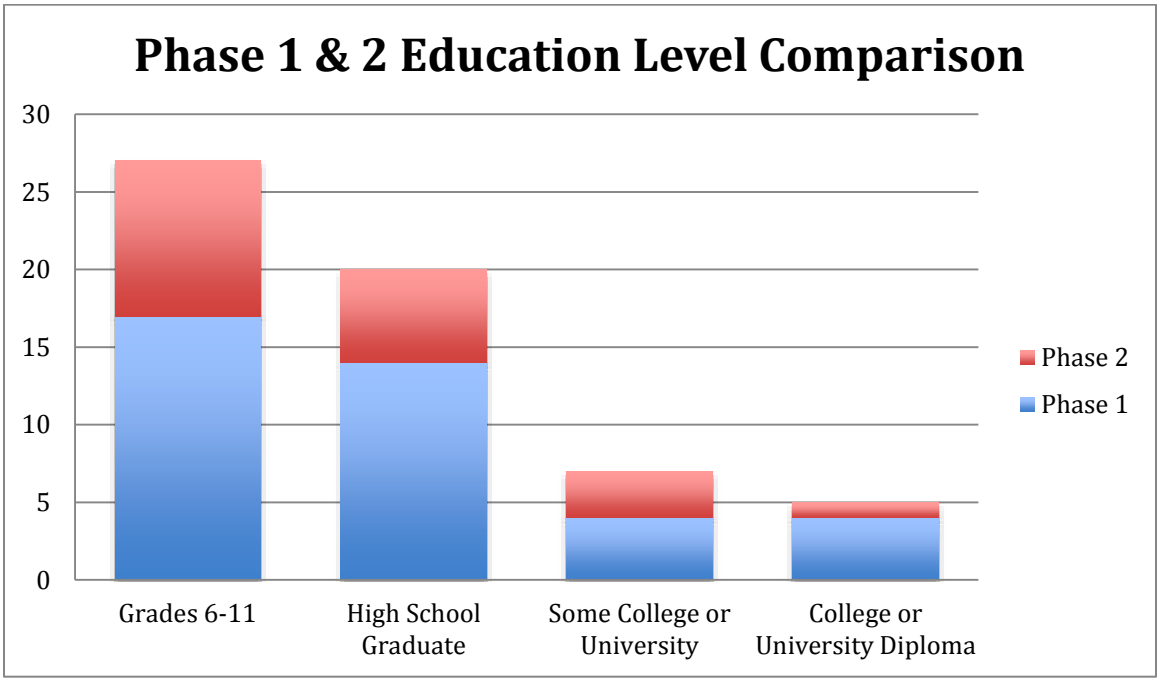


Figure 2

As a final matter concerning the one-on-one interviews and research circles, each participant was given an honorarium for participating in the project as well as travel costs. Despite this, accessing participants became an issue, particularly in the north.

Problems with Making Contact

Very early on in the project it became apparent the methods used to find participants in the southern part of the research were not having the same success in the northern region. In southern regions, contact was initially made with service providers who would come into contact with clients who are likely to have experienced homelessness. Typically, these would be service providers like homeless shelters, or women's shelters, but also Child and Family Services, RCMP, Youth Centers, Rehabilitation facilities, etc. This proved very successful in southern regions and the vast majority of our participants were referred to the project through a service provider.

In northern regions, these same service providers located there were unable to put us in contact with any Aboriginal youth who had or were experiencing homelessness. A common reply was "We don't have homeless people here." The research demonstrated that this is not true, but what is true is that homeless Aboriginal youth are not utilizing the services in the north of the province. Also, definitional issues to partially to blame here. One Child and Family Services social worker I spoke to from a reserve in the north told me, "We don't have any homeless people here", but then elaborated saying, "Everyone has shelter." I pointed to the

CHRN definition of homelessness, and that "sheltered" is not synonymous with "home". These kinds of definitional issues are a major barrier in accessing services. If a service provider is not able to identify their clients as homeless, how can they offer them relevant services?

This definitional issue could also create problems in other areas as well. Since homelessness is often understood to mean, "unsheltered", it is framed as a "big city" problem, one that a city like Bathurst for example, does not need to address. This has resulted in there being a lack of services in the northern part of the province specifically designed to serve homelessness and the ones that do exist Aboriginal people are not using them. Sixteen out of the twenty participants to the northern part of the research were living in Fredericton, and access to services was something all of them stated influenced the decision to move. This migration from the rural to urban[20] is reflected in the literature on Canadian homelessness[21] and also in the literature describing the pattern of migration among Aboriginals in moving from their home communities to urban centers[22]. Despite this, there is a gap

[20] While many of the communities this project focused on in the northern part of the province were classified as urban, the northern landscape is significantly more "rural" and many Aboriginal communities in the north are much more rural as well.

[21] See: Christensen, 2012a), (Forchuk et al., 2010) (Gray, Chau, Huerta, & Frankish, 2011) (Karabanow, Aube, & Naylor, 2013), (Stewart & Ramage, 2011) – fix proper citations Schiff.

[22] See: Belanger, Y. D. Weasel Head, Gabrielle. 2013. *Urban Aboriginal Homelessness and Migration in Southern Alberta* and, Peters, E. J., & Robillard, V. (2009). " Everything You Want is There": The Place of the Reserve in First Nations' Homeless Mobility. *Urban Geography, 30*(6), 652-680.

in the literature exploring movement between the rural and the rural, for an Aboriginal person who prefers to stay in a more rural environment, this may look like migration between reserve communities and local, small towns or between different Aboriginal communities. In the southern part of the province migrating to a large urban center like Fredericton, Moncton, or Saint John from another community in the southern part of the province, still allows for homeless youth to stay close to their home communities. In the northern part of the province a youth from Dalhousie coming to Fredericton is subject to considerable geographic distance and thus closeness to their home community is impossible to maintain. This wanting to stay close to their home community may help explain why some homeless Aboriginal youth migrate between rural communities, and between northern New Brunswick Aboriginal communities.

In the northern part of the research, other participants typically referred participants to the project. There exists a network of Aboriginals from northern communities living in Fredericton and after each interview participants were asked to refer others who fit the criteria to the project.

Northern research illustrated that Aboriginals in the northern part of the province are relying much more on informal services[23]. These factors in combination with the other difficulties associated with making contact with this highly mobile, poor, and

[23] "Informal Services/Supports" will be discussed later in the report.

disenfranchised group of people, made it difficult to engage the population in the numbers it is estimated exist.

There are no official figures as to the number of homeless Aboriginal youth in the province, but according to the participants of this study, there are many homeless Aboriginal youth. Each participant knew directly of other Aboriginal youth who have experienced homelessness. Combine their experiences with the fact that Aboriginal peoples are the most materially, socially, and spatially deprived ethno-cultural group in Canada, and we are left with a telling tale. The vast majority of Aboriginals in Canada today live "off-reserve" in urban centers and the literature also tells us that they are significantly worse off than their non-Aboriginal counter-parts. All of that combined with the fact that Aboriginal people experience homelessness at a disproportionate rate compared to non-Aboriginals, leads one to the conclusion that there are in fact a great number of homeless Aboriginal youth in the province.

Structure of the Interviews and Report

One of the main themes that emerged out of this research was that homelessness is a fluid experience. Homelessness for the Aboriginal youth interviewed does not have a succinct beginning or end, but is rather something that grows and gains momentum over long periods of time. There is an "ebb and flow" to their experiences, where their lives if viewed in one moment with a focused lens may

appear to be stable. The reality is that their shelter circumstances and options shift and change dramatically, and with frequency.

Aboriginal youth homelessness is systemic, but it is also historical. Every one of the interviews/research circles created the feeling of "I know where this story is going". For these youth, the beginnings of homelessness first appeared in childhood, and it was the product of intergenerational trauma with their parents, grandparents, and other family/community relations, as well as other aspects of colonization, such as poverty and discrimination.

The fluidity of Aboriginal youth homelessness combined with the fact that for the vast majority of participants homelessness began in early childhood and was persistent, informed the structure of this report. The interviews themselves reflected this as well and we developed four themes[24] that covered the entire span of the youth's lives. These four themes were designed to uncover the supports, challenges, and barriers within each theme.

The four themes of the interviews were: (1) Looking back at how the youth grew in their early home lives; (2) Between then and now - How the transition to homelessness affected them and how they lived after, (3) What assistance the youth received or did not receive, and; (4) What could be done better? Youth suggestions

[24] Based on Baskin in Cyndy Baskin (2007). Aboriginal Youth Talk about Structural Determinants as the Causes of their Homelessness. *First Peoples Child & Family Review*, Vol 3, No 3.

for Government, policy makers, and service providers. This report will examine each theme in turn and look at what the participants said about supports, challenges, and barriers within each theme.

