No Moving Back

A study of the intersection of rural and urban homelessness for Aboriginal people in Calgary, Alberta

A Partnership between the Aboriginal Friendship Center of Calgary, Calgary Homeless Foundation and the University of Calgary with the support of Treaty 7 Management Corporation
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A quote from one of the participants:

Our Father, forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those, because the Creator is not one sided. He doesn’t put anybody [ahead]; we’re all equal before his eyes. That’s the way I was taught and I see it, because we’re all different.

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# Table of Contents

Acknowledgements........................................................................................................... 2  
Executive Summary........................................................................................................... 5  
Background and Rationale................................................................................................. 9  
  Conceptual Framework.................................................................................................... 10  
  Research questions......................................................................................................... 10  
Methods............................................................................................................................ 11  
  Recruitment: Interviews with People Experiencing Homelessness............................. 11  
  Recruitment: Interviews with Service Providers.......................................................... 11  
  The CHF Housing Management Information System (HMIS) for April 1 2012 to December 31 2012.............................................................................................................. 11  
Scoping Review................................................................................................................ 12  
Workshop.......................................................................................................................... 13  
Ethics.................................................................................................................................. 13  
Data Analysis.................................................................................................................... 14  
  Interviews......................................................................................................................... 14  
  HMIS Data...................................................................................................................... 14  
  Scoping Review............................................................................................................... 14  
  Workshop......................................................................................................................... 14  
Results............................................................................................................................... 15  
  Presentation of Results................................................................................................... 15  
  Interviews with People Experiencing Homelessness and Service Providers............... 15  
    The Participants.......................................................................................................... 15  
    Key Themes................................................................................................................ 16  
    HMIS Data.................................................................................................................. 25  
    Scoping Literature Review......................................................................................... 28  
    Themes from the Scoping Review............................................................................. 30  
    Workshop Participation.............................................................................................. 31  
Discussion........................................................................................................................ 35  
  The Research Questions.............................................................................................. 35  
    1. Why are Aboriginal people leaving their reserves?.............................................. 35  
    2. How are urban and rural supports coordinated for those homeless Aboriginal people who wish to return to a rural setting?......................................................... 36  
    3. What are the barriers to accessing supports to staying in their rural communities?................................................................................................................................. 36
4. What services do people moving to urban centres require in the first 24 hours, 48 hours, seven days of their move; and are there any challenges/perceived barriers to accessing these? ................................................................. 37

5. How are services organized and coordinated to deal with migrating families when they arrive in urban centres? ................................................................. 38

Strengths and Weaknesses of this Study................................................................. 39
Conclusions.............................................................................................................. 41
References.............................................................................................................. 42
Appendix A: Letter from Grand Chief Weasel Head .............................................. 45
Appendix B: Attendees at Intersections of Rural and Urban Homelessness Workshop, June 4, 3013, Wild Rose United Church, Calgary.............................................. 46
Executive Summary

Aboriginal people are overrepresented in Canada’s urban homeless numbers and the same is true for Calgary where the most recent count of homeless persons found 21% were Aboriginal and 38% of those found sleeping rough were Aboriginal. In the research project reported on here we critically examined Aboriginal people’s experiences of migration from rural to urban settings and how systems create and respond to homelessness. Specifically we explored the community’s capacity to adequately respond in a timely way to an emergent need; coordination and resourcing of systems of care; and culturally safe nature of current approaches to service provision.

We conducted interviews with 12 Aboriginal people who had or were experiencing homelessness in Calgary. They were recruited through homelessness serving agencies. There were 4 females and 8 males in this group. We also conducted interviews with 10 people who worked in the homeless serving sector who came from 8 organizations, 3 of which were Aboriginal specific. Among these service providers, 6 were Aboriginal and 4 of these had lived on a reserve in the past. There were 7 females and 3 males.

The key themes coming from the qualitative interviews can be summarized as follows:

1) There is no “moving back” for most Aboriginal homeless in Calgary. It is a myth that Aboriginal people move back and forth between their reserves and the city on the path to homelessness:
   a. Expect continuous relocation from reserves to cities over the next several years;

2) The pathway to urban Aboriginal homelessness is created by two intersecting systems of inequity unique to Aboriginals:
   a. Reserve life; and
   b. Discrimination against Aboriginal peoples in the cities.

3) Response from the reserve when assistance is requested from a city dweller;

4) There is little or no collaboration between reserve services and the homeless service sector in Calgary;

5) Three services stood out as offering culturally safe services at the present time, while the need was viewed as broader:
   a. Cultural reconnection;
   b. Gender issues;
   c. More than cultural reconnection;

6) The need for Aboriginal staffing was highlighted by:
   a. Reliance on the Aboriginal street network;
   b. The degree of racism experienced; and

7) The services needed in the first week in Calgary include shelter, food and child care.

While these themes intersect we addressed each of them separately in more detail in the full report.
We also analyzed the Housing Management Information System (HMIS) data for April 1, 2012 to December 31, 2012. The data set contained client records for Housing First (HF) programs (long term programs: housing with intensive supports and permanent supportive housing) funded by Alberta Human Services (HS). Of the 553 housed clients in the database, 177 (32.0%) self-identified as Aboriginal clients. Among Aboriginal peoples 125 (71.0%) were First Nations (Status); 14 (8.0%) were First Nations (Non-Status); 23 (13%) were Métis; 10 (5.7%) did not know; 2 (1.1%) were Inuit; and 3 (1.7%) declined to answer. The mean age of the sample was 38.8 years; 6.2% were children under the age of 18 years and only 2 (0.4%) were under the age of 15 years. These were “independent” youth that is not accompanied by parents, who were housed by programs. The sample was 41.6% female and 58.4% male. The results indicated: 1) the Aboriginal group was on average younger; 2) there were more females in the Aboriginal group; 3) the two did not differ on rates of Chronic or Episodic homelessness or on being Absolutely or Relatively homeless, or on the number of years homeless; and 4) Aboriginal clients were more likely to have come from an addictions treatment facility or a shelter when compared to non Aboriginal clients in the sample.

We also conducted a scoping review of the literature on rural to urban homelessness for Aboriginal peoples. Twenty-five articles were selected for full analysis after comparing the results of the search to our inclusion criteria. Racism and discrimination were themes running throughout the literature. Social policies (e.g., The Indian Act, Child Welfare) are reported to continue colonization and efforts to assimilate exacerbate cultural loss and experiences of oppression. The negative impact of residential schools was emphasized. Very few or no articles addressed the needs of sub-populations, notably, those with addictions or those leaving correctional services, and families with children. The pathway to urban homelessness was often linked to conditions on reserve that challenged peoples’ capacity to make a stable life – poor housing, and lack of education and employment opportunities.

Next, we held a workshop with 46 attendees who ranged from management to case managers and front-line service workers, including health service related staff and students. A brief overview of preliminary project results was provided and the participants answered two questions: 1) Given the current research findings, what can your agency/organization do in the next 1 to 5 years to address Aboriginal homelessness?; and 2) How does change happen in your agency/organization to put ideas from Session #1 in place?

In answering question 1, the following themes were identified: 1) planning of services needs to consider Aboriginal peoples overall and child care needs, youth, and people with disabilities. The harm reduction model was mentioned as appropriate. 2) More than one group highlighted the need to incorporate diversity among Aboriginal peoples in achieving cultural safety. This respects Aboriginal peoples’ right to choose among cultural activities. Collaboration and partnership among agencies to implement culturally safe services, hiring of Aboriginal staff including Elders, the need for awareness and skill building among current staff, changing systems and structures, prevention at root causes, and the role for research in policy or program implementation were also discussed.
Our results from participant interviews are discussed in the report in terms of the five research questions. We found people are leaving reserves to make a better life with jobs, education, and services where they are treated with dignity. Our study uncovered little evidence that they move back and forth between the city and reserves, which may differ from other cities; therefore the question of how urban and rural supports should be coordinated for those homeless Aboriginal people who wish to return to a rural setting is moot. The barriers to accessing supports to staying in their rural communities included a lack of supports, family conflict, loss of identity, and leaving the reserve at a young age due to child welfare placement. Asking people what services people moving to urban centres required in the first 24 hours, 48 hours, or seven days of their move resulted in one fundamental answer – safe accommodation. The homeless and service providing participants identified that better coordinated services, with a more comprehensive approach to meeting the needs of clients were needed. Aboriginal people identified the need for more Aboriginal people among service providers. There are few resources in the homeless serving sector for families with children in Calgary and this affects Aboriginal people more.

The interviews, workshop participants, and literature all pointed to an increased need for culturally safe services for Aboriginal peoples in Calgary. With the strategic plans to end homelessness, a specific plan to end Aboriginal homelessness, as well as, the newer plans to end poverty and focus on Aboriginal poverty in Calgary, the community is well positioned to be a leader in responding to the needs of the Aboriginal population. It was acknowledged, particularly in the workshop and in the literature that this can only be done by partnering with Aboriginal Elders, and including Aboriginal peoples in the design and evaluation of services.

A number of conclusions were reported. Coupled with the report just released from Lethbridge, another city in Alberta, the results of this study indicate that it will be important to consider the issues of urban Aboriginal homelessness during Alberta’s efforts to end homelessness. Aboriginal peoples on reserve face a number of challenges around education, employment and housing that lead them to seek opportunities in the cities. Calgary may experience less mobility back to rural areas and be seen as more attractive those for whom this returning is not an option. The differences between urban centres call for care that provincial policies and programs are flexible enough to accommodate the needs of different social contexts.

