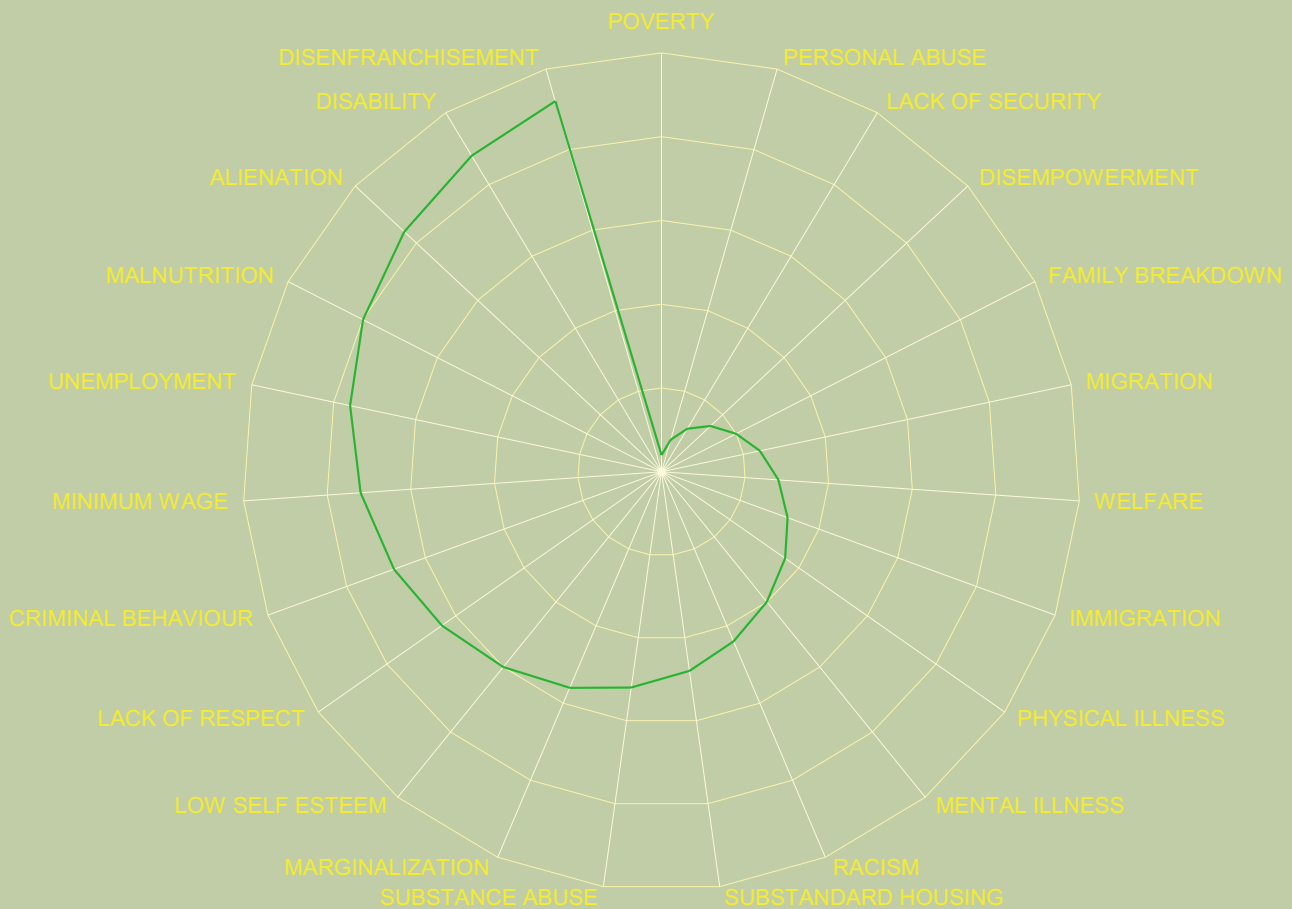


# THE VIEW FROM THE SIDEWALK



TOWARDS A NEW DEFINITION OF  
PEOPLE WHO ARE HOMELESS

A STUDY BY ORGANIC INTELLECTUALS

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*Homeless is where one within  
the loneliness lives among the others:  
Those others who are searching for what  
they don't know or can't give.*

*The one has been humbled by life's questions.  
The others are afraid to ask what it is,  
because they might become  
the one among the others.*

Todd  
(Member of research team)

## **Preface to Organic Intellectuals' First Report**

I believe the publication of this report to be a truly historic occasion. As far as I am aware this is the first time people who are homeless have had the opportunity to not only review and critique the literature on homelessness but to travel throughout British Columbia to meet with other homeless persons and members of supportive communities. They have taken their review and their ethnographies, applied their own experiences and knowledge, and suggested policies that will allow for persons who are homeless to chart their own futures.

Heretofore people who are homeless have been considered "target populations" that others study and define. Policies are developed and implemented that are aimed at improving the conditions of homeless persons. As we are all aware, these have various levels of success. Some even act to perpetuate the very conditions that create and maintain homelessness. Generally, homeless persons have been considered to be without communities while those who work on their behalf are seen as a community. Thus homeless persons have been seen as objects rather than subjects. As such the homeless are involved only as interviewees or focus groups.

This preliminary report seeks to turn this traditional way of looking at homelessness upside down and put people who are homeless in the forefront. These Organic Intellectuals fortified their own experiences and knowledge by such pursuits as Humanities Education and Research Committee, Humanities 101, Women's Humanities Year, and courses such as UBC's Anthropology 303(Ethnography of the Downtown Eastside) and Anthropology 510(The Urban Field School) and other intellectual pursuits.

This intervention, although critical, does not seek to vilify the work of civil servants, consultants, elected officials, service providers or those that advocate for the homeless. Rather, it insists that there is knowledge that cannot, and should not, be silenced. As a society, we should shift from banishing to cherishing such knowledge.

It must be remembered that this is a first draft offered for your comments and criticism. You are being asked to become an ally by applying your experiences and knowledge to this document. This may well lead to other Organic Intellectuals from other parts of Canada joining the movement. I cannot help but believe that this is not only a necessary but essential component to understanding and transforming homelessness. This becomes the essential step to a positive unity of theory and practice that may help to eradicate the horrific apparatuses that create and perpetuate homelessness and that may help to work toward the creation of a truly inclusive society.

*Jim Green*  
*November 16, 2001*

# The View From The Sidewalk

## Towards A New Definition Of People Who Are Homeless A Study By Organic Intellectuals

*“The words used to define something are important because they dictate the way in which we perceive and ultimately act on the subject being defined.”*

- Jim Green

*“Homelessness is the most fundamental problem that a contemporary democratic society can face. Until society faces this situation and conquers it, it is truly not civilised.”*

- Sylvia's interview with William in Vancouver

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The following report on Homelessness In British Columbia has been researched and written by eleven individuals who are experiencing, or have previously experienced, homelessness.

*“Many studies have been written on the homeless, but one would assume that a first person account would truly give the most accurate reality of what homelessness ‘is’.”*

- Sylvia interview with John in Vancouver

#### 1.1 People And Homelessness In British Columbia

Recently, there has been increased concern about the issue of “homelessness.” The term “homelessness” is often used as a stereotype that describes persons who are shelterless, without homes, living on the streets or in temporary shelters. This stereotype has played a large part in the shaping of official/government definitions of homelessness, which commonly do not include individuals who are at risk of becoming homeless because they live in unaffordable or inadequate housing.

Another prime reason why official/government definitions frequently only encompass the “shelterless”, could be because this results in there being fewer “homeless” people who need to be addressed and served.

*“Over one million Canadians spend more than 50% of their income on rent.”*

- Jack Layton; Federation of Canadian Municipalities Study

As we encountered in our study, there are countless individuals caught in cycles of homelessness, struggling to deal with internal/personal issues and appearing to be unable to mesh seamlessly into society. It is possible that the official definitions of “homelessness” do not allow for such people.

While we realize we cannot hope to redesign society, nor was it our mandate to do so, we believe we can provide some useful input to the discussion of homelessness in our society. The primary purpose of this community-based research initiative was to develop a definition that accurately describes the problems and conditions associated with homelessness from the point of view of those people most affected.

## **1.2 How The Study Began**

On January 15<sup>th</sup> 2001 Jim Green, Executive Director of the Social Alternatives Unit within the BC Ministry of Community, Aboriginal, and Women's Services, attended a meeting in Toronto about "communities sharing their experience counting the homeless population." Then in May, Mr. Green participated in a National Homelessness Initiative Evaluation Meeting, where a logic model was revealed that did not include the participation of people who are homeless, and seemed to be aimed more at improving and maintaining the conditions of homelessness than at bringing an end to homelessness.

While this aim might be applauded for its pragmatism, it nevertheless was striking that the homeless were not being involved anywhere in the process of being defined. With the idea of "when in doubt, ask the experts", this project was initiated to work towards creating a grassroots definition of homelessness in British Columbia. Funding was obtained from BC Housing and the Ministry of Community, Aboriginals and Women's Services to gather together a core team of researchers.

There were two prerequisites for these researchers. The first was that they have first hand experience of homelessness. The second was that they qualify as "organic intellectuals" (see below).

Their task would be to review existing definitions, literature and policies on homelessness, conduct province-wide interviews with people who are homeless, and then come to consensus on a definition of homelessness.

*"There is a need for testimonials vs. statistics. [A need to] stop using vast sweeping statements when discussing poverty. [To] stop patronising the poor. [To] stop making decisions and policies from statistics and start consulting the poor."*

- Andrew OI, first writings

## **1.3 Who Are Organic Intellectuals**

For the purpose of this study, we adopted and adapted Antonio Gramsci's concept of organic intellectuals (OIs). Gramsci states that everyone has intellectual capacity and capabilities ... the intellectual switch just needs to be turned on.

Gramsci went on to say that there are two ways to turn on the intellectual switch: the 'traditional route' that involves removing oneself from society to learn through formal schooling (the traditional intellectual); and the 'organic route,' to be a student of the school of living and learning through life's varied experiences. Usually this organic life-learning is complemented by self education and other alternative forms of learning. Once the intellectual switch is activated, organic intellectuals then tend to focus their energies on the social class/condition from which they came.

This idea of organic intellectuals has found expression in Vancouver through the creation of a Humanities 101 program based on the ideas of Earl Shorris who says that in, "contemporary [society], the poor must overcome the panicked reaction of people who live in a surround of force in order to escape from poverty; that is, they must learn to think reflectively and act politically" (Shorris 2000, Pg. 85).

In 1997 Shorris created the Clemente Course in the Humanities in New York City where he offered a barrier-free access to post secondary education for low income and homeless people. In Vancouver the Humanities 101 was adapted from the Clemente Courses and has grown to the point that there is also a Humanities Store Front Speakers Series, a Humanities Educational Resource Centre, and a Women's Humanities Year (all of which have been created and run by Humanities 101 grads).

#### ***1.4 How The Team Was Put Together***

1. Market Facts MarkTrend was commissioned to provide the general Facilitation (PF) of the project design, and administration, including the editing and production of the report.
2. A Project Co-ordinator (PC) was hired to assemble the team of researchers.
3. The Project Co-ordinator accessed contacts already in existence within Vancouver Downtown Eastside, through Humanities 101, Women's Humanities Year, and the Humanities Educational Resource Centre.

#### ***1.5 Sources Of Funding***

Funding for this project was provided by BC Housing and the Ministry of Community, Aboriginal, and Women's Services.

#### ***1.6 The Format of the Report***

The next two sections of the document deal with the objectives of the study and the methodology we employed.

Sections 4 and 5 are the main fruits of our efforts. Section 4 summarizes our debates and thinking about the issues underlying our definition. Section 5 sets out our definition.

We could have stopped there. But, we felt it was important to capture another aspect of our discussions. Inevitably, we found ourselves thinking about the implications of our definition for policies, policy makers and service providers. Our thoughts in this area are contained in Section 6.

We used the next section to record the thoughts of the team as a whole, and of individual members, on matters that might be considered beyond or beside our brief. Since these thoughts grew directly out of our learning, we considered them relevant and worth sharing.

We have called Section 7 "Reflections". There are two types of reflections included. The first is a summary of Policy Directions – thoughts the team developed on how policies need to evolve in order to accommodate our definition of homelessness. The second consists of observations by individual team members on the process we followed and its outcomes. We offer these reflections at least in part in the hope that they might have value for anyone treading a similar road in future.

The document concludes with an appendix containing a bibliography and notes from our interviews with people who are homeless.

## **1.7 Acknowledgements**

Unfortunately we are not going to be able to thank all the people who deserve our thanks, but we shall try.

Thanks to Jim Green, Carla McLean and the Social Alternatives Unit; the Urban Community Development Unit; Barbara Montgomery; Lorraine Copas; BC Housing; The Community Housing Initiatives in Victoria, Nanaimo, Kelowna, Kamloops, Prince George, and Terrace; the people at MarkTrend; Women's Humanity Year; the Humanities Educational Resource Centre; and all of the people and groups we met with and learned from during our research.

*The Project Team*

## **2. OBJECTIVES**

### ***2.1 What We Set Out to Achieve***

The goal of this community-based research initiative on homelessness was to develop a working definition that accurately reflects the issue of homelessness and its related problems.

Since homelessness is a complex, multifaceted social issue, the project has a number of subsidiary objectives, namely:

- Investigate a regional picture of homelessness from the point of view of those most affected;
- Consider recommendations to inform policy;
- Develop a better understanding of the 'hidden' homeless and the social consequences of not having access to decent affordable housing;
- Provide information that will assist BC Housing and other government departments in better understanding homelessness and delivering options and supports that are responsive to local needs.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Research Methods**

It was decided to use qualitative research techniques to interpret the realities of homelessness. Our goal was to provide input to the definition of the homeless condition, not measure its extent.

#### **3.2 Timeline**

- Project Co-ordinator (PC) Literature Review from July 4 to July 27
- Recruiting Organic Intellectuals (OIs) from July 20 to July 30
- Organic Intellectuals (OIs) Literature Review from July 30 to August 13
- Hypothesis Development Brainstorming Sessions on August 13, 15, and 20 to develop hypotheses for investigation during fieldwork
- Fieldwork period August 21 to September 7
- Synthesis Workshops September 10, 13, 20 to synthesise data from field trips and begin process of definition development.
- Report Writing September 24 to November 20

#### **3.3 Summary of the Major Steps In The Process**

##### **The Literature Review**

The Project Co-ordinator reviewed current literature and policies on homelessness from provincial, national, and international sources. This effort was made to compile a digestible body of relevant information for the Organic Intellectuals to work from. This information was subsequently viewed, compared and critiqued by the organic intellectuals both individually and collectively.

##### **Hypothesis Development Brainstorming Sessions**

Three workshops, each of which lasted three to four hours, were held with the PF, PC, and the eleven OIs. The purpose of these sessions was to share experiences and observations about being homeless, express thoughts on the literature reviewed and to develop key themes that would evolve into guidelines for the OIs to use as the basis of their field research.

##### **The Eight Key Themes that emerged are**

- What is a home (Physical address? “Where the heart is?” Being part of a community?)? Is it more than just four walls? How do we address the whole person?
- What is liveable housing (room size, phone, privacy, laundry, security, day-care, access to healthy food, bathroom, etc.)? What is an acceptable quality of life?
- What trauma suffered/displacement issues have led people to become homeless? (Physical/Sexual abuse? Mental health issues? Loss of job? Loss of family Drug/alcohol issues? Lack of safety? etc) People are rarely homeless because they choose to be. What are people’s “bundles of issues”? Rarely is homelessness the sole issue a person is dealing with.
- Who are the homeless? What percentage of homeless communities are men/women/children? Who are the invisible homeless? How do they learn to become invisible? People who are homeless are not one homogenised group = “the homeless.”
- The “banished knowledge” of the homeless versus the “culture of experts.” Where are the user-designed, bottom up policies and housing?

- What is learned helplessness, the crisis of achievement, and dependent development? How do they affect people who are homeless and do they perpetuate homelessness?
- Why have people who are homeless not been involved before in defining themselves?
- The empowerment and disempowerment of being homeless and trying to overcome homelessness. The loss of control and freedom at the hands of BC Housing, BC Benefits and other service providers.

### **Fieldwork Designs and Practices**

The interviews took place in Vancouver and the communities within the Greater Vancouver Regional District, Prince George, Victoria, Kamloops, Nanaimo, Kelowna and Terrace.

Teams of two interviewers were dispatched to each community for two days of talks with service providers, the homeless and those at risk. In some communities prior appointments had been arranged with service providers to maximise our efforts, since – of necessity – the OI’s were working under stringent timelines.

The teams of researchers were encouraged to develop their own ways of identifying, approaching and interviewing “homeless people” in each community. Each team set out to encounter individuals who might be classified as either “absolutely homeless” (ie shelterless) or “relatively homeless” (at risk of becoming shelterless).

This process of identification and engagement required both skill and courage. In Nanaimo, the two OIs stayed over night at the Samaritan hostel so as to access the local homeless communities. In Victoria, the researchers were able to meet a benevolent SRO landlord who gave them a tour of her SRO hotel and provided them an opportunity to speak with residents. In Prince George, one OI interviewed the head librarian and a Police officer to get their perspectives on homelessness. In Terrace, one OI entered town as if homeless and looking for work to see how he would be treated and what the services were like before revealing his true purpose for being there. In Kamloops, the OI researchers went to a local reserve to better understand First Nations’ living conditions and homelessness.

Although each OI was provided with interview guidelines, the PF and PC made it perfectly clear from the outset that this Community-based Research Initiative was a grassroots project. The OIs were encouraged to use whatever personal style/or method of approaching their interview subjects suited their personal style of communication. The personal anecdotes from the OIs interviews interspersed throughout the report will provide a flavour of the approaches utilized.

### **Synthesising Sessions**

Following the completion of the fieldwork and a period of consolidation of their working notes, the OIs reconvened with the PF and PC for three workshop sessions (again of three to four hours duration).

The aim of these sessions was to work through the themes, each OIs field research, new thoughts, and to come to an agreement on what the group’s definition was. In these sessions the OIs also came up with policy implications based on their research and agreed upon definition.

### **Writing Team**

Three OIs were then chosen to write the report. The report was broken into three parts and over a three weeks period the three OIs wrote their sections with editing and feedback from the PC and PF in group meetings and one on one meetings between an OI and the PC.

The final layout and grammatical edit was conducted by the PF who accepts all responsibility for any misrepresentation that might have resulted from this “tidying up”.

## 4. TOWARDS A DEFINITION OF HOMELESSNESS

### 4.1 Introduction

*"Homelessness is only a title and doesn't represent the true history of these people."*  
- Sylvia interview with John in Vancouver

As a group of people who have experienced or who still are experiencing homelessness, we are in a unique position. We are able to examine and discuss existing definitions and literature on homelessness from a homeless perspective.

It was from this perspective that we asked questions, examined and, if necessary, combined or created concepts and definitions that more clearly and honestly reflected both the situation of homelessness and the meaning of the word homeless as we know it. We understand, on a personal level, what it is like to be homeless and have experienced first hand the forces that helped to make – and keep us – homeless.

*"Homelessness is merely an economic title that implies no democracy or sociability. Homelessness is a negative title that implies someone has lost his or her home. It implies that the persons that are homeless need to be treated or classified...rather than relieved or enfranchised."*

- Sylvia's interview with John in Vancouver

The homeless are by no means an homogenous group and those of us involved in this project were by no means an homogenous group either. Ages, genders, situations, experiences and perspectives varied greatly – as did the reasons for our "homeless condition." So much so that at first the thought that we might agree on anything seemed, well, preposterous.

However, we were not alone. We had academic assistance and support from Norman and Matt and others to help with structure, focus and criticism. It might be added that while the selection process may have been top-down, the working relationship between 'professionals' and the rest of us was not. We met as equals where all individuals and all their ideas were given equal respect and consideration.

Sometimes none of us could see the forest for the trees, and at other times we were exasperated with each other's obtuseness. This was no rubber stamp project. People fought long and often passionately over concepts and points of view. Emotions, passions and biases (ideologies?) clashed over and over again.

We also had our own networks of friends and acquaintances with all their understandings of the situation and, at times, solace. We were also privileged to be the recipients of so much wisdom, knowledge and experiences freely and generously given by those we met and interviewed during our period of research 'in the field.' This was particularly true from those who are or were homeless themselves. It was this experience, perhaps more than any other, that helped us to come to agreements - not compromises - in forming what we all feel is a clearer, more exact definition of homelessness and its ramifications.

## 4.2 Who are the Homeless?

*“Homeless to me is any person without an address, any person living on the street wrapped in a blanket on a sidewalk or in an alley. Homeless is anyone without a place they could call home. Homeless is anyone that cannot find a permanent place to live. Homeless means lost and forgotten and nobody cares what’s happening to you or if you need help. Homeless is someone who lost their family, their home, and their children and gave up on all their responsibilities. Homeless is losing all financial security. Homeless is not having a secure atmosphere; always looking over your shoulder when you try to sleep on a park bench with one eye open. Homeless is being alone outside, cold and hungry and praying to God that he will look out for you. Homeless is wandering the streets day and night in search of food and shelter. Dirty and in need of a hot bath or shower that never seems to happen. Homeless is a person who becomes sick mentally and family and friends who abandoned them not understanding the state of their mind (example) thrown out with no place to go.”*

- Sylvia interview with Doug in Vancouver

Beginning in the 1980’s increasing concern over who is homeless and why came about, in part, because of the large and rapid increases in the numbers and types of people who were seen to be living in a state of absolute homelessness in places like New York and Toronto.

In BC, the 2001 reports “Homeless – Causes and Effects” and the “Regional Homeless Plan for Greater Vancouver,” stated that the absolutely homeless were traditionally seen as 80% adult males with alcohol (ab)use issues and/or mental health issues, and that native people were over represented.

These reports commented on how this picture of homelessness is changing. Our own experiences as homeless people and our experiences ‘in the field’ confirm that the situation of homelessness and the demands placed on those dealing with it are both changing rapidly.

We believe it is impossible for one person or group to know and list all the different people and groups that are facing some version of homelessness. However, we have listed all the people and groups that we are thus far aware of (this list is incomplete):

### Men

*“One homeless man I met in Nanaimo said that he didn’t speak to anyone for the first 8 months he was homeless, because he was so ashamed that he was homeless and that the reason why was because his wife beat him up.”*

- Martin from Nanaimo

*“I was vice president of the Penticton District Jay-Cees. I was always community minded. [I had a] loss of work due to injury. [Then my] place got burnt out and it took two weeks to clean up. My last girlfriend has 3 kids – messed my head up when I left there I didn’t know who I was or what I was. Towards the end I was drinking a lot (binge drinking)”*

- Martin interview with John in Kelowna

### Women

*“Carmelle is a woman in her 30’s who has lived in Kamloops for 10 years. She was a hairdresser, married, living in a nice house, and was and is very well known in town. Her homelessness is the result of a divorce and consequent depression, which led to drug addiction. After that she couldn’t keep a job and was reduced to her present situation - on welfare living in sub-standard accommodations.”*

- Luka and Sylvia interview in Kamloops

*"I am a mother of three beautiful daughters and I gave them to their dad so that they would be safe and have a roof over their heads. I know what it is like not having a home, no address, nothing to call my own. I hope and pray everyday it never happens again. I'm getting back on my feet slowly."*

- Sylvia interview with Lina in Vancouver

### **Seniors**

*"See that guy? That's Halifax. He worked in the lumber industry. Now that he's too old and there isn't much work, he can't get a job. So now he's homeless. There's lot's of guys like him here in Prince George."*

- Melissa interview with John in Prince George

*"...a homeless woman in Vancouver at the age of 61 ... However, what avenues do I have to remedy a problem that so many seniors have here in Vancouver? Where does one turn to and what resources do I have? Being destitute and disabled with heart disease and many other health problems. I am not only isolated by being unable to get around but there is a void in my life after working since I was 16."*

- Dianne interview with Judy

### **Youth**

*"My mother kicked me out because I was drinking and doing drugs all the time."*

- Martin interview with James in Kelowna

*"I've been homeless since I was 14 when I rebelled against society because it was too scary."*

- Julie interview with Martin in Kelowna

*"Youth with dogs face discrimination but people don't know that these dogs are family and protection"*

Caroline

### **Families**

*"Couples expressed concern that existing emergency housing is (only) available for single people, thereby forcing couples who are homeless to separate in order to access housing. Families are forced to separate to access shelter because it is only available to single people or single mothers. This is particularly backward given the fact that most people experienced homelessness as a response to a loss of family/community."*

- Jesseca summary of interviews from Victoria

*"Social housing is not available for me because I'm a single father. It's only for single mothers. There should be services for all single parents."*

- Melissa interview with Vince in Prince George

### **First Nations**

*"Lorraine is an elder who has been in Kamloops 3 years. She was born and raised in Merritt. From her reserve she was sent to residential school in Lytton for 6 years. It was very traumatic - to escape she "shacked up" at 15 years old and started drinking. She is still in the grips of alcoholism and lives in a building where everyone drinks."*

- Luka and Sylvia in Kamloops

*"Native medicines and the healing way of life are almost forgotten - a lot of native culture is almost forgotten. I'm Native but I was brought up in white society"*

- Melissa interview with Vince

#### **People with disabilities**

*"I have bronchial asthma, a stroke, 4 heart attacks, and 5 slipped discs."*

- Martin interview with John in Kelowna

#### **People with HIV/AIDS and other illnesses**

*"A couple years ago I was working in the Alberta Oil Fields as a roughneck and training to be a foreman. But now I'm too sick to work. I can't go back to the work I used to do. I left my job at the oil fields and came to Prince George because of the vision I had of two women. One was an old medicine woman. The other was a lot younger. I saw the younger women on the street in Prince George not long after I got there and started going out with her. She told me she was HIV positive right away but I said it didn't matter, that we'd work something out. It was months however before I knew that she used needles. When I caught her in the bathroom "shooting up" I demanded to try it too. I kept using - all my savings disappeared. At one point, somehow, when we were high (I don't know how, we had always been careful) I must have used her rig by accident. Now I'm HIV positive too. I tested positive in March. It had a devastating effect on my emotions. I've tried to kill myself twice since then."*

- Melissa interview with Vince in Prince George

*"People who have are HIV+ (particularly full blown AIDS) have a difficult time securing a steady income and finding housing that offers needed supports."*

- Jesseca interviews in Victoria

#### **People with drug/alcohol issues**

*"I became homeless because of drugs. I started doing drugs to grow a thick skin. It's a self-destructive downward spiral."*

- Julie interview with Stacey in Kelowna

#### **Refugees and Immigrants**

In Victoria one OI and the PC visited a service provider for immigrants and refugees who listed many of the issues faced by immigrants and refugees that can lead to their becoming absolutely homeless. Often immigrants and refugees enter into Canada as relatively homeless. Unfortunately, although we were able to meet with some immigrants and refugees we were not able to reflect their stories accurately, owing to issues of language, security and time.