Context: Aboriginal Youth Homelessness in Canada

Before we examine the findings of this report it is important to give the reader some additional context to consider. Aboriginal youth homelessness in New Brunswick is not just a provincial problem; it is part of a much broader set of issues facing Aboriginal people in Canada today. As was stated earlier there has been no national study dedicated to enumerating Aboriginals who are homeless despite the evidence that urban Aboriginals are disproportionally represented in the homeless community[25]. Much of the evidence comes from regional calculations in major urban centers but there has been no research done in New Brunswick[26], and the research that does exist is inconsistent across Canada and thus does not function very well as comparative data.

The current situation Aboriginals face is a direct product of their relationship with the Government of Canada, which has been the driving force in the dispossession of

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[25] See Peters 2012, DeVerteuil and Wilson 2010, Leach 2010, Distasio et al. 2005, Walker 2005

[26] Belanger and Awosoga 2013. *Homelessness, Urban Aboriginal People, and the Need for a national Enumeration*.

Aboriginal lands, genocide, intergenerational traumas as a result of residential schools, and systemic racism and racist government policies. This relationship has led to Aboriginals being the most materially, socially and spatially deprived ethno-cultural group in Canada today and are subject to an Aboriginal-specific homeless and housing crisis[27].

When you look at the multiple, collective and ongoing traumas experienced by Aboriginal peoples in Canada[28] it is easier to understand many of the related struggles homeless Aboriginal youth are currently experiencing. Trauma, particularly when it occurs/is experience in the early years of development have a number of impacts. Effects on the individual include a destabilizing of an individual's sense of trust and security as well as development of feelings of abandonment, alienation, and disconnection which persist well into adulthood[29]. Other issues the literature, and this research has shown, is that Aboriginal people are subject to a disproportionate amount of physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, which has huge impacts on an individual's ability to function in social and family life.

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[27] Patrick, Caryl. (2014). Aboriginal Homelessness in Canada: A Literature Review. Toronto: Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press.

[28] See Czyzewski 2011, McCall et al. 2009, Menzies 2008, 2009, 2010, Mitchell and Maracle 2005, Denham 2008, Evans-Campbell 2008, Haskell and Randall 2009, Brave Heart 2003, Brave Heart 1999.

[29] Herman, J. L. (1992). *Trauma and Recovery.* New York: Basic Books.

The racism Aboriginal peoples face in Canada also has a significant impact on their experiencing homelessness at a disproportionate rate. Colonizing social policies, discrimination in service funding, and negative portrayals of Aboriginals in the media and in the education system are issues Aboriginals must contend with on a daily basis[30]. The negative effects of systemic racism and neglect by various governmental agencies in Canada towards Aboriginal peoples have been well document in the literature[31].

Findings

This section of the report will outline the findings of the research conducted within the north and the south of the province. These findings will be discussed within the four categories used in the interviews to help frame the participant's life and experiences. To begin, each participant reflected on where their story began and how they became homeless. Next, they told us about that experience of being homeless, what it has been like to get to where they are now. The third section explored the supports they received during their experience of homelessness. Finally, each participant looked forward to their future but also reflected on their experiences. These are the four themes, and what follows is a more in-depth view of

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[30] Menzies, P. (2010). Intergenerational Trauma from a Mental Health Perspective. *Native Social Work Journal,* 7, 63-85.

[31] Baskin 2007, Waldram et al. 2006, Adelson 2005, Mitchell and Maracle 2005

some of the issues that arose from each theme. The issues that emerged within each theme will be posited against the backdrop of supports, challenges, and barriers.

Looking Back: "I guess I've always been homeless."

> "When was the first time you felt you experienced homelessness?"
>
> Jane thought for a moment, and then replied, "After my first year of university, when my funding was cut off and I had nowhere to live."
>
> Jane's early home life was filled with foster homes, group homes, and more apartments then you could keep track of. Her father was never in the picture and her mother was an alcoholic and drug addict. I pondered all she had told me in the interview up until that question and asked, "what about all those years in foster homes and group homes, and moving around every few months with your mother? Were all those places home?".
>
> She was silent for a few seconds then fighting back tears she said, "I guess I've always been homeless then…."

For nearly all of the participants, homelessness has been a process that began in early childhood. Rarely was there a significant traumatic event that put in motion homelessness, rather they had either always been homeless or it was a gradual process of becoming homeless. For many of the youth, homelessness has been normalized, it has been the only life they have ever known. This is the first challenge these youths have to face.

> "I have always, ever since I can remember, I have always lived in poverty. I have never eaten every day, that's always been a thing, finding something to eat... I mean I've slept in bus stops, I've seen the stares. Ever since I was thirteen I've done everything I could do to survive."

The process that results in a state of homelessness for Aboriginal youth never involves a single issue. Poverty, drug and alcohol abuse, physical, sexual and emotional abuse, and even systemic issues and community politics are some of the

issues that drive the process of being/becoming homeless. Every youth told a story that involved at least one of the issues above in their early home life, and most of the youth had a number of these issues in their early home life.

One of the most prevalent issue was drug and alcohol abuse. No other issue seemed to have such a direct affect on youth experiencing homelessness than drugs and/or alcohol. The issues that flowed from either their parent(s) drug/alcohol abuse, and/or their own drug/alcohol abuse, often put the youth on an inevitable path to homelessness. As one 20-year-old participant shared,

> "I lived with my mom until I was 5, then I was in foster homes for 2 years… My mom had addictions and there were 5 of us kids. She wasn't taking care of us; all that mattered were the drugs. They ended up putting us in 7 or 8 different homes in the community and 3 group homes before I was 16… Then I went to rehab because I had a drug addiction, it was court ordered, and then I went to Juvi… and that pretty much takes us up to now."

Stories like this were incredibly common among the youth interviewed. Drugs and alcohol abuse are linked to intergenerational trauma and substance abuse, whether by a parent or youth, opens up the youth's life to a number of risks.

> "It was pretty rough for us kids. My mom, her addiction to drugs was really bad at that time. I would steal stuff to eat and survive, and mom was leaving all the time, like for a month at a time. It was pretty crazy. I wasn't going to school; her boyfriends would beat me. We moved a lot. In and out of foster homes too. It was rough."

This statement by a 22-year-old male embodies the experiences many of the youth participants have lived through. Parental addictions to alcohol and/or drugs resulted in exposure to physical and sexual abuse in the family home, poverty, criminal activity, etc.

The second biggest issue in the participant's early home lives was housing. Obviously, housing is central to any discussion of homelessness, but in the Aboriginal context it takes on special meaning. As stated earlier, 90% of the youth participants started their lives living in a reserve community for which it is well documented the issues surrounding reserve housing. For many of these youth reserve life was short lived and they have thus lived the majority of their lives in urban or rural communities that are not reserves, none the less, these issues continued to plague them off reserve as well. Their experience of homelessness is directly tied to the Aboriginal housing crisis occurring in this country. There are so many issues within the Aboriginal housing crisis it is worth mentioning a number of them here in order to better understand what these youths are dealing with.

Aboriginal peoples, experience some of the worst housing conditions in Canada[32], where the majority of Aboriginal communities exist in a state of tremendous deficiency with respect to both housing and infrastructure[33]. The main issue expressed by the youth was overcrowding, but there also exists a lack of plumbing

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[32] Patrick, Caryl. (2014). Aboriginal Homelessness in Canada: A Literature Review. Toronto: Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press.

[33] See: Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation. (2011). *Research Highlight: 2006 Census Housing Series: Issue 13 – On-Reserve Housing Conditions.* Ottawa: Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation. Retrieved from: http:// publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2011/schl-cmhc/NH18-23-111-007-eng.pdf, Durbin, A. (2009). Canada's Response to the On-Reserve Housing Crisis: A Study of the Kelowna Accord. Pimatisiwin: *A Journal of Aboriginal and Indigenous Community Health,* 7(2), 181-200.,

and electricity, poor insulation, toxic mold, substandard construction, and lack of major repairs[34]. It is within that context that many of the homeless youth interviewed for the project began their lives.

In terms of living in over-crowded housing, 80% of the youth interviewed had lived in a home with multiple families[35] at some point in their early home lives. These over-crowded living conditions would lead to an incredible amount of moving around at a young age as one participant states.