This study reinforced previous work calling for more cultural safety for Aboriginal peoples in the homeless serving sector. The community of the homeless serving sector has begun to address this gap; and has made significant progress towards understanding in the last 4 years. Increasing the capacity to address Aboriginal homelessness requires advocates and champions, such as, those among the ASCHH. Collaboration across the sector would provide an opportunity to benefit from joint capacity building. Calgary’s homeless sector currently does not have the capacity to deal with an increased influx of Aboriginal peoples who are homeless as well as their children is sufficient. Waiting lists and discrimination in the housing market compound the severity of the situation for
Aboriginal peoples. The quantitative analysis in this study indicated that the current housing first programs are serving an appropriate proportion of Aboriginal clients. The needs of Aboriginal children and the relationship of homelessness to child welfare involvement were not addressed in this study and require serious attention in terms of prevention of future cohorts of distressed adults.

This study identifies opportunities for future policy relevant research:
1. exploration of success rates and opportunities for program refinement in housing first programs;
2. assessing and responding to the unique needs of Aboriginal children who experience homelessness;
3. given the high involvement of Aboriginal children in foster care, assessing the role of homelessness;
4. development, dissemination or adaptation of models of collaboration among federal, provincial, and municipal government to address Aboriginal homelessness;
5. investigation into models that funders can use to increase intra- and inter-sectoral collaboration; and
6. exploration of interventions on reserve to prevent urban Aboriginal homelessness in collaboration with reserve communities.
Background and Rationale

Aboriginal people are overrepresented in Canada’s urban homeless numbers. In the most recent count of homeless persons in Calgary, 21% of those counted were Aboriginal, and a full 38% of those found rough sleeping were Aboriginal (Calgary Homeless Foundation, 2012. For comparative purposes, Calgary’s overall Aboriginal population is 2.5% (Statistics Canada, 2006).

Oelke (2010) reports that many Aboriginal people are migrating to Calgary to access needed health and social services. In addition, they report a dramatic increase in the numbers of Aboriginal families accessing emergency shelter services, as many as 50% of current users are from nearby Aboriginal communities. A second stage shelter, for instance, reported that 30% of the clients were self-reported as Aboriginal over a 10 year period (Thurston, 2006). Migration to a large urban center can result in a loss of social supports and cultural connections. As well, the high costs of housing and other basic needs places people at risk of homelessness, this is often thought to result in a continual cycle of back and forth migration and/or homelessness experiences (Bird et al., 2010).

While Aboriginal communities’ share some commonalities in experiences, they are very diverse in their needs, beliefs and practices and availability of on-reserve supports. Further, the accessibility of appropriate supports in urban centers can be confusing and ineffective when structural issues create barriers (Bird et al., 2010; Oelke, 2010) These include: a lack of services designed specifically to address the unique pathways into and out of homelessness for Aboriginal people and jurisdictional complexities of funding for services (Bird et al., 2010). The disproportionate number of Aboriginal people who experience homelessness, the greater number who live on the streets, and the increased duration and frequency of homelessness suggest that the causes and needs are likely different from other populations. The literature also implicates the long standing structural inequities that are embedded in Aboriginal communities including multigenerational poverty, multigenerational trauma, mass removal of children from homes and families, history of colonialism, apartheid cultural genocide policies, and dispossession of lands and property (Daiski, 2007).

The University of Calgary and Aboriginal Friendship Centre of Calgary program of research on Aboriginal homelessness (Bird et al., 2010) has found that coordinated, intersectoral collaboration is key to effectively address issues specific to Aboriginal homelessness. They also argue for inclusion of Aboriginal communities in the development of interventions or solutions to reflect culturally appropriate approaches so that community-based and participatory methodologies are essential. An earlier study (Thurston 2011) focused on policies and procedures in seven large urban centres in Western Canada found that with the exception of one in Saskatoon, there were very few examples of formal partnerships between urban homelessness programs and First Nations. In part this is because members of urban Aboriginal homeless populations often come from different First Nations, out of province, or have lost contact with their rural roots. Also, jurisdictional issues dominate when coverage of services for First Nations
people in cities is debated between levels of government. Recent research also indicates that Calgary is particularly problematic because of economic and other factors (Kneebone, Emery, & Grynishak, 2011).

**Conceptual Framework**

As we have articulated, homelessness is a social inequity faced by Aboriginal people that is embedded within a history of colonialism and oppression, the effects of which are still felt today. The study of populations differs from the study of an aggregate of individuals in important ways. As Rock (2003) notes, we learn different things if we assume that individuals are part of groups. Following Rock’s position on diabetes, we believe that homelessness is not a “lifestyle” problem in the sense of an individual’s choices, but develops in the face of “power - or, more specifically, the various ways in which capacity develops and is exercised” and various forms of duress (p.133) are experienced by Aboriginal populations.

In this research project we sought a critical understanding of the context of Aboriginal people’s experiences of migration from rural to urban settings and an analysis of how systems create and respond to homelessness. Specifically we explored the:

- community’s capacity to adequately respond in a timely way to an emergent need;
- coordination and resourcing of systems of care; and
- culturally safe nature of current approaches to service provision.

**Research questions**

Multiple research methods were used to investigate the following questions:

1. What are the primary reasons Aboriginal people are leaving their rural communities when housing is not available at their destination?
2. How are urban and rural supports coordinated for those homeless Aboriginal people who wish to return to a rural setting?
3. What are the barriers to accessing supports to staying in their rural communities?
4. What services do people moving to urban centres require in the first 24 hours, 48 hours, seven days of their move; and are there any challenges/perceived barriers to accessing these?
5. How are services organized and coordinated to deal with migrating families when they arrive in urban centres?
Methods

Recruitment: Interviews with People Experiencing Homelessness

Initial recruitment of clients took place at agencies in the homeless sector in Calgary. These agencies included: Inn From the Cold, the Drop In Centre, the Mustard Seed, CUPS, Métis Calgary Family Service Rainbow Lodge, the Aboriginal Friendship Centre of Calgary, and Alpha House. Eligible participants were 18 years of age or more who were homeless or at risk of being homeless, and self-identified their Aboriginal status. Clients were approached by service provider staff for participation in the study. We ceased recruiting clients when we were no longer obtaining new information to answer our research questions.

Recruitment: Interviews with Service Providers

Service providers were recruited through the same organizations from which clients were recruited as well as through the research team’s professional networks. They were contacted directly by the project manager or another member of the research team and asked to participate.

The CHF Housing Management Information System (HMIS) for April 1 2012 to December 31 2012

The HMIS database was instituted by the Calgary Homeless Foundation in 2011 to collect and store electronic information about the Calgary homeless population. The HMIS is a web-based database which is used across Calgary’s System of Care and tracks the following Universal Data Elements: Name, Date of Birth, Gender, Ethnicity, Postal Code and Neighbourhood of last permanent address, Ethnicity, Aboriginal group if applicable, Current Citizenship and Immigration Status, Primary Residence prior to program entry, and Specialized Housing Accommodations due to a disabling condition.

The data available for the current study was for the following time period: Q1 (April 1 2012 – June 30 2012), Q2 (July 1 2012 – September 30 2012), Q3 (October 1 2012 – December 31 2012). The data contained client records enrolled in Housing First programs (long term programs: housing with intensive supports and permanent supportive housing) funded by Alberta Human Services. Clients can stay in Housing First programs for 12 months, two years, or longer if needed. The data was collected using Human Services intake forms and was then entered into the electronic HMIS database. Every time a new client was added to the system, he/she was automatically assigned a unique client ID based on first name, last name, date of birth, gender, and ethnicity. When the client was moving into housing, their date of move-in was populated in the intake assessment. Date of move-in was used as a filter to obtain client records for the quarter; therefore, our data represents the HMIS clients who were housed during the time period described above.
For analysis we used the following definitions concerning homelessness prior to housing, as outlined by described on the human Human Services website (2012):

1. *Episodically homeless*: A person who has been homeless for less than a year and has had fewer than four episodes of homelessness in the past three years.

2. *Chronically homeless*: has either been continuously homeless for a year or more, or has had at least four episodes of homelessness in the past three years. In order to be considered chronically homeless, a person must have been sleeping in a place not meant for human habitation (e.g., living on the streets) and/or in an emergency homeless shelter.

3. *Absolute homelessness*: Living on the street with no physical shelter of their own, including those who spend their nights in emergency shelters.

4. *Relative homelessness*: 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; access to employment, education and health care; and the provision of minimum space to avoid overcrowding.

All data, including ethnicity, were self-reported by the person seeking services.

The sample total was 554, but 1 case was not used for analysis because it contained only client ID. When the data was cleaned it was observed that categorization into Absolute and Relative homelessness did not fit the above definitions. A significant number of cases were re-coded to Absolute or Relative homelessness by comparing the cases’ last primary residence with above definitions (e.g., if the last primary residence was emergency shelter, they were coded Yes for Absolutely Homeless).

**Scoping Review**

Following the methods outlined by Arksey and O’Malley (2005), a scoping review of the published literature from the last 10 years was conducted on rural and urban Aboriginal homelessness.

Research questions were answered by searching a range of peer reviewed databases including the following 33 electronic databases: Academic Search Complete (EBSCO)/JSTOR; Annual Reviews; Anthropology Plus; Engineering Village 2; Anthropological Index; Web of Science; CBCA Complete; Canadian Periodicals Index Quarterly; EconLit; Environment Complete; GEOBASE; America: History and Life; Canadian Research Index; Bibliography of Native North Americans; Arctic and Antarctic Regions; CINAHL; Mosby’s Nursing Consult; Nursing Reference Center; MEDLine; PUBMed; PsychInfo; International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences; Psychology and Behavioral Sciences Collection; PILOTS; Social Services Abstracts; Social Work Abstracts; SocIndex; Sociological Abstracts; Academic OneFile; Criminal Justice Abstracts; Urban Studies Abstracts; and Scopus (Elsevier).
When searching these databases, we used the following terms: Aboriginal, “First Nation***”, homeless*, rural, urban*, reserve*, support, services, barriers, organizations, coordinate, migrat*, mov*, mobility, “emergency services”, facilit*, center, centre and Canada.