#### **Working Poor**

*"I could be described as the working homeless. Right now, today, I have three confirmed jobs and no place to live ... I am fully qualified for all three jobs and the rates of pay range from \$16.00 an hour to \$20.00 an hour. What will happen, I know, is I will arrive in Kelowna [where the job is] with no housing and no money. My boss will expect me to be ready for work immediately, but I will have to spend the next week with HRDC (sic) trying to get help to get work (transportation, housing, food). After I make excuses why I need time off for appointments etc, I will have lost all credibility with this employer, lose the job, and start this cycle all over again."*

- Dianne interview in Prince George

*“When I was homeless I worked and slept in my boss’s old truck in his backyard. If it was truly democratic there would be more emergency shelters for the working poor and homeless.”*

- Sylvia interview with John in Vancouver

### **People with criminal records**

*“When I got out of jail, they said they had a place for me, and they did ... you have your own bathroom, kitchen ... Then people moved in and started dealing and stealing ... I don’t feel safe anymore, it’s not good there anymore.”*

- Melissa interview with Richard in Prince George

*“When women are released from the Burnaby jail, they get a ticket home but most cash it in and end up on the street.”*

- Melissa interview with Margarett in Prince George

Put simply, the homeless are people who lack adequate housing and the money and/or resources to remedy or better their situation. People who are homeless are, in general terms, the most marginalized and impoverished of society’s poor.

*“There should be other titles more often used than ‘the homeless’. Labels that come to mind are the oppressed-addicted, the tortured-criminal, the faceless-victims, mentally ill human beings, or simply the broken hearted.”*

- Sylvia interview with John in Vancouver

In addition, we came to recognise relative homelessness as constituting a state of homelessness. According to Bruce Alexander (Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives report) global capitalism has created a situation of almost universal dislocation, which he describes as unconnectedness, a feeling of not belonging or not being a part of anything. This is the same type of dislocation felt by native peoples under colonialism. Dislocation can lead to a type of relative homelessness that can be universally felt whether one is rich or poor, homeowner or renter. It is also true that a well off person can suffer abuse at the hands of a mate and, under the criteria of relative homelessness, would have to be considered living at least in a state of “temporary homelessness”.

*“However, a home is more than just a building one lives in. A home is a person’s identity, belief system. To be homeless would mean to be disconnected from where or from whatever it is someone may have come from.”*

- Sylvia interview with William in Vancouver

*“My home ... that would be my grandfather’s land ... it’s underwater now ... ever since they put up the Alcan dam in the 1960’s.”*

- Melissa interview with John in Prince George

Ultimately, we identified as homeless or potentially homeless:

- anyone without resources, or access to them;
- anyone who has a disability
- anyone who lives from pay cheque to pay cheque and has no savings
- anyone who has lost a job and cannot get another;
- anyone who is not recognised for the capacity to contribute to society
- anyone who has drug/alcohol issues;
- anyone who has suffered severe dislocation;
- anyone who has lost their shelter, or family, etc.

This list, by extension, would include those previously thought to be more or less impervious to homelessness: the upper and middle classes.

Who are the homeless? Perhaps it is just as important to ask “who is in danger of becoming the homeless?”.

*“Dislocation in free market societies is not confined to poor people or poor countries ... jobs disappear on short notice, communities are weak and unstable ... prices and incomes are no more stable than social life.”*

- Bruce Alexander, *Confronting the Globalisation of Addiction*, p15

### **4.3 Causes of Homelessness**

The *Regional Homelessness Plan for Greater Vancouver* identifies a lack of affordable housing, high housing costs, and a lack of employment as the major reasons for homelessness. While *Homelessness: Cause and Effects* states that

*“there are many factors that lead to homelessness. They range from broad economic factors to individual circumstances, such as mental illness and/or alcohol and substance misuse.”*

Official reports and definitions on the topic of homelessness outline the major causes of homelessness. They are the same, or similar causes that we, the homeless have identified from our life experiences.

However, we also believe that all of these causes apply to and/or are created by society (politically, economically, culturally). Every person who is homeless has their own story, as unique as themselves, as to how they came to be homeless.

Our review of the societal causes of homelessness that encountered led to the development of the following list of causes. This is followed by some examples from our interviews.

#### **Societal Causes**

Lack Of:

- Affordable housing
- Appropriate housing
- Employment
- Education
- Training
- Safety
- Security
- Social supports such as hospitals, etc
- A sense of belonging
- Choice/Options

Because Of

- Discrimination (individual and systemic discrimination and stereotyping)
- Mental/physical disabilities
- Alcohol/drug use
- Dislocation/Colonisation

- Family break up
- Weak social support
- Network of friends/family who are homeless

### Individual Causes

*"Why am I homeless? Tired of standing in line...tired of living in cockroach palaces...it's better to live outside - at least in summer."*

-general agreement among several men at St. Vincent de Paul Drop-in, Prince George

*"I got homeless by having an argument with a roommate; I got kicked out with the clothes on my back and a blanket. I went to social services, got into a shelter and three days later my roomy let me move back in."*

- Martin interview with Keith in Nanaimo

*"Her mother's parents are from Alberta, victims of residential school abuse. Randi has a good relationship with her grandmother, and says that grandma doesn't ever talk about the residential schools, but when something comes on TV about them, grandma starts to cry. Her grandfather was an alcoholic- they moved to Tagish while he was in the army. Randi thinks mom's alcohol and drug issues stem from her childhood experiences of isolation and poor role models."*

- Luka and Sylvia interview with Randi in Kamloops

*"When I was 11 I took off from child services and came to Maple Ridge to live with my brother. Later I lived in a car for 7 years."*

- Julie interview with Grant in Kelowna

*"Home is where I grew up as a kid. Home is memories gone by, some memories of good times and bad times, now when I think of home it's very hard to outweigh the good compared to the bad. The bad far outweigh the good. Because home back then was full of anger, hate and unrest. Along this line when my parent would leave us, (my 2 sisters and I) in the car while they went into the pub and drank. I could not wait to get home, where I could hide until morning and time to go to school."*

- Sylvia interview with Doug in Vancouver

*"I was brought up in white society. Natives have lost their spirit or close to it, once it's gone that's it."*

- Melissa interview with Bill in Prince George

*"I am a single middle-aged woman. I have always worked hard having a job for 8 years and another for 7 years, but that was the past. I now find myself caught in a jam of 7 jobs in 5 years. The bit of savings I had vanished even though I tried my hardest to go without, but finally I had nothing and had to move out of my home. The few friends I had let me sleep on their couches but I felt uncomfortable and started to become very depressed. When I finally got some social assistance they only allowed me \$325.00 for a place to call home, where does such a place exist. It does exist if you want to share a bathroom and smelly dirty kitchen and sleep on a filthy mattress in a room the size of a dog house with a bunch of men and if you do sleep the fear of something bothering you at any time."*

- Dianne interview with Samantha in Prince George

*"I got hurt at work, I was in a coma for 17 days. A tree fell on me. Everything changed after the accident. I'm still going through it and it happened 17 years ago. I changed physically*

*and mentally. I got hurt and I wasn't living in [my trailer home] for a while. The neighbour's kid broke into it and stole everything, then the Regional District condemned it. They stole it off my land, crushed it, and sent me the bill. They said it wasn't safe for the neighbourhood children, so they took it off."*

- Dianne interview with smashed up logger in Prince George

*"I turned 44, menopause, went coo-coo, decides to pawn my stuff and get drunk. Then my roommate evicted me and a girlfriend took the rest of my stuff. That's how I got to be homeless."*

- Martin interview with Theresa

*"Most women have lost their children to the Ministry because of poverty, addiction and sometimes abuse. They then turn to the streets because they have nothing left to live for. We need to come up with a new way of intervening in dysfunctional homes that provides supports rather than tearing families apart. It is ludicrous that families receive less than foster families to raise the same child."*

- Jesseca interview from Victoria

During our field research it also became apparent that the lines between *absolute* homelessness and *relative* homelessness are fluid, especially for those who experience chronic homelessness. Length of time being homeless, learned dependence (or institutionalisation), marginalization issues like a criminal record, age, mental health and drug use, the degree of poverty and lack of education, a lack of resources, coping skills, a social network of homeless friends and similar issues add a downward curve to this fluidity, making it far easier to fall into and remain in a state of homelessness than it is to find a way out.

#### **4.4 The Web of Cause and Effect**

Our debates around “causation” led the project team to the conclusion that, in most cases, regardless of how our interviewees might characterize their own situations, it would be difficult to pinpoint a single cause of an individual’s homelessness. So, as many of the studies had suggested, the causes of homelessness are many.

Furthermore, there appear to be many inter-relationships involved. For example, lack of formal education might lead to lack of employment which could lead to loss of self esteem which could lead to substance abuse which could lead to lack of socialization which could lead to homelessness.

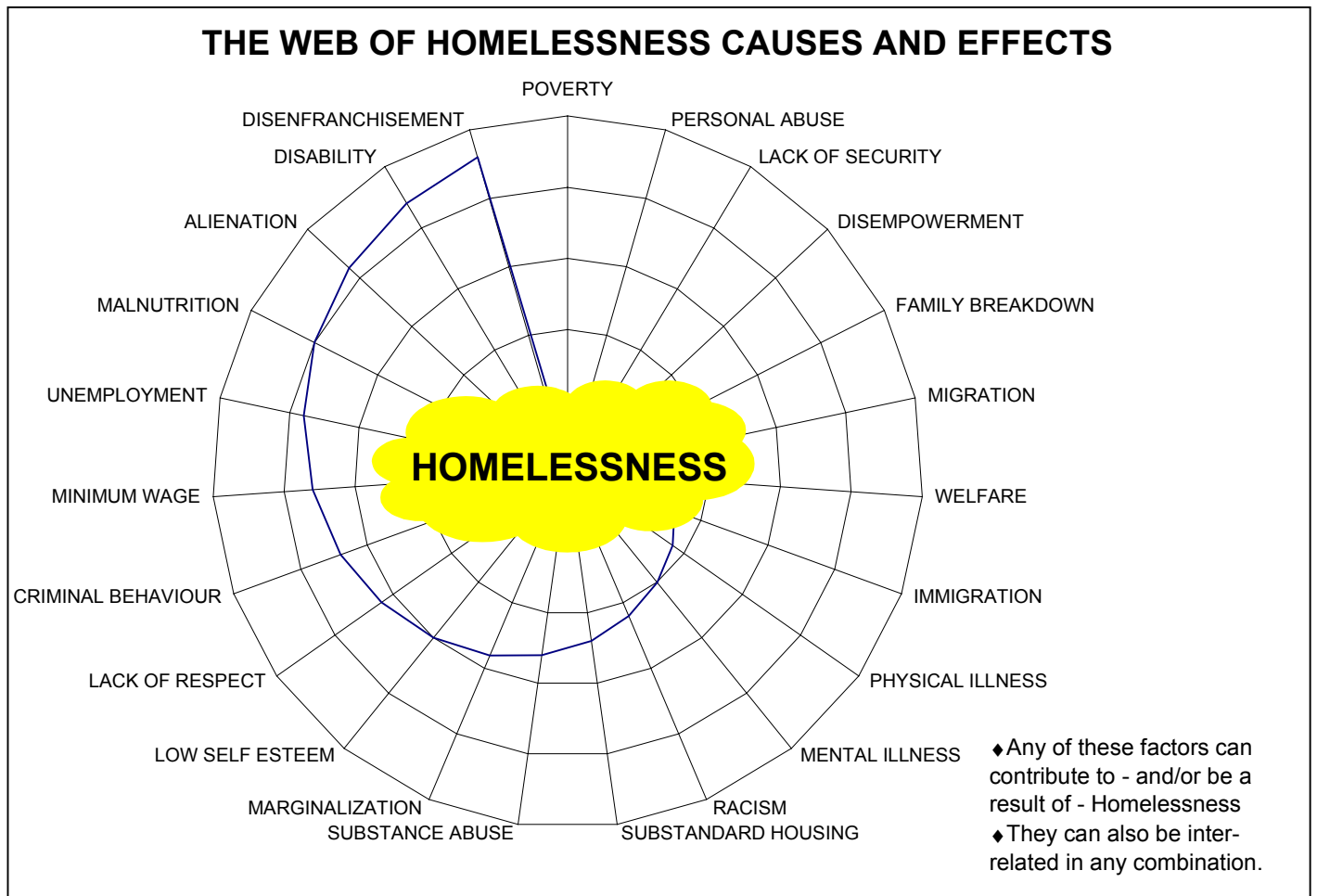
But our work also suggested that once a state of homelessness has been achieved, another set of inter-relationships can kick in. Lack of – or poor – housing often coincides with lack of access to decent food. Hence, poor nutrition could lead to poor health which could lead to inability to keep a job which could lead to .....etc. (Even worse, there is evidence to suggest that in some cases, the institutions set up to support the homeless are – wittingly or unwittingly – perpetuating the very condition they hope to assist by contributing to the poor nutrition, low self esteem and lack of self reliance of many homeless people.)

At first we tried to draw lines between factors that appear to be directly related to homelessness and factors that seem more directly related to other issues. But we soon realized that, although objectively we might be able to draw some arbitrary distinctions of this sort, people who are homeless cannot.

These realizations led us to suggest that this inter-connected set of causes and effects can be thought of as a “web” of influences. They can combine in any number of permutations either to bring about, or to prolong, a state of homelessness.

We believe that this insight is important not only for our definition of homelessness but also for the policies that are developed to “deal with” homelessness conditions. Any definition of homelessness needs to acknowledge the complex of factors underlying it; and any policies need to be directed to treating the complex of causes and not just the symptoms it creates. We need to recognize that homelessness is at once a cause, an effect and a product created (some would say “served”) by society and its social service systems.

Figure 1 should be viewed as an interim summary of the “web” of causes and effects that we are hypothesizing. The list of factors identified here may not be complete. But, we hope, the graphic will provide an initial idea of the complexity of the topic.



*Figure 1*

What follows are excerpts from our interviews that show the intimate link these issues and challenges have with each other and with homelessness.

*“People are dealing with so much pain in their lives. They are trying to deal with or cope with the pain day in and day out. Getting a home feels impossible.”*  
- Jesseca interview from Victoria

*“I realised that there were certain social barriers that served to block my progress. To further hinder this problem of homelessness I was not eating properly and also taking drugs to try and change how I felt. Rotten... eventually this cycle is too much. Physically damaging and emotionally oppressive, I screamed out for a change. I was hurting inside.”*  
- Sylvia interview with William in Vancouver

*“When you have money, you’re king of the party. Soon as you’re broke you’re out the door. That’s basically it.”*  
- Dianne interview with smashed up Logger in Prince George

*"When I finally got some social assistance they only allowed me \$325.00 for a place to call home, where does such a place exist. It does exist if you want to share a bathroom and smelly dirty kitchen and sleep on a filthy mattress in a room the size of a dog house with a bunch of men and if you do sleep the fear of something bothering you at any time. You begin to lose hope."*

- Dianne interview with Samantha in Prince George

*"Because she has anger management challenges her campsite is more of her home because it offers her the peace and tranquillity that a rooming house can't offer."*

- Jesseca interview in Victoria

*"My depression started in 1994 when my dad got sick. I had family problems, my dad dies of Alzheimer's. My mother and I were the prime caregivers."*

- Martin interview with Thomas in Kelowna

*"Drug abuse led to homelessness. I was a rebel against my parents. I hung out with a 'bad crowd'."*

- Julie interview with Steve in Kelowna

*"I believe that a lot of people who have been abused as children grow up to be homeless. I was abused as a child – physically, mentally, emotionally – my whole family was. We grew up poor. When you grow up poor you're marked. You get tormented by all the other kids – 'you're a bum,' 'you don't have nice clothes'."*

- Dianne interview with Popeye in Vancouver

*"Being labelled as a skids, deviants or useless instead of emotionally displaced castaways who need support from their communities."*

- Todd first writings

*"The fact that he has become positive in the last 6 months has put him into a situation where he is afraid of the future and emotionally (if not yet physically) unable to work. In other words his HIV status has thrown him into a state of helplessness where he feels isolated and shunned by friends and employers alike. He also feels estranged from any Native supports or services, because of his ongoing drug use and his HIV positive status he feels that he will not be accepted by Native Elders and healers."*

- Melissa interview with Vance in Prince George

*"I had been a patient of Riverview Hospital for two months because I was paranoid living in the Downtown Eastside after being homeless there. I feel an intense sense of isolation from the world and my self, the entire government is faceless."*

- Sylvia interview with John in Vancouver

*"I lost everything due to drinking. Not one of my criminal charges did not involve drinking. I didn't choose to be homeless – I chose to be drunk, that's why I don't have my kid and wife and daughter. It's a lousy feeling."*

- Martin interview with James in Kelowna

*"Many women report becoming homeless after leaving abusive relationships and plummeting down into poverty. Many people who fall unexpectedly into deep poverty don't know how to access services, where to look."*

- Jesseca interview in Victoria

*"I thought of dying, killing someone, being killed, you name it. I was so discriminated against by social services because I had no address."*

- Martin interview with Kevin in Nanaimo

*"Institutionalised violence = residential schools, orphanages, foster homes, group homes. 'The pain comes back' to create fear of 4 walls, fear of financial aid workers, fear of health and or mental health workers."*

- Dianne first writings

*"Most women have lost their children to the Ministry because of poverty, addiction and sometimes abuse. They then turn to the streets because they have nothing left to live for. We need to come up with a new way of intervening in dysfunctional homes that provides supports rather than tearing families apart. It is ludicrous that families receive less than foster families to raise the same child."*

- Jesseca interview from Victoria

*"I spoke at an anti-poverty meeting last year and the # 1 problem is affordable housing."*

- Martin interview with Theresa in Kelowna

*"He was in jail at 16 for theft, and was in and out of jail for about 7 years after that. In 1997 he hit the street in Burnaby and Vancouver, got involved in alcohol and crack."*

- Luka and Sylvia interview with John in Kamloops

*"Being told to leave the community because you are poor, a binner, or on welfare."*

- Dianne first writings

*"Because home back then was full of anger, hate and unrest. Along this line when my parent would leave us, (my 2 sisters and I) in the car while they went into the pub and drank."*

- Sylvia interview with Doug in Vancouver

*"Politicians don't know how to talk to homeless people. They feel the homeless haven't got anything to say. The homeless are powerless."*

- Martin interview with Leanne in Kamloops

*"Free food services that contribute to malnutrition and disease = diabetes, giving garbage foods/foods that people and industry restaurants and grocery food stores in the past would throw out as garbage."*

- Dianne first writings

*"Homeless is a person who becomes sick mentally and family and friends who abandoned them not understanding the state of their mind (example) thrown out with no place to go."*

- Sylvia interview with Doug in Vancouver

*"The providers of services maintain the status quo by not providing real solutions."*

- Dianne first writings

#### **4.5 Reviewed Definitions**

The following are the definitions of homelessness that we examined as a group. We engaged in debate over the strengths and weaknesses of each definition, which greatly helped us to develop our own.

Vancouver:

"The city of Vancouver does not have one definition of homelessness, but rather will define what is meant by homelessness for each policy meant to address the homeless."

- City of Vancouver Housing Centre Official

Greater Vancouver Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness:

"The plan addresses the needs of homeless people who are living with no physical shelter - on the street, in doorways, in parkades, in parks and on beaches as well as people living temporarily in emergency shelters or transition houses for women fleeing violence. Some people who are homeless use emergency shelters some of the time, and sleep outside the rest of the time. An individual may move indoors or outdoors depending upon the weather, how long they can stay in an emergency shelter or for some other reason. Others living 'rough' never use emergency shelters. However, at any one time, there are homeless people living rough and homeless people staying in emergency shelters.

The plan will also address the needs of individuals 'at risk of homelessness'. This includes people living in spaces or situations that do not meet basic health and safety standards, do not provide for security of tenure or personal safety and are not affordable. This also includes people considered as the invisible homeless, such as individuals who are 'couch surfing' or staying temporarily with family and friends.

Throughout the plan, the term homeless is used to refer to both people who are homeless and those who are at risk of homelessness."

- Regional Homelessness Plan for Greater Vancouver, Pg. 5

Province of British Columbia:

"This report focuses on two distinct groups of individuals. The first is the homeless, who are people literally without shelter and who live 'on the street', as well as those relying on emergency shelter for accommodation. ... The second group is those individuals 'at risk' of homelessness. They are considered 'at risk' for a variety of reasons - paying too much of their income for rent, and/or living in unsafe, inadequate or insecure housing. Often, these households are one step away from homelessness."

- Homelessness: Causes and Effects (Volume 2: A Profile, Policy Review and Analysis of Homelessness in British Columbia), pg. 6.

Government of Canada:

"Canada does not have an official definition of homelessness. However, for the purpose of the Government of Canada's National Homelessness Initiative (NHI), homelessness is considered to be any person, family or household that has no fixed address.

The goal of the National Homelessness Initiative is to lessen the hardship of being homeless while contributing to the prevention and reduction of homelessness in Canada. However, it is recognised that homeless people represent a diverse group – some requiring a wide range of supports and others requiring specific assistance or no assistance at all."

- National Secretariat on Homelessness Official  
(nsh-snsa@hrdc-drhc.gc.ca)

Canadian Housing and Mortgage Corporation:

“Homelessness can be divided into three categories: situational (or temporary) homelessness; episodic homelessness; and chronic (long term) homelessness.”

- Canadian Housing and Mortgage Corporation website  
([www.cmhc.ca/en/imquaf/ho/abpeho\\_001.cfm](http://www.cmhc.ca/en/imquaf/ho/abpeho_001.cfm)).

United Nations:

“1. Absolute Homelessness or shelterless refers to individuals living in the street with no physical shelter of their own, including those who spend their nights in emergency shelters.

2. Relative Homelessness refers to people living in spaces that do not meet the basic health and safety standards, including;

- protection from the elements
- access to safe water and sanitation
- security of tenure and personal safety
- affordability
- accessibility to employment, education and health care
- provision to minimum space to avoid overcrowding”.

- Layton, Jack. Homelessness: the Making and Unmaking of a Crisis. Penguin/McGill Institute: 2000. Pg. 25.

Oxford Dictionary:

“*Adj*; lacking a home. Homelessness *n*.”

- Oxford Dictionary of Current English. Oxford University Press: 1998. Pg. 420

## 5. OUR DEFINITION

Our life experiences, our debates as a group, and our field research, have taught us all that homelessness is complex in general, unique individually, multi-faceted and overwhelming both to deal with and to fully understand for the purpose of defining. Therefore, our definition has attempted to portray as full as possible a picture of homelessness in all its different manifestations. For us, the condition of homelessness is not something that can be summed up in a few sentences, if at all.

We feel that one key part of our definition is our attempt to understand homelessness both from the perspective of the individual who is living in a state of homelessness and from society's perspective. In many ways, homelessness is a relationship between a person and their society; physically, socially, mentally, and spiritually.

For these reasons, our definition of homelessness has been divided into the following components:

- ❑ the subjective and objective aspects of having and not having a home
- ❑ the need for consensual recognition
- ❑ absolute and relative homelessness
- ❑ liveability standards
- ❑ the need for emotional, spiritual, and mental – as well as physical – comfort.

### 5.1 Component One: Subjective and Objective Considerations

The differences between subjective and objective definitions were at the heart of some disagreements and confusion within the working group itself. At first, the two perspectives seemed mutually exclusive but this turned out not to be the case. The overwhelming symbolism and personal meaning attached to these words could not be excised without compromising the holistic definition that we had envisioned. Both views have their place and both are "right".

In a sense, they depend on each other since things like liveability standards can only truly be achieved through understanding that it is the subjective and the personal that make a house a home and, conversely, that without objective definitions and standards, a home for some, especially the poor, may not remain one for long.

In the end we all felt that there needed to be a subjective component to any definition of the words home and homeless.

*"Homelessness is a state of mind that exists not only for the homeless, but also the perspectives of society and the entire human race. The homeless person interprets their own society as well as persons that sees the homeless."*

- Sylvia interview with John in Vancouver

*"Homelessness is a relative term! The earth is our home, and it's inhabited by earthlings, it is our home in the universe. You can be homeless in a space ship to Mars and worry if you'll ever be home again!? At the same time you can be homeless on the sea, on the highway or just about anywhere. We even now have the 'Health Van' and Lookout [local shelter] giving out blankets. 'A home for the homeless'."*

- Sylvia interview in Vancouver

## **5.2 Component Two: Consensual Recognition**

*“Housing is not a home it is a service. A home is a feeling you have, something that needs to be defined on an individual basis.”*

- Jesseca interview in Victoria

A home must be consensually recognised by both the individual and the larger society. For instance an individual living in a tent, in the middle of Vancouver, may 'feel at home', but they are not safe from the elements, can't access infrastructures set up to maintain urban homes and in fact are at risk of having the state demolish their home in reaction to a lack of proper, legal title, health code (liveability standards) violations, etc.