> "I lived in a lot of different places…. We bounced around a lot; we stayed at a lot of different places on reserve. My grandmas house, my uncle's house, my mom's boyfriend's places on reserve… It was just always moving. By the time I was 16 I had lived in 24 different residences, and since then it's gone up, now it is over 40 different places. (29 years old at time of interview)"

Over-crowding also lead to a number of other issues as well, one of which being sexual abuse. Far too many youths described being sexually abused as a result of overcrowded housing,

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[34] Monette, L., Rourke, S. B., Tucker, R., Greene, S., Sobota, M., Koornstra, J., ... & Guenter, D. (2009). Housing Status and Health Outcomes in Aboriginal People Living with HIV/AIDS in Ontario: The Positive Spaces, Healthy Places Study. *Canadian Journal of Aboriginal Community-based HIV/AIDS Research, 2,* 41-60., Statistics Canada. (2008). *Aboriginal Peoples in Canada in 2006: Inuit, Métis, and First Nations, 2006 Census.* Ottawa: Minister of Industry. Retrieved from: http://www12.statcan.ca/census-recensement/2006/as-sa/97-558/pdf/97- 558-XIE2006001.pdf, Adelson, N. (2005). The Embodiment of Inequity: Health Disparities in Aboriginal Canada. *Canadian Journal of Public Health,* 96, S45-S61.

[35] Multiple family homes imply that more than one nuclear family was living in the home, not necessarily nuclear families of different kin-groups. For example, one participant lived in a home on reserve with his mother, himself, his four siblings, his aunt, his aunts husband, and their 3 kids, that is 11 people in a 3-bedroom home with a single bathroom.

> "I was raped by my uncle and two other guys in our house. When I was only 11-years- old. I mean what do you do when it happens in your own home. Especially when its family. Know what I mean?"

Abuse in the home was directly correlated with over-crowded living conditions, as one female youth's experiences illustrate.

> "On top of everything, my mom's friend's son (participant and her mother were living with her mother's friend) was sexually assaulting me since before I was seven years old… Oh because he was older and was always left to watch me… I told my mom but she either didn't believe me or something… she didn't do anything about it."

We can never know why her mother did nothing about the sexual abuse, but it can be imagined that being without a home may have factored into that decision. Many of the participants described their mothers, alone raising multiple children, without financial security and with little to no options for housing. This is a precarious position to be in, and many of the decisions the youths' mothers were forced to make did not help their children avoid future homelessness. Frequent moves were another outcome of the precarious housing situation for Aboriginals.

This frequent moving was often due not only to overcrowding but also the lack of financial resources. Another youth spoke of how once his non-Aboriginal mother left his Aboriginal father they found themselves without financially support and separated from the community he had grown up in.

> "After he left – financially, yes it was hard. That's why my mom had to move around so she could get work. It was tough, we had to change schools a lot and start over. We had to go to a lot of schools man…. we probably went to 10 schools…. I dropped out in grade 11 and got the boot (his mother kicked him out)."

Whether it was due to overcrowding or for financial issues, the vast majority of youth interviewed, relocated many times as young children. This constant dislocation is all part of the gradual, life long experience of homelessness most of the youth experienced. Drugs and alcohol abuse were also significant factors in creating an experience of life-long homelessness. Drugs and alcohol abuse are one of the primary motivating factors in breaking families apart, usually through Child Protection Services. Regardless constant dislocation was a major challenge for the youth interviewed.

> "Well, I lived with my mother for most of my life on-reserve, and besides that I've been living with other people on-reserve too. So like, we were living with my uncle [on- reserve] for the first little while when I was first born, and then we moved into an apartment out some ways [off-reserve] and then we moved to the trailer park [off- reserve] and lived there for a while. Before that we lived with another uncle [on-reserve] too."

Another youth explained her early-life living situation:

> "I lived with a lot of people. I started off living with my mother and she had a boyfriend that she was with for quite a while. She ended up leaving when I was like twelve and she left me with that boyfriend because she couldn't afford to take care of me. Then I left when I was thirteen to go live with her. She lived on the reserve at that point, St. Mary's. That didn't really last too long, we lived in a lot of different places, on and off the rez [reserve] always getting evicted and stuff like that. Then I got taken away from her and put into a group home. I was in there for five years."

These statements reflect the experiences of many of the youth. The majority of the youth were in situations where their families relocated more than once during their childhood, not by choice. This resulted in the youth experiencing a sense of homelessness for as long as they could remember. There were multiple stories shared with us that describe the youth and their families moving multiple times at

an early age. Whether it was due to a lack of financial resources, inadequate and over-crowded housing, drug and alcohol abuse, no jobs available within their communities, or due to a lack of housing, or a combination of all the above, they all played a role in their experiencing homelessness.

This was often times further exasperated by local politics and discrimination between on and off-reserve Aboriginals.

> "Trying to get your own place, like the band will give you the first and end of month's rent, but like if you don't live on-reserve the band don't help you at all. There's no place you can live on the reserve because there isn't enough space. So basically, you got a place off reserve for like two months, because there's no way to make rent and power."

For many of the youth and their families the dilemma was; stay on the reserve and live in over-crowded/inadequate housing, where the prospects for employment are minimal, where the youth were at risk of a number of harms, or move off-reserve, live in overcrowded housing, receive less assistance from their band and feel a sense of isolation. For non-status Aboriginals, this scenario is often even worse as they did not have the benefit of band assistance. Also factored into this decision to migrate from reserves to urban spaces was the issue of band favoritism.

> "Unless you know someone or have family in the band office you aren't gonna get the same help as those other guys who do. It sucks for people like me who don't. You see other people getting cheques and housing and leave us out in the cold. They don't care if we gotta move off-reserve. Its more money for them."

This was elaborated upon by another youth:

> "A lot of the reserve though, like if you have family that works there then they help their family. If you're not family, they are not going to give them any help. There are people at St. Mary's who like get their houses built, and all their kids are getting their houses built but it seems like all those people who don't have family working for reserve aren't getting a home built. As for help, there is no help unless you have the same last name."

This favoritism, along with the other barriers cited by the youth, are factors that all form together in affecting the lived experiences of the youth. The movement from their communities (whether urban or rural, on-reserve or off-reserve) to larger urban centers, and repeated many times, has the effect of causing a sense of disconnectedness for the youth. When we asked the youth to explain what they meant by this sense of disconnectedness, one youth stated "honestly, its friends or no friends. Living on-reserve means friends. Living off- reserve means complete isolation." The result of this is that the majority of the youth experienced some form of disconnectedness from their communities, families, and friends as a result of having to move so frequently, and this is something the literature has shown to have dramatic effects on individuals.

This disconnectedness has special significance for homeless youth from the northern part of the province. As will be discussed in greater depth later, the majority of homeless youth interviewed from the north of the province typically ended up moving to one of the southern urban centers (either Fredericton, Moncton, or Saint John). It proved incredibly difficult for these youths to maintain familial and/or community ties.

> "I came to Fredericton, because there is nothing back home, or I guess it's more like I am better off here than there… I guess the negative is that I don't

> get to see my family… if I can hitch a ride with someone then I will go, but that doesn't happen very often."

Out of province Aboriginals who came to New Brunswick in order to find shelter and hopes of opportunity also expressed this sentiment. Transitioning between communities was not limited to the nearest city or community. Rather, the youth and their families relied on friends and families for accommodations, even if that meant moving hundreds of miles away from their current community.

> "There weren't any support systems for us when we moved from Nova Scotia [on- reserve] to New Brunswick [off-reserve], not that I know of. We were in native housing, off-reserve. But that's it, that's all we got from anyone. And we weren't in province from where we were from, so they [band office] seem to cut you off."

Lack of services was a major challenge, especially for out of province Aboriginals and Aboriginals from the northern part of the province. For youth from the north of the province, lack of services in the north translated into great dislocation. For all the youth, informal services account for the vast majority of service usage, and to be separated from family support systems, support from their community and band, would leave them in a very precarious position.

Looking Back: No Assistance

Some thing that was prevalent throughout the "looking back" theme was the lack of assistance when the youth were very young and their families were encountering difficulties. The only consistent area of assistance across the board was Child and Family Services, and from the youth interviewed, their intervention was only in

removing the child from the home. Obviously, there are some major gaps in the narrative, but regardless that is the perception these youths have about their past.

> "Nothing was done until it was too late. I guess if my mom had of been sent to rehab, or given the ability to have a place of her own, none of this would have happened."

Another youth who had also gone through the foster system was more cautious.

> "I don't know if there is anything that could have kept our family together. I don't think my mother ever wanted help, she still doesn't, believe me I've tried…"

The general feeling among the youth is that not enough was done to help their families stay together. Even the youth who expressed a guarded pessimism acknowledge that little seemed to be done. This lack of services continued once the youth were in care, as one participant explained.