**Workshop**

A workshop was held on June 4, 2013. Invitations were sent by email to the managers of 24 CHF funded service organizations. Additional invitations were sent to agencies on the CHF list of Housing and Program Resources and researchers drew on professional networks and lists of agencies that participated in past research projects to ensure a broad audience was engaged.

**Ethics**

The project was approved by the Conjoint Health Ethics Review Board at the University of Calgary. All participants in the interviews and workshop signed letters of informed consent and received a copy. To honor the principles of Ownership, Control, Access and Possession (OCAP) we obtained support from the Grand Chief of Treaty 7, Chief Charlie Weasel Head. We met with his representative, Mr. Jerry to review the project. Chief Weasel Head and Mr. Jerry will receive copies of the report (Appendix A).
Data Analysis

Interviews

All interviews were transcribed verbatim and entered into NVivo9©, software for analysis. The client interviews were analyzed by WT and the service provider interviews by SC. They then met to discuss convergence in the two sets of data. Preliminary results were circulated to the rest of the research team to obtain feedback.

HMIS Data

The HMIS data were entered into Stata©, software for analysis. Data distributions were checked using frequencies, and means and medians were calculated. Comparisons of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples were done using t-Tests and Chi-square statistics.

Scoping Review

One research assistant independently reviewed the titles of 5525 articles found in the initial literature search. During this review 5427 references were removed from the review because they contained irrelevant key words in the title (e.g., the focus was not homelessness). Duplicate articles were also removed. During the title review, the citations were retained for the next level of analysis if the researcher was uncertain whether or not it was relevant to the study. After the broad title review, 98 references remained and were abstracts were reviewed by the research assistant. Inclusion/exclusion criteria used were: Canadian study; English; peer reviewed journal; relevant to study research questions; focused on Aboriginal homelessness; not a commentary or report. Abstracts for which there was uncertainty were discussed with the principal investigator for inclusion decisions. From the 98 abstracts, 57 studies remained for full review. After review of the complete articles, 25 articles were deemed relevant for charting of content, where the research assistant coded the papers for themes related to this study.

Workshop

Sheets were provided at registration for individuals to write answers to the workshop questions and groups were asked to record notes of their group discussions on flipchart pages then summarize their main points in reporting to the group as a whole. The flipcharts and individual notes were typed and reviewed by the research team and facilitator as a group the day after the workshop to identify common themes and recommendations.
Results

Presentation of Results

When presenting the rest of the results for both brevity and to help maintain the confidentiality of the one Métis participant experiencing homelessness who was interviewed we will say reserve rather than “reserve and settlement.” For brevity we will also shorten “Aboriginal people who had or were experiencing homelessness” to client and “participant who was a service provider” to service provider. This should not be construed as viewing Aboriginal people who had or were experiencing homelessness as solely having an identity as a client. In addition, some service providers had experienced homelessness in the past, but were not recruited for that reason and were asked to speak as service providers.

We chose to prioritize the words of the clients when presenting quotations to illustrate the results because following our conceptual framework, these are the people with least power in our society; however, as with all the data we did analyze their talk using critical social theory. We identified every participant with a code: a) the clients are C, a number from 1 to 12, and F or M, signifying Female or Male; b) the service providers are SP and a number from 1 to 10. We aimed to protect the confidentiality of clients and service providers by not including identifying information, or quoting them so often that their identities could be guessed. Quotes may have been edited slightly, for instance, removing sounds, such as, Um or adding “be” to “’cause”, without changing the substance of the quote. Added words were included in [brackets].

The results of the interviews, HMIS analysis, and the scoping review are presented in separate sections.

Interviews with People Experiencing Homelessness and Service Providers

The Participants

We had 12 participants who were Aboriginal people who had or were experiencing homelessness in Calgary. Two of these people were from reserves in Saskatchewan, nine were from six reserves in Alberta, and one was from a Métis settlement in Alberta. There were 4 females and 8 males. We did not ask ages but we learned the range was 39 to 68 years. We did not ask a specific question, but one person mentioned being a residential school survivor. Seven people talked about having experienced or still experiencing addiction problems.

There were 10 participants who worked in the homelessness serving sector, 7 as frontline workers and 3 in management. They came from 8 organizations, 3 of which were
Aboriginal specific. Among these service providers, 6 were Aboriginal and 4 of these had lived on a reserve in the past. There were 7 females and 3 males.

**Key Themes**

The key themes coming from the qualitative interviews can be summarized as follows:

1. There is no “moving back” for most Aboriginal homeless in Calgary. It is a myth that Aboriginal people move back and forth between their reserves and the city on the path to homelessness:
   a. Expect continuous relocation from reserves to cities over the next several years;

2. The pathway to urban Aboriginal homelessness is created by two intersecting systems of inequity unique to Aboriginals:
   a. Reserve life; and
   b. Discrimination against Aboriginal peoples in the cities.

3. Response from the reserve when assistance is requested from a city dweller;

4. There is little or no collaboration between reserve services and the homeless service sector in Calgary;

5. Three services stood out as offering culturally safe services at the present time, while the need was viewed as broader:
   a. Cultural reconnection;
   b. Gender issues;
   c. More than cultural reconnection;

6. The need for Aboriginal staffing was highlighted by:
   a. Reliance on the Aboriginal street network;
   b. The degree of racism experienced; and

7. The services needed in the first week in Calgary include shelter, food and child care.

While these themes intersect we will address each of them separately in more detail.

**1. No “Moving Back”**

The majority of the clients in this study did not hold strong attachments to living on the reserves from which they or their parents had come. None had a desire to move back to the reserve, and only one mentioned that ability to visit relatives would be a good thing in her future. The common theme was that Calgary was the end of the road for them; they had tried either on reserve or moving around to make the life they wanted and Calgary held the most possibility in their minds for success. This was true whether they had been in Calgary for one year or 20.

I’ve seen a lot of them, a lot of people got, um, Native people, they don’t want to go home because they don’t got nothing, there’s nothing there for them and a lot of them die here in Calgary and, um, I have a lot of friends it happened to them and … I [ask] them, well where are you from? They tell me which reserve and
they say, um, they tell everyone I came to Calgary because it’s better here. At least we can go to day jobs and that, have money in our pocket. C4M

Some people did say that they would go back for events such as funerals:

She [mother] yeah passed away. I never got to see her. To go to the funeral, but I did see my Dad’s funeral. Got to go to that and yeah so just still, ah, ever since I haven’t really, well it’s yeah pretty much I haven’t really gone down to the Reserve. C1M

One client noted that it was not easy to move back and forth:

Ah, well you pretty well have to do it [move back] on your own. With the resources that they give you, let’s say they give you a cheque at the end of the month, and you want to move back to the Reserve, then you have to, you’re on your own and they will not pay, they will not help you. Once you’re on the Reserve and then you have to start all over again and then the notification that you’re back on the Reserve. It’s complicated. C3M

Service providers identified the same pattern for themselves and their clients of leaving reserves and not moving back, “we usually don’t have a lot of families going back to the Rez” (SP7). The main support that service providers were asked for in terms of returning was transportation, particularly bus tickets, so that people could attend funerals.

It was also clear that Aboriginal homeless people developed community by asking each other for information and, if they stayed ‘on the streets’ a long-time, by building up what was referred to as a “street family.” As one service provider said, this can have negative implications for people as they are supported in behaviours that do not lead to leaving homelessness, but the clients did not frame their street friends and family in this way, while they did acknowledge that some people, not those they discussed in terms of social support, tried to take advantage of their income for drinking.

In the following sections, other explanations for not wanting to “move back” are also raised, for instance, no identity as an Aboriginal person and no place to stay on the reserve.

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2. **Pathways to Urban Homelessness**

The only common element to the stories of how people came from reserves to Calgary was in their disrupted lives on reserve. The story was the same from clients and service providers. The lack of quality housing contributes to other social problems, such as, family conflicts, children in foster care, and exposure to unhealthy lifestyles. Waiting lists for housing on reserve was mentioned. It was clear, however, that reserve housing alone would not have kept these clients on their reserves; as pointed out in the previous section, other life choices, were also part of the decisions to leave.
I think, um, you know unfortunately for a lot of folks I, you know they speak of isolation on the reserve, there’s just one primary way of life living out there and, a lot of times there’s addictions and all sorts of abuses out there. Um, I think they come to the city for a couple reasons. It may be looking for employment. Ah, it may be looking for housing. It may be wanting just to escape the boredom of the isolation of living on the reserve. CP5

The lack of housing on reserves caused family conflicts and disruptions. Some clients were estranged because of family conflicts that resulted in them losing their housing when a grandparent or parent with whom they were living died and another relative took over the home and asked or forced them to leave. The effects of overcrowding are reflected in the following quotation:

[I was] Twelve years old and my mom and my late dad [actually grandparents], kind of had no choice but to kick me out because it got to a point where their own kids were turning against them, like my aunties and uncles. And then after that I got kicked out so I was forced into the child welfare system and then I didn’t like it. I felt neglected. I felt you know this isn’t my place. C9F

The following quote, even though expressing altruism, also illustrates that, even when contact with family is maintained, the person originally rejected may not feel that they are welcome guests:

*Interviewer:* And how is your relationship with your uncle now?
*Client:* We still talk and we still communicate but I hardly ever see him because I hardly ever go to the reserve because the main key is I don’t have a place to stay and I understand that people have their own families and have their own kids and stuff so, and I don’t want to be a burden on anybody else in my family because I know they’re having a hard time so I don’t just go there and mooch off of them you know. C6M

Over half (n=6) of the people experiencing homelessness had been in the child welfare system or raised by relatives not their parents. For some, such as the woman who had been with her grandparents but was “forced into the child welfare system”, both occurred. Four clients had been estranged from their family who remained on the reserve as they were put in foster care at young ages (ranging from “three” to “six or seven” years) and raised off reserve. Two had spent all their time in non-Aboriginal foster homes, while for two this was not clear. A fifth had been sent from one to another reserve as a baby and then entered the child welfare system off reserve.