Conversely, homelessness is also a consensual relationship between the individual and the larger society in which both parties must recognise the lack of basic necessities before the problem can be remedied. A person may live in a space that exceeds liveability standards and is fully recognised by the larger society as constituting “a home” yet, no matter how much such a person may 'feel' homeless, society will not 'see' them as homeless and any supports offered to the homeless will not be available to them. (For example a women who is abused by her husband in their West Point Grey home is most likely “homeless” under our definition.)

## **5.3 Component Three: Absolute and Relative Homelessness**

We felt that overall the United Nations definition of homelessness was the most inclusive thus far produced; but from our perspective it is far from complete.

While it does include the terms relative and absolute homelessness, and also outlines in some detail those elements that create states of homelessness, it is important to take account of the fact that the challenges and issues faced due to, and the feelings resulting from, being relatively homeless are rarely different from those involved in being absolutely homeless. Any such differentiation is more semantic than experiential.

However, we should stress that we are not trying to homogenise people who are homeless. On the contrary, we are trying to expand the definition of the homeless people so that they may be addressed inclusively and based on their unique situations.

## **5.4 Component Four: Liveability Standards**

*“I choose to be homeless, I can get a room anytime I want, but they are either too hot, too dry, too noisy and too many noisy people who can't mind their own business. On welfare all you can afford is a basic room (SRO), shared bathroom which isn't healthy, room with a sink, bed, dresser. Most places don't even have cooking facilities. Or you have to share a filthy kitchen so you still have to find yourself eating out anyway. I need more than one room.”*

- Dianne interview with Popeye in Vancouver

Despite the fact that many of us feel that a home does not necessarily need four walls and a roof, we recognise that there is an inherent danger in not having adequate, legislated liveability standards.

Liveability standards should be in concert with (and dependent on) the infrastructures a society creates and maintains in order to insure that a home is indeed safe, secure and has access to the

necessities of life. Liveability standards are enforced through (and are also dependent on) the laws and by-laws created to ensure that these standards are met. Without these laws in place, there is a much greater risk that more people would fall into absolute and relative homelessness, with far less recourse.

The following, in no particular order, is our list of essential liveability standards. Some are enshrined in law, some are not.

- **Housing should conform to established minimum standards** (of health boards, of residential tenancy acts, etc.)”
  - Shawn OI, first writings
- **Access to affordable housing: less than thirty percent of income should be spent on rent**
  - “A place that is affordable- no more than 30% of income.”
    - Jesseca interview in Victoria
  - “I have paid up to 90% of my income to have a home.”
    - Jesseca interview in Victoria
- **Protection from the elements**
  - “I'm from the Island originally and it's awful not to have a dry sleeping spot.”
    - Martin interview with Bob in Nanaimo
- **Personal safety**
  - “Homeless is not having a secure atmosphere, always looking over your shoulder when you try to sleep on a park bench with one eye open.”
    - Sylvia interview with Doug in Vancouver
- **Security of tenure**
  - “To be able to say I am at home I need security of tenure. Knowing that I can stay for at least one year makes me feel safe enough to unpack.”
    - Jesseca interview in Victoria
- **Access to air and light**
  - “A window that opens to outside light and air”
    - Shawn OI, first writings
- **Self contained**
  - “Self containment - a unit of housing should have a toilet, sink, bathtub, refrigerator, stove, oven, and kitchen sink”
    - Shawn OI, first writings
- **Minimum size** 325 sq. ft. (self contained) and 290 sq. ft. (with common areas or amenities)
- **Protection from harassment**
  - “Social services should not be able to barge into the homes of poor people-the government doesn't do that routinely to anyone else.”
    - Jesseca interview in Victoria
- **Ability to have pets**
  - “There has to be a place for my pets.”
    - Melissa interview with Robert in Prince George
- **Protection from noise violations**
- **Access to telephone and mail**
  - “A home has to have access to a phone.”
    - Julie interview with Joseph in Kelowna
- **Access to electrical or other power**
- **Access to storage**

*"There needs to be enough space to store our things- welfare doesn't cover the cost of storage and the housing I can get is too small so what happens to my things? Do they go to the man that beat me - that forced me out of my home?"*

- Jesseca interview in Victoria

- **Access to food/clothing**
- **Access to 'other' places for exercise/recreation**
- **Freedom to 'come and go', to have friends over etc.**

*"...Motel would not let my girlfriend in. I was paying cash, I should be able to bring my girlfriend in."*

- Julie interview with Francis
- **No vermin**

*"Where I live some think my Landlord is a Slumlord. I've got holes plugged everywhere to keep the rodents out, but they still get in. I know that's not a home."*

- Martin interview with Brian "Crow" in Nanaimo
- **Access to day-care and other support services**
- **Access to living supports** (homemakers, workshops on how to manage money, etc.)
- **Access to a community**

*"A home is a place that let's you feel a part of the community, instead of waking up alone and washing up in creeks."*

- Martin interview with Donald in Nanaimo
- **Access to safe water and sanitation**

*"I've lived in abandoned trailers and after that you appreciate toilets I'll tell you that much."*

- Martin interview with Theresa in Kelowna
- **Ability to cook**

*"Some place where you can have a good meal, buy your own groceries, rather than having to depend on the Drop In Centre for a meal."*

- Martin interview with Leonard
- **Access to health care**
- **Access to educational and employment opportunities**

*"Somewhere to work from, I don't need or want possessions. Just a dry place where I can shower and get up and go to work."*

- Martin interview with Allan in Kelowna

*"There would be easier access to education and upgrading for fair employment."*

- Sylvia interview with John
- **Access to and influence over 'decision makers' and the decisions implemented that concern one's housing** (i.e. renovate, housing design)

*"People need furniture that meets their lifestyle"*

- Jesseca interview from Victoria

*"A place where the tenants make their own rules."*

- Jesseca interview from Victoria

Liveability standards can vary with the environment, i.e. rural concerns and needs may be different from the concerns and needs of individuals living in an urban environment.

In the end, they mainly boil down to respect and dignity for the individual.

## 5.5 Component Five: Home is where the heart is

*"There is a difference between houseless and homeless."*

- Andrew interview in Nanaimo

*"Home is an extension of who you are. It is your safe place to be. Your art, your poetry, your special things are everywhere. You know where everything is. You can be yourself. I have paid up to 90% of my income to have a home."*

- Jesseca interview in Victoria

*"You can be living in a home and still feel homeless. For me it is because I don't feel part of the family I am living with, I actually don't feel part of anything because I feel the best when I am alone."*

- Sylvia interview in Vancouver

Human beings are not just physical beings. They have intellect, emotions, personalities and a spiritual side, as well as individual strengths and weaknesses. Because of this complexity, a home must speak to more than just the physical and must be recognised as more than just shelter. It must speak to the subjective, to the soul and heart as well as the body and the mind.

*"A home is what you make it, a sparrow makes a nest where she will lay her young and that's her home, to me a home is where you could feel peace and at ease, where you could feel safe, warm, and cosy. A home is love, if there is no love, there is no home. A home is a sense of ownership, responsibility and freedom to be able to come and go where you please."*

- Sylvia first writings

Personal definitions, or ideas of home, go beyond liveability standards, safety and security issues. They are also bound up with subjective concepts that include: independence or freedom, responsibility, pride, choice, family, belonging, love, individuality, dignity, faith, acceptance, and happiness, or at least a place where it is possible to achieve happiness.

Because of the intensely personal nature of the word 'home' and because concepts of home include things like being part of a community and being part of a family, it can be difficult to decide where definitions of home/homelessness end and other definitions (like community and family) begin.

Below we have listed some examples, by no means an exhaustive list, of ways in which a home is more than just a physical entity.

*"A place to sleep, sometimes even ambience."*

- Martin interview with Keith in Nanaimo

*"A home is a person's identity, belief system. To be homeless would mean to be disconnected from where or from whatever it is someone may have come from."*

- Sylvia interview with William

*"Home is belonging to a family."*

- Martin interview with Kevin in Nanaimo

*"A home is a place that let's you feel a part of the community, instead of waking up alone and washing up in creeks."*

- Martin interview with Donald in Nanaimo

## **6. IMPLICATIONS OF OUR DEFINITION**

Our definition is almost as multi-faceted as the condition it has attempted to delineate. Each of our definition's components has certain implications for "homelessness policies". Those that strike us follow.

### **Component One**

By incorporating the need for both objective and subjective definitions of homelessness and home we are:

- establishing that the definition of "homelessness" and "a home" are never fully defined
- allowing there to be a role for both government/society in setting the objective standards and the individual in setting the subjective standards for what constitutes a home and homelessness.

### **Component Two**

Consensual recognition (between the government/society and the individual) of what constitutes homelessness requires acknowledgement of the view that homelessness involves a relationship between society and the person who is homeless. This means that:

- both sides are active participants in the creation as well as the ending of homelessness
- people who are homeless are not homogenised
- people who may not traditionally be considered "homeless" have the right to assert that they are and that society is not meeting their basic needs.

### **Component Three**

The recognition of absolute and relative homelessness requires that governments and society address the needs of people who:

- have no physical shelter and/or no fixed address,
- are living in sub-standard housing and/or are paying more than 30% of their income on their rent.

### **Component Four**

Including in a definition of homelessness prescriptions for liveable housing conditions suggests that government and service providers should be required to set and deliver certain minimum standards. We believe that our list of suggestions would make a good starting point.

## Component Five

Defining home as something that is more than just a physical entity involves the realization that a lack of community, loss of family, discrimination, depression, and other such non-physical things can constitute homelessness. This, in turn, means that government and society need to work towards alleviating such conditions.

This component of our definition also implies giving people more control over the physical entity they wish to call home. For example, tenants could have a say in setting “rules” for a building, or in its design (or re-design as when it is renovated).

But, acknowledging the aspect of home that is beyond four walls and a roof, more ways need to be found:

- to keep families strong and intact (whether the family in question is one person, a pet rat or 2 kids and a mate),
- to lessen the powerlessness and degradation individuals feel and experience in situations of homelessness
- to utilise the unique strengths of each individual so that all of us feel that we are appreciated and are able to contribute in a meaningful way to our culture or society and to 'belong'
- to recognise the inherent dignity of each and every individual no matter the circumstances
- for people to live independently, in their own way.

## 7. REFLECTIONS

### 7.1 Introduction

The complexity of homelessness is addressed in Clause 4 of the Istanbul Declaration of Human Rights, which calls on governments to give "priority consideration to homelessness, increasing poverty, unemployment, social exclusion, family instability."

The Columbia University School of Public Health Internet site states:

"In terms of its health impact, homelessness can be viewed as an environmental stressor comparable to other trauma, including refugee experiences, natural disasters, and criminal victimisation. Clearly, homelessness is not good for your health".

This quote illustrates what we know from experience: it's impossible to address homelessness in isolation of many other factors. Again the "web of homelessness" serves as an important illustration.

The first part of this section will discuss some of the ideas and issues presented in "Homelessness - Causes & Effects - A Profile, Policy Review and Analysis of Homelessness in British Columbia" published by the former Ministry of Social Development and Economic Security. In reviewing this document, we tried to take account of all aspects of our definition. We were struck in particular by the need to reflect the fact the discomfort and tensions experienced in relative homelessness are often the same as those of absolute homelessness.

A summary of policy recommendations developed by our research group follows this discussion.

Finally, we have included a series of observations written by members of the team. They are concerned primarily with the process adopted in our study. They tend to be quite personal and are as diverse as the team itself. Taken together, they give a flavour of what it was like to be involved in this work. In their own way they also illuminate further the experience of homelessness.

### 7.2 Reflections on Homelessness Causes and Effects

#### 7.2.1 Economic Trends and Policies Affecting Homelessness

The Ministry document drew the following conclusion regarding economic trends:

*"The working poor have been squeezed out and down the social and economic ladder. The jobs the unskilled worker once depended on have disappeared." (p.43)*

The following quotations, collected on our travels through BC, resound with the same message:

*"...the line of the needy in Merritt grows lonnnnnnnger (sic) as the bottom layer of the middle-class comes unpeeled from prosperity."*

*"Derrick moved to Kamloops from the Yukon 10 years ago...he always had work until the sawmills closed"*

The Ministry study acknowledges people face difficulties which “may also be due to a lack of jobs for unskilled workers, **racism**, and other barriers to housing and employment” (p. 52, emphasis added), and this is especially true for First Nations. However, despite barriers and lack of jobs the poor are expected to constantly be on a job search.

The basic goal of BC Benefits is described as: "to help people move from income support to work" (p.62). This is increasingly unrealistic in view of current economic trends. Failing to recognize this may just result in more people dying in the hospitals and jails. We recommend that new policies support the inclusion of the marginalized in meaningful activities, engaging them in social interaction, education, and alternative health practices. For example, food production is one area that is rarely present in any discussions about "employment". Production of food could easily be incorporated into any future housing plans, trimming the budgets while providing jobs, improved nutrition, social interaction, support, education, and myriad untold benefits. This is a simple example of a solution-oriented look at the current unemployment picture.

## 7.2.2 Housing Policies and Programs

The Ministry report says the Province acted on the recommendation of the **Provincial Commission on Housing Options (PCOHO)**, established in 1992, by "giving local government tools to encourage more, and better, housing for low-income households and continuing to work with local governments, advocacy groups, and communities to provide housing throughout the province" (p.54).

We applaud and encourage any approach to housing that will improve the conditions existing in Single Room Occupancy Hotels (SROs) and rooming houses across the province, and increase the supply of affordable housing.

Our group heard it re-iterated again and again that having to pay \$325 a month for **sub-standard housing** is demoralising and unfair. We also discovered that there is a common practice in these buildings of charging visitors a "guest fee". Could this be why so many people die alone in their rooms? The risk of disease in buildings where bathroom facilities are shared by dozens of people must also be underlined as one of the major factors in the declining health and well-being of our low-income residents.

Every city we visited had its stock of SRO and rooming houses, with the same complaints coming from the residents:

*... "the landlord won't fix anything" ... "I can't have guests because there's no room" ... "My guests are charged \$15 to visit" ... "There's no public phone" ... "Housing costs are too high...there's no affordable housing" ... "There's a two-year waiting period for housing" ... "The government allows people to live in conditions they would never accept for themselves."*

The BC Benefits rates for shelter allowance (tables 22 and 23 on p.63) are clear evidence of inequitable access to housing for people on welfare. With market rents which are 123% to 170% of the shelter allowance the poor have no choice but to move into SROs and rooming houses, at great cost in terms of health, well-being, and self-esteem.

The Ministry report notes that British Columbia's landlords "are able to set the rent at the level the market will bear" and, that "this has not been raised as an issue contributing to homelessness in BC" (p.76). To clarify, "slumlords" in every BC community we visited set the rent at the maximum shelter allowance for BC Benefits.

Our group is of the opinion that there is collusion between the SRO/rooming house landlords and BC Benefits, and that this issue is at the very heart of homelessness in BC. If there is to be collusion between the government and the landlords, may that collusion be for the betterment of the standard of living for every resident of British Columbia. Every SRO situation needs to be accountable to its residents, and standards for group housing of that nature should have provisions for whatever services are necessary to address the needs of the residents. One solution would be to require (and fund) a foodsafe kitchen and dining room to be built into each SRO. A mentorship program could teach and guide the residents in its operation, creating employment and education, as well as improved nutrition and health.

Within the definition implied by our "web of homelessness", SROs, rooming houses, and other **sub-standard housing** arrangements perpetuate the homeless condition. We therefore recommend that true stakeholder input (i.e. homeless people) be gathered in developing low-income housing projects and policies. The housing dilemma could be turned into a solution by following models like the Portland Hotel Society (in Vancouver), whose housing complex includes advocacy, nutrition, education, safety, and other physical and emotional supports. Stakeholders would, naturally, design and take part in the construction and/or renovations of existing **sub-standard housing**, as in the Portland Hotel Society model.

Provision of adequate housing (housing which meets our definition) would address many of the issues in the web of homelessness. For example, please note the many areas which are touched upon in the single example of "sweat equity" being used in every phase of a project. Mentoring, if applied effectively, would create many jobs for many people from the outset, while being at the same time a pro-active delivery of services. Please gaze at the web of homelessness as you consider how many of these "causes" are addressed by including the organic intellectuals of any field in the studies and work which concern them.

### 7.2.3 Emergency Shelters

Our research indicates that provision of emergency shelter is pathetically lacking. This is especially the case for women, children, and youth who are escaping abusive situations.

Shelter policies were seen to be conditional on certain behaviours and criteria. Many of the people we interviewed were disqualified from emergency shelters for a variety of reasons.

One of the primary obstacles to the delivery of emergency care was seen to be fear on the part of people who are hiding for some reason. These reasons range from idle threats to mental illness to arrest warrants. Confidentiality and anonymity are especially important for youth and must be incorporated into shelter policies if we are to keep kids from dying on the street.

To emphasise this we quote from the RHC Review, Summer 2001:

*"...in a two-week period this past spring, 13 street people died in Kamloops. Most were in their mid-twenties to early thirties...they become masterful at evading mandated care".*

The evidence from our field study is that often emergency shelter spaces are used by ex-inmates, which may have a negative impact on other potential users ... particularly women and children. Therefore, discharge policies should be modified to ensure that inmates do not have to rely on emergency shelters for housing upon release from prison. Often these shelters are preferred over

the SRO and rooming house stock available in small communities, since these sub-standard residences breed diseases of all kinds, including reversion to substance abuse.

*"She is still in the grips of alcoholism and lives in a building where everyone drinks."*  
Luka – Kamloops interview.

We recommend that policies be immediately put in place to duplicate and multiply services based on the **Safehouse** model (a model emergency shelter for youth located in Kamloops), which is enjoying great success at guiding and mentoring at-risk youth. Self-referred youth are adequately housed until acceptable longer-term housing can be found.

#### **7.2.4 Mental Health Policies and Programs**

Volume 2 of "Homelessness - Causes and Effects" reports that: "A recent survey of adult clients of GMHSS found that 65% of their 3500 adult clients were in receipt of BC Benefits" (p.66). This statistic supports our analysis that many conditions come into play within the vicious cycle of homelessness.

Recipients of BC Benefits have extremely limited housing options, making it very likely that the adult client will be housed in sub-standard housing. Once again we are reminded of the impact of sub-standard housing on the perpetuation of the web of homelessness: malnutrition, alienation, poverty, welfare, no telephone, marginalization are but a few of the tributaries of the BC Benefits shelter policies.

Please refer to the section on housing policies for our recommendations regarding stakeholder participation in planning and building adequate housing for all. Apprenticeships would lead to a community of qualified tradespeople who could be employed for many years just meeting the needs of the mentally ill.

Our team was alarmed to read on page 66 of the report that Bill 22 makes it possible to retain and commit people involuntarily. To quote the report: "It is hoped that these changes will reduce both the number of people with mental illness living on the street and the criminalization of the mentally ill". Bill 22, we feel, **is** criminalization of the mentally ill and we are opposed to it.

#### **7.2.5 Substance Misuse Policies and Programs**

The Ministry report quotes the Provincial Health Officer as stating that "adequate mental health services, health care, housing and social support should be provided to injection drug users **at all stages of addiction and recovery**" (p.70, emphasis added). Unfortunately, on the same page the report states that many addicted individuals "end up in emergency shelters or SRO rooms, not suitable environments for promoting recovery." Of particular interest to us was: "The fact that substance misuse may be the single largest health issue faced by BC Shelter clients is not reflected in current budget allocations" (p.70). The present policies, then, exacerbate substance misuse issues by placing users in unhealthy environments. Our field investigations led to the same conclusions. People with alcohol and drug issues repeated the same complaints ... after detox they end up in the same lousy rooms, surrounded with alcoholics and addicts, increasing the likelihood of relapse.

Our observation is that the transfer of this category to the Ministry for Children and Families in 1997 resulted in the relegation of the drug-addicted to the category of invisible homeless. We are pleased that the responsibility for this marginalized group is moving back to the Ministry of Health Services, and we hope the Ministry of Health Services will consider the wisdom of using our vicious web of homelessness as a base for planning solutions through liaisons with other ministries, like housing.

### 7.2.6 Children

The Ministry paper concludes the section on Child Protection by saying that "further research is needed to explore the relationship between child welfare policies and homelessness" (p. 72). We couldn't agree more. There was consensus from the group that all of our research concluded the same thing...that children are sadly overlooked in homelessness discourse and policy. One of our main concerns is for those youth who are living independently with **no** shelter due to adverse conditions at "home". These children are effectively ignored although they constitute a large number of homeless people in our communities. We think that there needs to be more done for these children, and that provisions must be made to allow for the safety of anonymity. Please refer to the section on emergency shelters for our discussion on the **Safehouse** model from Kamloops.

All of our citizens should receive equal opportunities for health, safety, and well-being and recovery from childhood abuse. It's time we recognized our youth and their needs for inclusion as valuable members of neighbourhoods and the larger society. Once again, the process begins with soliciting answers from those with first hand experience, then employing them in implementing the solutions.

## 7.3 Policy Recommendations

The following is a list of policy recommendations brainstormed by the project team. We have assigned them to broad policy areas but they are in no particular order of priority.

### 7.3.1 Economy/Government

- ◆ A percentage of all new development should be designated for low-income people (end ghettoisation)
- ◆ Cut down on bureaucracy (reduce the industry of homelessness)
- ◆ Flexibility in policies and Ministries
- ◆ Government needs to better monitor slum lords
  - Reason; make sure they are complying with regulations and/or ensure they are not overcharging (rent being set at welfare rates when the accommodation is worth less)
- ◆ Have homeless people offered jobs that develop tourism
  - Reason; instead of trying to 'rid the streets' of homeless people for tourists through by-laws
- ◆ Low income parents should receive the same amount of money as foster parents
- ◆ More accountability to make sure that service providers are using funds properly
- ◆ Need a stronger work ethic for service providers as well as transparency
- ◆ Need more money synergy between Ministries to address homelessness
- ◆ Need more money to foster peer based, organic, user driven, supports

### 7.3.2 Housing

- ◆ Culturally appropriate housing (i.e. First Nations)
- ◆ In BC Housing mothers whose children move out should not lose their home
- ◆ More social housing with support for youth
- ◆ No discrimination from landlords based on age, etc.
- ◆ Social housing needs to be designed in collaboration with future tenants
- ◆ When new market housing developments take up what was an 'empty' or unused space where people used to sleep, the developer should have to develop a percentage of units for low-income people

### 7.3.4 Support Services

- ◆ A welcome centre for people who 'hit town'
- ◆ As a last resort, instead of taking a child away from a family, offer the family a team to help support the family in crisis
- ◆ Deal with family problems in house (supportive as opposed to combative)
- ◆ Deal with individual, not a homogenised group
- ◆ Explore the possibility of food stamps
- ◆ Family first: parents are the most important role model
- ◆ Food Banks should deliver, or there should be a service that delivers for the Food Bank
- ◆ More detox centres that are ready to take people in on demand and provide a continuum of care and recovery after detox
- ◆ More peer support training sessions
- ◆ More services open twenty four hours
- ◆ More support for parents dealing with health issues (mental and physical)
- ◆ Need a reduction of line ups (i.e. When accessing services)
- ◆ Need community kitchens with no barrier access and life skills training options (cooking lessons, dietary workshops)
  - Reason: get given a can of food at the Food Bank when many homeless people have no way to open or cook it
  - Warning: be careful not to create learned helplessness
- ◆ Need educational facilities in every neighbourhood
- ◆ Need food co-ops
- ◆ Need more choice at Food Banks (because people have individual, and often unique, dietary needs)
- ◆ Need programs/continuing/system of reintegration for people being released from jail which includes housing
- ◆ Need quality day care, recreational options, parks
- ◆ Need safe shelters for youth that give them a way out (children that leave dangerous homes should have opportunity to access life skills training)
- ◆ Need to balance needs of individual (i.e. Sex, age, race) and not create segregation
- ◆ Parents should not be penalised for asking for help with their children
- ◆ Service providers should be able and willing to diffuse throughout the city
  - Reason: in most cities there develops a concentration of services in low income areas (i.e. The Downtown Eastside)
- ◆ Social workers who do not know a situation should not have one on one interviews with minors, they should work with the family and community to understand and assess the situation
- ◆ There needs to be a provincial 'red book' that lists services in the province and it needs to be accessible (free) and better distributed

### 7.3.5 Shelters

- ◆ Need more shelters for couples and couples with children

### 7.3.6 Welfare

- ◆ End rent based on welfare
- ◆ In context of children, people in need of financial assistance should not have to prove their need for financial assistance
  - Reason: children can get treated differently by teachers and officials if they know the child comes from a family experiencing difficulty
  - Reason: sometimes guidance councillors or officials may contact the family's social worker/financial worker before the parent if there is an issue with the child
- ◆ The child portion of welfare should not negate the payments required from the missing parent
- ◆ There should not be a financial penalty for being a couple on welfare
- ◆ Welfare rates need to truly and properly reflect the cost of living

### 7.3.7 Overall

- ◆ Accessing services should not lead to medication
- ◆ Acknowledgement of First Nations particular issues in regards to homelessness and colonialism
- ◆ Age of consent must be re-assessed
- ◆ Decriminalise the needy
- ◆ Do not automatically assume to turn to professionals
- ◆ Foster support network that addresses individual needs to prevent marginalization
- ◆ People have the right to say no

### 7.3.8 Conclusion

Our concluding recommendation is that every individual be regarded as a valuable source of society's wealth. This perspective makes "spending" an investment, the product of which can be measured in immediate as well as long-term benefits to the society.