> "Well everyone thought I was mentally challenged because I had a lisp, so when I dropped out of school in grade 6 they never made me go back (to school) … I did have trouble learning how to pronounce though. So anyway, they started offering me services for my speech but when I dropped out it just ended because it was through the school… after that I was just in group homes, until I was sent to Juvi for arson."

Another youth described how after his sister committed suicide as a young teen, social workers came to the house with the police, found his parents drunk and no food in the house. They took him for one night to a foster home, and then he went to his uncles for 3 months. Despite the fact that such a huge trauma had occurred in the home no services were offered. After three months, he went back to his mother who had developed an addiction to painkillers. In the years to follow he went door-to-door looking for food daily, never going to school again.

> "It was weird man, I was sleeping in this dome most nights, no one cared. I was in grade six, sleeping outside man! My dad never asked me to come live with him, my mom was messed up and didn't realize I was gone, I was so embarrassed I couldn't go to school, I wanted to look normal, my clothes were junky, I was dirty… It was weird man…"

This child in grade 6 was left to fend for himself. The question one must ask is, how does this abandonment by the system affect their future interactions with service providers? Most youth expressed a disdain for the system that failed them so greatly. The best-case scenario was that the youth felt the support they received was less than ideal or needed.

> "I would have my social worker who took me out once a month, but nothing like therapy or anything. She didn't get too involved. I internalized all my stuff. I had these feelings of my foster brothers doing this stuff to me and feeling like am I gay because this is happening to me? And after a while I like, I put a gun to his face and said it had to stop. I ended up leaving a bit after that I just couldn't take it anymore. But yah, like I said you don't get help the way you need it."

The worst-case was that many of the youth, involvement with the system marked a continuation of the sorts of harm they were receiving that had them removed from the home in the first place. Many of the youth participants were placed in foster homes for various durations of time throughout their childhood. Once there some of the youth explained how the abuse followed them into the foster homes where they were told they would be safe.

> "When the foster care came when I was turning 11, it was a couple who were both accountants and they had their son, and an adopted son and they treated them better than me. The oldest son was into drugs and was trying to force me to do them, and then he started molesting me and stuff. So, he beat me up and said if I told anybody he would do worse, so I said I fell downstairs. So, they moved me to another foster home [...] and it was really bad there. It's a pretty nice neighborhood, but there was a lot of gangs and I was introduced to things

> I shouldn't have been and I started getting molested in that one pretty regularly for a solid year."

This sort of abuse was relatively common amongst participants who had been in either detention centers and/or foster/group homes. It is easy to draw a connection between the trauma of residential schools and what is occurring today as one participant explained.

> "I think residential schools; colonization has a huge impact on the homelessness that we deal with. Sexual abuse, physical abuse, like our parents don't know how to deal with it and they take it out on us. Everything is inter-generational. Everything we do today, being assimilated, not allowing us to be who we are. It's just passed on, handed down. It's a bad cycle we are in."

The youth explain that a result of the generations before them suffering from poverty, abuse, and a lack of resources and discrimination in resource allocation, was that the youth were affected by factors outside of their control. A common theme in the early lives of the participants was that systemic and historical/intergenerational problems were the source of much of the challenges facing them. These were not "bad" or "troubled kids" as many homeless youths are often framed, but rather youth from a very specific context.

Looking Back: Supports

A common theme throughout the entire project was the importance role informal supports played in the participants' lives. Where formal supports lacked, as we saw under the previous heading, informal supports attempted to pick up the slack. Informal supports provided things like accommodations, food, mental health, etc.

> "When I was little I would go from door to door, all my uncles and aunt's houses' and beg for food! Some days I ate really good doing that… Really, I didn't even beg, they just knew my mom was all messed up, so they just fed me."

> "If I didn't have good friends who let me crash at their place I don't know where I would be. I have a criminal record so it's hard to get a job, I'd probably be right on the street. I'm glad I didn't have to go there."

Another participant spoke of the power of informal supports as medicine.

> "My aunts would check in and always remind me what I wanted to do, and remind me how to get there… They never let me forget what I wanted. The best thing anyone can do for you is believe in you, that is the strongest medicine, and eventually I believed in myself and then the real change happened."

Informal kinship fostering was also prevalent among the participants. It was common for drug and alcohol abuse to spiral out of control before Child and Family services became involved with the family. For some of the participants they would partially weather the storm at a relative's home.

> "To be honest, I had no idea my mom was a druggie, I just thought she was tired all the time, later I learned she was a pill popper… I would spend like weeks at my grams house, I loved it!"

Unfortunately, relatives also possessed the learned distrust of formal supports and many issues in the family home went unreported as a result. None the less, families and friends of the family often times stepped in when the youth were children and provided support.

Between Then and Now: Becoming Homeless

As we have seen for most of the participants, homelessness is a process that began very early in their lives. For most of the participants they have been homeless their entire lives, whether they knew it or not, but some did make the transition suddenly.

> "When we had an apartment in town, and we were evicted. We had gone home in a taxi and saw the note that said we were evicted on the door. The doors were locked; the windows were locked. My mom found a way to get in but there was no working power, no water or anything. We were homeless."

In this section of the interview we were interested in hearing about how the youth transitioned into being homeless, whether it was discovering their homelessness, or actually becoming homeless. We were also interested in how they survived as independent homeless youth.

The reality for the vast majority of the participants was that they came from poverty. What this meant for them was that upon reaching youthhood, they were required to become much more independent, simply because their parents were unable to continue to support them, however inadequately. Also, the natural desire for independence acquired in youthhood would also become agitated it situations where their parents abused drugs and/or alcohol or were abusive towards them. Therefore, the majority of participants found themselves in a position where they had to provide for themselves at a very young age.

Not every youth interviewed experienced homelessness as a gradual process or as a situation they had always been in. For a few of the youth there was a single instance

that propelled them into a situation of homelessness. Even in those instances we see many of the issues that plague the Aboriginal community, as we can see in the following interview.

> "When did you first experience homelessness?"
>
> "I'd have to say when I first actually got kicked out. After I moved out of my original house I moved into my grandmothers after everything happened and you know, it was pretty good there. But it just wasn't enough, I wasn't being very obedient."
>
> "So, you say everything happened, do you want to explain what happened?"
>
> "Uh, it was when my dad killed my mother."

Another participant told of how his father inflicted one too many vicious assaults against him.

> "About 8 years ago my parents started drinking and fighting again, so I came down to the house to take care of my mother. I was afraid my father would show up and they'd start fighting, and I'd have to fight with my dad. It's happened three times. It's gotten so bad that he got put in a hospital. Anyway, this time he threw a bench off the patio, split my head open, broke my shoulder, knocked me out for however long. So, we don't talk at all. Off and on they'll drink and they'll fight, now that I'm on parole it's just hard, I have to stay away."

This youth went on to state that it was this act of violence that ultimately caused him to be displaced from his community, a situation where he found himself having to sell drugs to survive in the city. The decision to sell drugs eventually lead to a 4-year sentence in a federal penitentiary, which further isolated him from his community. This sort of community isolation is something that a number of the participants who had gone through the criminal justice system experienced.

Mandatory halfway housing is only available in urban settings and therefore far removed from the rural reserve.

None of the participants in the northern region experienced a sudden event that lead to them being homeless. In the north, the vast majority of the participants experienced intense displacement from their communities, something that is more pronounced in the northern part of the province.

> "I doubt I'll ever go back (to the Dalhousie area) … I don't ever want to go back right now… There is just nothing there, like what would I do there? It's hard here, but there I'd probably be back on drugs just because there is nothing to do."

This displacement affects many things for the youth, not the least of which is familial relationships, but for some participants all relationships, as one 16-year-old participant explained:

> [Interviewer] What's the big difference living on-reserve and living off-reserve?
>
> [Youth] Honestly, its' friends and no friends. Living on reserve means friends. Living off reserve means complete isolation.
>
> [Interviewer] How do you think that affects you living off the reserve?
>
> [Youth] Honestly, I can't handle living off the reserve and the isolation. Sometimes I need the sense of comfort, probably why I jump around all the time but stay on the reserve.

Unwrapping participants experiences of homelessness gave us some insight into the supports, challenges, and barriers these youth face as they experience homelessness. Within this theme, areas of grey emerged where certain supports

also became challenges, or vice versa, depending on the context. This is indicative of the complex and interwoven factors that constitute Aboriginal youth homelessness.