Youth are especially vulnerable to problems when they have to rely on extended family as illustrated by this story of one client, remembering life as a teenager:

You know I can get it [high school] by the time I’m sixteen I told her. I was like you know if I really work my ass off, I can do it and she was supporting me but it was her boyfriend there that was saying no, no, we need her as a sitter and it was
you know it got to a point where he kicked me out in the middle of the night, I had no place to stay and so I basically slept in skate parks for a week you know.

When asked why they had left their reserve responses from clients (n=4) commonly included the problem of alcohol addiction on the reserves; three were from one reserve and one from a second reserve. The lack of housing options increases exposure to opportunities for heavy drinking and as a result, some were worried about their own behaviour.

Well, um, there’s no employment and, ah, a lot of alcoholism and I, I didn’t have a place there, my home yeah and I don’t like to live at my relative’s house. P1M

*Interviewer*: What’s the main reason you left your community?
*Client*: I was drinking a little too much… I was waiting for a house but at the same time it was just not where I wanted to live I guess. C8F

The lack of educational and employment opportunities were frequently mentioned as part of reserve life. One client reflected on the fact that youth on reserve needed to move to Calgary for education that wasn’t available on reserve. Three clients reflected that Aboriginal people moving to Calgary would need education, for example:

*Interviewer*: What do you think are the most important things that somebody needs when they come here from reserve, that are most important things?
*Client*: They can go back to school. You know that’s number one. Two they could, ah, have a job. Three, have a home. C1M

A partner of one client was in school and two other clients said that the desire for an education brought them to Calgary. The idea of pursuing education was linked to the ability to find and keep employment that would pay enough to manage living in Calgary.

There were a few negative comments from both clients and service providers about the integrity of reserve administration and lack of equity in dealings with the people on reserve. This included favouritism in terms of who received housing or other financial supports while living on reserve, and accusations that money was sometimes misspent. These were expressed more as opinions than concrete examples. Some service providers felt there may be reluctance by reserve leadership to acknowledge the extent of their social problems.

### 3. Reserves Assisting City Dwellers

When asked if she thought her experience was the same or different from that of other Aboriginal people experiencing homelessness, the following client summed up what most participants experienced, that few could expect assistance from their reserve:
I kind of think we’re all the same. The reason being for that is because when everyone moves off from the reserve, it’s the same issue, housing, financial needs, you know getting the help they need on the reserves…You know the housing, it just all comes down like for the financial and the housing help from the reserves. You know the band will only help so much and it’s like it’s limited to what they can do and it’s because of you know it’s always because the reserves are in debt. C9F

Two clients talked about approaching bands on reserve for help but either getting a promise and no action or not having their calls returned. For those people who had been sent off the reserve when they were children there was an added disincentive for the reserve to help them because this would take resources away from the people who were currently living on reserve, who would be a more present priority:

…with my reserve they said well even if I actually lived on a reserve since you were a kid so there’s not much we can do. C9F

A service provider observed the same issue for the many children who had been taken into foster care:

Then you have a whole bunch of those that grew up in the foster care system and the social system and they’re now 18, they don’t have that connection to their reserve and then if they call, you know the, the reserves now are so tight, “I’m sorry I can’t help you, I don’t even know who you are” right, so you have that as well so you have those that, yes they may be from somewhere but they don’t have that connection, so you have a whole couple of generations that are disconnected and that’s what I mean by we’re so diverse and different ‘cause there’s some reserves that are totally thriving economically, totally doing great in this and great in that and then there are some that don’t even have dollars to do anything, then some are struggling and there’s, they have a few things that they’re doing so there’s a big difference all over. CP9

Service providers were also unable to identify any system of support that bands would provide for members in the city. One provider identified a band that had provided a damage deposit so that a person could get an apartment and then look for a job, but this person clarified that this was not to be expected from all bands and that sometimes band politics affected who would be helped or not. In general the feeling about looking for support from bands was summarized but the following: “It’s always been a one way street with the Bands calling us up saying we need somebody housed in the city of Calgary” (SP4).

4. Collaboration between Reserve and Urban Services

No one provided an example of an actual case of collaboration between reserve administration and urban services. One client mentioned the possibility of collaboration but that was a second hand account of someone else hearing that day that they could get
financial assistance with schooling from their band and administered by the urban service where they were staying. In terms of helping people move back to reserves, there was the response discussed earlier that the clients did not want to move back so this was not an issue.

One client and one service provider did suggest that reserves could prepare people for their move to the city, which is one form of collaboration:

_Interviewer:_ Would it help if there were connections between the agencies in Calgary and the reserves?
_CLIENT:_ Oh definitely so at least they, they have a sense of direction when they come up here. Not just coming into Calgary just being lost all of a sudden like what do you do because I ran into people over the years and it’s like their first day in the city, so like I help them direct them to like, you know, okay well this is a good shelter, this is a bad shelter and you know, yeah. C2F

Service providers identified that clients who were receiving income support from their band had to close that file before they could receive the same in Calgary and that this was often a problem:

Well income sometimes is a barrier because they often are receiving funding from their band, and the way income support works on the reserve is different than it works in the city so like phoning and closing a file, I find can be so hard for them for some reason like we’ll give them a, you know they can phone long distance [from the agency], it’s not a problem but once they get on the phone I’ve heard a few frustrations about I’m on hold and then they don’t call me back and stuff like that, but they have to close that file on reserve before they can open a new one so that’s definitely a barrier. SP1

Another problem identified was that Aboriginal people are forced to travel to their reserve to get their status cards which enables them to access health services covered by Health Canada. Transportation is therefore a problem when reserves are far from Calgary. These are two examples where collaboration from reserves could assist urban agencies in serving clients.

5. **Culturally Safe Services in Calgary**

When asked about opportunities in the city services for cultural reconnection or practicing traditional ceremonies the only sources identified by clients were Alpha House, the Aboriginal Friendship Centre of Calgary, and the Métis Family and Children’s Services Rainbow Lodge. Service providers identified Inn from the Cold as having cultural reconnection services. The consensus among clients was that other places did not provide these opportunities, and some perceived that “unfortunately there’s still more agencies out there for the white people” (C2F). Cultural safety is about more than the spiritual side of life, as evidenced by the examples of struggles around identity issues. A struggle with identity issues and the need for healing was highlighted by examples of
internalized racism, exemplified in the quote above, “I was ashamed of my own people.” Other examples from clients included: negative comments suggesting Aboriginal people should be sent back to the reserve; and tougher laws should be created against parents who became homeless with children.

One client reported a difference over the years, with more agency staff taking an interest now in whether the clients were of Aboriginal background. Service provider responses supported the clients’ assessment that they asked more often; most reported asking clients if they were of Aboriginal background (ethnicity is one of the variables in the HMIS), but most, also said that it did not affect what services were provided.

The importance of choice and timing for the individual was highlighted by those clients who had not grown up practicing traditional ways, particularly those placed in foster care off reserve:

*Interviewer:* Was it difficult for you in terms of your identity of knowing that you’re from that Reserve and being Aboriginal to feel not connected to your family and to, to people is that, have you struggled with that?
*Client:* Yes and no but, I don’t know, but I’d say yes and no because you know having [been] more brought up in a white society and being brought up in, in my own traditional way and I, it’s kind of hard to keep up what side you’re on and where you should be.
*Interviewer:* Kind of like you’re caught between two worlds?
*Client:* Yeah. Yeah.

*Interviewer:* Do you think that, um, programming or opportunities specific to Aboriginal people would have been helpful to you or helped you in that process?
*Client:* Partially no, ah, and at the time I just, I didn’t think, kind of like my culture, didn’t like singing, Natives drinking Listerine, and stuff like that on the streets and pan handling and that kind of thing. I was ashamed of my own people so the idea of walking down and giving a Native person change was just, it never could happen. I never really ever did anything like that until I was probably about 35 and I came, the first time I came here I was, I was like 19. When I moved back I was 29 so for that little six years and stuff, boy I ended up spending quite a bit of time getting to know Native people, getting to talk with them, drink with them, that kind of stuff where you know, I don’t know things started to change where I wanted to know you know where is my family, what are they doing, like a Powwow to begin with and like I mean I heard that word and I was like what do you do at a Powwow? C7M

Service providers also stated that not all Aboriginal clients wanted to access cultural ceremonies or practices and that choice needed to be left with the client.

Gender issues were identified by clients in both experiences on the street and in provision of culturally safe services. The safety of women in services was raised by one client:
...you do run into the, the drunks and they do bother you but at the same time you know we mentioned it and they said that there should be a little spot outside for like when we want to go out there and have a smoke so that they don’t bother us because it’s usually us women that are getting bothered...C8F

Another client, when asked if cultural reconnection was available, noted that gender differences in cultural ceremonies need to be taken into consideration:

Not really for here like there was a drumming circle, you know it’s basically for men more or less because in our culture we were taught women are not really supposed to be touching the drums so it was, it’s mostly like for the men and then there’s not much really offered. C9F

Women were reported to be more likely to end up in the sex industry and this was considered shameful as one woman reported “I used to get a lot of respect on the street because I never sold my body for it [drugs] or anything.” The need for a network for Aboriginal women experiencing homelessness was supported by one client.

Women were also the only ones to mention the need for child care services and for parenting programs as services that were needed by people who experienced homelessness.