## **7.4 Team Member Observations**

### **7.4.1 Introduction**

Everything to this point in our document was been written by the “writing team” – a kind of sub-committee of the project team overall. This and the necessity of structuring the report along formal lines meant that we could not say everything that everyone wanted to say.

And yet, there remain important points of view that are germane to the topic of homelessness. There are also observations on the process we followed in our study that may be useful to those wishing to do similar work.

So, this section of our report includes both “what we didn’t get to say” and “what you might like to know later”.

### **7.4.2 Banished Knowledge: Why Even Bother to Write about Homelessness?**

“Definers (persons who insist on defining others) are like pathogenic micro-organisms: both invade, parasite, and often destroy their victims. As persons with poor immunological defences are most likely to contract infectious diseases, so persons with poor social defences – the young, and the old, the sick and the poor – are most likely to contract invidious definitions of themselves.”

- Thomas Szasz, *The Untamed Tongue*; a dissenting dictionary

When the political/professional class set the tone and chooses the terms of a discourse politically, psychologically, and socially, they can skew the outcome however they want. If we are to truly question and understand the roots of homelessness we must seek to understand the language of people living with homelessness and respect the terms that they use to describe their experiences. People living with poverty and homelessness have their own culture rich with language and expression. This language must not be silenced or negated. By labelling the language and words of people living with homelessness and poverty as barbarism, the experiences of these people are discredited and negated. This is linguicism, which is part of the process of banishing the knowledge, language, voices, and culture of people. Linguicism is discrimination. Therefore, the language of experience is the only language that can be used to accurately describe the experiences of people surviving within the legislated, institutionalized poverty–homelessness welfare industry.

Welfare is a misnomer. Canada is a capitalist “welfare” state. It only follows then, that anyone who collects a paycheque from the state is a welfare recipient. Anybody who collects a paycheque from a corporation, institution or facility that receives government subsidies and grants is also a welfare recipient. These people thrive on social assistance. They are “worthy” welfare recipients. However, on the other hand, people defined by the government as being “on-welfare” are actually on poorfare because they fare so poorly on this income.

We have gone from resource - production based economies to service -based economies. The service economy called welfare is designed to produce; it is an industry. Many of the educated get or have jobs that create, label, control, stigmatize, coerce, criminalize, “psychiatrize” or maintain the population of people living with poverty and homelessness. If poverty can be constructed by a system designed to create it then surely it can be eliminated by a system designed to eliminate it. Homelessness is perpetuated by building shelters instead of homes, soup lines instead of kitchens and creating slavefare instead of real jobs.

The production of poverty and homelessness ensures the paycheque of service providers, the fortunes of numerous vampiric and unscrupulous rental property owners and politicians desperately in need of scapegoats. When this production stops, the cheque for the service providers stops. The welfare industry serves itself. Poverty and homelessness is the product of this service economy. Monies that should be allocated to eliminate poverty and homelessness are used to create and maintain it. Instead of building affordable housing and creating barrier-free permanent, meaningful, productive jobs with living wages our society allows our politicians, businessmen and media to scapegoat and incite hatred and discrimination against people living with poverty, disability and homelessness. Instead of providing poor families (be they "on-welfare" or working poor) with adequate supports the system puts their children in "care". Why is it that foster parents often get more money and additional family supports for a foster child than that child's natural parents would get? Instead of eliminating poverty that is often the real cause of family breakdown the system breaks up families, which perpetuates poverty. (As noted in many other studies, most street children are products of the foster care system.) Foster care can be a lucrative business for foster parents and a way for the government to reward the middle class. These children would be better served if monies and supports spent on foster care went to eliminate family poverty in the first place.

The working poor and poorfare recipients have no choice but to use the services and facilities offered by providers in order to survive and to maintain the welfare service economy. Service providers, who receive their welfare in the form of a government pay cheque either through a non-profit association or government ministry, are dependent on people who are homeless. People who benefit, directly and indirectly from homelessness and poverty are "poverty-pimps" while the people who suffering on poorfare are called "cheats", "lazy" and "frauds" and are coerced to participate in slavefare programs. (For example, a mental health facility's program that requires psychiatrically labelled people to work for meals instead of wages, and to work for the privilege of socializing with their friends.)

We have men, women and children in this country who are starving in their substandard unaffordable housing and all that the government has to offer them is that "chain gang mentality" of slavefare for the homeless, and nofare for the working poor. There are people in government-sponsored "workfare"/slavefare programs cleaning streets and lanes without the proper safety attire or tools necessary for handling bio-hazardous materials like mouse droppings and used intravenous needles and condoms. Where are the people to monitor the health and safety of these workers? Who is in charge of setting and enforcing the health and safety standards for "indentured" street cleaners and wageless workers? (Are we being used to destroy the unions? Will the rights and benefits for workers that union members have fought and died for disappear? Maybe we should learn from our past and create an unemployed people's union. ) A worker without employment benefits and human rights is a slave.

Welfare and unemployment payments disable people by not meeting their basic survival needs. Similarly, services that are supposed to meet basic needs do not. Some facilities get extra funding for food. And although many of the services provide free or low cost decent nutrition there are those that are inflicting malnutrition and illness through sub-standard and contaminated food. In many cases, the donated food has been pulled from the shelves because it is not fit to sell to the paying public. In the past it used to be thrown into the dumpster.

Can poverty create illness? Soup lines and food banks are depressing. So are SROs the size of a closet. Behaviour that is thought of as deviant or crazy is more than likely a natural response to the inordinate amount of stress stemming from poverty and homelessness. Instead of warehousing psychiatrically-labelled people who have enhanced sensory awareness, and giving psychiatrists and private therapists exorbitant fees, money would be better spent on eliminating poverty and building

decent affordable housing. We must stop the psychiatrization of poverty and the wasting of billions of dollars to control and silence marginalized people.

How does one show the service providers, bureaucrats and academics that homelessness is institutionalised and that the services provided enable and create poverty and homelessness? The first step is recognizing and utilizing the knowledge of the people most impacted by poverty. We don't need to be taken care of. We need to be included in discourse, policy-making, everything. For we are your brother, your sister, your mother, your father, your daughter, your son, your neighbour, your friend, and maybe you one day.

*Diane*

#### **7.4.3 Causes and Entrenchment of First Nations Homelessness**

We felt it necessary to add this postscript because of our observations in the Nicola Valley. The historic and blatant disrespect for the First Nations presence in this valley was experienced first-hand by the First Nations member of our group who toured Kamloops and was subjected to name-calling in two public places. We feel this overt and systemic racism is one of the underlying causes of the "homelessness" of First Nations people.

While every study about poverty in Canada makes the assertion that First Nations peoples are over-represented while at the same time being the smallest percentage of the population, none of the policy recommendations reflect this knowledge. Further, it became apparent through our study that only in Vancouver is the First Nations tradition respectfully recognized in public circles. For example, meetings which are attended by First Nations people in Vancouver always begin with a blessing led by a native Elder who is invited by the group. In contrast, we have cited the following excerpt from a Merritt Chamber of Commerce pamphlet entitled "Some Quick Facts about the Nicola Valley...": This quote was taken from the section "Interesting Questions and Answers about Merritt"... "Who discovered this valley? William Henry Voght in the 1800s". What is not mentioned by the Chamber of Commerce is that the children of aboriginal families were, during this period, being removed from their traditional homes and forced into residential schools, and their culture and ceremonies were being outlawed to make way for European settlers like Voght. (Potlatch ceremony outlawed in 1884)

Bruce Alexander and Stefa Shaler have given this condition of homelessness the title "dislocation" in their article "Addiction in Free Markets", and trace its origins to colonization: "...addiction was not a ruinous problem among natives until assimilation subjected them to extreme dislocation." And later in the article: "The key to controlling addiction is maintaining a society in which every member is included in a larger community with a sense of meaning and belonging."

In Kamloops we were in the neighborhood of SunPeaks, where a battle was waging between the First Nations people and the owners of that resort. A quote from a pamphlet we received again reminds us that the roots of First Nations discontent lie in unresolved "dislocation" issues: "The B.C. government, Nippon Cable, and SunPeaks Resort, Canadian Pacific, and other companies continue to violate our basic human right - the right to gather our foods and medicine and practice our way of life". It behooves our policy makers to consider the subject of homelessness from a First Nations/colonization perspective.

A September 2001 paper entitled "Urban Aboriginal People in Western Canada: Realities and Policies" states that "Aboriginal people consistently face challenges in excess of those experienced by the general public." And..."several studies, including the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, have argued that past policy decisions by Canadian governments have contributed to, if not created, the conditions faced by many Aboriginal people in such areas as domestic violence, education, employment, income, housing, criminal justice, and health. Negative social attitudes towards Aboriginal people (*racism...ed*) have also been identified as a significant factor...public policies have particular impact on, and relevancy for, the Aboriginal population".

To conclude, we quote from the Secwepemc News, the voice of the Shuswap Nation, August 29, 2001: "Under the B.C. Human Rights Code the commission's mandate includes the prevention and elimination of discrimination and the promotion of a society based on mutual respect where all people enjoy full and free participation in the social, political, and cultural life of British Columbia." Additionally, paragraph 12 of the Habitat Agenda and Istanbul Declaration on Human Settlements states that "the enabling strategy includes a responsibility for Governments to implement special measures for members of disadvantaged and vulnerable groups when appropriate."

We feel our First Nations people are especially disadvantaged and vulnerable, yet the current policies and studies have not addressed this anomaly. We urge our policy makers to enter into dialogue which is informed, honest, and takes responsibility for the role our governments have played in the dislocation and resulting dysfunctions of today's First Nations people.

We should not be able to read in government policy papers remarks such as:

*"Substance misuse as a health condition is more prevalent among this sub-group"*

and

*"our present policies are based on a level of poverty below which no member of society should be permitted to fall".*

We need to find a more positive way of approaching the subject and of avoiding the bandaid treatments we now have.

*Luka*

#### 7.4.4 Homeless in Kamloops

Kamloops is a very degenerated community, there is a very big gap between the rich and the poor. There are very minimal services to the poor of the downtown. Most of all services I find are only open from 9:00a.m to 12:00p.m. The only mission in town that feeds the poor is in a state of closure due to no support from the town. They are in dire need of financial help.

After the mission closes in the afternoon people have no where to go so they get some wine and sit by the river bank. The only shelter for men has such tremendous rules in order for a person to stay there that they have to have a clean criminal record. To ensure this rule is not broken they are checked out by the police if they want to stay there, so not many people use the facility.

The police come to the mission to arrest those that have outstanding warrants and they are taken away. To me that is poor bashing. The big gap between the rich and the poor has quite an impact on the poor. It seems in Kamloops that the rich think if they don't support the missions who feed people, then the missions will close and the poor will simply go away and move to another city. This is not so, most of the people survive in the community by stealing, panhandling, picking up returnable cans and bottles and going out to farms to pick fruit.

There is also a big gap between the natives and the whites, there is such a huge discrimination in the town that I even myself have experienced that discrimination. I was not welcomed in many areas of the town. Kamloops has really nothing to offer the poor who are mostly left on their own to fend for themselves.

There is estimated about 200 homeless youth in the vicinity of Kamloops BC and it is estimated about 300-to -400 homeless people on average frequent the downtown core in the summertime. And about 200 in the winter. There are no churches where people can sleep. No shelters for women and only one shelter for men (the one with the strict rules). There is only one food bank that mainly serves people in homes but not the homeless. The population of Kamloops is just estimated at a little under 80,000 people appears mostly to consist of upper class, middle class.

The north shore consist of mainly single moms, people on disability and elderly pensioners. The north shore is the lower income of Kamloops and the rich all live in the hillsides. Kamloops north shore is in deep economic trouble. A one-bedroom apartment rents for \$482.00 per month. A two bedroom goes for \$580.00 per month. Three bedroom for \$699.00 per month. 50% of low income people make less than \$20,000.00 a year. 29% of Kamloops lower income people pay 50% or more on rent.

Kamloops' main employers are BC Lottery Corporation, ranching, logging, services, and lots of pubs. Kamloops has only two street nurses that travel as far away as the town of Merritt and Cache creek and the surrounding areas. Kamloops has some native services but tend to be very discrete about what is optional to natives. Kamloops has three prisons that serve all of BC. Kamloops is very racist against the native people and there is a tremendous gap between the natives and the whites. There is no place or no shelters for woman and couples, the sad situation is that there is no services open after 1:00 p.m. and the poor and homeless have nowhere to eat such as soup lines like we have here in Vancouver.

*Sylvia*

#### 7.4.5 Homeless in Nanaimo

The ferry from Vancouver to Nanaimo imposes a sense of vacation as we are crossing the Georgia Strait. How does a homeless person remain homeless in a rural community?

My impressions of homelessness are a result of personal experience and subject to translation. Shelter is simple in my mind: a sleeping bag, a dry spot, and access to food. I am a camper; a retired boy scout with adventure embedded deep in my memory, yet this is not facing reality.

Nanaimo is one of the starting points to tour Vancouver Island. Tourists race through on their way to various recreation island recreational areas and facilities. Urban sprawl is limited, as are jobs. The options for those living in poverty are few, and remain in central areas of the town. Street people and panhandlers are rare, hidden, or transient.

Yet despite the small number of people, the services available to the homeless are more humane than their metropolitan counterparts. Hostels are clean, and staff is polite, helpful, and they seem genuinely concerned. Programs for youth in the area take a holistic approach by ensuring clients have proper housing, clothing, and food while looking for work. Job training programs exist side by side with job postings in job centers for youth.

The options for older people though are not in abundance. Food and shelter exist as does free clothing rooms and spiritual support, yet none of the core gathering places for the homeless seem to advance to the next step by offering solutions. The job market seems to be changing as resource industry positions are disappearing to make room for the growing tourist industry.

The shift seems to alienate those without the requisite hospitality industry skills. The solution for the older homeless or displaced persons seems to be moving to the larger cities and towns that can support a larger number of clients to warrant training programs for that part of the population.

Having said that, the need for programs offering education or training for older homeless persons is still high in rural towns. No one program can offer all the answers and more power needs to be given to those in social worker positions to allow for individual solutions. The challenge most people face when living in poverty is to incorporate all the necessary requirements to look for work: transportation, clothing, toiletries, telephone, resume, and employment counseling and training, at the same time. Social service workers may be able to grant some of the above but not all.

Homelessness is not a band-aid problem. The population has undergone a monumental shift in employment options since the seventies and this problem alienates those without access to resources. Education, training, support, choice, shelter, and encouragement are part of the solution. How can a lumberjack cook a flambé? How do those with resource skills and families move to other areas of economic growth? Who is responsible for the residents in these communities?

The definition of homelessness is vast and cannot offer a blanket interpretation. All factors need to be considered and assessed at the local and individual level. Those in social assistance positions need to be granted more authority to assist those in need. Services in metropolitan areas need to be available in rural areas.

I have since improved my situation; I live in a subsidized apartment and work while pursuing an education. My connection to homelessness is still strong however as I am still poor and live in a marginalized area, and I also work in a program that offers free education to those in need. The decision I made to help those in need stems from personal experience. Since becoming poor my awareness of social inequality has affected how I perceive others, the marginalized, the destitute,

and the homeless. The idea of all of us being one paycheck away from poverty is still very real. If we can consider that thought while we assess those living in poverty we might be more generous in our decisions.

Andrew

#### **7.4.6 Homeless in Terrace**

The people in Terrace, BC are unique in their attitude toward a visibly homeless new comer. In contrast to places like Fernie, BC where the general public are openly hostile to visibly homeless people, the townsfolk in Terrace tend to have a polite cheerfulness.

This cheerfulness is especially remarkable considering the economy is floundering with the decline of its primary resource of logging. I rode the buses and I noticed every second or third house is up for sale.

One bus driver was particularly talkative. Assuming initially that I was indeed landed in town homeless he began a moralistic rant about a job that was waiting for me, but when I explained about our research project his perspective shifted and he went on and on about how everyone was losing work and leaving town.

For a homeless person this time of year, the best chance to make some money would be in the bush picking gourmet mushrooms. The woods abound with a plethora of monster toadstools, some of which would fetch primo dollars from several mushroom brokers in town. On a very lucky day legend tells of harvesting up to \$2,500 worth from a large concentration of pine mushrooms.

This cash sounds deceptively easy. One would actually have quite a bit of where with all to make good money picking mushrooms. During the week I spent in Terrace it was constantly overcast and raining, making the bush a dangerous place to be. I mention this because I myself spent a day of terror in the mountains having lost my bearings hiking into town from my campsite. I made my way out of the woods after hearing an aeroplane take off from the airport. The heavy rain disguises light to moderate trails, and the clouds conceal the sun's position. Unless one is well equipped and familiar with picking mushrooms, one risks ending up aimlessly scrambling around panic stricken and soaking wet in very dense rugged terrain, affectionately called "Grizzly Bear country."

Evidently, the densely forested, rugged mountains around the city of Terrace is host to most of the region's absolute homeless. I did not personally encounter any of these folks, but people in town tell that they are highly reclusive and secret, typically First Nations men. They are the invisible homeless – mysterious and almost mythical sounding.

Other invisible homeless are predominantly couch surfing with friends, mostly in a cluster of low rent houses called "smurf village." An apartment in smurf village costs around \$650 per month and so requires low incomers to double up. Another alternative is a room at the Skeena Hotel which starts at \$100 per week (share bathroom, no cooking), but rarely has vacancies. Then there's the shelter.

I stayed at the Terrace Homeless Shelter/Hostel for two nights and felt obliged by a pocketful of cash to pay. Paying (\$15.00 / night) put me on the hostel side, and the staff at the facility proved quite adamantly against my interacting with shelter folks or taking photos of the shelter rooms. My impression was that there where three or four residents there, about two dozen beds, a washroom,

laundry, television lounge. I felt the strange delineation between one with no money and someone with \$15 was offensive and found my banishment to the side of the “elite” quite frustrating.

The shelter doesn't provide service for homeless with any behavioural difficulties such as those which might be experienced by people with mental health, or drug and alcohol issues. One fellow is Fred Aban.

Fred Aban sleeps under a tree with just his clothes on his back. He is middle aged First Nations man in the advanced stages of alcoholism with badly impaired motor functions. He is having a lot of trouble getting on social assistance due to his inability to make his appointments and his illiteracy, of which he is ashamed and conceals. He goes for coffee at Kermode Friendship Society, where his daughter works.

The Kermode Friendship Society is the closest thing to a drop-in centre in Terrace, although it is not mandated as such. It is primarily a base for First Nations folks to network adult education or career training, and is currently working to expand its capacity to include Metis. The Mental Health Society has a drop-in for mental health consumers that I did not visit.

I did visit the Community Housing Initiative when I decided to try and find Fred Aban and help him in getting housed. This endeavour yielded naught but a dismal prognosis for Fred, under the tree. Interesting I learned that several units of housing had been created for women and children fleeing abusive domestic situations, but that this particular housing was not sought after and sits vacant. The Community Housing initiative is in the Terrace Anti-Poverty Society building whose advocates offered to help Fred Aban get social assistance.

I found Fred passed out face down in the mud in the park in the pouring rain. His paperwork from welfare was destroyed, lying in a puddle not far away. Soon the police showed up and carried him off to the drunk tank. They apparently stay on top of unsightly situations like this. They are also prompt to prevent the perpetration of panhandling or busking, although, there are no written laws on these matters.

*“A home in Prince George. Anything right now would be nice even just a tent and a bed roll would be better than just under a tree. Any kind of apartment. Last time in an apartment was three months ago in Prince George. The worker at the shelter gave bad attitude so I left to avoid problems. Under the tree it stays fairly dry, but it gets cold at night. Need an intent to rent on welfare, but its hard to get on one foot. Sometimes don't eat for a few days, it's hard living like that. Souplines only on Saturdays.*

*“A home has privacy. Access to telephone is a necessity if you don't have access to a telephone you're a second class citizen. Decent, affordable housing is impossible to find. Slumlords just into the money, for welfare rate you get a naked light bulb and bugs biting you at night. Home is where you are safe. If you don't feel comfortable where you live something is wrong. Laws are applied differently to the homeless. Poor are criminalized. Poverty causes homelessness. Wealth is inherited. Fruit pickers work their asses off and they are living in shacks and tents and the orchardists complain that they don't have enough money while they are living in mansions.”*

Shawn

#### 7.4.7 Honesty Is Bitter - But Then So Is The Cold

I was asked to participate in the project by a friend who has been living in his van for the past several years. I had taken Humanities 101 and Anthropology 303 with this friend at UBC. As well, I am presently taking the Women's Humanities through the Portland Hotel.

My experience with homelessness as an adult was limited to when I had my daughter and was evicted for having a child. Apartment buildings did not allow children then. Some don't still today. I fought the eviction and lost but was given time to find another apartment. By this time I was on welfare and had no resources. The apartment I found was not even a bedroom, nor was it a bachelor or a studio it fell somewhere in between, having an open bedroom that exited onto a balcony. It was very expensive. I had to pay my whole welfare cheque on rent. In order to exist I borrowed some money and bought, what was at that time a word processor. It was huge. I remember that at night after I put my child to bed, the neighbours would complain because the ceiling shook. The vibrations were coming from the huge old printers. One day, welfare came for a checkup. They asked how I could exist when all my money was going to rent. The huge computer/word processor stood like a dinosaur in the corner. I don't think they knew what it was. After they berated me for not living with the father of my child they left.

Eventually, I was accepted into BC Housing where I have lived quite happily for the past 12 years. When I participated in the project I repeatedly expressed the concerns of the people living in BC Housing. I consistently said how BC Housing housed people with jobs that could afford rent and in my particular situation, 4 2-bedroom suites sat empty for over a year. Another participant told how she was evicted onto the street after her kids had left and she was living in BC Housing. At the same time as promoting low-income housing tenants needs are overlooked and homelessness may result.

Presently, I have been evicted from BCHousing. I fought the eviction and lost. BCHousing hired a well paid lawyer and had the caretaker and property manager sit through seven hours of arbitration hearings. In the end BC Housing has offered me a subsidy for the private rental market. The money spent on this is on top of the other taxpayers' money that was spent on arbitration. The very people who funded this project are making me leave my home. Do they really need to do a study?

In Victoria I visited Reverend Al. Everybody in Victoria knows who Rev. Al is. He runs The Door is Open, which is down by the bridge in the skids. It is in the funnel area. The area that cities funnel or channel the poor into. Street Link is also in this funnel. Rev. Al told me that Street Link has \$2million in funding. When I asked for how many beds? the answer was 20 beds. Then I asked, well, the money is not the problem - is the space too small? Rev. Al told me that over 50 people sleep on his balcony each night and it was much smaller and outdoors than Street Link. Ta, Da, - maybe homelessness is an industry? The money is available the space is available. The political will is not.

When there is no more homelessness or poverty - there will not be any jobs for the FAW's or the Service Providers or the Facilitators of homelessness reports.

o0o

When the group was formed, and the process explained, the unwritten understanding was one of equality, regardless of race, sex, social class or ideas. This was to be a group initiative where information was not only gathered but shared, not only amongst ourselves and other services providers, but the data about homelessness provided to us by the bureaucrats would be shared with the homeless during our interviews. A researcher would tell or show the official government

definition of homelessness, for example, to the homeless and ask for their comments or criticisms. Give and take.

A well meant but unachievable goal. Unachievable because one must be freely able to give and take. Published information about homelessness excludes the homeless. Bureaucrats can control what information is hidden and what is shared. In my experience the homeless were chosen for us to talk to. Chosen by the service providers. In one instance in Victoria, we as researchers were told that the prearranged visit would have to be cancelled by a particular homeless institution because there was a crisis there. Cancelled. Wouldn't that be an excellent time to really see and report on what is happening to/with the homeless? Instead as researchers we were silenced. On my own I visited this particular institution - I saw no crisis. And when I spoke to the people there I heard of no crisis. Whether the crisis was fabricated or real, the end result was that the researchers were silenced and only had access to the chosen hideaways of the bureaucrats.

On the other hand, it was reported that the homeless actually criticized the government and in most cases were unable to speak in their own identity for fear of retribution - of having their welfare cheques cut, or their hidden homes found, or returning to fostercare - but this is not contained in this report. There were many stories from homeless people I spoke to that were not recorded either because they could not or did not want to sign the waiver form because they were under 19 or a refugee or just because they were afraid. The stories of these homeless people who had the courage to come forth were never explicitly acknowledged.

There were hidden boundaries and parameters that were too sensitive to be explored. When an issue came close to the boundary it was shut down. Honesty is often bitter. And in this case it is better to label honesty as emotions or hysteria or being non-objective.

When sitting in your nice warm home with your nice warm family and your pocket book is bulging, attitudes and behaviours become paternalistic and control is maintained. It might be interesting to note that the Facilitator never revealed the amount he was being paid for his part in the "equal" project. Instead, he was offended and found it rude to be asked what he was being paid. What are the welfare rates? One only has to phone a welfare office, check the website or even the printed news. As a welfare recipient my income is public information but the income of the Facilitator is sacred. This is poor bashing. He has the right to know our income because he is not poor. The same can be applied to the recent transit strike. When the rich decided that they were not going to pay the \$75 transit levy, a facilitator was not hired to "help" the car drivers maintain objectivity and understand that the pollution and greenhouse gases spewed from cars had a negative effect on the environment for all of us. No. The people who refused to pay the transit levy were not labelled as angry, cheats, hysterical, emotional, helpless or using strong language, but as taxpayers who had the right to break the law. That is poor bashing or poorism. (See, for example, the published work of Jean Swanson.)