Between Then and Now: Informal Supports – Support and Barrier

Informal support systems played a huge role in the early lives of the youth we interviewed. In many instances those informal supports were the only other supports available to them as children, other than Child and Family Service intervention. Informal supports continued to play a role in their lives as they entered youthhood as well, but the relationship between these informal supports and the youth became more complex.

> "Looking back, it seems like a really stupid move, but I had to take care of my daughter so I moved in with him."

Jane found herself moving in with her drug dealing boyfriend, a move she knew was risky but she felt she had no other choice.

> "I just stayed in the house, he gave me drugs, I was pissed at myself because I knew I was putting my daughter at risk of going through all the shit I had gone through."

Jane's mother was a drug addict, a fact that resulted in Jane being put into the foster care system at the age of 9. After graduating to the group home system, Jane developed a drug addiction herself and ran away. She became pregnant at 18 and she wanted to give her daughter the life she had never had, but it never worked out that way.

> "One night he came home and started accusing me of stealing drugs from him. I hadn't touched his drugs, anyway we were fighting really loud and I figured he

> wouldn't do nothing because my daughter was there…. I told him if he didn't stop yelling and accusing me I was going to call the police."

The fight continued, and Jane packed up her daughter. Her intent was to leave him, first going to a neighbor's house for the night, and then hitching a ride to Tobique to stay with her grandmother.

> "Right when I was walking out the door I just felt something touch the back of my head. I turned around and he was holding a gun to my head. He told me if I left him he would kill me… I stayed, because I did what I had to do to survive."

The next day Jane made a quick exit and found her way to a woman's shelter, but coming so close to becoming a statistic shook her to her core. Many of the female participants interviewed were also single mothers. The dire situation they find themselves in often times sees them having to take on risky situations in order to survive. Already struggling with drug addictions these youths are easy targets for anyone looking to exploit them.

Talking to the youth, utilizing this sort of support is a conscious choice that involves a weighing of risks. In the case of Jane, if any other option were available to her she would have taken it. She knew the risks but never imagined she would find herself looking down the barrel of a pistol.

Obviously the above is an example of how informal supports can go horribly wrong, but the reality for most of the participants is that informal supports provide accommodations, food, mental health, etc. without issue and on a regular basis.

> "My uncle is someone I got to if I need to talk to someone. He always has good advice you know…. I've never been to like a real shrink or anything, all I need to get me through are my uncles stories (laughs)"

This was a common sentiment amongst the participants. They felt more comfortable utilizing informal supports versus formal support systems. That being said, these informal supports were at the survival level, no informal supports encountered throughout the research did anything to help lift the youth out of a state of homelessness.

Between Then and Now: A Different Kind of Service Provider

The importance of individual service providers on how well the youth was managing their homelessness and overcoming it, was second to none. This can especially be seen in terms of mental health. A number of youth cited a lack of "someone to talk to" as an important service that is lacking. This was a problem even in their own communities, or on-reserve where kinship factionalism made it difficult for some youth to navigate who they could talk to and what they could say. One youth with an alcoholic and mentally abusive mother spoke to this point:

> "I think if there was like more people that I felt I could talk to when I was younger, outside of my family, that would have helped. We had a youth center, but everyone you see there is from the reserve, so you don't want to be telling them about your family. So, if there are people there you don't really know, at any time at the youth center that would have been awesome. Because I didn't want anyone telling my mom or something. Like my mom is pretty well known on the reserve, and they all liked her. I didn't want to give my mom a bad name."

The importance of individual service providers was first witnessed during the interviews in Saint John, NB during phase 1. Four of the five youth interviewed in

Saint John had all come into contact with a particular service provider (we will call her "Susan") that went above and beyond what any of these youths had experienced before from service providers. Most of the youth first came into contact with her while in Portage, but reconnected with her at the Teen Resource Centre in Saint John.

> "With everybody else, social workers and stuff, I knew that at the end of the day they had a job to do and they didn't realize how I felt. But with [Susan] she genuinely cares about everyone she comes into contact with, especially youth. She would take everybody she could and take them to a farm just to get them away from everything. So, they can just live. She really wants to make a difference. She made me feel accepted, instead of being a job. She made me feel like a family member, she seen me as a person, for who I was. Which was a scared little kid, not this hard-looking person people thought I was. She was the first one to break the walls, she did the work to get in. She didn't push me to the side like everyone else did."

Even a really great foster parent can have a huge impact on a youth's life.

> "They stuck me with this kick ass sixty-five-year-old lady… She made me kick drugs, get my butt back to school, I was even withdrawing and she made me go, she was like, 'I don't care, go to school'… She scared me, but she changed my life."

The trajectory of the youth's lives up until meeting these outstanding individual service providers were no different than many other youths interviewed but once meeting them that trajectory changed and they are now on a very different track. Furthermore, the few services offered via these service providers made a much greater impact because of that special relationship.

Between Then and Now: Intimate partner Relationships

Intimate partner relationships are a subcategory of informal supports, but one that deserves special attention. Throughout the research youth in positive relationships were doing significantly better, in terms of escaping homelessness, than those not. There are a number of factors that could potentially explain this divergence, one being economic. Two people working together towards the same goals are more likely to succeed because they can pool their limited resources.

> "My goal for the future is to graduate from university, I'm in my first year right now… It would be impossible to go to school without my boyfriend. He helps so much with my son, so I can go to class, and write my papers. Once I am done school then he is going to go to college."

Without in-home childcare, work and/or school are financially incredibly difficult. The issue here is that many homeless Aboriginal youth are deprived of this particular mode of life, not because they do not want it, but because typically Aboriginal youth experiencing homelessness have difficulty forming intimate relationships simply due to the nature of being homeless.

> "I think it's effected my ability to have a relationship with a girl, but I still can like go out. I just can't like, you know when you have a girlfriend she wants to know what you're doing and where you're sleeping and I can't answer those things. They ask too many questions; they want to know too much."

Another youth spoke to the same point regarding her experience of homelessness and its effects on her relationships:

> "It's the worst experience ever. You don't want to tell anyone, or be like oh 'hey man I'm sleeping in the woods can I come sleep on your couch'. It's just embarrassing. I felt ashamed; I didn't want anyone to know what happened. It's a lot easier to do that, rather than to tell my family that I had failed."

The feelings of shame had far reaching consequences aside from its effect on intimate partner relationships. As a long-term solution to Aboriginal youth homelessness, being fulfilled on an emotional level is central to not falling back into a state of homelessness.

Between Then and Now: The Role of Culture and Tradition

A number of the youth had come into contact with traditional Aboriginal knowledge keepers, elders, etc. and the impact was stark. Those who actively participated in traditional Aboriginal healing practices, learned about their culture, participated in ceremony, were better off than those who did not. There are a number of studies and reports that show that incorporating traditional healing and wellness into health services for Aboriginal people improves health and wellness, and health and wellness is such a huge part of the Aboriginal homelessness problem.

> "Big time, Big time… it helped me deal with my past, it was very powerful. I started just by going to a sweat. In our community, there are a lot of people that put on sweats. I needed some strong medicine and I got it in our ancestors' teachings."

Another youth spoke of the value sweats have above western approaches to healing.

> "So many different ways that sweats are done, but they have helped me stop drinking, AA didn't help me at all. I learned to respect creation, respect females, and life, I learned forgiveness. There was a lot of stuff I had to relearn because of the way I was raised, and when you sweat, you go back and start over, it's just you, you sweat out any impurities, you know physical ones and the ones inside you, in your spirit."

The main issue here is that only two of the sixty youth interviewed had been referred by a service provider to someone who could guide them in tradition,

culture and ceremony. The way the youth are getting in touch with these people are through informal support networks.

Between Then and Now: Internal Coping Mechanisms – Support and Barrier

The youth developed a number of internal coping mechanisms as a strategy for dealing with being homeless and to deal with the trauma they had experienced. Some of the youth interviewed had developed strategies in order to avoid certain situations, some with very negative consequences. Drugs and alcohol were cited as a way of "dealing with" or "surviving" being homeless.

Similarly, some youth developed behavior that limits interpersonal relationships. As one participant said, "you don't have to explain where you live to your friends, if you don't have any." Some youth would even avoid using services for the homeless rather than face the social stigma. One female youth who had used various forms of social assistance as a way to tackle homelessness in the past has found herself on the brink of being without a place to live again and did not want to use those services again, saying, "once you've been on assistance it's almost embarrassing to go back, and you don't want your kids to see you on it." While another youth who had also utilized assistance, in this case the Fredericton Food Bank, felt shame after doing so.