One of the issues facing Aboriginal populations is the history of residential schools and the numbers of children placed in foster care by the state. While clients mentioned foster care many times in their pathways to homelessness, only two service providers, who were both Aboriginal themselves, spoke of the consequences:

You know and that’s one of the missing pieces of a lot of these people is that they never had anybody teach them how to be a parent. You know, they didn’t live in that kind of environment or they grew up [moving] from one foster home to another or they grew up in a very dysfunctional environment where nobody taught them how to parent. They were taught how to survive but not how to parent you know and that’s the intergenerational impact that you see from residential schools and even with my generation it didn’t stop there, you know, it’s still affecting two, three generations after me and my family. .. Well from the people that I see on the street and the ones that I’ve had an opportunity to deal with or you know and help either through the court system or through the Aboriginal Resource Center, I know a lot of those people are what I call the walking wounded. The intergenerational impacts of residential schools resonates you know among the homeless populations here and in Edmonton and they don’t under, like people don’t understand that. You know when you’re, when you’re broken...some of those people that I see walking on the street, particularly in Edmonton, are people that I went to residential school with you know and I see them on the street and I know their story and I often wonder does anyone else? CP7
6. Need for Aboriginal Staffing

The need for Aboriginal staff in services was highlighted by the extent to which clients talked about relying on other Aboriginal people on the street for information, guidance and social support. They displayed a tendency to seek out other Aboriginal people, even if later in the street careers, as reflected by the man who originally was ashamed of his people. Earlier in the report, for instance, a client discussed helping people new to the city select a “good shelter versus a bad shelter” (C2F). She also talked about having a street family and looking out for each other by calling services or providing advice to “survive.” She recalled learning about services at the Aboriginal Friendship Centre of Calgary “through somebody pushing a cart, you know, ‘Where are you going?’ ‘I’m going to the Friendship Centre.’ ‘Where is that?’ And then I got all that from somebody else” (C2F). Another talked about their street family also being drinking buddies that ensured each other’s safety, “because Calgary’s a different place and dangerous. Can’t really walk around, around alone eh. Gotta be with somebody” (C4M).

One service provider put the value of Aboriginal staff this way:

Oh well it’s great because like I have clients, for example, um, a lot of the caseworkers are not Aboriginal right, but then they see me and they’re like oh she’s Aboriginal right so they make that automatic connection with me, not to mention I understand you know the spirituality and the culture and even if a client is Aboriginal but was never raised within its culture or spirituality, really has no idea to it, it’s almost like, um, an, an, like useable bond. SP10

In addition to the fact that Aboriginal people experiencing homelessness see the services as “for white people” and feel that they are treated differently, they experience racism from the general public, from landlords, the police, social workers, and others in the public service. There were clear examples presented. Service providers mainly talked about racism among the landlords but one notes that some Aboriginal people won’t self-identify as Aboriginal because they are afraid the service providers will treat them differently. That client’s think their ethnicity is a source of discrimination indicates that they have experienced being the ‘other’ in society.

7. Services Needed in the First Week

We asked both clients and service providers what services people needed within the first 24 hours of moving to Calgary, the next 48 hours, and the first week. Not surprisingly, the majority of service providers considered basic needs (food and shelter) to be the most crucial. Six clients immediately mentioned shelters or “a roof over your head” (C9F). One mentioned an Aboriginal shelter as a particular need.

Oh that would be so nice if they just, you know, to be honest with you, if they just had an Aboriginal shelter. You know because they would feel more comfortable, easier, you know, instead of getting, you know, moving first from the reserve like I know people out there that say it’s a culture shock and they don’t know where to
One client mentioned bus passes, another a job coach, and a third an Aboriginal worker on the street – “a person you can go to” for advice. In the later interviews, fewer were asked about 48 hours and the first week, as it became clear that the needs were the same. With waiting lists for housing, it was clear that housing was the main issue; especially, for those with children. A woman with children mentioned that child care became an issue after 24 hours as taking children to appointments by bus was quite difficult. For those trying to heal from addictions, the need for support around this issue was mentioned.

HMIS Data

Of the 553 housed clients in the database, 177 (32.0%) self-identified as Aboriginal clients. Among Aboriginal peoples 125 (71.0%) were First Nations (Status); 14 (8.0%) were First Nations (Non-Status); 23 (13%) were Métis; 10 (5.7%) did not know; 2 (1.1%) were Inuit; and 3 (1.7%) declined to answer.

The mean age of the sample was 38.8 years; 6.2% were children under the age of 18 years and only 2 (0.4%) were under the age of 15 years. These children were “independent” youth, who were housed by programs and not accompanied by parents. The sample was 41.6% female and 58.4% male.

There was a statistically significant difference between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal clients in average age with a younger Aboriginal population. There was a statistically significant difference in the proportion of males and females with a higher proportion of Aboriginal females than non-Aboriginal females (Table 1).

Table 1: Demographics by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Aboriginal</th>
<th>Non-Aboriginal</th>
<th>Test</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean Age</td>
<td>35.2</td>
<td>40.4</td>
<td>t = 4.22, p &lt; 0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>58.0% (n=102)</td>
<td>34.0% (n=128)</td>
<td>Chi Sq=28.46, p &lt; 0.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 shows the data on experiences of homelessness before obtaining housing in terms of chronic versus episodic, and absolute versus relative homelessness. There was no statistically significant difference by ethnicity between rates of chronic and episodic homelessness or absolute and relative homeless. (Note that the data were cleaned so that a person could not be both chronically and episodically, and absolutely or relatively homeless. There was some missing data on these variables).
Table 2: Chronic, Episodic, Relative and Absolute Homelessness by Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Aboriginal</th>
<th>Non-Aboriginal</th>
<th>Test</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chronically Homeless=Yes</td>
<td>41.8% (n=74)</td>
<td>38.8% (n=146)</td>
<td>Chi-Sq=2.52, p=0.281</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Episodically Homeless=Yes</td>
<td>57.6% (n=102)</td>
<td>68.58% (n=221)</td>
<td>Same as Chronically*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absolutely Homeless=Yes</td>
<td>81.8% (n=144)</td>
<td>74.8% (n=282)</td>
<td>Chi Sq=3.34, p=.207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relatively Homeless=Yes</td>
<td>17.6% (n=31)</td>
<td>24.4% (n=92)</td>
<td>Same as Absolutely*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Since one could be either Chronically or Episodically, Absolutely or Relatively homeless the Chi Square tests would be the same.

There was no statistically significant difference in the distribution over the number of years reported chronically homeless by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples. It is interesting to note, however, a trend towards a larger percentage of Aboriginal peoples reporting 5 or more years (Table 3).

Table 3: Years Homeless among the Chronically Homeless

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years Homeless</th>
<th>Aboriginal</th>
<th>Non-Aboriginal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>9 (12.3%)</td>
<td>21 (14.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>13 (17.8%)</td>
<td>20 (14.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>9 (12.3%)</td>
<td>14 (9.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>4 (5.5%)</td>
<td>21 (14.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 or more</td>
<td>38 (52.1%)</td>
<td>66 (46.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>73 (100%)</td>
<td>142 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chi Square=4.823, p=0.310

Among the episodically homeless, months of homelessness were not statistically different across the distribution (Table 4). A higher number of non-Aboriginals were in the 7 to 12 month range. The number of times homeless was also not statically different when comparing the Aboriginal and Non Aboriginal population across the distribution (Table 5).

Table 4: Months Homeless among the Episodically Homeless

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Months Homeless</th>
<th>Aboriginal</th>
<th>Non-Aboriginal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 1</td>
<td>53 (53.5%)</td>
<td>111 (51.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-3</td>
<td>24 (24.7%)</td>
<td>48 (22.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-6</td>
<td>11 (11.1%)</td>
<td>22 (10.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-12</td>
<td>11 (11.1%)</td>
<td>36 (16.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>99 (100%)</td>
<td>217 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fisher’s exact p=0.654
Table 5: Number of Times Homeless among the Episodically Homeless

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Times Homeless</th>
<th>Aboriginal</th>
<th>Non-Aboriginal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>9 (8.8%)</td>
<td>26 (11.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>67 (65.7%)</td>
<td>153 (67.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-3</td>
<td>23 (22.5%)</td>
<td>42 (18.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-5</td>
<td>3 (2.9%)</td>
<td>4 (1.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 or more</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>2 (0.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>102 (100%)</td>
<td>227 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fisher’s exact p=0.696

The numbers were too small to calculate a statistical test when primary residence before being placed in long term housing was assessed (Table 6). However, a number of trends appeared so primary residence was grouped into fewer categories: Don’t know, Declined to Answer, Dwelling Unfit for Human Habitation, Hospital/medical Facility, Hotel/Motel, Long-term Housing with Supports, and Other where all categorized to as Other for this recoding. Summary and analysis for the recoded primary residence can be seen in Table 7. There were 5 cases with missing values on Primary Residence.