Within the group of Ol's and co-ordinators we had our own small society that mirrored the work we were trying to achieve on the streets, sidewalks, bushes and funnelled areas. We did not need to go outside the conference room, except to see that the cause of homelessness that we were analyzing existed right within our own group and caused severe disruptions and problems. A higher value was placed on the opinions of some group members while others were silenced and isolated and misattributed. Money became secretive and although each participant received the same amount of money, some participants did not participate at all which was sanctioned by MarkTrend while another participant was asked to refund money because he could not make one meeting.

When it came time to write the report - participants were chosen and paid by MarkTrend according to criteria that were not made public to all participants. Even if one wanted to volunteer and write the report they were not allowed. At first only 2 people were to write the report, then politically 3 people

were chosen. These people were to take the words and ideas of the group and interpret them, banish the collective knowledge of the group. Make the knowledge bureaucrat friendly.

Our group was made up of a very well paid Facilitator from MarkTrend, a fairly paid Co-ordinator (who would use this experience to bolster his career), recent graduate from Jim Green's anthropology course at UBC and a core group of homeless Organic Intellectuals (researchers) not so well paid, in cash and the researchees who were paid a pittance \$5-\$10 for their stories.

The core group consisted of two main groups 1) service providers who were employed and receiving legitimate paycheques from organizations that receive some of their funding from the government and 2) welfare recipients. Both groups were made up of men and women.

There was an attempt made to 'define' or 'label' the members of the group when a presentation was to be made to the local SCPI committee. It was interesting that the co-ordinator and service provider slotted people into what they thought were appropriate definitions or labels and it was interesting to note their reaction when their labels were opposed or questioned. They had assigned people with varieties of disabilities, age, race and parentage. The only exception was, of course, that only the single mothers were defined. When asked about single fathers - they had to think about it. When asked about grandchildren - again another oversight. In the end, this was one of the true victories that this process held for me. I was able to influence these people who defined us to include single fathers and grandchildren. So instead of saying we have x single mothers, x first nations elders, x service providers, x people with disabilities, it was said that our group consisted of 4 males and 7 females directly representing 9 children and 5 grandchildren.

I insisted that the 'isms' used to define our team be removed - after all we were all supposed to be equal - poorism, racism, ageism, sexism, coupleism. People that are homeless face these 'isms' all the time. People who are homeless are faced with being labelled and defined all the time. Most of the labels do not fit, just as the definitions did not fit for our group when opposed or questioned. The first step to solving homelessness is to remove the labels. To remove the bureaucrats. To remove the definitions. They do not fit. We all have mothers and fathers. To only label single mothers is wrong and dated.

If you are homeless it does not matter what race, age or sex you are. Homeless people come in all sizes and colours for all reasons. The one thing for sure is that you cannot pigeon hole homelessness. The homeless teenagers I spoke to, were probably 15 or 16. However they had to define themselves as being 19 because if they did not they would and should be in the care of the Ministry of Children and Families. One teen was pregnant but proudly showed me the tattoo she had to represent her first child that is now apprehended and living in foster care. She was a child-mother taken from her child.

She will not see her children, just as the many homeless people who devoted their time and had the courage to tell their stories will have these stories stolen from them. Good intentions are not enough. Publishing reports that contain stories of homeless people is well and good but unless it results in positive changes their lives then it is just more bureaucratic paper.

How did we resolve the differences in our group - first by recognizing that there were differences. By recognizing the broad spectrum of ideas and ages and cultural influences that we have. By accepting and acknowledging the problems that existed and accepting that we each had an opportunity to give something and take something away. And finally by neglecting and attempting to silence the stories of those who opposed the 'status quo'.

Equality can be achieved by treating people the same despite their differences while at the same time equality can only be achieved by making accommodation for peoples differences and limitations. If more accommodations had been made for the language and culture of the homeless and it had been recognized that the homeless do not need MarkTrend to speak for them this would have been a much more successful and honest project. But again honesty can be bitter and does not pay.

Someone has to be willing to secure the integrity and dignity of the researchees. And if it has to be me, then so be it. Clayoquot Sound would not exist today if the people fighting for it were influenced by being called lazy, hippies, professional protestors. No - Clayoquot Sound was saved for the rich and poor alike. I hope that by speaking out I can prevent one family from being torn apart and from becoming homeless.

Caroline

#### **7.4.7 Reflections from the Co-ordinator**

The French philosopher Michelle Foucault developed a concept that the world/society we live in is governed by what we see, and what we see is in turn governed by the world we live in. I do not wish to enter into the debate of whether there is an objective world or not, but I think most people would agree that either way each person has a unique and individual experience within our world(s).

Every person is subject to forces both within their control and outside of it, we each make decisions and we are all part of different political, cultural, and economic groups. Inevitably we share commonalities with certain people and certain groups may form (physically or not) as a result of a high concentration of similar/shared experiences or circumstances. All of these experiences, circumstances, forces, and groups come together to shape how a person “sees” the world, how they perceive it and in turn act within it.

What Foucault tried to help us understand is that inevitably, we can not “see” all ways of looking at the world, and that often our way of seeing conflicts, blocks, and negates others who see the world differently due to their different lives (different positions). It is easy to think of this physically, if two people were looking at a tree from either side of it and one was sitting down while the other was standing, they would not be seeing the same thing. Sure they are looking at the same physical entity, but the way that they perceive that entity is different, maybe drastically so if the light is shining in one of their eyes, if one is sitting in a bramble bush, if one is cold and hungry from sleeping on the street the night before.

Being a member of the Community Based Research Project on Homelessness has led me to be astounded at how differently homelessness is perceived and “understood” by different people within our society. At the beginning of this project I spent a month reviewing as much of the current writing on homelessness that I could find. This ranged from academic writing, to policy reports, to government commissioned research, and very early into the review I began to see that the discourse of homelessness was repetitive. So many of the research reports repeated each other.

Then Norman and I met with the Organic Intellectuals and right from the start they were telling us things that I had never heard before. Experiences, analysis, solutions, causes, of homelessness came pouring out of them so fast that I was often shocked and overwhelmed. When Dianne brought up in one of our second meetings that the knowledge of the homeless is banished, I felt like we had hit on one of the most important and overlooked (or suppressed) issues in the discourse of homelessness.

Looking over this report reminds me that at the heart of it there is a very important ideological point being made, that people who are homeless need to be included in the discourse of homelessness. They need to be incorporated in the research, in the policy making, in the implementation of strategies to end homelessness, and not as focus groups that are underpaid and under respected, but as equal members. The fact that this has not been done before this project (and we by no means did it perfectly) reflects the mentality that is at the heart of causing homelessness.

What is this mentality? Well it is shifty and hard to put into the words, but I can say that in my opinion homelessness is caused by our society more than anything else. More than by one person's decisions or actions, more than by economic booms and busts, more than by people's differing abilities (mentally or physically) or substance uses.

If we as a society are truly determined to end homelessness then we need to change the way we see homelessness and the way we deal with it. People who are homeless are in a unique position that no one else in our society can occupy. Just as policy makers and politicians are in their unique positions. Only by allowing and fostering the equal participation of all these people with all their ways of seeing can we find the solutions to homelessness. It will not happen over night and once it is achieved there will be just as much work needed to protect people from becoming homeless and ensuring that housing is available at affordable costs and that the right services are in place to help people overcome personal issues and access our society in the ways they choose.

Matthew Smith

#### **7.4.8 Facilitator Reflections**

Working with this project team was both stimulating and a privilege. I have had little first hand contact with the community we have come to call the homeless. And prior to thinking about how to approach a project like this, the concept of the Organic Intellectual meant little to me. Needless to say, the process of getting to know the project team and working with them over a period of months not only rectified both these shortcomings in my life but also managed to break down any stereotypes I might have unwittingly developed over the years about so-called "street people", "high school drop outs" and other demographic sub-groups whose course has been different from my own.

Initially, I was struck by the alacrity with which the newly-assembled members of the team identified with the purpose of the project and the eagerness with which they got to grips with large quantities of published information and "official thinking". Even though the intention was to allow each individual to approach their part of the work in their own way (within certain overall guidelines), we at first appeared to have a cohesive, like-minded group.

As the project progressed, however, a clear division emerged. On the one hand were those who accepted the need for objectivity and were able to adopt fairly consistently the role of the (dispassionate) researcher. On the other, were those who found it difficult to shed suspicion and cynicism about the process the project involved.

Of course, there is nothing surprising about this latter response. The personal circumstances that led many to be sitting around the project table would have engendered in most people a desire to question the intentions of those "fronting" the project – and to find support for their suspicions wherever they could.

Furthermore, the subject matter of our project is in itself likely to evoke an emotional response in anyone with a modicum of humanity. So, inevitably, there were some strong differences of opinion as we struggled with the business of synthesizing the data collected, analyzing it and attempting to reduce it to a set of working definitions and implications.

In the end, we had to produce a document that “worked” both in that it remained fair to the data we had collected and that it made sense to those working in the social policy arena. (Unless both these conditions are satisfied, there will have been little point to the exercise. We set out to create a definition that was rooted in the reality of homelessness and that policy makers could consider worth taking further, incorporating in their own thinking and, we should be so lucky, reflecting in their future policies.)

So, in the end, some team members felt less than satisfied with the outcome. And, I feel, some of their concerns are valid. After all, is it not reasonable to fear that a report written in the terms of “the researcher” may not reflect the language – and hence the perspectives and attitudes – of the community it purports to be examining? By translating the language of the homeless into the language of the academic, will we inevitably sanitize, and minimize the importance to that community of, their issues and potential solutions?

Of course, we have tried to avoid this problem. After all, our mandate was to develop a definition from the perspective of those personally involved in “homelessness”. But, I can see how and why the concern surfaced.

Reflecting on the “hows” and “whys” leads to a realization that those, be they administrators, bureaucrats, academics, planners, social workers, service providers or volunteers, whose jobs and roles revolve around “serving (or studying) the homeless” may not all be aware of how they are viewed by “the homeless”. Even those who are most closely involved in meeting the day-to-day needs of their “clients” may not have had the time to stop and consider what they look like to the recipients of their (nearly always well meaning) attention.

Working with the project team, attempting to achieve unanimity of word and view, exposed me to some of these perspectives. And, I believe, it is important for the types of “suppliers” mentioned above, to be cognisant of how they can sometimes come across.

On more than one occasion, I was referred to as a “Poverty Pimp”. By being paid a commercial rate for my part in the project, I was joining the ranks of those who make money on the backs of the homeless. Ironically, by attempting to be part of a process that would ensure that the voices of the homeless were heard, I became merely another exploiter. From the perspective of those accustomed to being exploited, it was but a small step from this accusation to the one that maintains that the whole process is inevitably flawed.

It is probable that the root of this perspective lies in the fact that homelessness and poverty are (almost invariably) linked. Explaining poverty often requires the invocation of “class” and models that involve “us” and “them”. Once this happens, it is easier often to think of “we” and “they” as enemies rather than allies.

This is bound to become the case when any system (designed by one group to “assist” or “deal with” the other) fails to work perfectly.

It is not surprising, therefore, that specific failures of the existing system – failures to deal with what are perceived to be root causes as well as failures that “merely” exacerbate conditions rather than

improve them – are interpreted as signs of insensitivity. And, again, it is but a small step from being insensitive to being exploitative.

We who are not homeless need to be aware of one other important difference in perspective that surfaced constantly through the working group's debates. By and large, social policies appear most often to be constructed and funded by those who come from a world where opportunity is deemed to have been equal and effort and application are rewarded. Those whom the policies are designed to "serve", on the other hand, most often see themselves as coming from a world where access to opportunities has not been equal and where effort is no guarantee of "success".

My career as a marketing researcher has involved urging "managements" of many kinds to understand and respond to the needs of their consumers. In this case, I feel it necessary to urge policy makers not only to understand and respond to the needs of their consumers but also to incorporate their views, energies and talents in the development of policies and practices. As I learned through the process of this project, Organic Intellectuals see the world differently. That could be because they have lived it differently. And, it is, after all, their world that social policies are designed to affect.

*Norman Mould*

## **APPENDIX**

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## **ORGANIC INTELLECTUALS' INTERVIEW NOTES WITH PEOPLE WHO ARE HOMELESS**

What follows are the OIs first writings/impressions on the Key Themes we developed, and the OIs interview notes from the interviews they had with people who are homeless around BC. Each OIs used the Key Themes as the basis of their interviews and every interviewee signed a release form giving us permission to use and print their interviews.

### **Key Theme 1**

***What is a home? (Physical address? "Where the heart is?" Being part of a community?) Is it more than just 4 walls? How do we address the "whole person"?***

#### **[Sylvia: first writings]**

According to Webster a home is a place where one lies down, rests, a homestead, townsmen, a home where one lies dwelling, the place where a person or family lives, ones dwelling place, the house or apartment, etc. Where one lives or is living temporarily; living quarters, the region, city, state, where one lives. The place where one was born or reared, one's own city, state or country. A place thought of as home, a place where one likes to be, restful or congenial place, the grave, the members of a family as a unit, a household and its affairs, an institution for care of orphans, people who are old and helpless. The place where something is or has been originated, developed, to have a home, a neighbourhood.

So really, according to Webster, no matter where you lie down to sleep, that is your home. So according to Webster being homeless is not really homeless at all. You could be anywhere in the world, any country, any state, no matter where you lie down to sleep that is your home. Well I think Webster has to make some sort of redefinition of what a home really is or become homeless himself for a period of time to really find out what a home really is.

A home is what you make it, a sparrow makes a nest where she will lay her young and that's her home, to me a home is where you could feel peace and at ease, where you could feel safe, warm and cosy. A home is love, if there is no love, there is no home. A home is a sense of ownership, responsibility, and freedom to be able to come and go as you please without being monitored.

#### **[Todd: first writings]**

Pride. Lions. Comfort. Something to believe in. Ground – a place which helps one feel grounded. Interaction versus dependency. Incorporated versus sovereignty. Overwhelmed versus self-determination. Dogma versus dreams and beliefs. Manipulated. Inhuman versus human.

Home, home on the range, where buffalo roam and the deer and the antelope play. Where seldom is heard, a discouraging word, where the sky is not cloudy all. Like the DTES.

#### **[Melissa: first writings]**

Increasingly definitions of homelessness include not just the 'absolute' homeless but the 'relative' homeless (inadequately sheltered) as well. The definitions offered by the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation and the United Nations are two of the best examples of this shift in thinking and two of the best definitions of homelessness I have come across.

The CMHC's definition avoids differentiating between absolute and relative homeless altogether. This makes the definition perhaps more inclusive and helps make sure that both situations are seen equally grave in nature. In part the definition states that a state of homelessness occurs with "peoples who have problems with their housing adequacy, suitability and affordability." I like this version by the CMHC perhaps the best.

It really says all the UN definition says. However the UN Istanbul Declaration is by far the most detailed definition of homelessness. It leaves little question as to what constitutes adequate and inadequate shelter (and thereby an adequate or inadequate home). In part it states that the homeless are “those who have no home and who live without adequate protection from the elements, access to safe water and sanitation, affordable prices, secure tenure personal safety and accessibility to employment, education, and health care. The UN declaration is also very good in that it looks at the situation from the more positive perspective of what makes an adequate shelter. For some reason working with more positive feels like one is working for, or towards, something positive instead of fighting against something negative.

I like that you also asked what is a home as a them as opposed to “what is homelessness.” It (again) is a more positive position (perhaps it only seems that positive positions get more done?) to start from.

What is a home? The more one looks for a definition on what makes a home – or doesn’t – the less adequate these definitions seem. As mentioned they do not give power to individuals to determine for themselves whether they have a home or not and they do not acknowledge the consensual relationship that must exist between the larger society and the individual (or family) for a home to exist. As well there is no overt acknowledgement that there is not just a physical aspect but also a psychological aspect to feeling and being homeless at home.

This next definition of a home is a composite taken from other definitions and from what has been said at the meetings on homelessness. “A home is a physical and psychological space that feels and indeed is safe, secure and comfortable by the standards of both the individual(s) and the dominant society. A home must be consensually recognised as such by both the larger society and the individuals concerned.” In order for this definition to stand the wording itself must be defined however. In particular the words safe, secure and comfortable need to be articulated in such a way as to fit the UN definition. Where *safe* means safe from the elements and human conflict, *secure* means secure from government or other groups taking over or invading the space (i.e. security of tenure) or of having laws enacted that create an insecure place (i.e. a tent under the viaduct is not secure because it can be legally invaded and destroyed by government actions. A tent under a viaduct is also not safe from the elements or violence, nor does it have the infrastructure to ensure safe water and sanitation. In other times however the same tent may be an ideal home), and *comfortable* means financially, physically, and psychologically comfortable. Since stresses related to inaffordability can create relative homelessness. The word comfort also stresses different individual needs when it comes to shelter, i.e. what is a home for an able person may not make a home for someone physically or mentally disabled. Similarly, a home at one stage of a persons life may not seem – in terms of comfort – a home later on, i.e. a child in a parental home vs. an adult offspring in parental home. Comfort also indicates that one’s home and one’s self is accepted and indeed welcomes as a part of society. Almost anyone could self define as homeless however, society must recognise someone as such in order for them to be considered homeless and eligible for any supports offered.

**[Martin: interview with Bob in Nanaimo]**

A home is a sanctuary. Home is where you have the ability to feel secure and dry. Dry is important, I’m from the Island originally and it’s awful not to have a dry sleeping spot.

**[Martin: interview with Lucy in Nanaimo]**

A home is what you make; that could be a sanctuary or a shit hole. Home is where you are happy. For some it’s just a place to stay dry.

**[Martin: interview with Keith in Nanaimo]**

Shelter from the elements. A place to sleep, sometimes even ambience. I got homeless by having an argument with a roommate; I got kicked out with the clothes on my back and a blanket. I went to social services, got into a shelter and three days later my roomy let me move back in.

Home is a place to get away from it all, to rest from the world.

**[Martin: interview with John in Nanaimo]**

1 bedroom, self contained, clean environment, but I don't see why with Disability 2, why not live in the park for the summer.

**[Martin: interview with Brian "Crow"]**

Where I live some think my Landlord is a Slumlord. I've got holes plugged everywhere to keep the rodents out, but they still get in. I know that's not a home.

**[Martin: interview with Glen in Nanaimo]**

A home is a place where comfort, love and a roof are shared. Where one can be happy.

**[Martin: interview with Kevin in Nanaimo]**

Home is belonging to a family. Where all the necessities are. To have enough room for your possessions (pots, pans, toilet paper, all that stuff).

**[Martin: interview with Donald in Nanaimo]**

A home is a place that let's you feel a part of the community, instead of waking up alone and washing up in creeks.

**[Sylvia: interview with William in Vancouver]**

Homelessness is a lack of a home.

However, a home is more than just a building one lives in. A home is a person's identity, belief system. To be homeless would mean to be disconnected from where or from whatever it is someone may have come from. Homelessness is often linked closely to mental health issues.

Homelessness is a situation that can be compounded with length of homelessness, health issues may arise that out weigh the initial problem itself. Homelessness in my humble opinion can only be combated with further resources being given directly into housing and development or social programs to assist the truly needy.

I can certainly remember being homeless.

The feeling of shame and inadequacy that overwhelmed me were awful. My feet began to blister from the endless walking I did to fend off sleep. I would look longingly at people driving home in their cars. I wished I had a home to go to.

I realised that there were certain social barriers that served to block my progress. To further hinder this problem of homelessness I was not eating properly and also taking drugs to try and change how I felt. Rotten... eventually this cycle is too much. Physically damaging and emotionally oppressive, I screamed out for a change. I was hurting inside.

Homelessness is the most fundamental problem that a contemporary democratic society can face. Until society faces this situation and conquers it, it is truly not civilised.

The question what is a home is deeper than one may initially believe. A home is more than just a building or physical shelter. A home is a place where a person feels he or she belongs. A person may be in a totally strange environment yet feel at home because a particular language is spoken and they feel at home. A certain group of people can also make a person feel that they are home. Yet for all intents and purposes here, a home would be a sheltered enclosure where a person feels safe and secure.

**[Sylvia: interview with John in Vancouver]**

Homelessness is an objective state of mind that exists not only for the homeless, but also the perspectives of society and the entire human race. The homeless person interprets their own society as well as persons that sees the homeless. Many studies have been written on homeless, but one would assume that a first person account would truly give the most accurate reality of what homelessness "is."

I just woke up on the property of Riverview Hospital after sleeping on the cement for only about 4hrs. There is no sense to accessing some government or service, but only that I need food and some place to sleep more. I know that it won't be possible unless I just sleep on the ground. I feel like I have failed or the system has oppressed me. I had been a patient of Riverview Hospital for two months because I was paranoid living in the Downtown Eastside after being homeless there. I feel an intense sense of isolation from the world and my self, the entire government is faceless and I feel free like I had no part in the oppression of people that led to homelessness. Somehow from my underclass I have found victory and comradeship. However I realise that I feel more at home being homeless and paradoxically feel somewhat sorry for those in homes and the so-called establishment.

I feel a sense of freedom in my isolation and poverty. I am grateful that I can access government services on my disability pension even though I feel suspicious about the true relationship between myself and the rest of the government. I say government because I feel I am apart from the government and it is not truly fair to classify me as homeless.

I believe there should be other titles more often used than the homeless. Labels that come to mind are the oppressed-addicted, the tortured-criminals, the faceless-victims, mentally ill human beings or simply the broken hearted. Homelessness is merely an economic title that implies no democracy or sociability. Homelessness is a negative title that implies someone has lost his or her home. It implies that the persons that are homeless need to be treated or classified by superiors rather than relieved or enfranchised.

When I was homeless I worked and slept in my boss's old truck in his backyard. If it was truly democratic there would be more emergency shelters for the working poor and homeless. There would be easier access to education and upgrading for fair employment.

The word homeless stigmatises them more than they already are or need to be. It seems like the establishment and media enjoy using words with a negative impact to classify them rather than trying to help them or truly enfranchise them. It should be obvious that there is a vicious conspiracy against the homeless that is both historical and recent. Homelessness is only a title and does not represent the true history of these people.

**[Sylvia: interview in Vancouver]**

A home is where there is a new Buick, 7 bedrooms, a wife, 2.3 kids, and a multi-billion dollar job with a strict budget. It's when you feel like a family of bro's and sisters and everything is okay with the plumbing. A home isn't just a place to sleep – it's a state of mind and a "peace of mind." I need a wife to make it all come true in the eyes of the Lord, government and the country's people.

Homeless is when the rent doesn't get paid, an act of God happens and/or the vulture who rob me on the streets of upper skid row etc and I no longer reside in comfortable surroundings or fertile land for farming. Psychologically it's a state of mind more than an act of God (like a fire) and worse because it's in the mind like some festering disease. I might live at a room for a while or in the bushes or the park – but it's not really what I would call a home.

**[Sylvia: interview with Lina in Vancouver]**

Homeless should not ever happened to any human being, it's just not right when your walking on the streets and you see someone wrapped around a blanket sleeping in a park or on a bus bench. It's not right for anybody to be treated that way. They should have more resources to get them off the streets. There are people out there that only know about homelessness, they feel safe

but really they are not really safe. I am a mother of 3 beautiful daughters and I gave them to their dad so that they would be safe and have a roof over their heads. I know what it's like not having a home, no address nothing to call my own. I hope and pray everyday it never happens again. I'm getting back on my feet slowly.

A home to me is a place where I could bring my kids up in a safe environment. Home is a place where you share happy times that turn into good memories. A home to me is a place you could feel wanted no matter what kind of person you are. A home to me could be anywhere you feel safe it could be in a park or a street corner. A home is where you could call your own and don't have to worry so much about the safety of life for yourself and anybody surrounding you...

**[Sylvia: interviewing Tony in Vancouver]**

A home is somewhere you know is safe to sleep and call your own. Paid for or rented, it's a place to bring a friend over and to watch TV or have a bite to eat. Most important a place you can be yourself and not have to worry about anyone bothering you.

Not having a home, a place to sleep, a place to eat, a place to go to when things are not going your way, not being able to get my shit together. Not being able to leave my things anywhere and having to carry them everywhere.

**[Sylvia: interviewing Doug in Vancouver]**

Home means to me is somewhere you can call your own private sanctuary, a safe place to live without any fear from outside intrusions. Home is where I grew up as a kid, thinking now it was a place where I was taught right from wrong. Given the tools to be able to survive in this world, the real world without asking for help from anyone. Home is memories gone by, some memories of good times and bad times, now when I think of home it's very hard to out weigh the good compared to the bad. The bad far outweighs the good. Because home back then was full of anger, hate and unrest. Along this line when my parent would leave us, (my 2 sisters and I) in the car while they went into the pub and drank. I could not wait to get home, where I could hide until morning and time to go to school. Home I've always thought but never felt was somewhere you could always go anytime you needed help (example I'm going home for awhile to rethink my life) for me moving back home was never an option. Home could also mean a city or country or place of birth. Home to me mean Victoria, BC Home is 3 square meals a day, clean clothes and a big comfy bed with thick blankets.

Homeless to me is any person without an address, any person living on the street wrapped in a blanket on a sidewalk or in an alley. Homeless is anyone without a place they could call home. Homeless is anyone that cannot find a permanent place to live. Homeless means lost and forgotten and nobody cares what's happening to you or if you need help.

Homeless is someone who lost their family, their home, and their children and gave up on all their responsibilities. Homeless is losing all financial security. Homeless is not having a secure atmosphere always looking over your shoulder when you try to sleep on a park bench with one eye open.

Homeless is being alone outside, cold and hungry and praying to god that he will look out for you. Homeless is wandering the streets day and night in search of food and shelter. Dirty and in need of a hot bath or shower that never seems to happen.

Homeless is a person who becomes sick mentally and family and friends who abandoned them not understanding the state of their mind (example) thrown out with no place to go.

**[Julie: interview with Francis in Kelowna]**

Apartment or own place, but a collection of stuff that is your own is home, even if the collection is behind a car.