> "I would go down to the food bank and get some food with my friend, I felt like I really didn't belong there because all the people were homeless, like straight up homeless, living in the street. So, I was just like freaked out, and I felt kind of bad about that. Here I was wearing some rich kid clothes and whatever, I felt like I didn't need it as bad as they did."

The effects of their homelessness are far-reaching and have both positive and negative effects. Overall, the majority of the youth demonstrated internal coping mechanisms that strengthen them. You look at the fact that 22 of the 63 youth interviewed spent time in a corrections facility and you still get statements like this,

> "Being incarcerated gave me time to think about my options and my paths. So, after weighting my options I chose to give Fredericton a try. I was released from jail and I chose to come to Fredericton because of the post- secondary education and work opportunities, and to escape my previous environment. This is the city I'm going to build my life in. I planned the work I need to do, and now I am working the plan. I landed a job this week. I've got my applications to St. Thomas University, and the navy done, I'm just waiting on my transcripts, which should be in soon."

Despite all this youth has been through, physical and sexual abuse, the displacement from community and family, being incarcerated for 4 years, he still has a positive outlook and views his homeless experience as a learning experience and this speaks to the feelings of hope, ambition, and optimism so many of our participants exhibited. These internal coping mechanisms proved in many cases to be the youth's greatest support.

Assistance: Dealing with the Lack of Services

Every single youth interviewed spoke to the lack of services available to them. Some of this is an actual lack of services, while in other cases it involves other factors. The biggest factor is the definitional issue discussed under the "Problems with Making Contact" sub-heading. You have a situation where service providers, because of poorly constructed definitions of homelessness, are mischaracterizing or not

characterizing youth at all as homeless. This was particularly troublesome in the north of the province where homelessness is not conceptualized as being a problem.

Lack of services is a major challenge for the youth in terms of meeting their goal of escaping homelessness. Under this theme of the interview we delved deeper into the youth's experiences and tried to extract detailed information about the services they utilized or any assistance they received throughout their experience of homelessness.

We started by asking the youth what assistance or services they have utilized. A number of youth described how there was either nothing available in terms of services or assistance or that they chose not to utilize them:

> "There is not much… I was on welfare but all that did was maintain me staying at my buddies' place for a while for a couple dollars… I am not on it now because you need an address, but you can't afford a place for 500 a month…I don't know…I just try living with a friend who has his own place…"
>
> "There's absolutely nothing. On the reserve, they have drug and alcohol groups. But they even pick and choose who they want to help. Like it's so stupid. I've been going to NA [Narcotics Anonymous] and AA [Alcoholics Anonymous] and I do whatever, and I contacted them. But they won't help."
>
> "I don't know, I really like, I don't like to ask any of those people for help. I just try and do it all on my own."
>
> "I can't get social assistance, no, I don't know the age that you can, maybe nineteen."
>
> "No, I've just struggled through it. "
>
> "I never used them. I think my pride just got in the way."

This lack of knowledge or refusal to utilize services was a definite theme for some youth throughout the interviews/research circles. Given that so many of the youth have been displaced geographically, the result has been a disorientation that prevents or creates a barrier in accessing services. Most of the youth did not grow up in the urban center they are currently living in, and therefore are not aware of what is available or where to look to see if something is available. This problem was exacerbated for youth from the north.

> "Yeah no, I had never been to Fredericton before… We used to go to Quebec, over to Maine a couple times, but never down here… I just figured it seemed like a good place, my brother was living with this girl in St. Mary's, but yeah when I first got here I didn't know where anything was… No, I still don't know where social development is…."

Also, as was seen in the last section, strategies to avoid the social stigma associated with homelessness are a way for the youth to cope with living homeless. Unfortunately, at the same time these strategies can also act as a barrier to receiving services or assistance as can be seen in some of the above quotes.

The services that the youth interviewed had utilized where emergency services, services like women's shelters, men's shelters, food banks, etc. Other than a few male youths who had been incarcerated and were referred to the John Howard Society, none of the youth utilized or had access to services that helped move them away from a state of homelessness. One of the questions in each interview was asking if any services helped move them away from a state of being homeless. The answers to that question were a resounding "no".

> "Nothing out there helps you not to be homeless, I just deal with that on my own, figure it out you know. I need a place to live! I can't afford a place on welfare even, I've been on a wait list at Skigin (Skigin Elnoog Housing Corporation), I guess Skigin would help me not bein'[sic] homeless but a lot of people need their help, you know. It's tough…"

Another barrier for Aboriginal youth who are homeless in terms of accessing services has to do with identifying as an Aboriginal person. Aboriginal youth often times require or benefit greatly from services designed for Aboriginals because of the unique context and history Aboriginal peoples have in Canada. Unfortunately, the vast majority of the youth interviewed did not identify as Aboriginals if they utilized off-reserve services. When initially reaching out to service providers looking for participants many of them would not know if any of their clients were Aboriginal, "We don't really ask them" I was told on one occasion. Many Aboriginal youth choose not to identify as Aboriginal as one youth spoke to:

> "I don't [identify as Aboriginal to service providers]. I know some people do whenever they can, but for me, there is a lot of discrimination and I don't want people to think I am trying to get more than my fair share. Everyone that is homeless, whether they're white or Natives, are having a rough time. I'm lucky I don't really look native so I no one even knows."

Quotes like this are so dense with meaning. It reflects certain racist discourses that Aboriginal people "want more than their fair share", when in fact they just want what was promised to them, or equitable treatment. This acts as a huge barrier for Aboriginal youth who rely on the informal community around them, many of whom are non-Aboriginal. For these youths not identifying as Aboriginal is a strategy for survival, a way of maintaining those important social relations.

While there are services available for homeless Aboriginal youth, many of them go unutilized due to the issues mentioned above. That being said there are actual gaps in service that were uncovered in the interviews and which have been identified by service providers as well. In Child and Family Services there is a service gap between the ages of 16-19, particularly for on reserve youth, but there are still significant obstacles for youth in that age bracket off reserve.

> "I was told about this thing called the Y.E.S. program (Youth Enhancement Services), someone told me about it, I can't remember who, but anyway I called about it and they told me I had to be living on my own for 3 months before I would qualify or whatever. Like my mom had kicked me out because she was an addict and couldn't deal with me, so like where am I supposed to go for three months? Stuff like that is so stupid, I don't understand why they can't just help me out, obviously I needed it."

The situation for on-reserve youth is not much better in some communities. Reserves do not have access to provincially funded programs, such as the Y.E.S. program, and it is up to each community to use prevention dollars for youth who fall in the service gap.

> "I went into Child and Family Services on the reserve and was like, 'is there anything you can do for me?' and they just told me no… Apparently I am in that age bracket where if you aren't in care they won't do anything, but they won't put me in care because I just left the situation I was in at home."

This lack of services for you at such a critical age troubled many of the participants. The age group with the least amount of services available were also the age group where many of the youth went astray, down paths to crime, violence, drugs, etc.

> "Everybody talks about the youth being the future, but they tell us we are on our own with the other cheek. They need to start putting their money where their mouth is!"

Looking Back: What could have been done better?

In this section, the youth were asked to look back and reflect on their lives and experiences as homeless Aboriginal youth and to identify what could have been done better. The youth had a number of suggestions over both phases of the research. For the most part, youth in the north mirrored southern youth in terms of recommendations, but there were a few notable differences.

In the north, the youth were primarily concerned with meeting their fundamental needs as human beings; food, shelter, money, whereas in the south, the youth were primarily concerned with recommendations beyond the fundamental, recommendations that would help move youth out of a state of homelessness. This could be representative of the difficult situation involving services and access to services in the north of the province as compared to the south.

Each subtopic under this heading will highlight a recommendation made by the youth interviewed under the northern and southern parts of the project. These recommendations were made after each youth recounted their entire journey and reflected on the reality of living homelessness in that it is not a static but fluctuating experience that for most of the participants has spanned their entire lives.

Looking Back: I. More Affordable Housing for Off-Reserve Aboriginal youth experiencing homelessness

The majority of youth interviewed cited lack of affordable housing off-reserve as one of the biggest obstacles facing homeless Aboriginal youth in New Brunswick

today. For many of the youth this has been an issue in their lives for a long time, given that more than 50% of Aboriginals in Canada live off-reserve in an urban setting. In this study 94% of the youth started their lives on a reserve but then transitioned off-reserve. For many of those youth the transition off reserve was never complete due to insecure housing off reserve.