Table 6: Primary Residence before Placement in Long Term Housing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary Residence</th>
<th>Aboriginal</th>
<th>Non-Aboriginal</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Addictions Treatment</td>
<td>19 (10.7%)</td>
<td>32 (8.5%)</td>
<td>51 (9.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correctional Facility</td>
<td>4 (2.3%)</td>
<td>20 (5.3%)</td>
<td>24 (4.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergency Shelter</td>
<td>101 (57.1%)</td>
<td>168 (44.7%)</td>
<td>269 (48.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transitional Housing</td>
<td>4 (2.3%)</td>
<td>21 (5.6%)</td>
<td>25 (4.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renting</td>
<td>12 (6.8%)</td>
<td>22 (5.9%)</td>
<td>34 (6.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own Home</td>
<td>2 (1.1%)</td>
<td>1 (0.3%)</td>
<td>3 (0.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary Residence</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1 (0.3%)</td>
<td>1 (0.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staying with friend ‘couch surfing’</td>
<td>14 (7.9%)</td>
<td>50 (13.3%)</td>
<td>64 (11.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hotel or motel</td>
<td>1 (0.6%)</td>
<td>4 (1.1%)</td>
<td>5 (0.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospital/medical</td>
<td>1 (0.6%)</td>
<td>5 (1.3%)</td>
<td>6 (1.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long-term housing with supports</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1 (0.3%)</td>
<td>1 (0.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renting subsidized</td>
<td>4 (2.3%)</td>
<td>5 (1.3%)</td>
<td>9 (1.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renting unsubsidized</td>
<td>8 (4.5%)</td>
<td>17 (4.5%)</td>
<td>25 (4.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dwelling unfit</td>
<td>2 (1.1%)</td>
<td>1 (0.3%)</td>
<td>3 (0.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside/rough</td>
<td>8 (4.5%)</td>
<td>32 (8.5%)</td>
<td>40 (7.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Declined to answer</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1 (0.3%)</td>
<td>1 (0.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t Know</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1 (0.3%)</td>
<td>1 (0.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>8 (4.5%)</td>
<td>13 (3.4%)</td>
<td>21 (3.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>176 (100%)</td>
<td>377 (100%)</td>
<td>553 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As Table 7 indicates there was a statistically significant difference in the distribution of primary residence, with more Aboriginal clients having an addictions treatment facility or emergency shelter as their primary residence before being housed and non-Aboriginals more likely to have been in a correctional facility, transitional housing, or couch surfing.

Table 7: Primary Residence before Placement in Long term Housing Recoded

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary Residence</th>
<th>Aboriginal</th>
<th>Non-Aboriginal</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Addictions Treatment</td>
<td>19 (10.8%)</td>
<td>32 (8.6%)</td>
<td>51 (9.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correctional Facility</td>
<td>4 (2.3%)</td>
<td>20 (5.4%)</td>
<td>24 (4.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergency Shelter</td>
<td>101 (57.4%)</td>
<td>168 (45.2%)</td>
<td>269 (49.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transitional Housing</td>
<td>4 (2.3%)</td>
<td>21 (5.6%)</td>
<td>25 (4.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renting</td>
<td>12 (6.8%)</td>
<td>22 (5.9%)</td>
<td>34 (6.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside/Rough Sleeping</td>
<td>8 (4.5%)</td>
<td>32 (8.6%)</td>
<td>40 (7.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Couch Surfing</td>
<td>14 (8.0%)</td>
<td>50 (13.4%)</td>
<td>64 (11.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>14 (8.0%)</td>
<td>27 (7.3%)</td>
<td>41 (7.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>176 (100%)</td>
<td>372 (100%)</td>
<td>548 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chi Sq 15.869, p=.003

**Scoping Literature Review**

The 25 articles which were chosen for full analysis were grouped under 5 themes related to the research questions as shown in (Table 8): Causes of Aboriginal Homelessness; Services and Supports in Urban Settings for Aboriginals; Causes of Aboriginal Mobility; Housing Off-Reserve; and Reserve Conditions.

Racism and discrimination are themes running throughout all of the literature. Social policies (e.g., The Indian Act, Child Welfare) continued colonization and efforts to assimilate exacerbate cultural loss and experiences of oppression. The negative impact of residential schools cannot be overemphasized.

Very few or no articles address the needs of sub-populations: those with addictions; those leaving correctional services; youth; families with children; couples without children; people with disabilities; gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered or two spirited people (GLBTT); or sex trade workers.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study Title</th>
<th>First Author</th>
<th>Journal</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Aboriginal Youth Talk about Structural Determinants as the Causes of their Homelessness</td>
<td>C. Baskina</td>
<td>First People Child and family Review</td>
<td>2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. “Home and Native Land”: Aboriginal Young Women and Homelessness in the City</td>
<td>L. Ruttana</td>
<td>First People Child and family Review</td>
<td>2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Developing an Aboriginal Healing Model for Intergenerational Trauma</td>
<td>P. Menzies</td>
<td>International Journal of Health Promotion and Education</td>
<td>2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Intergenerational Trauma and Homeless Aboriginal Men</td>
<td>M. Peter</td>
<td>Canadian Review of Social Policy</td>
<td>2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Reconciling indigenous need with the urban welfare state? Evidence of culturally-appropriate services and spaces for Aboriginals in Winnipeg, Canada</td>
<td>G. DeVerteuil</td>
<td>Geoforum</td>
<td>2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Aboriginal organizational response to the need for culturally appropriate services in three small Canadian cities</td>
<td>D. Sookraj</td>
<td>Journal of Social Work</td>
<td>2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. “We do not lose our treaty rights outside the... reserve”: challenging the scales of social service provision for First Nations women in Canadian cities</td>
<td>E. J. Peters</td>
<td>Geo Journal</td>
<td>2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. “Everything you want is there”: The place of the reserve in First Nation’s homeless mobility</td>
<td>E. J. Peters</td>
<td>Urban Geography</td>
<td>2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. The effects of personal characteristics on migration from Prairie cities to First Nations</td>
<td>M. Cooke</td>
<td>Canadian Ethnic Studies</td>
<td>2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Housing for Aboriginal Ex-offenders in the Urban Core</td>
<td>J. D. Brown</td>
<td>Qualitative Social Work</td>
<td>2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Housing Needs and Preferences of Relatively Homeless Aboriginal Women with Addiction</td>
<td>R. Schiff</td>
<td>Social Development Issues</td>
<td>2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Engaging the urban Aboriginal population in low-cost housing initiative: lesson</td>
<td>R.C. Walker</td>
<td>Canadian Journal of Urban Research</td>
<td>2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. “I want to see these words turned into action”: Neoliberalism and urban housing for elderly people of Aboriginal origin</td>
<td>L. Lange</td>
<td>Canadian Journal of Urban Research</td>
<td>2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Designing Affordable Housing with Cree, Anishinabe, and Metis People</td>
<td>L. Deane</td>
<td>Canadian Journal of Urban Research</td>
<td>2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. No Taps, no toilets: First nations and the constitutional right to water in Canada</td>
<td>D. R. Boyd</td>
<td>McGill Journal</td>
<td>2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. First Nation educational governance: a fractured mirror</td>
<td>S. Carr-Stewart</td>
<td>Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and</td>
<td>2009</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Themes from the Scoping Review

Reserve Conditions

The literature describing homeless for urban Aboriginal peoples highlighted the poor living conditions on many reserves. Lack of properly built housing, insufficient numbers of houses, and houses with threats to health and safety (e.g., mold, unsafe water systems) was discussed in depth. The systems to provide housing and to ensure safe drinking water are not working. Reserve lands are being degraded by pollution of air and water systems off reserve. The result is a poor standard of living, crowding in homes, illness, and family tensions.

Causes of Aboriginal Homelessness

The causes of Aboriginal homelessness are directly linked to reserve conditions and the additional challenges of lack of opportunities for education and/or employment. The results of poor reserve conditions is often the development of negative coping mechanisms that lead to addictions and physical and mental health issues, such as, domestic and sexual abuse. These issues are often exacerbated by residential school policies and practices. Involvement in the child welfare and criminal justice systems is both an outcome of the breakdown in traditional family life and a cause of family breakdown. Involvement in child welfare and criminal justice systems can be helpful to people; however, the literature suggests that Aboriginal people do not often benefit from time in these systems.

It should be noted that not all Aboriginal people develop psychosocial problems and that successful coping and resilience are supported by many spiritual and community practices and norms in Aboriginal cultures.

Causes of Aboriginal Mobility

The literature suggests that people are leaving rural communities to access education, employment, and better living conditions. Intergenerational trauma originating in colonialism and residential schools plays a major role as the underlying cause of ruptures in families and communities. Reserve conditions (e.g., poor housing quality and water safety) are linked to issues of governance. Inter-governmental relations were highlighted in one article on urban services.

Aboriginal people are often reported to move to urban areas as a direct result of the conditions on reserves. For some people, however, the reasons for moving are linked to their experiences of assimilation and colonization, so they don’t identify with life on reserve. When people move back to reserve it is often for similar reasons that they left the reserve in the first place: poor quality housing, few employment opportunities,
experiencing unsafe neighbourhoods, or changes in family situation. Thus, people are hopeful that a move will result in a better life but racism, discrimination, low education and limited skills sets to secure employment erode the hope, often leading to despair and unhealthy coping mechanisms.

Housing Off Reserve / Services and Supports in Urban Setting for Aboriginal People

Many Aboriginal people face a number of challenges obtaining housing off reserve: needing a co-signer for a lease; lack of credit history; lack of rental history; illiteracy; financial challenges in providing security deposits; as well as racism and discrimination among landlords. In addition there are often long waiting lists in cities for affordable housing. Affordable housing is often located in high poverty neighbourhoods where crime is more common and opportunities for participation in spiritual ceremonies are often non-existent.

Workshop Participation

A cross section of personnel that ranged from management to case managers and front-line service workers, including health service related staff and students attended the workshop. A total of 46 workshop attendees gave informed consent to participate in the research project. The listing of research participants and their associated agencies can be found in Appendix B.

The workshop was facilitated and food was provided. It was held in an inner city church hall that was downtown and street parking was free although time limited. The majority of participants stayed for the full workshop which began at 12:00 pm and ended at about 3:45 pm. The participant package included: an agenda for the workshop; a two page précis of the project; a copy of the Best Practices Framework from Thurston, et al. (2011); a diagram representing a theoretical framework for building cultural safety in mainstream organizations cultural safety from Bird et al. (2013); two sheets labelled Session #1 and Session #2 n which individual answers could be written; and the overheads from the presentation.