**[Julie: interview with Steve in Kelowna]**

Somewhere you can feel good about being there, not just a park. Somewhere to feel safe and where you can close and lock the door.

**[Andrew: summary from Nanaimo interviews]**

- Family: 3
- Community: 4
- Group contributing, work, finances, etc: 3
- Secure: 2
- 4 walls and roof: 2
  - place to lay head
  - out of the rain
  - children
  - depends on where you're at
  - settled down
  - roots
  - 4 walls closed in
  - difference between houseless and homeless
  - hiding from someone

**[Sylvia: interview in Vancouver]**

Shakespeare is quoted as having said, "to be or not to be? That is the question." What did he mean in those days? Even today in the "Modern Era" it's not just enough to succeed – the object is to survive and to be! In being that means to live and live life more abundantly. Homelessness is a relative term! The earth is our home, and it's inhabited by earthlings, it is our home in the universe. You can be homeless in a space ship to Mars and worry if you'll ever be home again!? At the same time you can be homeless on the sea, on the highway or just about anywhere. We even now have the "Health Van" and Lookout giving out blankets. "A home for the homeless." Lookout really can help people if you can stand it. I've heard a lot of complaints by people but they are not lucid enough and cast shadows in our lives. Lookout does a great job of finding people a place to rest and recuperate. You could write a large tomb on all the files of people through the past darkly that have used the services of Lookout. In closing I'd like to reiterate that the feelings of a good home and its reality isn't just physical but involvement psychologically is a major role player. It's like "happiness," can it be pursued with just the physical. Homelessness is the Bushes.

**[Sylvia: interview with John in Vancouver]**

For me a home is what you make it. Like I have been comfortable under bridges sleeping on boxes. There are many ways to enjoy or dislike your home situation. Most people are like robots and think a home is having a job, wife, kids, and in debt for the rest of there lives and are happy with that. But for me now in this stage of my life I want my home to be quiet and my own space where ever that might be.

What is homelessness? This is the hardest of the three questions to answer because you can be living in a home and still feel homeless. For me it is because I don't feel part of the family I am living with, I actually don't feel part of anything because I feel the best when I am alone. I really have to break out of this way of thinking or I am going to be very lonely, like I have been so far in life. So for me a home is what you make it.

**[Melissa: interview with Margaret in Prince George]**

A family, kids, furniture, food, a place to go and relax every night, not get bossed around, and can set your own rules.

**[Melissa: interview with Vance in Prince George]**

Home is where there is trust, privacy, funds, loyalty, respect, and a feeling that the place is mine. Also wisdom and responsibility need to be there for it to be a home.

**[Melissa: interview with Richard in Prince George]**

I don't know. I guess it's a house - the place I live isn't very safe, it's a drug place, when I go to get out of the joint I found a place. They said they had everything, and they do, you have your own bathroom, your own kitchen, and they said that it was a good place to live and it was, but then people moved in and started dealing and stealing.

*[You mean you felt you had a home before the dealers came?]*

I don't feel safe anymore, it's not good there anymore.

**[Melissa: interview with Joey and Robert in Prince George]**

J: 4 walls, roof, furniture, TV, privacy, pets (birds/fish)

R: big house, 4 walls, upstairs, downstairs, basement, place for my dog, cat, and pet rat.

**[Jesseca: summary of interviews from Victoria]**

- A physical structure, warmth, eating nutritiously, freedom to have friends in/out, sense of independence, affordable with a legal income.
- A hotel room is not a home.
- A place I can call my own. Social services should not be able to barge into the homes of poor people-the government doesn't do that routinely to anyone else.
- Home is an extension of who you are. It is your safe place to be. Your art, your poetry, your special things are everywhere. You know where everything is. You can be yourself. I have paid up to 90% of my income to have a home.
- A place where I feel like I belong.
- Housing is not a home it is a service. A home is a feeling you have, something that needs to be defined on an individual basis.
- To be able to say I am at home I need security of tenure. Knowing that I can stay for at least one year makes me feel safe enough to unpack.
- One woman, living at PEERS House, reported that her campsite was her home because she could be alone and do what she wants free from house rules. Because she has anger management challenges the campsite is more of her home because it offers her peace and tranquillity that a rooming house can't offer.
- Place that is safe/ a refuge from the world "secure and peaceful."
- Depends on the individual- some people define a home as a shared place others define it as a place to be alone whenever they want.
- A place that you can come and go from as you choose. Emergency housing and some SROs have rules dictating when you can be home and when you have to go out.
- A place that is affordable- no more than 30% of income.
- A place that reflects back who you are. We need housing for our First Nations elders. Victoria is filled with old folks homes but nothing for our people.
- We need housing specific to First Nations youth.

**[Martin: interview with Scott in Kelowna]**

I'm not sure! I don't know what a home is! It's been too long. My home, I guess that's where I used to live.

**[Martin: interview with Theresa in Kelowna]**

A place where you can be yourself and nobody criticises you. You can sleep in. You can eat what you want. I've lived in abandoned trailers and after that you appreciate toilets I'll tell you that much. You can have a home, but if you don't have anybody to love then you are homeless.

**[Martin: interview with Leanne in Kelowna]**

Being able to have a family/friends of support (community)

**[Martin: interview with Leonard in Kelowna]**

Some place where you can have a good meal, buy your own groceries, rather than having to depend on the Drop In Centre for a meal. Secure, not having to worry about getting bothered on the street. A place out of the elements.

**[Martin: interview with John in Kelowna]**

Somewhere you can go and relax, unwind, have privacy, sleep when you want. Somewhere you can go when you want. Somewhere you can cook when you want. Security of possession. Freedom, no restrictions. A home gives you a life where as many of these boarding house type situations can't because of scrapping, stealing food and all that. A place to do your life comfortably.

**[Martin: interview with Allan in Kelowna]**

Where the heart is! You got to want to be there to be able to call it home. Somewhere to work from. I don't need or want possessions. A dry place where I can shower and get up and go to work.

**[Martin: interview with Jack in Kelowna]**

Home is a luxury. It has to have a bed, a kitchen, a living room. A place where you can start over to a better life than what you had. Basically I've adopted 3 kids where I live and at the Drop In Centre they call me "Uncle"

**[Julie: interview with Stacey in Kelowna]**

Homelessness is no stability, no freedom. You have to follow society to gain anything. Also no control.

**[Julie: interview with Grant in Kelowna]**

Home is what you make it. A house is structured and structure is what people need. A home is what you make from that structure. Can't have a home without the structure.

**[Julie: interview with Joseph in Kelowna]**

Homelessness is not having a place to live/being on the street.  
A home is having personal space – just a roof, access to a phone.

**[Julie: interview with Martin in Kelowna]**

A home is someplace where you don't feel alone. I've been homeless since I was 14 when I rebelled against society because it was too scary.

**[Julie: interview with Walter in Kelowna]**

Homelessness is having nowhere to live, a home is a roof over your head.

**[Melissa: interview with Bill in Prince George]**

A home is a place you can go to be safe, where you are cared for, where your family is.

**[Melissa: interview with John in Prince George]**

My home is my own land, which I can put what I want on it. It would have to be a log house (24 \*16) with lots of room.

**[Dianne: interview with Popeye in Vancouver]**

I choose to be homeless, I can get a room anytime I want, but they are either too hot, too dry, too noisy and too many noisy people who can't mind their own business. On welfare all you can afford is a basic room (SRO), shared bathroom which isn't healthy, room with a sink, bed, dresser. Most places don't even have cooking facilities. Or you have to share a filthy kitchen so you still have to find yourself eating out anyway. I need more than one room.

**[Dianne: interview with smashed up logger in Prince George]**

Q: What is a home?

A: It's a place where you live.

Q: What was your home like?

A: Well, it had 3 bedrooms, a bathroom, a kitchen, and a living room – it was a 3 bedroom trailer home.

Q: Where was your home located?

A: Chief Lake, it was on a couple of acres.

Q: Was it your land?

A: The whole works yeah! I bought it. Yes, I paid the bank. I owned the whole thing (trailer home and land).

Q: What happened to your trailer home?

A: It disappeared. I got hurt and I wasn't living in it for a while. The neighbour's kid broke into it and stole everything, then the Regional District condemned it. They stole it off my land, crushed it, and sent me the bill. They said it wasn't safe for the neighbourhood children, so they took it off.

Q: They sent you the bill for taking your home away?

A: Yeah! But I never paid them.

Q: What did you do after?

A: Well, I was living in a hotel room, It's a place to stay out of the cold, out of the rain.

Q: Is a hotel room a home?

A: No. Well, no. You pay the rent, you get a room, eh, but it's not a home. It's a room, it's just a place to stay out of the cold, out of the rain.

Q: What makes a home a home?

A: Well a home's a home, you got a family. It's a place to stay, to live. You can have a dog or cat or whatever you want to have. I'd get to cook and eat my own food.

Q: So it is more than just 4 walls?

A: Well yeah.

Q: What makes it more?

A: That's your hideaway from the world, the weather, whatever.

Q: What makes a home liable?

A: You got to have water, heat, food, a bed to sleep in and stuff like that.

Q: What about room size, the number of rooms?

A: Well, that depends. Oh I need lots of room.

Q: What has led to you becoming homeless?

A: It's a long story, it's hard to explain. I got hurt at work, I was in a coma for 17 days. A tree fell on me. Everything changed after the accident. I'm still going through it and it happened 17 years ago. I changed physically and mentally (he told me before the interview that his foot was crushed off, he had many broken bones, ribs, legs, arms, etc., and concussion/ head trauma. He walked with a limp and crutch).

Q: Where you able to work after the accident?

A: No (he said he wanted to and tried to but he couldn't because of his disabilities).

Q: Has anyone else asked you what your thoughts about your situation – like how you feel and think about it?

A: No, they never asked, they just told me.

Q: Do you think other people have had their homes taken away.

A: Lots have. I know lots that have. Lots are in worse shape than me – physically and mentally. When you have money, you're king of the party. Soon as you're broke you're out the door. That's basically it.

Q: Poverty equal homelessness?

A: Yeah!

Q: What did you do when you were working?

A: I used to fall, I fell trees (logger).

Q: Is that where you were injured?

A: Yeah, it's hard to explain – a tree fell on me. (during non-interview part he talked at length about the accident and having so much trouble with getting compensation or money from the workers compensation board (WCB), he said he had to hire lawyers and had several lawyers working on it. He said they treated him like he had jumped under a falling tree on purpose. He said everybody knew what happened to him, but he was the only one in the accident. Everyone told him how it happened, but they were not present when it happened.)

Q: Is the process and system hard to deal with?

A: I was in supports, Canada Pension, WCB, doctors, different doctors here and there and in the end you know less than when you went in. All you do is get mixed up. They tell you this and that, eh. Everybody's got an opinion.

Q: You've been going through all these agencies all these years, have none of them helped you?

A: No! Basically you have to help yourself. Some of it was paid through medical. If they do help you it's usually not enough. I've had to pay cash and it took 10 years for them (WCB) to pay some of it back. If they help you, they leave things go like your teeth. All my teeth are rotten. They (the dentist) charged WCB and whoever's supposed to pay for it, they paid for some of it, some of it paid through my own medical, some I paid cash – now look, I've got no teeth. It was too late, they made me wait too long to get me teeth fixed. My teeth were broken in the accident when the tree fell on me, and then between Abscesses and root canal they made me wait too long.

Q: How about your housing situation, how has it changed?

A: Well it's gone. My home is gone. Somehow I will have to rebuild it or whatever or buy a new home.

Q: Do you still own the land?

A: Well, I paid for it and I still pay the taxes. Yes.

Q: How have the services taken away your personal power?

A: Well, it's taken my independence, to be in my own home on my own land, my house 25 miles from town (PG). My own home 25 miles outside of town is not there, there's no place to sleep eh. No place to get out of the rain or whatever. My own personal thought on the whole thing is in the system nobody waits for you, they figure this is what you deserve and that's what you get.

Q: What are your thoughts on the system?

A: Some of it is good but most of it is BS.

Q: What is the BS part?

A: Well, lots of it you know, like WCB when you start fighting with them or whatever. They've got all these appeals you have to go through, then you're supposed to hire a lawyer to do it for you.

Q: Where were you staying when you we're fighting WCB and going through all this?

A: Well I lived there in my trailer home for 6 to 8 months and was travelling back and forth to hospital after I was hurt. Then me and my wife moved to town (PG) because she had a job. After that they sent me to Vancouver/Richmond for rehab therapy. Then I was kicked out of there. Then I stayed in a hotel room in the DTES. I was fighting WCB, lawyers, doctors – I don't know who was doing it. But these people deprived me of compensation for my work injuries.

Q: Did anyone from WCB or the doctors and lawyers help you?

A: No! No, not really – in some ways they made it worse. It's insurance that's what it is. Everybody is trying to find the case of why I got hurt, eh. Here I am 40 miles out of Fort Nelson, 300 miles from PG, 800 mile from Vancouver and everybody in WCB, half the people around PC and lots people I worked with knows how I got hurt. That's kind of funny – if everybody knows how I got hurt then how come I laid under that tree for an hour and a half? if WCB knows it's my own stupid fault, that I did this thing to get hurt. Then how come you let me freeze trapped under a tree for an hour and a half. if you know how it happened then you must have been there. They treat me as if I jumped under that falling tree on purpose.

That's the way the system is – when someone gets hurt. They pick on the weakest. Any one who has fought with WCB knows what I'm talking about. I think a worker's a worker, like a chess board game, you're just a pawn. The kings and queens benefit, you're just used by the system. They just run you around and it costs you money. It costs you money to hire a lawyer/legal help costs money for that. Costs you \$100 for them to write a letter for you and it's never done with one letter – there are many letters written. Then they want you to settle it and make a deal. It's just like the television show Let's Make a Deal. They're dealing with playing with people's lives. If you're born healthy with all your parts and you can see and hear then you're lucky. But if you're working and you get smashed up and crippled then you can't physically look after your home. We live in the country. You know, you need firewood, you need to get it, chop it up, and then you can't do it anymore. I had to move to town to try to get healthier. Being on compensation with a common law wife and two kids even though she was working and I was getting money from the comp after we paid all the bills there was nothing left over to fix things or do anything anyway. I couldn't fix my home myself so it (my home) deteriorated and I couldn't afford to call a repair man.

Q: How long have you been in PG?

A: I've been here since 67. It's my home now.

Q: What housing options are open to you now?

A: I don't know, I just rent a room eh.

Q: What are the living conditions of your room? Do you have cooling facilities?

A: No, it's just a sleeping room – I just sleep there. I eat at restaurants like McDonalds. I could rent a place with cooking facilities and go shopping and bring food back to cook but it would cost me just as much as eating at restaurants. I would have to buy dishes, pots, pans, furniture, fridge, and stove. You name it. I had all that but I lost it.

Q: Do you feel safe here?

A: I feel safe anywhere. You're gonna die, you're going to die what the hell eh.

Q: What are the challenges that prevent you from getting a better housing?

A: Well to me the only thing I have to do is buy another trailer or build a house on my land. If I buy another trailer I'd have to put pillars back in again because they tore the pillars out – so that will cost me 3 or 4 thousand dollars for that.

## **Key Theme 2**

***What is liveable housing (room size, phone, privacy, laundry, security, day-care, access to healthy food, bathroom, etc?)? What is an acceptable quality of life?***

### **[Shawn: first writings]**

Suite size should be able to accommodate:

- Self containment - a unit of housing should have a toilet, sink, bathtub, refrigerator, stove, oven, and kitchen sink
- Storage - enough space for storing clothing, kitchen utilities, cleaning supplies, and food
- Balanced lifestyle - a table with two chairs, a bed, a big "cosy" chair, and enough open floor space for a body to lie down and stretch out

- Secure privacy - a personal locking door
- Light and air - a window that opens to outside light and air
- Area - minimum 325 sq. feet relax able to 275 sq. feet by consideration of amenity/common areas
- Code - conforming to building codes
- Special needs - customised for wheelchair, blindness, claustrophobia
- Vermin - free of vermin
- Telephone - telephone capable
- Secure tenure - subject to provisions of the r.t.a
- Unconstrained - re: diet, sleep, state of dress, etc.

**[Todd: first writings]**

To live, be, freedom of thought, choice, make mistakes, to learn, care, be part of --- of life, the colour instead of what the status allows you.

**[Martin: interview with Lucy in Nanaimo]**

The phrase \$325 a bed is etched in my mind, the welfare rate set for shelter. A fridge, stove, and window help. Although sometimes I'd rather sleep on the streets.

**[Martin: interview with Keith in Nanaimo]**

Affordable rent, big enough to live in, convenience to services in community.

**[Martin: interview with Kevin in Nanaimo]**

I was homeless for 6-9 months, looking for a place during that time so much went through my mind and any dry place would be so appreciated. It wasn't living at all. I thought of dying, killing someone, being killed, you name it. I was so discriminated against by social services because I had no address.

A home should be 5-600 sq. feet, and allow for a good quality of life = being able to cook at home, have friends/family visit.

**[Julie: interview with Steve in Kelowna]**

Will take 4 walls and a roof. Having more government housing. You need a phone to get messages.

**[Luka and Sylvia: interview with Lorraine in Kamloops]**

Lorraine lives in a small 2-bedroom suite for which she pays \$450 - the Inn is going to charge her an additional \$150 to let her son move in with her. There is no phone in her building. She can cook at home, and eats at the New Life Mission sometimes. She accesses the food bank, but they only give a person enough for 3 days.

**[Luka and Sylvia: interview with John in Kamloops]**

John and a woman share one small room. There is no space to turn around and they have shared bathroom facilities. The place is dirty, noisy, and there's a lot of drug use in the building. No phone. No laundry

**[Andrew: summary from Nanaimo interviews]**

- Bathroom: 6
- Security: 6
- Kitchen: 4
- Phone: 4
- No phone: 2

- Healthy food: 3
- Laundry: 3
- Privacy: 3
- Bedroom: 2
- roof over head
- basic necessities
- kind of job
- access to services
- fridge
- stove
- tub
- dogs allowed
- day care
- 500 square feet
- \$350-400 per month
- 7-8 people per house steal food

**[Melissa: interview with Margaret in Prince George]**

2 bedrooms (she has a child), bathroom & kitchen. Not all boxed in. Affordable.

**[Melissa: interview with Vance in Prince George]**

Physical surroundings don't matter ... doesn't matter whether there are 4 walls or not.

**[Melissa: interview with Richard in Prince George]**

Safety issues were understandably big with Richard. He kept stressing that it was a great place and that he really liked his place, but that the "dealing and stealing" made the place unliveable.

"Food, furniture, bed, bath, kitchen," all of which Richard ticked off as possessing. He felt these things were needed as far as basic physical needs were concerned to make a place liveable.

**[Melissa: interview with Joey and Robert in Prince George]**

J: Need pets and companionship.

R: There has to be a place for my pets.

**[Jesseca: summary of interviews from Victoria]**

- All people need to have the right to choose whom they live with. Many people expressed this sentiment. Single people rejected the idea of an assigned roommate. Couples expressed concern that existing emergency housing is available for single people, thereby forcing couples who are homeless to separate in order to access housing. Families are forced to separate to access shelter because it is only available to single people or single mothers. This is particularly backward given the fact that most people experience homelessness as a response to loss of family/community.
- People need furniture that meets their lifestyle
- No cameras in rooms, people don't want to feel watched in their own 'home.'
- There needs to be enough space to store our things- welfare doesn't cover the cost of storage and the housing I can get is too small so what happens to my things? Do they go to the man that beat me- that forced me out of my home?
- People need to be able to lock their door to assure privacy and security.
- All people should have the right to do what they want in their own living space as long as it doesn't cause harm to themselves or others.

- People should be allowed to have guests.
- A place that responds to health concerns: a recovering crack addict said it is very difficult for her to find affordable housing that is drug free.
- Must have a phone to increase safety and community.
- “Liveable” means being able to eat and have support getting off the drugs and out of prostitution.
- Forced treatment or counselling to access basic human rights like housing and food isn’t fair.
- A place where the tenants make their own rules.
- A place that is clean, each unit has its own bathroom, kitchen, living room and doors and windows that lock. No bugs.

**[Martin: interview with Scott in Kelowna]**

Size wouldn’t matter, a loving home, a fridge, and a stove. I went to Vernon social services; they gave me \$17.00. I just don’t know what to do without money. Every time I go for a job they don’t call me back.

**[Martin: interview with Theresa in Kelowna]**

Affordable. I spoke at an anti-poverty meeting last year and the # 1 problem is affordable housing. A fridge, stove, bathroom. A nice warm quilt because you can’t afford heat.

**[Martin: interview with Leanne in Kelowna]**

A safe place, access to healthy food, a place to sleep, have friends over, have privacy, create your own rules, have a telephone, and amenities.

**[Martin: interview with Leonard in Kelowna]**

A sleeping place is okay, A place to shower everyday – don’t mind communal. A place to house possessions and not worry about getting robbed.

**[Martin: interview with John in Kelowna]**

Self contained. Close to amenities. Large enough to have all my possessions in one place (I still have stuff in storage after a fire).

**[Martin: interview with Allan in Kelowna]**

Well the Mission is shitty with all them hours and rules. Dry and clean.

**[Martin: interview with Thomas in Kelowna]**

Clean, respectable. Have good surroundings. Bachelor or one bedroom apartment self contained. A place where you can do your own thing and a lot of happiness can come from that.

**[Martin: interview with Jack in Kelowna]**

One that is affordable. 1 bedroom apartment – average rent “\$500 - \$550” if no job, no social services, no place. To have no restrictions on coming and going.

**[Julie: interview with Grant in Kelowna]**

Warm bed, toilet, shower, clean, cooking ability, food in a fridge, phone number.

**[Julie: interview with Joseph in Kelowna]**

Just personal space, no specific size. We need more places (houses) made available for the homeless.

**[Julie: interview with Martin in Kelowna]**

Low-income housing. It takes too long to get into BC Housing. It shouldn't take 3 months.

**[Julie: interview with Walter in Kelowna]**

Roof, running water.

**[Melissa: interview with Bill in Prince George]**

As long as there is a roof over my head and meals and I have clean clothes that's enough for me.

**[Melissa: interview with John in Prince George]**

Cook stove (wood), heater (both wood burning), probably a garden 50 by 50.

**Key Theme 3**

***What trauma suffered/displacement issues have led people to become homeless? (Physical/Sexual abuse? Mental health issues? Loss of job? Loss of family Drug/alcohol issues? Lack of safety? etc) People are rarely homeless because they choose to be. What are people's bundle issues? Rarely is homelessness the sole issue a person is dealing with.***

**[Diane: first writings]**

- Child hood abuse, sexual abuse, physical and emotional abuse
- Institutionalised violence = residential schools, psychiatric institutions, orphanages, foster homes, group homes
  - "The pain comes back" to create fear of 4 walls, fear of financial aid workers, fear of health and or mental health workers
- Discrimination of being labelled psychiatrically
- Giving disabled people volunteer positions in the services instead of real jobs
- Enforced psychiatric treatment of those who won't conform to societal norms, i.e. dominant discourse
- Misdiagnosed trauma survivors as psychotic, manic depressive, bi-polar
- The providers of services maintain the status quo by not providing real solutions
- Free food services that contribute to mal nutrition and disease (i.e. diabetes, compromised immune system, heart disease, stroke, and cancer); giving garbage foods/foods that people and industry restaurants and grocery food stores in the past would throw out as garbage
- Being told to leave the community because you are poor, a binner, or on welfare

**[Todd: first writings]**

Lack of options. Being labeled as a skids, deviants or useless instead of emotionally displaced castaways who need support from their communities.

**[Julie: interview with Francis in Kelowna]**

Motel would not let girlfriend in. He was paying cash, he should be able to bring girlfriend in.

**[Julie: interview with Steve in Kelowna]**

Drug abuse led to homelessness. I was a rebel against his parents. I hung out with a "bad crowd."

**[Luka and Sylvia: interview with Randi in Kamloops]**

Randi is Cree and Blackfoot, but looks Metis. She and her mom moved to Kamloops from Calgary, escaping from the father's abuse, when she was about three. Randi recounted a story

about a trip she and her mother made to the place of her birth, TAGISH, NWT when she was about 10 years old. Mom left Randi alone in the van, parked near some residences for 2 weeks while she spent her holiday on a drug binge. Randi managed to survive on her own in the van by obtaining help from one of the residents, who let her come in to clean up and eat from time to time. Her mother returned to the van after her binge and they returned to Kamloops together.

Since then Randi has been in foster homes and had a period of anorexia, which she has recovered from. Her social worker is now searching for a foster home for her, which is gay accepting, and in the meantime she has accessed safe house.

Her mother's parents are from Alberta, victims of residential school abuse. Randi has a good relationship with her grandmother, and says that gramma doesn't ever talk about the residential schools, but when something comes on TV about them, gramma starts to cry. Her grandfather was an alcoholic- they moved to Tagish while he was in the army. Randi thinks mom's alcohol and drug issues stem from her childhood experiences of isolation and poor role models.

**[Luka and Sylvia: interview with Carmelle in Kamloops]**

Carmelle is a woman in her 30's who has lived in Kamloops for 10 years. She was a hairdresser, married, living in a nice house, and was and is very well known in town. Her homelessness is the result of a divorce and consequent depression, which led to drug addiction. After that she couldn't keep a job and was reduced to her present situation - on welfare living in sub-standard accommodations.

**[Luka and Sylvia: interview with Lawrence in Kamloops]**

Alcohol is an issue and has been since 1994. His longest abstinence was for 10 months. His big problem is that the whole building where he lives is alcoholic and noisy. He says all low-income housing is the same.