Whether it was their parents or themselves inability to afford urban housing was exacerbated by a number of factors. Many of these factors act in a snowball effect that creates another barrier for youth in accessing urban housing. Many of the youth were dealing with drug/alcohol addictions, emotional trauma, or having been "in the system" as children in care. This context lead to increased difficulties in getting a job, which further promoted social assistance as a means to provide for themselves. The youth told us that social assistance just is not enough.

> "I think affordable housing should be top of the list, and I think a raise in the allowance that they give. Like social assistance and stuff, it barely pays just your rent, unless you're already in affordable housing, but if you're not, it's not paying for rent. And if you have to pay your rent each month then it's your power bill that doesn't get paid for two or three months because you just can't afford both."

The youth did acknowledge that there is affordable housing available to Aboriginals but there is simply not enough of it. Skigin Elnoog Housing Corporation is one such service that many youths cited, but every youth that cited them as a service were unable to utilize that service due to waitlists.

As a result of the scarce affordable housing available to homeless Aboriginal youth, their only other option available was to "couch surf" or to use emergency shelter's. But for some youth even that is not an option as one youth explains.

> "Other than my daughter, it's just me. I have no support system, no family, I don't have any friends anymore because I'm trying to stay away from drugs so I can get my daughter back. If I get kicked out of the place I am now, I literally have no where to go, or no one to go to…."

The youth in the quote above went on to explain that she was already behind on the rent. The honorarium from the interview was going to her landlord in hopes to buy her some time in getting the rent she owes together.

Looking Back: II. Improve Housing Availability and Conditions On-Reserve

As has been stated a number of times throughout the report, the vast majority of participants began life on-reserve and where later forced, for various reasons, to move off-reserve. One of the main reasons the youth cited for that move was the inadequacy of reserve housing.

The inadequacy of reserve housing was twofold, first, there was simply not enough of it, and second, the housing that is available is severely overcrowded and often times unliveable. Some youth described housing that was falling apart or in need of major repairs, but the most common description was severe overcrowding.

> "Looking back, it was pretty ridiculous, but I kind of enjoyed it at the time, there was always someone around… So, at it's worst it was me, my mom and dad, my brother and two sisters, and then my oldest brother's girlfriend and their two kids, and my mom's sister and her 2 kids. Oh man it was so crowded,

I don't know how my parents standed it… I guess they didn't, we moved after a few months of that…"

Overcrowding is such a huge problem on reserves. Throughout our research, 83% of the youth who had started life on reserve had lived in a home with multiple families at some point while they lived on reserve. Many have called the housing situation on reserves in Canada a "housing crisis". The reality for the participants of this project is that this reserve housing crisis is fueling the urban Aboriginal homelessness problem.

While this report is concerned with urban Aboriginal youth, to end Aboriginal youth homelessness in New Brunswick, the housing crisis off reserve is not the only issue that must be solved. The housing crisis in all Aboriginal communities has to be addressed.

Looking Back: III. Aboriginal Culture and Traditions as a Path to Healing

The contrast was stark throughout the interviews between Aboriginal youth who had used traditional Aboriginal teachings, ceremony, and medicines as a way of healing, and youth who had not. All the youth for the most part came from the same place, but upon being referred to a traditional practitioner, their paths diverged. The youth who had utilized traditional culture were all on a positive path.

Admittedly some of the youth interviewed expressed no interest or desire to utilize or practice traditional culture. But for the ones who had, the impact was immense. Unfortunately, traditional culture and practice is not given the same weight as more

western approaches to healing and lifestyle. Only two of the youth interviewed were referred to someone to do traditional Aboriginal healing, ceremony, or practice by a service provider. In both of those cases the referring service provider was an Aboriginal woman.

The youth are being referred to this very valuable practice through informal support networks. The formal support system has completely dropped the ball in this area and the youth noticed. “Why are these things not recommended to our youth?”, one participant asked. “They have had such a huge impact on my life, I’ve been clean and sober for three years now and I tried everything before that, drug counselors, you name it.”.

Whether an Aboriginal youth decides that tradition culture is the path to healing she wants to take or not is a choice for them to make. Despite this the youth interviewed recommended that traditional Aboriginal culture be treated as equal to western-settler culture, and made available to them.

Looking Back: IV. A New Ethics for Service Providers Working with Aboriginal Youth

It cannot be underestimated the impact an individual within the system can have on a homeless Aboriginal youth. While many of the challenges and barriers facing homeless Aboriginal youth are systemic and/or structure issues, the individual service provider does not have to be a challenge or barrier for these youths.

A recommendation that frequently appeared in the interviews was to have service workers that actually cared about them. The idea that their lives are in the hands of a worker who "see it as a job", promotes the feelings of disconnectedness that many of the youth generally feel. For many of the youth, their service workers, whether individual social workers, counselors, etc. are the only adults in their lives. This is due to a number of factors, such as, the unique history of dislocation, not only geographically or spatially, but also dislocation from family and friends through over-representation in the child welfare system. This lead some of the youth to recommend changes to ethics codes that allow for close or personal bonds (akin to familial in some cases) to be developed between service providers and youth.

There definitely was a theme in the interviews where youth who had encountered a social worker or counselor "who went above and beyond", seemed to be in a better place than those youths who had not encounter such service providers. One youth explained how this works.

> "With everybody else, social workers and stuff, I knew that at the end of the day they had a job to do and they didn't realize how I felt. But with [Jane] she genuinely cares about everyone she comes into contact with, especially youth... She really wants to make a difference. She made me feel accepted, instead of being a job. She made me feel like a family member, she seen me as a person, for who I was. Which was a scared little kid, not this hard-looking person people thought I was. She was the first one to break the walls; she did the work to get in. She didn't push me to the side like everyone else did."

Looking Back: V. Close the Service Gap for Youth and Put Your Money Where Your Mouth Is.

There still exists a service gap, particularly in Child and Family Services for youth ages 16-19. This gap is particularly harmful for youth living in reserve communities, as it is up to each community to determine where prevention money is best spent. Youth living on reserve miss out on services like the Y.E.S. program among others.

The youth noticed this gap and identified the strong contradiction within, if youth are the future, why are they left to fend for themselves in many instances? Not only did the youth recommend closing this service gap but want it to go one step further.

Ages 12-17 are such critical ages, especially for at risk youth like those interviewed for this project. The youth interviewed identified this age group as the most at risk, and want more to be done to counter the intense pull these youth face to drugs, alcohol, crime, etc. Some of the youth hypothesized that after-school recreational programs would greatly assist this age bracket. One youth cited urban Friendship Centres as a space he has used successfully before. He explained that having a place like that to just hangout was a way to avoid the drugs and alcohol so prevalent in his age group. The youth want these outreach or access centres to be open to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth alike:

> "When I was off-reserve I didn't have programs and stuff like that sounds appealing. Something that they'll like to do and enjoy going to. All kids can go, like not just native's. Off-reserve native too, and white kids."

That youth explained how he would avoid an Aboriginal youth center if available, because most of his friends are non-Aboriginal, and he doesn't feel like they would be welcomed. Another youth, who has a small child of her own, explained:

> "Send them [children aged 12-17] to a place where they can play and have supper, they don't have to pay for it, they can just go. Like if they do come up with those things for off reserve they make people go. At risk youth on and off reserve need a place. I just don't want to do it just for on reserve kids. My kids hang around with off reserve kids, I did too. That's the majority of who my friends were. To make a thing just for native kids and their kids are on the outside, they might not want to go to the service. They need to open it for everything."

It is clear to see that these youth view structures such as a Friendship Centre or a Boys and Girls Club as a valuable tool for youth aged 12-17. Further, to ensure the youth will actually utilize such services, they recommend promoting such agencies and advertising that non-Aboriginal youth are equally as welcome. Without services such as these, the youth stated that youth in the future are at risk to crime, drugs, alcohol, and potentially a life involving time incarcerated. They explain that by government and service providers waiting until youth reach their twenties it is too late.

Looking Back: VI. "Under One Roof" Approach to Services for Aboriginal Youth

Aboriginal Youth Homelessness is a complex web of interrelated factors and issues. The youth interviewed felt that because of this fact, these issues could be better treated "under one roof". The youth recommend that services designed for an array of issues facing Aboriginal youth be housed within the same building. Furthermore, many of the youth expressed their views of healing in a holistic sense, versus the

"divide and conquer" approach, you must treat the person, not the issue, and the "under one roof" approach would be in line with this way of thinking.

Also, given the nature of homelessness and some of the difficulties there in, logistically for the youth this approach would be a huge improvement. Most of the youth have been displaced from their communities and thus learning where to go for all the various services can be a daunting task. To add to this difficulty is the problem of getting to various appointments across the urban landscape. Mass transit is lacking in some of the urban centers in New Brunswick, and thus the youth must rely on their already strained social support system to get them to and from appointments.