The participants got their lunch, selected seats and we began with comments and an opening prayer song from Elder Ewenin. While participants ate, the results of the project were presented briefly and placed in the context of earlier research and the strategic planning that had taken place in various Calgary organizations and agencies in recent times.

During the workshop session participants discussed question one in small groups for approximately one hour, “Given the current research findings, what can your agency/organization do in the next 1 to 5 years to address Aboriginal homelessness?” They were asked to record responses on flip charts and to summarize the main conclusions. The flip chart pages were then taped to a wall and a representative from each
group presented the main themes. The groups then discussed question 2 for approximately one hour, “How does change happen in your agency/organization to put ideas from Session #1 in place?”. The groups again chose a representative to present the main themes from their discussion to the larger group. During the group presentations the facilitator took notes and then presented back the common themes that were common across groups.

**Workshop Themes; Part 1 What Can Your Agency Do?**

The flip charts produced by the workshop participants were coded separately for parts 1 and 2 of the workshop. Although there was some overlap, the participants did discuss the needed changes in part 1 and how to implement changes in part 2. In part 1, the themes identified were: planning of services; the need to incorporate diversity in achieving cultural safety; collaboration and partnering to implement culturally safe services; hiring of Aboriginal staff including Elders; awareness and skill building; systems and structures; prevention; and the role of research.

The groups discussed a number of areas where service planning needed to take into consideration the needs of Aboriginal peoples; transitional housing and permanent housing; best practices in market and program housing; and increasing short and long-term housing options. They also talked about childcare needs and suggested innovations, such as, partnering with childcare facilities; family to family care; collective childcare; and helping mothers set up their own day homes. Accessibility for people with disabilities was raised as an important issue in one group. Addressing youth needs and planning to house more youth was identified as well as helping Aboriginal youth to feel they belong in Calgary.

Addiction and mental health service needs for Aboriginal clients were discussed by several groups and the harm reduction model was raised as a valuable resource and approach for creative housing programs. No specific discussion of healing from intergenerational trauma was recorded. There was some discussion of providing better outreach to Aboriginal clients and building upon the “word of mouth” system to promote culturally safe services as they develop.

It was highlighted by more than one group that the planning of services had to be built upon an understanding of the diversity among Aboriginal peoples. One principle developed was that Aboriginal people should not be limited in their choices among services by an initiative to increase cultural safety. “Aboriginal people have the right to choose services that best meet their needs” was one recording. Another suggestion was that clients should be asked what their needs were, both as a planning mechanism for needs assessment, and in case management.

Needs assessment was just one way that research, particularly evaluation research, was seen to support culturally safe services. Assessing existing programs, making sure the data supported decisions; honouring Aboriginal peoples past experiences of exploitative
research, and assessing existing strategies (e.g., case management) for appropriateness to Aboriginal populations were suggested.

**Workshop Themes; Part 2 How Can Change Happen?**

The majority of comments (26 bullets coded under this theme compared to 18, 7, 4, and 5) on creating change highlighted the need to engage current front-line staff in understanding the need for change and putting changes in place, for instance, “You need to hook the 20% of your staff to move forward”, whereas another comment suggested that all staff should have a say in agency governance, and another that staff should be encouraged to sit on committees to assist the change process. It was suggested that all agency staff, even those not directly delivering service should at least spend some time with other staff on the front lines so they know what is entailed in service delivery. The involvement of staff in decision making was also described as bringing the clients’ voices to the table. One group highlighted the need for flexible staff scheduling so that change could be supported.

The people at the workshop suggested that they could be change agents by sharing information with fellow team members and engaging in meaningful dialogue, being role models by demonstrating the change needed, and advocating for changes with supervisors. Another line of discussion touched on utilizing staff satisfaction, surveys to catalyze change in the agency. The importance of preserving the sense of hope was also discussed by one group: “You have to have a sense of hope when dealing with the homeless.” A caution was raised that change had to be realistic and based on the resources of the agency and this relates to staff well-being and job satisfaction. Care of staff who are Aboriginal is also related to staff satisfaction and retention. It was commented that they needed to feel valued. In addition Elder experience and expertise needed to be understood as comparable to years of advanced training that, in the western tradition, is linked to university degrees. Compensation for Elders’ work needs to be taken seriously as a way of showing respect equivalent to western trained professionals.

People asked for innovative education that would break the cycle of judgement and stigma surrounding Aboriginal homelessness. It was suggested again that staff could be involved in identifying training needs and that “agency days” could be used for providing feedback on how far an agency had come and what was being tried at each site.

The next major theme was the need to develop ‘buy-in’ at the top of organizations – boards, CEOs, and managers. It was suggested that agencies should review Aboriginal programming needs in the strategic planning processes, in the mission statements, annual business plans, and so on. Planning was highlighted as the way that change would occur for Aboriginal clients. The management and leadership team should be actively involved in promoting change. It was identified that people at the top needed workshops and education. At the same time it was recognized that leadership emerging from inspiration and passion, and that champions could develop and provide leadership by example.
Several comments related to engaging Aboriginal clients in needs assessment and listening to what they had to say about service delivery. It was suggested that this could happen at many levels of the organization. Client feedback on services could also be used to develop new ideas for programming. One suggestion was that a discussion group be delegated to develop a process for implementing changes. This would be one way to ensure that proposals were based on collaboration by staff. Incorporating Aboriginal ceremonies (e.g., smudging) in the planning group could facilitate team development and motivation.

Creating change in the systems was another topic of discussion across groups. It was suggested that funders could lead Aboriginal program development by requesting proposals. Making cultural awareness part of accreditation was another recommendation. The funders need to be serious about requirements as there was some evidence discussed that change was being resisted. Requirements for funding could be adapted to encourage Aboriginal programming. It was also recognized that funders needed feedback on the trends, gaps and needs in the overall homeless population in order to be responsive. Finally, it was recognized that people in the homeless serving sector could be advocates for change as citizens, not just in their workplaces, and could write to governments in that capacity.

The next largest focus was on collaboration among agencies and relationship building. While it was recognized that everyone is competing for the same pot of money, there was a strong will to share information and to work together to solve problems. It was suggested that field trips between agencies, interagency team meetings, “lunch and learns”, and inviting other agencies to present at your own, could be used to build collaboration. Building “longer term engagement with Aboriginal communities”, encouraging Aboriginal participation on boards, committees, and in administration, could help change the “mindset rather than policies.”

Research was also discussed in terms of ways to get information that was reliable, valid and provided what programs need to make decisions. A holistic analysis of statistics was recommended in reaction to the HMIS analysis presented: “Include ALL statistics from ALL agencies in Calgary to reflect data more accurately” was one statement. Participants also focused on outcome measurement and the need for client-centred data that offered explanations for what worked for them and what didn’t.
Discussion

The Research Questions

1. Why are Aboriginal people leaving their reserves?

Aboriginal people are leaving their reserves without a home to go to in order to establish a better life, to find a place to belong, as stated in an earlier project (Turner et al., 2010). This project began with the assumption that some participants would describe a continual cycle of back and forth migration and/or homelessness experiences. In fact the opposite was true – people expressed resilience and the beliefs and hopes that Calgary will be their last stop. They wanted education, jobs, and to be treated with dignity. This is similar to the findings of Belanger and Weasel Head (2013) when they interviewed Aboriginal homeless participants who “acknowledged the endemic lack of reserve employment prospects and that they had a better chance of securing urban employment” (p28). Service providers in the current study concurred that clients may want to visit family but they were not interested in moving back to the reserve.

The majority of the clients in this study did not hold strong attachment to their reserves. Belanger and Weasel Head (2013) also found that the Aboriginal homeless were often disconnected from reserve and had a desire to remain in the city, only temporally relocating to reserve to stay with family. The consistent experiences found in both cities may be indicative of provincial trends. However these results are dissimilar to the Aboriginal people from Calgary who participated in the Environics Institute (2012) study who were not homeless. The latter reported that urban Aboriginal people retained “strong links to their communities of origin” (p. 10). The ASCHH (2012) also reported that many Aboriginal people are attached to their reserves. The lack of connection to reserve found in the current study is likely accounted for by disruptive life events experienced by the clients and the lack of support they received from some extended family members.

The removal of Aboriginal children to non-Aboriginal homes in the past was clearly also costly among our participants in terms of loss of attachment, identity loss, loss of self-esteem, and subsequent addictions and mental health challenges. Whitbeck, Crawford and Sittner Hartsburn (2012), in a study including four U.S. and four Canadian reserves, also found that people who had experienced homelessness were more likely to report negative family histories. As Tuty and colleagues (2012) reported after controlling for ethnicity and finding child maltreatment and foster care more predictive of homelessness, it is not being Aboriginal that causes homelessness but the increased exposure to traumatizing events to which that identity exposes one.

Many stereotypes of the Aboriginal homeless are challenged in our study, assumptions that seem unchanged in Calgary generally (Environics Institute, 2012). Not everyone had an addictions problem – though these were common; not everyone was without a job –
though salaries were low for those who did; not everyone practiced traditional spirituality – though this was widespread; and not all women were involved in the sex trade – though this practice is a concern. The one stereotype that is often unspoken, is that identified by White and Bruhn (2010) of the “essentially rural, ‘authentic’ Aboriginal life” (p. xii). In fact, over half of Aboriginal people in Canada now live in urban areas and the percentage is expected to increase in the coming years (Environics Institute, 2010; Spence & White, 2010). Our workshop participants recommended that more be done to lessen widespread stereotypes and negative attitudes about Aboriginal people.

2. How are urban and rural supports coordinated for those homeless Aboriginal people who wish to return to a rural setting?