- "In Kamloops there's a cold beer and wine store on every corner"

**[Luka and Sylvia: interview with Lorraine in Kamloops]**

Lorraine is an elder who has been in Kamloops 3 years. She was born and raised in Merritt. From her reserve she was sent to residential school in Lytton for 6 years. It was very traumatic - to escape she "shacked up" at 15 years old and started drinking. She is still in the grips of alcoholism and lives in a building where everyone drinks. Her son (30) will be moving in with her in her already sub-standard living arrangement because he was cut off welfare today (see Lawrence Picton).

**[Luka and Sylvia: interviewing Gerry in Kamloops]**

Gerry is 50 and has been in Kamloops on and off for 20 years. He was a sawmill worker - since the mills shut down he has had no work.

**[Luka and Sylvia: interview with John in Kamloops]**

John is 43, from a Metis colony in Alberta called Paddle Prairie. He attended residential school until grade 3 when his dad died and he moved to Manning Alberta with his mom. He has known only poverty, verbal and physical abuse, and has never had any support.

He was in jail at 16 for theft, and was in and out of jail for about 7 years after that. In 1997 he hit the street in Burnaby and Vancouver, got involved in alcohol and crack. He has been to Miracle Valley, King Haven, and New Life Mission (all men's' treatment centres) His last treatment centre was the NewLife in Kamloops and he has been sober one month.

**[Luka and Sylvia: interview with Al in Kamloops]**

Al is 51 years old, a Metis born in a reserve in Armstrong Ontario. His mom is Native (maiden name "Osquega") He attended regular school in Nipigon up to Grade 9. Then he worked at the

RedRock pulp and paper mill. He is a logger by trade. Came to BC and had to retrain. Never really got into any other trade because of medical problems.

Tried living in Vancouver. Didn't do drugs but is alcoholic. He also has chronic pancreatic. He takes Demerol often (when he has an attack) and ends up in the hospital a lot. He has always had the advantage of passing for native or white.

Al left home at 15 - never knew his mom because his dad left her on the reserve. He receives Disability II and that covers everything - he "gets by".

#### **[Luka and Sylvia: interview with John in Kamloops]**

John is 47 - born in Vancouver - his mom was a nurse's aide. Mom was born in Manitoba - half Cree and half French (name Thomas)

John says shame has been a big factor in his life. He is presently on his way to alcohol Detox - he's been staying with friends since his welfare ran out on Friday. He stayed at the men's hostel last night and going to detox called Phoenix (this is his 5<sup>th</sup> time in 3 years)

He grew up with white folks - now has no family. His sister was living in Williams Lake and died at 48 (A & D) mom died in 1991 and dad died in 1998. He has spent time picking fruit in Kelowna and is a qualified chef.

He eats out of dumpsters and lives under bridges.

#### **[Luka and Sylvia: interviewing Les in Kamloops]**

Les went to school up to grade 11 then worked in sawmills and tree spacing. Now he can't work because of arthritis in his back (even if there were jobs).

#### **[Luka and Sylvia: interviewing Derrick in Kamloops]**

Derrick is a forest industry victim - hasn't worked since sawmills closed.

He came to Kamloops from the Yukon 10 years ago and since then has had only sporadic employment. He has no phone and no laundry (he washes his clothes in the bathtub).

#### **[Luka and Sylvia: interviewing Troy in Kamloops]**

"Do you have a place you call home?" "No - I applied to Anahim Lake Band for housing and they refused because:

- a) I'm not related to the chief
- b) I'm not married (they told me to get a wife, then apply"

#### **[Andrew: summary of Nanaimo interviews]**

- Drug/alcohol: 3
- Trauma: 2
- Choice: 2
- Need for counselling: 2
  
- separation from family
- abused women
- need more Detox
- move for work and children
- death
- dogs keep homeless
- gaps in services
- jail caused loss of place
- moving around

#### **[Melissa: interview with Margaret in Prince George]**

- Drugs
- Transient
- No family
- No skills
- Very little support
- Bad relationships
- No training options
- Little affordable housing
- Intolerance in government facilities
- No housing for those who use drugs

This individual spoke about the other girls she knows on the street and answered the questions as to why they landed on the street – a situation that includes both absolute and relative homelessness – adequate housing from Margeareta's point of view (and mine) is rarely if ever the experience of the girls working the streets.

- Lots of girls were molested, some just want to fit in and even if you're straight you relapse on the street.
- An unsettled life where nowhere is home and there is no family or other supports (other than government)
- If you can't do what the services (like the shelter) want you to do (how services want you to behave) you get kind of stuffed off

*[What keeps you on the street?]*

- The money is easy, nowhere else to go, no family
- Even if you're straight you relapse on the street

Margaret's story (this story shows how services and government helps to keep people in the same situation). She is one of the many who migrate back and forth to Vancouver.

*[Why do you go to Vancouver and then come back]*

- The dope is much cheaper, but you have nowhere to stay, and there is more help (services)
- I was running scared all the time in Vancouver and it became a cocaine psychosis
- I lost my mind (3<sup>rd</sup> time especially) so I came back
- "The first time I went to Vancouver I was 13/14 and the social worker sent me back. The second time I was 19/20 and went down to look for my 'old man' and ended up in jail. The third time I was arrested here in P.G. and sent to Burnaby jail, was already doing to much coke (had cocaine psychosis – it still effects me like a flash back)

*[Margarette was very nervous and quiet, she seemed very fearful in general]*

- "When women are released from Burnaby they are sent to the bus station, to go back to where they came from. But no one goes home, they all go downtown for the cheap drugs (a flap of coke is \$10 in Vancouver and \$25 in Prince George)."

### **[Melissa: interview with Vance in Prince George]**

"Loss of job, drug use, emotional devastation, the friends you hang out with. A couple years ago I was working in the Albert Oil Fields as a roughneck and training to be a man. But now I'm too sick to work. I can't go back to the work I used to do. I left my job at the oil fields and came to Prince George because of the vision I had of two women. One was an old medicine woman. The other was a lot younger. I saw the younger women on the street in Prince George not long after I got there and started going out with her. She told me she was HIV positive right away but I said it didn't matter, that we'd work something out. It was months however before I knew that she used needles. When I caught her in the bathroom "shooting up" I demanded to try it too. I kept using - all my savings disappeared. At one point, somehow, when we were high (I don't know how, we had always been careful) I must have used her rig by accident. Now I'm HIV positive too. I tested positive in March. It had a devastating effect on my emotions. I've tried to kill myself twice since then.

**[Melissa: interview with Richard in Prince George]**

Booze and drugs I guess.

**[Melissa: interview with Joey and Robert in Prince George]**

J: They take advantage of their cheque (welfare), booze and drugs.

R: They're too noisy and they get evicted - maybe they start out by just wanting to get high and they get evicted

*[I asked them why people might get too noisy or why people spend all their money getting high]*

R: Felt it was simply because they could and then they get into a habit of it.

J: Disagreed with Robert, "I imagine some kids get molested and that could start it all out."

R: That's true, my sister's kids were assaulted.

**[Jesseca: summary of interviews from Victoria]**

- People are dealing with so much pain in their lives. They are trying to deal with or cope with the pain day in and day out. Getting a home feels impossible.
- Getting out of jail lands many people on the streets with no support.
- Many women report becoming homeless after leaving abusive relationships and plummeting down into poverty. Many people who fall unexpectedly into deep poverty don't know how to access services, where to look.
- Most women have lost their children to the Ministry because of poverty, addiction and sometimes abuse. They then turn to the streets because they have nothing left to live for. We need to come up with a new way of intervening in dysfunctional homes that provides supports rather than tearing families apart. It is ludicrous that families receive less than foster families to raise the same child.
- People who have are HIV+ (particularly full blown AIDS) have a difficult time securing a steady income and finding housing that offers needed supports.
- Residential schools.
- Foster care
- Death of family member
- Sexual, physical or emotional abuse at home.
- Loss of job
- Alcoholism
- Family of origin breaks down- kids search out a new family and find one on the streets.
- Violence

**[Martin: interview with James in Kelowna]**

I lit me kitchen on fire and fell asleep drunk, I woke up to the fire department. I've got mental health issues with suicidal thinking every day. Alcoholism, drugs, methadone, pills. I lost everything due to drinking. Not one of my criminal charges did not involve drinking. I didn't choose to be homeless – I chose to be drunk, that's why I don't have my kid and wife and daughter. It's a lousy feeling.

**[Martin: interview with Scott in Kelowna]**

My mother kicked me out because I was drinking and doing drugs all the time. I'm a drug and alcohol addict. I think suicidal thoughts once in a while. I stuck around Calgary for a while, come here to pick fruit and then go to Vancouver. I know about at least 60 homeless people here in the last month. In Calgary I know about 150.

**[Martin: interview with Theresa in Kelowna]**

I turned 44, menopause, went coo-coo, decides to pawn my stuff and get drunk. Then my roommate evicted me and a girlfriend took the rest of my stuff. That's how I got to be homeless.

**[Martin: interview with Leanne in Kelowna]**

Yes, yes, yes. I've never had a job, got kicked out of the house, so I was a runaway. Family abuse for sure. I had problems trying to get a place.

**[Martin: interview with Leonard in Kelowna]**

Too many rules leads to trauma. In places I did stay I should have been able to have friends over anytime.

**[Dianne: interview with Samantha in Prince George]**

I am a single middle-aged woman who I believe have always tried to be a good and honest person. I have never been in trouble and have helped others whenever possible, even sometimes at my own suffering. Always believing that good deed are always rewarded in just time. I have always worked hard having a job for 8 years and another for 7 years, but that was the past. I now find myself caught in a jam of 7 jobs in 5 years. The bit of savings I had vanished even though I tried my hardest to go without, but finally I had nothing and had to move out of my home. The few friends I had let me sleep on their couches but I felt uncomfortable and started to become very depressed. When I finally got some social assistance they only allowed me \$325.00 for a place to call home, where does such a place exist. It does exist if you want to share a bathroom and smelly dirty kitchen and sleep on a filthy mattress in a room the size of a dog house with a bunch of men and if you do sleep the fear of something bothering you at any time. You begin to lose hope. There should be a place for women to go where it is clean and safe whether or not it is their fault even if it is for a short period of time to help them get back on their feet, but in stead it seems you have no such place so a good human being finds a place for everyone to feel safe and loved and believe as I do that people deserve a second chance and take care of the Canadian public so we can be happy.

**[Martin: interview with John in Kelowna]**

When I was in Penticton, I was Vice President of the Penticton District JayCees. I was always community minded. Loss of work due to injury. Place got fire burnt out/took two weeks to clean up. My last girlfriend has 3 kids – messed my head up when I left there I didn't know who I was or what I was. Towards the end, I was drinking a lot (binge drinking). I like my beer but I'm not loaded all the time.

**[Martin: interview with Allan in Kelowna]**

Alcoholism and loss of friends (Dumpster Don). Now I'm trying to get myself clean (2 weeks now), after 5 years of drinking. Things were going good for a while in Hope, the stress got to me I guess. Loneliness, disappointment.

**[Martin: interview with Thomas in Kelowna]**

My depression started in 1994 when my dad got sick. I had family problems, my dad dies of Alzheimer's. My mother and I were the prime caregivers. Mental health problems. I've taken a lot of abuse from a lot of people.

**[Martin: interview with Jack in Kelowna]**

For me it was (and is) hard because I have bronchial asthma, a stroke, 4 heart attacks, and 5 slipped disks ... so physically it's tough – I mean street life. I haven't drank for 30 years and have been clean since last November. I'm separated from my wife. She moved out because I wouldn't go to work. I used to work at Money's Mushrooms (for 5 years) and got chemically poisoned by formaldehyde and ammonia. My wife said, I'll meet you in 3 months, I haven't seen her in 6 years.

We were married for 20 years, the first 15 were good. We used to make \$48.00 an hour, between the 2 of us circa 1980. To go from that level to Disability 2 licks you right in the butt.

**[Julie: interview with Stacey in Kelowna]**

I became homeless because of drugs. I started doing drugs to grow a thick skin (being homeless as a girl is hard. You have to become a “rock”). It’s a self-destructive downward spiral. Self-destructive.

Over the last little while I have been collecting disability, but my house just burned down and now it is hard because I have no address to collect disability at.

**[Julie: interview with Grant in Kelowna]**

Abuse in the home. Disconnected from society. Mental illness.

When I was 11 I took off from child services and came to Maple Ridge to live with my brother. Later I lived in a car for 7 years.

**[Julie: interview with Joseph in Kelowna]**

Family problems, physical and mental abuse from farther. Living in the Mission because there is no place to go after treatment, there really should be a place for someone to go after treatment.

**[Julie: interview with Martin in Kelowna]**

Spent some time in jail so now it is really hard to get back into the system/society. For example he is discriminated against because of tattoos, background checks, etc.

**[Julie: interview with Walter in Kelowna]**

Addiction, alcohol, drugs.

**[Melissa: interview with Bill in Prince George]**

Mental Health issues, mental and sexual abuse, unstable home environment. There has to be a give and take from both ends, if there isn’t then there is nothing there.

**[Melissa: interview with John in Prince George]**

Because they don’t want to toe the line.

**[Dianne: interview with from Vancouver]**

I have no way at my age to make up what I’ve lost. What does a disabled women at 61 look forward to in the future making up the losses not only of not having a home, not making a living, being destitute without friends, but being my age. I can’t get work.

Being alone, depression sets in and you think there is no future. What does someone do, or go to, to make their life worth wild. I am a skilled intelligent person, other than being sad all the time.

**[Dianne: interview with Popeye in Vancouver]**

Q: Have you ever been robbed?

A: Many times, always when I sleep.

Q: Is binning a full time job?

A: More or less it’s a full time job. I work more hours than people work in their full time jobs. Sometimes I bin for 24 hours at a time, have something to eat, and then go back to it.

Q: Does childhood abuse – mental, physical, sexual – contribute to homelessness?

A: I believe that a lot of people who have been abused as children grow up to be homeless. I was abused as a child – physically, mentally, emotionally – my whole family was. We grew up poor. When you grow up poor you’re marked. You get tormented by all the other kids – ‘you’re a bum,’ ‘you don’t have nice clothes’.

Q: Do you think a lack of self esteem contributes to homelessness?

A: Oh yeah, yes. My family was broken up – my sisters were raised by aunts and grandmothers, the boys went to foster homes except for the two oldest, there were 10 of us kids. My parents fought a lot, my Dad was violent and they lost control of the kids and so we had to go away.

#### **Key Themes 4**

***Who are the homeless? What percentage of homeless communities are men/women/children? Who are the invisible homeless? How do they learn to become invisible? People who are homeless are not one homogenised group = “the homeless.”***

#### **[Melissa: first writing]**

If comfort, including a sense of belonging are a part of the definition of what makes a home, then according to Bruce Alexander, who makes a good case for almost universal dislocation of individuals within the new Global Economy, anyone could be considered homeless or at risk of homelessness. Since the Global Economy seems to cause real and apparent insecurity and discomfort through dislocation (not belonging to, or a part of a society or group). However there is no question that living in poverty creates a situation where homelessness is far more difficult to escape than for someone who has financial resources.

Shelterless in Vancouver talks about the absolute homelessness in the GVRD as consisting of 80% men. However it and other literature on the subject suggest that as in Toronto and other large cities like LA that there is a growing number of absolute homeless that includes seniors, youth, families and women. The literature also suggests taking strong action before those who are not yet absolutely homeless become so. This makes the inclusion of the relative homeless all the more important in defining homelessness and adds weight to the need for including why people are homeless in the first place into the definition (no job, no home, no support as a single mother, etc).

#### **[Julie: interview with Steve in Kelowna]**

Half men and half women. There are approximately 100 homeless people in Kelowna that he knows of.

#### **[Luka and Sylvia: interview with Dean in Kamloops]**

Dean receives \$185 a month support and stays with relatives and friends. He belongs to the Squeetschastn band 59 miles north of Kamloops. He was born in Kamloops hospital and his family travelled all over the States when he was a small child, earning money picking fruit. There was 6 members in his family – he has happy memories of picking olives, grapes, oranges, peanuts, etc. he is planning to attend Caribou College film school and hopes to get work when they film his reserve.

#### **[Luka and Sylvia: interview with Gerry in Kamloops]**

Gerry lives in “one of Perry’s rooming houses” on Battle and St Paul. He has a small fridge and hotplate and shared bathroom. He pays \$370 for the room and gets \$130 support so he picks bottles to supplement. He goes to the food bank and gets bread from the mission. He gets toilet paper from public places.

Gerry complained about noisy neighbours and lots of alcoholism. He has no phone and no laundry facilities.

#### **[Luka and Sylvia: interview with John in Kamloops]**

Todd has a 2-year-old son who lives with him. He rents an upstairs suite - \$750.00 includes everything. His total cheque is \$860 plus he gets \$200 family bonus.

Prior to this address he was paying 600 plus utilities and cable. He had to find a place that included heat with winter coming on.

Todd was born in Regina - lived in BC most of his life. He goes to the Newlife Mission for bread and visits the food bank once a month. The child's mom recently left again after a 2-month reconciliation. She has two other kids who are in foster care - the foster parents are getting lots of money but the mother is destitute.

Todd has a really hard time making ends meet with the expenses of having a child - he spends \$60 to \$70 on diapers; \$20 to \$30 on water.

One of the reasons for Todd's difficulty is that he has to spend more than the shelter portion of welfare to get a decent place. (He doesn't want to live in the usual low-income housing and its associated drug and alcohol problems).

### **[Luka and Sylvia: interviewing Les in Kamloops]**

Les is 46 years old - has been in Kamloops for 9 years - previously lived in Kelowna. He's married, but his wife is in hospital with liver problems. He was born in Merritt.

He's lost his sleeping bag and has no place to stay. He's sleeping outside under a bridge while wife is in hospital. He has a brother in Kelowna.

Les gets support from welfare (\$175?) He seldom goes to the NewLife Mission, preferring to eat out of bins.

### **[Luka and Sylvia: interview with Carol in Kamloops]**

Carol is 37 years old. She and her husband, Tony Anthony, are couch surfing. They were in a trailer until this month - the owner took it over. They are looking for housing, but Kamloops has mostly slumlords. They started the month out with \$140 from welfare.

Carol went to school to grade 9, then left her abusive home. School was and is out of the question. She and husband have been staying with friends - all street people. There are no squats in Kamloops that she knows of, and there are NO FREE PHONES.

"You have to be beat up or have kids to get anything as a woman in this town"

"My husband gets food from the hostel and sneaks it out to me - sometimes he gets in trouble"

### **[Luka and Sylvia: interviewing derrick in Kamloops]**

Derrick has a \$325 room and gets \$170 support. That's gone after one week. He has a stove in his room but its practically useless on his budget. He accesses the hostel after 2 weeks (they only feed people 2 weeks after welfare day). Also he visits the Newlife Mission once in a while.

Conditions in his room are OK, but not all tenants are so lucky. He has a neighbour downstairs whose stove and fridge don't work.

### **[Luka and Sylvia: interview with Beeps]**

Right now he lives across the bridge in a sleeping bag. He's starting school (upgrade) in January at the college - he's going to take meat cutting.

### **[Andrew: summary of Nanaimo interviews]**

*Men: 50/50 :Women*

*50/50*

*70/30*

*80/20*

*90/10*

- 10-65 years old
- 14 years old and up
- 20-25 years old
- 10% families
- children apprehended by Social Services
- 1 or 2 families use Salvation Army in Nanaimo
- by choice because of apprehension
- youth scared to talk to services
- abused
- lots of women
- kids too
- guys sell themselves
- lots of kids on street in Hamilton
- Vancouver has a few
- runaways
- foster kids
- squatters
- depends on location
- disabled
- mentally ill

**[Melissa: interview with Margaret in Prince George]**

In Prince George it is mostly women (and their children sometimes). Lots of men who are homeless sleep in the "jungle" (a wooded hill not far from town).

**[Melissa: interview with Vance in Prince George]**

Almost all of them use drugs and/or alcohol.

**[Melissa: interview with Richard in Prince George]**

Men and women. Didn't know the %, but thought it was pretty even.

**[Melissa: interview with Joey and Robert in Prince George]**

J & R: Both men and women.

**[Jesseca: summary of interviews from Victoria]**

- "I see a lot of homeless people who are housed and a lot who aren't housed." Homeless people are people who do not have a safe, secure place to live that meets the individual/family's needs.
- Immigrants and refugees (BC Housing requires that you have been a BC resident for at least one year.)
- People waiting to get into BC Housing, Detox or emergency shelters.
- Youth who don't have the references necessary to get a rental.
- Sex trade workers fleeing pimps.
- Most people I spoke to had experienced loss of family due to death, divorce, social services, or addiction.
- Many women who have lost custody of their children.
- Many people with pets, particularly dogs, cannot find housing.
- People with severe addictions
- People who have a fight with their roommate and leave for a couple of weeks.

- People who cannot access the system: draft dodgers, people with outstanding warrants for arrest.
- People are poor who want their autonomy and feel that the streets are better than shelters.
- People who reject capitalism and refuse to be part of the system.
- People who have been marginalized due to sexual orientation.
- Since Victoria passed the anti-panhandling law many more people are homeless.
- Homeless because there is not enough DeTox services.
- Many people go from emergency psychiatric care to emergency shelter then onto the streets continuously.
- Most women are invisibly homeless. They can't live in SROs that are too dangerous for women; they can't sleep on the streets that are too dangerous for women. While men are safer to sleep on the streets and in SROs women will spend all of their income to secure shelter and then bin, beg or prostitute to get money for food. As a result they do not get counted in homeless studies.

**[Dianne: interview in Prince George]**

I am or could be described as the working homeless. Right now, today I have three confirmed jobs and no place to live. One of them is in Kelowna, one in Edmonton, and one in Gravenhurst. I am fully qualified for all three of these jobs and the rates of pay range from \$16.00 an hour to \$20.00 an hour.

Through a private organization I was able to make contact with these employers (send resume, make initial contact, and receive job confirmation). I then went to HRDC to get help to get to these jobs and was completely stonewalled. My employer (the one in Kelowna) wanted me their for Friday August 31<sup>st</sup>/01 and I was told the soonest I could get in to see some one at HRDC was 5 days from Wednesday August 29/01.

I finally received help in the way of a bus ticket from a private organization so I will be able to get there, but I have been through this before. What will happen I know is I will arrive in Kelowna with no housing and no money. My boss will expect me to be ready for work immediately, but I will have to spend the next week with HRDC trying to get help to get work (transportation, housing, food). After I make excuses why I need time off for appointments etc. I will have lost all credibility with this employer, loose the job, and start this cycle all over again.

**[Martin: interview with James in Kelowna]**

50/50 I'd say. Men are more visible because women get with a guy if they are homeless. More people would be seen if so many houses weren't turned into public parks. I usually ride route of downtown and sleep on someone's lawn.

**[Martin: interview with Scott in Kelowna]**

Everyone. Probably 2/3 men and 1/3 woman. If the only way to identify homelessness is by cleanliness then you can't tell.

**[Martin: interview with Theresa in Kelowna]**

People who are destitute and have no one to care for them. The lonely and the tired, always looking for the most basic of need to be met. I think there are more women on the street.

**[Martin: interview with Leanne in Kelowna]**

Somebody who is unable to provide for themselves and feels bad about it. You're not really homeless unless you feel you are.

**[Martin: interview with Leonard in Kelowna]**

70% men, 30% women ... seen a few families. It took them a while, but they eventually got a place or moved on to another town.

**[Dianne: interview with Judy in Vancouver]**

What it feels like to be a homeless woman in Vancouver at the age of 61. After many bouts with depression and without any money, support, friends, and shelters. After a lot of consideration I moved in with my daughter who can only help me by being by my side for moral support. However, what avenue's do I have to remedy a problem that so many seniors have here in Vancouver. Where does one turn to and what resources do I have? Being destitute and disabled with heart disease and many other health problems. I am not only isolated by being unable to get around but there is a void in my life after working since I was 16. Having the luxury of a home, two loving daughter and a darling grandchild. Here I am without anything, all lost due to helping my family with their problems and staying with a man who promised to do what is right by me. He did not do that. I have only the possessions that I could pack in my old car. Everyday goes by and I pray there will be an answer to what I am going through. I have tried positive thinking and I know somewhere or something will come out of all this suffering. I often ask myself why me? Was it my fault for believing that the ones that I loved so much are not here for me now that I need them. Do I feel sorry for myself, yes and no. I blame myself for not being stronger and thinking that it would never happen to me. Maybe there is a light at the end of this dark tunnel and I will get the help that I need to go on. It seems a long way off but somehow I truly believe that I will survive and God willing will once again be a part of the community with a home to call my own.

**[Martin: interview with John in Kelowna]**

50/50 women and men. Many women will just shack up with a guy to have a place to live. I see families at the Drop In Centre for lunch and dinner.

**[Martin: interview with Allan in Kelowna]**

95% men to 5% women. If the women are on the street they are not visible. I see families coming into the Drop In for food.

**[Martin: interview with Thomas in Kelowna]**

50 – 50. Not often too many kids that I see. Usually 20 – 60 yrs old. A lot of people who are homeless keep clean so you'd never know of they're homeless until you see them at Drop In Centres.

**[Martin: interview with Jack in Kelowna]**

More women are homeless.

The struggling women are very hidden as opposed to men. I don't see too many families, many have lost their kids to social services. The homeless are the drug and addicted, the lonely and the anti-social.

**[Julie: interview with Stacey in Kelowna]**

There is lots of placement for homeless children. On disability I was collecting (my daughter and I) \$700.00 (after rent). Now that Stacey's house is burned down she is having trouble finding a mailing address and her child is living with her boyfriend's parents.

**[Julie: interview with Grant in Kelowna]**

Everybody. Brother, mothers, sisters, everybody.