Looking Back: VII. Back to the Drawing Board – Develop New Ways of Reaching Homeless Aboriginal Youth

A complaint heard from service providers throughout the project was that Aboriginal youth are not utilizing the services that are available to them. Interviewing the youth exposed a number of reasons for this, but regardless, services need to be designed to serve those making use of them.

The first correction that must be made is for service providers to be able to identify homeless Aboriginal youth. Currently, definitional issues are making it nearly impossible for homeless youth to be identified, if you don't know they are there how can you serve them? Next is to understand the nature of their homelessness. The services required by a youth who is living on the street are sometimes different

from a youth who is couch surfing, or a youth in an unhealthy relationship for the purpose of accommodations.

The fact remains that the majority of the youth were not aware of any services outside of the food bank, emergency shelters, and Skigin Elnoog Housing Corporation. One youth mentioned the provincial Y.E.S. program, but only because of their inability to utilize it. For the men who had been incarcerated the John Howard Society figured prominently, but many of the overarching issues, or systemic problems remained a barrier even though services likely exist to help them.

Looking Back: VIII. More Prevention, Less Reaction – Stop working in crisis mode

Looking back most of the youth interviewed had significant issues in their lives that were causing trauma. In turn, this trauma played a central roll in their homelessness/continued homelessness. One of the main recommendations from the youth was that more needed to be done earlier to help their families. Obviously for the youth making this suggestion this time has passed, but the youth interviewed expressed great concern for the next generation of youth.

The youth perceived that the system is set up primarily to be a reactionary one, and not a preventative one, as one youth stated,

> "Listen, I had social workers coming to my house for years. They knew my mother was an alcoholic, they knew there had been issues of abuse in her past,

> because she was involved with CPS when she was a kid... Why didn't they help us more, give her services or whatever so she could start to heal? Instead they did nothing and left me there long enough so she could pass on all her shit to me."

Perhaps in this case the mother was offered services and denied them, we don't know, but this narrative was incredibly frequent. This is not to blame individual service workers, but rather the system within which they work, a system that is often times underfunded and workers over-worked. Regardless the youth recommend a reprioritization from reaction to prevention.

Looking Back: IX. Improve Prospects for Youth Exiting Corrections Facilities

As has already been mentioned, the majority of male participants had served time in a corrections facility. While they had little complaints about the services available in prison or juvenile detention centers, they all were concerned about services and organizations available after being incarcerated:

> "They [corrections facility] give you programs in there and set you up for when you get out. But really all they do is send you to the parole office or halfway house."

Obviously, this is not enough, especially considering the challenges a youth is going to face upon exiting a corrections facility. Gaining employment as an ex-convict or even securing an apartment can prove very difficult. Multiple stories were told of how parole officers would arrange for a job interview, only to have the employer tell the youth they were not going to hire them because of their criminal record. They are also subjected to ridiculous scenarios as one participant shared.

> "It's so stupid, okay, you can't get an apartment until you have a damage deposit, but social services won't give you the damage deposit they provide until you have proof of a rental.

Following these demeaning and embarrassing encounters, a few youths stated they gave up and refused to continue with this service. This set up a chain of events that sometimes led to recidivism. Other stories were told of the difficulties they encountered upon exiting the criminal justice system:

> "The halfway houses, which are through the John Howard Society, have also been supportive in my life. I always knew them, and they always really liked me. Seen potential in me, I just would give up on myself early. They are definitely a major support, always keeping me in line. They were starting up on apartments for me, for subsidized rent. This time like I got out, and felt different about myself, wanted a different life, just didn't know how. Being an adult, they could help me now. Couldn't really help when I was a kid. There are way more avenues as an adult. They just look at you when you're a kid and think you just need to change your life without helping you in anyway."

This quote says a lot; first, it echoes the previous issue of service gap. Second, this youth actually points out the positives of his and others experience with the John Howard Society. In addition to this organization, other youths cited the Portage substance abuse program as a place where they have received invaluable assistance. However, the youth went on to explain that no matter how helpful these organizations are, they are often far removed from their home communities. For example, we had youth from communities in the North-Eastern part of New Brunswick who were staying in half-way houses in Fredericton. There were also youth from the Western part of the Province who were seeking addictions assistance a few hundred kilometers away. Ultimately, the youth recommend more and better services closer to their home communities for when they are released from a correctional facility.

Looking Back: X. Make the system more user friendly/efficient

The final recommendation is an all-encompassing one. Nearly every participant had a recommendation in some regard to the inefficiency and complexity of the current system. Homelessness can be a fluid experience yet the needs are pressing and consequences great. Having to wait weeks or months to qualify for a service can have a dramatic impact on the individual as we have heard. Furthermore, the consequence of running a program or service that is just not working leaves homeless Aboriginal youth in limbo. This relates back to developing new ways to reach youth, but inefficiency is central here.

> "You hear how Trudeau is spending all this money on Natives, but where is it? Maybe it is going to some people, but it isn't coming to me or the people I know. I feel like we have a right to that, and we should be gettin' it. Maybe a lot of it goes to reserves, but I don't plan on ever living on the reserve again."

The fact of the matter is that the money is not reaching those who need it. A greater effort needs to be made to design services and delivery of those services in an efficient and less complicated manner. Nearly all of the homeless youth interviewed were dealing with a number of parallel issues, and having the added stress of attempting to navigate services was often the breaking point. Therefore, the youth recommend a system that makes their lives easier not more difficult. These youths have jumped through enough hoops; more hoops are not going to help them overcome homelessness.

Conclusion

Something all of these interviews exposed about Aboriginal youth homelessness is that it is predictable and preventable. Unfortunately, the lens the system uses to look at the problem with renders Aboriginal youth homelessness largely invisible. While there is a visible segment of the Aboriginal youth homeless population, it represents only the tip of the iceberg in terms of the extent of the problem.

Who are these youth, how are they living, what help are they receiving? These are all questions that need to be asked and that is what this project has sought to do by talking to the youth. This report is not the end point though, these youths have not told their stories for historical record, but for something meaningful to happen as a result.

Appendix A

Interview Guide

1. Opening Questions:
    a. Introduce interviewer.
    b. Age?
    c. Where were you born?
    d. Currently residing?
2. Personal History (Past)
    a. Can you tell us/me about your early home life?
        i. Who did you live with?
        ii. What was your home life like?
            1. How would you describe your early home life?
        iii. From your perspective what were the issues in your home growing up?
            1. Eg. Economics / finances, alcohol, abuse, abuse.
    b. What supports were available to you and your family during this time?
        i. Extended family? Friends?
        ii. Formal supports? School, social services, groups.
        iii. First Nations/Aboriginal community?
    c. What could have helped back then?
        i. What did you and your family need back then that wasn't available?
    d. Did you / your family have any interaction with any Aboriginal organizations when you were younger?
3. Between Then and Now
    a. When did you first feel like you experienced homelessness?
    b. How did the transition take place?
        i. What issues did you face specifically that lead to you experiencing homelessness?
            1. ie. Historical and cultural trauma, systemic/societal factors (addictions, poverty, violence (including domestic violence), environments and systems related to racism (i.e. policies such as the Indian Act), lack of relevant supports, and changes in supports and services.)
            2. Traumatic event? Loss of job? Death in family?
            3. Or was it a gradual process?
    c. How did/does the transition into homelessness affect you?
    d. How have you lived/survived after the transition?
4. Assistance
    a. What agencies have you utilized throughout your homeless experience?
        i. How did you find out about them?
        ii. How did you contact them?
        iii. What services did they provide you with?
        iv. How has that service moved you towards not being homeless?
        v. As an Aboriginal person how could the agency better serve you?
        vi. Did you identify as an aboriginal person when using these services?

5. What could be done better?
    a. What are your suggestions for policy makers and/or workers of the agencies you have used?
    b. How might the needs of you as an Aboriginal person be better accommodated?
        i. physical, spiritual, etc?
    c. If you were a service provider what would be your main focus be?

Appendix B

Participant Information Form

Project Title: Urban Aboriginal Youth Homelessness in New Brunswick

Age: _____

Education level attained: _____

Approximate monthly income and source: _____

Where you were born: _____

Where you currently reside: _____

Gender: _____

Sexuality: _____



Participant Information Form

Project Title: Urban Aboriginal Youth Homelessness In New Brunswick

Age: _____

Education level attained: _____

Approximate monthly income and source: _____

Where you were born: _____

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