**[Julie: interview with Joseph in Kelowna]**

%50 - %50. There should be co/op homeless housing available.

**[Julie: interview with Walter in Kelowna]**

70% men and 30% women. People are homeless because they want to be.

**[Melissa: interview with Bill in Prince George]**

Everybody, not just Natives or whites. Blows me away to see the people that come here. They have home but not paid enough from family welfare – unless you bend over backwards and jump threw hoops.

**[Melissa: interview with John in Prince George]**

Like Halifax cause he just got a room and lots of older guys worked in lumber mills and now they come in here. No sawmill work for them, got to on welfare – too young for old age too young for work.

**Key Theme 5**

***The “banished knowledge” of the homeless versus the “culture of experts.” Where are the user-designed, bottom up policies and housing?***

**[Andrew: first writings]**

- A need for testimonials vs. statistics
- Moral hazard argument in top-down rhetoric stricken from solutions
- Stop using vast sweeping statements when discussing poverty
- Stop patronizing the poor
- Stop making decisions and policies from statistics and start consulting the poor
- No more stigmatizing and poor-bashing
- No more black and white arguments
- Social needs vs. market demand too vague a model
- Re-introduce by-law enforcement to rehabilitate SRO hotels
- A need for user-based policies and plans
- Include resident steering committees in social housing development

**[Andrew: summary of Nanaimo interviews]**

- Have never been asked about homelessness before: 4
- Welfare or other don't want to know: 2
  
- have never been homeless
- government want to keep money to themselves
- government spends money overseas before spending it at home
- government rarely talks about homeless
- middle class reaction
- not understood by middle class
- government only came for photo op
- hostel closes at 6pm
- slept under bridges because turned away by hostel
- 5 deaths in Victoria
- kids come straight from university so don't know social issues, need more life experiences
- panhandlers vs. obnoxious panhandlers

**[Melissa: interview with Vance in Prince George]**

Native medicines and the healing way of life are almost forgotten - a lot of native culture. I'm Native but I was brought up in white society.

**[Melissa: interview with Richard in Prince George]**

The city hires students, why can't they hire some of us to clean up, you know, sweep the streets...

**[Melissa: interview with Joey and Robert in Prince George]**

R: You need your friends because people can take advantage of you.

J: Friendship's important - we're best friends and have been for a long time but we still need professionals, friends can't help you with everything.

**[Martin: interview with Theresa in Kelowna]**

Bureaucratic government – they don't give a shit as long as they get their 80,000 a month. We aren't homeless, we're speechless.

**[Martin: interview with Leonard in Kelowna]**

People give up on the system. No street people want to talk because their voice is not heard.

**[Martin: interview with John in Kelowna]**

Try living it! Bureaucrats don't want to hear it. "Things can't be that bad," is the impression I get. The only reason people are homeless is by choice when it comes to bureaucracy. I've had to fight with them since day one. Even social service workers admit their services are flawed, but no one seems to care. Denial by the powers that be revamped the system in Kelowna to make it harder for us.

An alphabetical system has caused people insane travel problems for social service recipients. With social services issues I could go on ...

**[Julie: interview with Joseph in Kelowna]**

I've fallen into the Gospel Mission. Trap? Routine?

**[Melissa: interview with Bill in Prince George]**

I was brought up in white society. Natives have lost their spirit or close to it, once it's gone that's it. You shouldn't have to rely on places like this (St Vincent drop in). government should make sure everyone has enough.

**[Melissa: interview with John in Prince George]**

There never use to be a place to sober up, now there are detoxes. Today they got all that stuff, but it doesn't really change things except for the people who get jobs out of it.

**Key Theme 6**

***What is learned helplessness, the crisis of achievement, and dependent development? How do they effect people who are homeless and perpetuate homelessness?***

**[Sylvia: first writings]**

Learned helplessness is a system dependent on free hand outs, enabling the poor, oppressed, the needy to become helpless in an already helpless society, to down grade, instead or upgrade.

Look around you at all the agencies, services, and organizations. All getting government grants to help whom? Surely it's not the homeless. The way I look at it, it is only to help the helpless become entirely helpless, depended upon a system, to strip you of your dignity, self esteem, your right to be a human being you are meant to be.

At one time these so called agencies, services, organizations, had people in mind but after a while they became lost and dependent on the system themselves, living of government grants and expecting handouts where the handouts should be.

The crisis of achievement is when one could escape from the grasp of this hold that society has on one's self. To render yourself of such a strong hold is an achievement in it self, no longer in control of a society that is out of control its self is a victory won. Such a battle won is the beginning of restoration of one's intellectual well being, learning to live again, after a society that had taught us helplessness for so long, no longer has a grip on us.

Dependent Development to me is a freedom to no longer depend on a system and to learn again to be depended, to seek out your own freedom. Spiritually having a sense of peace and no longer feeling the effects of society, no longer feeling bogged down and kept a prisoner of a systematic control of an out of control society. I can freely say I have my God for guidance, having a heart, compassion and love is one of the benefits of being free from a society that has a grasp on the homeless to teach them to be helpless in order for themselves to benefit from this already out of control society. I feel the freedom to walk in the truth, I have the choice not to sit with deceitful wicked people. Society can now bow down to me and now I feel it is all worthwhile in being on the other side of the glass, feeling whole as a person and not just a number the society. Living in a society where the society turns a deaf ear and doesn't want to hear the cries of the oppressed is somewhat a depressing and undesirable feeling of helplessness. A society no longer there for people, they so readily agreed to be there for them in the first place. A society that found they could not, or no longer, or will not manage a people so oppressed by there own failures that they just learned up a new and deceitful schemes to keep society from finding out that they had failed them, so what do they do? Ah! They make you believe that you are helpless and cannot mänge your own self in society, so they misdiagnose you as bi-polar, schizophrenic, or some sort of mental illness so that, you the society will be so medicated that you will not or in hopes not to discover there mistakes and their failures they label us as misfits. The good news is that some of us discovered the truth and we freed ourselves from the oppression and became as useful and as tactic as they are or ever will be in society.

### **[Julie: first writings]**

Welfare. Foodbank – not enough money for the rest of the month. How am I to find a job (no phone, clothes – lack of confidence due to this). Loss of thought social ability. Experiment. Freedom. The ability to feel and be who you want.

The want to overcome “homelessness” but BC benefits has so many hoops to go through. Very hard to make app. to no more bus passes, phones. The feeling of no hope. Living month to month, scraping by in food lines. Very depressing. You are your surroundings.

### **[Sylvia: interviewing Lina in Vancouver]**

I was helpless against my mother because she wouldn't show me any love what so ever. I would take it out on my brothers and sisters. When I was a kid and my mother didn't pay attention to me I would cause a crisis to upset her and get her angry at me. Even when I was nice to my brothers and sisters I'd jeopardize by causing some crisis all my life when I would achieve I would cause some kind of crisis.

The only develop dependent in my life was my uncle because he never threatened me in anyway. I always felt independent with the rest of my family because none of them would develop an independent relationship with me.

**[Sylvia: interviewing Tony in Vancouver]**

When I first saw how much I liked things that were bad for me and still did it. It seems like fun but it all leads to the same thing all the time. It never changes but still I used to do it thinking it would be different from last but the only things that changes is the place or the people. I never changed till this time I was in recovery and saw myself the way I was and it bothered me the way I was. The only way to change is to start with self and the way we live and act towards each other and one self. Slowly things will changed if you want them to they will. Here I am trying to get better and still shit is coming my way. I'm being accused of things I have not done and it goes on and on. It seems once you are something it is hard to say another.

**[Andrew: summary of Nanaimo interviews]**

- People become dependent
  - Dependent on the system
  - Who cares
  - Welfare not enough
  - Can't make ends meet
  - Trapped
  - People lose their dreams, goals
  - Become institutionalized
  - Hardly see some of the stuff that gets donated
  - Charities are in business for themselves
  - If everything is free, can afford drugs
  - Being babysat
  - Some have limited access
- 
- Ok for disability of mental handicap
  - Choice
  - Should only be used in emergencies
  - Use till get on feet
  - Most charities are decent
- 
- Does not create sense of dependency
  - Surviving but don't care
  - Happy with self
  - Children all grown

**[Sylvia: interview with William in Vancouver]**

Learned helplessness is a social learning. It is what we learn from our parents, friends, culture. We can be subliminally indoctrinated into believing that we are helpless against a certain thing. Whether it be alcoholism or poverty, drug addiction. We believe that we are powerless to change because that is all we know.

The crisis of achievement. This particular one sounds like me. When someone is on the edge of success, they feel so uncomfortable or out of touch that they self-destruct and go back to what they know, this to me is the crisis of achievement.

Dependent development, this one should be called dependency development. Dependency does develop to different stages if we feed it. The worst stage being chronic. The development of these stages may be determined by certain criteria. Emotional stability is a main factor involved in this development. The stage can be halted if for example an intervention takes place or the person genuinely wants to change his or her direction.

**[Sylvia: interview with John in Vancouver]**

I know I learned help-less-ness as a young child. Like when my father would beat up my mother and sister. I learned the help-less-ness by fear and not getting hit. You learn it quite well when it happens on a regular basis, and it sticks with you for the rest of your life in many shapes and forms of learned help-less-ness. Basically it is self-defence.

I don't know exactly what you meant or want from this question, but I will let you know how I think about it. It's like when you achieve something or promise to achieve something. The crisis of achievement starts right from the beginning by trying to screw it up. It's like you never want to achieve anything in life.

My dependent development started when I was very young. My true independent development was stolen from me but I still have it inside and know what it is, but I am afraid to show it or let it out because of fear of confrontation from other people.

**[Melissa: interview with Margaret in Prince George]**

Margaret did not talk about this in explicit terms, but with no supports except for services at shelters and the like and time in jail have helped to create very low self-esteem. She does not believe she is able or strong.

**[Melissa: interview with Vance in Prince George]**

Without a job Vance has been forced to rely on welfare and whatever services like food line-ups and drop-in centres and St Vincent de Paul. The fact that he has become positive in the last 6 months has put him into a situation where he is afraid of the future and emotionally (if not yet physically) unable to work. In other words his HIV status has thrown him into a state of helplessness where he feels isolated and shunned by friends and employers alike. He also feels estranged from any Native supports or services, because of his ongoing drug use and his HIV positive status he feels that he will not be accepted by Native Elders and healers.

**[Melissa: interview with Joey and Robert in Prince George]**

R: People won't accept each other's ideas. They won't get together because they take advantage of each other - stabbed, beaten up.

J: It's true, they're always after each other - hurting each other for wine.

**[Martin: interview with James in Kelowna]**

People get hooked on services, especially food services. They know when they get broke they can always find a way to eat. They won't help out one bit (social services). They gave me shit because I got kicked out of the OK college dorms so now my only challenge is on the street. I'm not allowed in the Mission either, I passed out there one day when I was on pills.

**[Martin: interview with Scott in Kelowna]**

I rely on the Drop In Centre for food during the day, but they close at 2:00. After that it's the Mission. A guy can get hungry at times but I'm not starving.

**[Martin: interview with Theresa in Kelowna]**

It's all about control, like the Blair House, you're told when to get up, told when to shower, told when to go to meetings. I feel really bad for the guys at the Mission, they get kicked out at 7 am.

**[Martin: interview with Leanne in Kelowna]**

It was very easy to get on social assistance, but it's not so easy for some guys I know. One guy it took 3 months to get assistance.

**[Martin: interview with Leonard in Kelowna]**

I see a lot of regulars. Let's put it that way. Pretty much keeps people in place. What else is there for people coming into towns with very little funds.

**[Martin: interview with John in Kelowna]**

The Ivory tower League – they don't want to admit, sure, they do provide services that trap a lot of people into dependency, especially if you live at the Mission – depressed, frustrated, a feeling of no where to turn hits a lot of people in that situation.

Many potential employers, as soon as they hear the contact number is the Mission or the Drop In Centre. They won't accept that.

**[Martin: interview with Allan in Kelowna]**

There is way more red tape than is needed. It's politics raiding our pockets. The deal is "I'm hungry," why do you want to know my life story. But truthfully, people do get used to going to free places on a scheduled for sure. It's totally like putting a dog on a short leash. There's not much room for movement.

**[Martin: interview with Thomas in Kelowna]**

There are definitely a lot of people who depend on these services. I can't really put single mothers down, but I should be working, I guess a lot of people feel that. I'm just trying to take it one day at a time. It takes a lot of independence away from the person. I'm counting on them too much right now. I'm the one who has to make decisions. I used to have homes and vehicles and it feels weird to feel dependent on these services.

**[Martin: interview with Jack in Kelowna]**

People do get dependent because everything is handed to them. It's too easy to survive in terms of not starving, but it's very exhausting. Then you're on assistance, why go to work. There's no incentive to get out of the system.

**[Julie: interview with Stacey in Kelowna]**

Being homeless holds you back. You are controlled monthly, by your cheque. Stacey says she'll do anything for her cheque.

**[Julie: interview with Grant in Kelowna]**

Yes.

**[Julie: interview with Martin in Kelowna]**

Yes.

**[Melissa: interview with John in Prince George]**

Money talks.

## Key Theme 7

### ***Why have people who are homeless not been involved before in defining themselves?***

#### **[Andrew: summary on Nanaimo interviews]**

- Not counted or ignored: 3
  - No one asks or not listened to: 3
  - Too busy searching for help: 2
  - People/taxpayers aren't interested in hearing from the homeless: 2
  - Can't help those who don't want to be helped/told what to do: 2
- 
- too busy hiding in the world
  - people form assumptions about homeless
  - like old age, forgotten
  - mental health don't know where to go
  - society doesn't want help
  - homeless ignored
  - homeless aren't allowed a point a view
  - have few resources
  - people try to sat they're helping

#### **[Martin: interview with James in Kelowna]**

That's bullshit. How can they tell me what my experience is. The only person qualified to tell my story is me cause I've been there.

#### **[Martin: interviewing Scot in Kelowna]**

Probably because they don't care about poor people. Because poor people can't do them any harm.

#### **[Martin: interview with Theresa in Kelowna]**

Because all we are is reports, we're not people. They feel sorry for a while, they say they are going to help you ... but ...

#### **[Martin: interview with Leanne in Kelowna]**

Politicians don't know hot to talk to homeless people. They feel the homeless haven't got anything to say. The homeless are powerless.

#### **[Martin: interview with Leonard in Kelowna]**

"Don't bring up any truths, and no one will ask about the lies."

#### **[Martin: interview with John in Kelowna]**

They do a study and formulate unfounded opinions, not realising the problem is affordable housing. The current economic system is not workable. You get \$440.00 a month, rent and utilities are \$350.00, so there is \$90 to live in for the month. That pretty much reduces me to smoking butts and pipe or rolling papers?

#### **[Julie: interview with Stacey in Kelowna]**

Because the government/bureaucracy think they know how to define homelessness, but they don't, they haven't lived that life.

**[Julie: interview with Grant in Kelowna]**

Because afraid of the realities of homelessness.

**[Julie: interview with Joseph in Kelowna]**

The bureaucracy doesn't want to know the truth. They really don't want to help.

**[Julie: interview with Martin in Kelowna]**

The bureaucracy is too selfish. The homeless have no voice. Homeless need to protest. Homeless don't feel people will listen.

**[Julie: interview with Walter in Kelowna]**

Politics, homeless don't vote. They are thought of as lost cause.

**[Melissa: interview with Bill in Prince George]**

People look down on homeless.

**Key Theme 8**

***The empowerment and disempowerment of being homeless and trying to overcome homelessness. The loss of control and freedom at the hands of BC Housing, BC Benefits and other service providers.***

**[Shawn: first writing]**

- Homelessness is a misanthropic socio-political statement
- "hard to house" = people with mental health issues, addicted, diseased, disabled, criminalized, tooth decay are denied social assistance and therefore marginalized out of housing
- Poverty = "deserving" and "un-deserving poor"
- Industry of homelessness - poverty pimps and perpetual homelessness
- homelessness compromises personal integrity; prostitution, savaging, begging, criminalization, squeegee, humiliation
- In access to telephone
- Physical danger from public, police, weather, disease, vermin, dogs
- Trauma
- Garbage food from charities
- Return to abusive relationships to avoid being homeless
- Isolated from family, friends, community
- Stereotypes, stigmatized, discriminated against
- Broken hearted
- Welfare rate absurdly low

**[Julie: first writings]**

Why did these people leave home? Issues of restraintment (either parents, jail, abuse, lack of freedom) if you are going to give someone a house then give them a house. Don't create an outside "jail", providing a space for someone to live grow and give opportunity.

**[Martin: interview with Bob in Nanaimo]**

Everybody knows about the Rules and Regulations of the system.

**[Martin: interview with Lucy in Nanaimo]**

Well you're stuck in certain ways and if you want to get any kind of help you got to play the game.

**[Martin: interview with Keith in Nanaimo]**

Yeah I felt pretty weak and helpless on the street. There is a balancing point at times where you just can't seem to be able to help your self. I just want to keep a roof over my head now. It's too hard to live outdoors in this country

**[Martin: interview with John in Nanaimo]**

Even after getting social housing people are kept enabled by dropping down their ambitions.

**[Martin: interview with Brian "Crow" in Nanaimo]**

I feel very free sometimes and so stuck at others. It's confusing to know what to do anymore.

**[Martin: interview with Glen in Nanaimo]**

The experts don't know about the situations poverty brings on, they have roofs over their heads.

**[Martin: interview with Kevin in Nanaimo]**

People are kept under control by gradually being convinced in a 1,000 ways they aren't able to properly help themselves.

**[Martin: interview with Donald in Nanaimo]**

I think the longer one stays homeless the more it plays on the self esteem. Even though it's lonely at times it's nice to have the freedom to ponder life and why I'm here. I feel disempowered, often hopeless & helpless about my current situation.

**[Martin: interview with Scott in Kelowna]**

Like I said about Vernon. They give me a hard time and yes I feel very powerless. Not just about not having a home but about everything. My experience of homelessness means violence and shelters.

**[Martin: interview with Theresa in Kelowna]**

No. Not easy to get in or out of the system. Workers have jobs and mandates and they go by the book they wrote. How to get out of homelessness – win the lotto, sober up.

**[Martin: interview with Leanne in Kelowna]**

That's shitty! I don't like it because I'm not in control and I'm limited in my situation. It's difficult to get the basics together and that causes me shame.

**[Martin: interview with Leonard in Kelowna]**

I know at least 30 people who are homeless. Too much stuff I had to go through to get on social assistance, so I gave up, no address, no money. The only way out of this is through my own initiative.

**[Martin: interview with John in Kelowna]**

It's very difficult to get the help a person needs when they need it. Bus passes are a major problem – if something could be set up to increase mobility. Some people are making an effort to get clean, but they have to want to ... Then they need better access to employment – Employer Initiatives, like the downtown Binner (operated) bottle depot were hoping to get. With lockers,

showers, etc. Innovative thinking like this needed. If its run by the people that are actually running it.

*How do I get out of my current situation?*

I need a steady roof with privacy so I can build my life on solid ground, not some place that's too crowded. I could be homeless after Thurs (it's Tues). I'm in a not good roommate situation ... anyways I could go on, I just need to keep myself organized and get more organized.

**[Martin: interview with Allan in Kelowna]**

My way out is to get cleaned up and work. Don't smoke dope or do pills, just alcohol. I take care of my street people. Everybody looks to me for advice and I'll help them out if I can. As for the system, who knows.

**[Martin: interview with Thomas in Kelowna]**

I haven't found it easy dealing with this system. I feel pushed aside, employable in their eyes, social services is a hassle to access, so many requirements.

**[Julie: interview with Grant in Kelowna]**

Yes. There are too many hoops to jump through. Hard without ID.

**[Julie: interview with Joseph in Kelowna]**

Really easy. You got to play their game. It's hard for people because they don't want to cooperate. They don't know how to go about talking to the system.

**[Julie: interview with Martin in Kelowna]**

You loose your power when you join the system.

**[Julie: interview with Walter in Kelowna]**

Frustrating rules. Different workers have different rules. I would change welfare to workfare so everyone had to get off their ass. People can get off the system if they want to.

**[Melissa: interview with Bill in Prince George]**

First people I met were street people, it blows me away how much they all watch out for each other. The homeless are very respectful.

**[Dianne: interview in Vancouver]**

They look at our morality and our character and tell us what to do and yet they do what ever they want – that's immoral or illegal. if you have money then you're important – if you have nothing then you're garbage. They don't want you around.

My manager has harassed me – when I call the cops they ask me what I've done wrong and the manager comes kicking my door yelling at me. My manager gets away with abusing me, the cops don't do anything. I am not safe in my home. I don't wan to move – it's to stressful. I've been living here since I was 16 years old. I'm now 43.

Just because I do this (binning) he discriminates against me – I only do this as a hobby, its fun. this is not hurting anyone – a home should be a safe place where no one discriminates against you and where no one threatens you. Property managers get away with so much in the West End.

**[Dianne: interview in Vancouver]**

I told them I didn't know how many welfare recipients lived in the west end, but I believe that if they're on welfare then either their landlords doesn't know or if the land lord knows then the recipient is watched constantly. My property manager harasses poor people. I've seen my property manager harass others in my building. There was an old man living in the building for many years and he was a binner and the manager was always yelling at him even after the elderly binner started using a motorized scooter chair. The property manager still was screaming at this guy, the manager

just could not understand that this disabled man was a working man whenever he could not walk anymore. Using his wheelchair he was still recycling Beer and Pop cans and bottles. This was how he himself bought food with the money he got from recycling bottles and cans.

**[Dianne: interview in Vancouver with 6 men]**

Interview With Six Male Friends

1 of them on DBI  
4 of them on DB2  
1 on regular welfare

All of them afraid of their FAW – all of them want to work but can't for various reasons. No energy, no bus pass, address discrimination.

People give up hope = hopeless  
Poverty and homelessness is a trap = once

You've been poor or on welfare or homeless – you cannot get out of it.

If you've been down in the downtown eastside for six months you'll never get out of it. You'll keep coming back. You have to for food. Suicide is high if you're poor. They know \_\_\_\_\_ within a week hanged himself. The other committed suicide too. Suicide rates are high in DTES.

People coming back to DTES for food. If you're here for six months or a year maximum you're basically here forever. You're a lifer.

When you do get out or if you do get out you're put into public housing but you're still on welfare.

You're pretty well stuck in this area for life. Your only hope is if you get a job.

If you pick up every cigarette butt you might get enough money to get another room.

If you get out you might have a part time job or temporary job but you end up coming back when that's over. The whole table said they did not know anyone who got out of the DTES and stayed out. They always came back.

They come back because they're too far away from the free food.

Income has decreased. Proof of that is three years ago income for a single person on welfare was \$221 but it was dropped down to \$185. With inflation, they've dropped welfare by 20%.

The welfare rates make it harder to get out although the upside is that several years ago there were fewer free food places. There was a lot less variety in the type of food. It was all rotten so it was very depressing years back. If you needed food it was the same food seven days a week. You ate the same thing everyday.

Q. Do the area services provide you with the food you need daily?

A. No they don't provide you with the food you need daily. They don't provide foods that make you healthy. A lot of the food makes you sick. Most people spend their money on their addiction – whatever it might be. So they don't have money for food. (I.e., drugs, alcohol, gambling, cigarettes etc).

Q. How long can you subsist on the money welfare gives you for food?

A. Except for one male, all the rest said two weeks. He was on DB2 and had brain damage from a car accident that prevented him from working anymore. He said he could live on the money and ate sirloin steak all the time but in reality he too went searching for food and ate at the free services. He picked up butts to smoke after the first week on welfare. In other words, he was bullshitting.

They are the enforcers.

The quality of volunteers in this neighbourhood has to improve. What's a 9 letter word for anal? Volunteer! (There are certain volunteers who use their position to abuse others.)

I told the men that DTES is my real home. When I told them about my situation "I'm paying \$634 for rent and my roommate doesn't pay any rent" one of the men said "Take me as your roommate, I'd love to live in the West End". I told him and the others that they too could live in the West End if they had a roommate. They asked me if I felt out of place down there (West End). I said of course. They don't want poor people there. The reality is that property managers don't want to rent to welfare recipients. My property manager tells me I should be on Hastings Street and I'm nothing but scum and a stupid bitch. He has even threatened to hit me when I told him he could not talk to me like that. I pay my rent and I wasn't his wife then he raised his hand as if to hit me. One man asked that must be tough feeling out of place all the time. Even the men said that they (West Enders) don't want you there. That you should be down here where you're supposed to be (DTES).

When the men said "it must be tough feeling out of place all the time" I said, I don't have a place there. Actually my home is here meaning DTES with my friends but I just couldn't live in a single hotel room because of PTSD.

They asked how many welfare recipients lived the West End.

Welfare workers treat you badly. For example, if you have an appointment with them at 10am, they will come out at 10am to see if you showed up and then make you wait at least ½ hour before they see you.

One man said "I get the feeling they just put you down here and wait for you to die".

You just can't live under these conditions.

At this point, one of the men at the table said "get a job then" Losers Anonymous.

The quality of volunteers in this neighbourhood has to improve.

"You can tell a volunteer a mile away because they're a victim." A man at Carnegie Centre said this after reading the Health Boards. Choose a way to honour volunteers by creating some sort of monument. He said "it would be a monument to victims".

How come people in DTES don't get paid for all the work they do? As volunteers? People whom we call volunteers aren't always volunteers, they are wageless workers. Honorariums don't pay rent.

No real jobs exist for us. They only exist for those who have been educated or trained or are able to control and deny others Human Rights. Jobs exist for people who are able to watch all the suffering and only throw food on a place. There are two classes of people in the DTES. Users of services and providers of services.

Providers of services are the poverty pimps and vampires that thrive on the suffering of others. Without us and our miserable existence they would have no jobs. These services do not help us out of poverty.