Our second research question was answered tangentially, as we found few study participants have asked for any assistance to return to reserves except for short visits for family events. This is different than what was reported by service providers in the 2011-2012 study conducted by the Aboriginal Standing Committee on Housing and Homelessness (ASCHH) (2012) where a ‘revolving door’ between reserve and Calgary was described for “many” Aboriginal clients. This may have resulted from different sampling strategies in the two studies and the larger sample in the ASCHH study, but in the present study neither service providers nor clients discussed going back to reserve. A second possibility is that trends have changed in the last two years and clients no longer see any purpose in participating in the ‘revolving door’. In addition the literature suggests that people may move back to reserves. If Calgary has a different experience it could be an indication that Calgary’s plan to end homelessness is actually succeeding. This may be a difference between Calgary and other cities where the socio-economic context is different and should not be generalized to all urban settings; for instance, Belanger and Weasel Head (2013) found that over half of the participants in their study did move frequently between the reserve and the city, and 80% would consider moving back to the reserve. The main reason given for mobility was being close to family, however, some participants in their study also talked about the reserve providing respite from the “hostile environment of the city” (p. 29).

3. What are the barriers to accessing supports to staying in their rural communities?

The supports needed for people to stay on reserve as identified in this study are safe and adequate housing, educational opportunities, employment, and health and social services. The numbers of reserves reported depend on which Federal government department website one visits, but there are approximately 45 First Nations living on 145 reserves under three treaties in Alberta (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, 2013). Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (more recently known as Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada) studied the community well-being of First Nations in 2004 based on: attainment of high school; labour force participation and employment; income; and housing quality and quantity. Two First Nations were identified as above
average compared to the score for all First Nations in Canada, 38 were average and 17 were below average (Health Co-Management Secretariat, 2013). The same study found, by comparison, “Most towns and cities in Alberta receive an “above average” ranking”. The literature also pointed to poor living conditions on reserves. We can expect, therefore, that there will continue to be movement to the cities by Aboriginal peoples in the foreseeable future. In fact the issue of urban Aboriginal homelessness is even greater as another study reported that 42% of the Aboriginal people experiencing homelessness had actually been born in Calgary (ASCHH, 2012).

It is also foreseeable that Aboriginal peoples will continue to come to Calgary, not only from within Alberta but from other provinces as well. It is beyond the scope of the study to forecast whether some provinces will provide services to keep Aboriginal people nearer to home. An earlier study of western provinces indicated that the disproportionate number of Aboriginal peoples experiencing homelessness is a concern in all of the metropolitan areas (Winnipeg in Manitoba; Regina and Saskatoon in Saskatchewan; Edmonton and Calgary in Alberta; and Vancouver and Victoria in British Columbia) in Western Canada (Thurston et al., 2011).

**4. What services do people moving to urban centres require in the first 24 hours, 48 hours, seven days of their move; and are there any challenges/perceived barriers to accessing these?**

Substantial work has been undertaken by the Calgary Homeless Foundation and the Aboriginal Standing Committee on Housing and Homelessness to better coordinate services within the homelessness sector. The clients in this study continue to express a need for collaboration and it may be that they seek a one-stop model that does exist. A study conducted in Ottawa, Toronto, and London Ontario concluded that, “Services that are divided into very small, targeted blocks of people work less effectively for Aboriginal clients in the cities” and advocated for “programs that…treats community members in a comprehensive manner, not just as clients with a specific problem to fix” (Spence & White, 2010, p. 93). Workshop participants noted that there are few specialized services and that each of these has policies restricting certain clients; for instance, there is a large shelter service for single men; one service for adults with children; and there are restrictions on alcohol or drug use related to be banned from a service. Service providers who attended the workshop also wanted to increase collaboration and build relationships with Aboriginal communities and among agencies. The structural barriers to collaboration and innovation need to be removed, such as, competition for funding, lack of opportunity to network and develop relationships, and jurisdictional disputes.

Having staff who “look like” them, are secure in their own identities, understand reserve cultures, and model success are important to Aboriginal peoples. In a previous study it was identified that an increased number of Aboriginal employees was needed in the homeless serving sector in the western provinces (Thurston et al., 2011). This is also a goal of the Aboriginal Standing Committee on Housing and Homelessness Ten Year Plan (ASCHH, 2012). The workshop participants also highlighted this need and some
suggested that services needed to consider years of experience and equivalent hiring criteria rather than expecting post-secondary degrees in order to attract more Aboriginal peoples.

The HMIS data suggest that the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples receiving long-term housing placements do not differ by length or type of homelessness (episodic, chronic, relative or absolute) but they do differ by primary residence before placement. It was surprising that non-Aboriginal peoples are more likely to have been in a correctional facility given the disproportionate representation of Aboriginal peoples in jails and prisons. Given this discrepancy it may be valuable review what is happening in this part of the system.

5. How are services organized and coordinated to deal with migrating families when they arrive in urban centres?

As the ASCHH states, current efforts in Calgary have been insufficient to decrease the rates of Aboriginal homelessness whereas success is being achieved among the non-Aboriginal population (ASCHH, 2012). Thus new solutions are needed.

The plan [to end Aboriginal homelessness] is rooted in three primary beliefs: that we can build a continuum of supports across and between our communities that will reduce the numbers of Aboriginal people who are homeless; that we can prevent homelessness before it happens for Aboriginal people and families; and that this must be done within a culturally safe and appropriate framework and with ongoing collaboration, engagement and consultation. (ASCHH, 2012, p. 2)

There are few resources for families with children in Calgary. Inn from the Cold and Brenda’s House are the primary sources of emergency service and Rainbow Lodge provides longer term accommodation and both are well recognized by other services. The data reported here only concerns independent children, those “immancipated” from parental or guardian care. Since there was a disproportionate (58.0%) number of Aboriginal women in the HMIS sample, and Aboriginal peoples tend to have children younger and to have more children than non-Aboriginals it is likely that there are proportionately more Aboriginal children experiencing homelessness. The discrimination by landlords identified throughout the study would be a larger problem for Aboriginal children. In addition, the link between housing and apprehension of Aboriginal children needs further examination.

The interviews, workshop participants, and literature all point to an increased need for culturally safe services for Aboriginal peoples in Calgary. While our respondents identified only four services providing specific Aboriginal programming, the ASCHH (2012) plan reported that 9 of 16 or more than half of service providers reported having Aboriginal specific programs. It may be that our recruitment strategies drew on a more limited sample than that of the ASCHH and resulted in a less informed sample; however, the response from our service providers was largely that they referred to the Aboriginal Friendship Centre of Calgary and relied on AFCC for support and services they could not
provide their Aboriginal clients. In addition, some clients had been ‘on the streets’ a long time and seemed to be widely aware of the service system, so lack of exposure was not an explanation for the difference. We cannot explain the discrepancy in results but the workshop participants did not contradict our findings.

A significant shift was noted in the conversations in the gatherings in 2009 (Turner et al., 2010) and in this one in 2013. In 2009 the Aboriginal Friendship Centre of Calgary had started outreach to other services and as a result of this experience with AFCC, Alpha House developed a model of cultural safety for the intox and detox programs offered there (Bird et al., 2013). The interviews and the workshop participants in this study acknowledge the efforts of these and other services. The policy of asking ethnicity in the HMIS has increased awareness among staff, and clients acknowledged that they are likely to be asked, even if it does not lead to different services. A theme in the workshop was the opportunity to build cultural safety into programs starting from agency management (intentionality) and being strategic and realistic, a more optimistic stance than in 2009.

With the development of the strategic plans to end homelessness among a number of homeless serving agencies, a specific plan to end Aboriginal homelessness (ASCHH, 2012) as well as, the newer plans to end poverty (Secretariat of the Calgary Poverty Reduction Initiative, 2013) and focus on Aboriginal poverty (Calgary Poverty Reduction Initiative, 2013) in Calgary, the community is well positioned to be a leader in responding to the needs of the Aboriginal population. It was acknowledged, particularly in the workshop and the literature that this can only be done by partnering with Aboriginal Elders, and including Aboriginal peoples in the design and evaluation of services.

**Strengths and Weaknesses of this Study**

The major strength of this study was the decision to ask interview participants to talk about their pathway to homelessness in Calgary. Their stories revealed the interconnections between homelessness and the history of colonialism and its impact through policies like residential schools, child welfare policies, registration policies, removal of women from bands when they married, and the collective struggles of reserves with addictions, youth gangs, poor housing, and intergenerational trauma. We believe that had we simply asked, “Where were you before moving to Calgary?” the data would have been less rich. Another strength of the study is that we also interviewed clients with a variety of backgrounds and experiences, ages, and from different reserves across Alberta.

The study was strengthened through the triangulation of data from clients and service providers, HMIS, and the literature. In addition we triangulated analysis and interpretation by involving researchers with different disciplinary and professional backgrounds.
In hindsight, it was not useful to ask about service needs in the first 24 hours, next 48, and first week. It appears that few people obtain permanent housing in the first week, and the only question that made sense to clients concerned the first 24 hours in which sleeping rough would be avoided. This speaks to the urgency of their need to be safe.

Partnership development and maintenance suffered as a result of several factors (changes within partner organizations, unexpected medical leaves) and this was one of the only projects that our team did not commence with a ceremony. We regretted that in the end as it is an important covenanting exercise. Nevertheless, we were happy to end with a ceremony at the workshop and we may yet have a special event. Some of our own research has been on healthy partnerships and it falls to us to say, build in time and resources to keep strong relationships and communication.
**Conclusions**

This study used a variety of sources of data to increase our understanding of the relationship between rural and urban homelessness among Aboriginal peoples. Specifically we explored the community’s capacity to adequately respond in a timely way to an emergent need; coordination and resourcing of systems of care; and culturally safe nature of current approaches to service provision.

Coupled with the report just released from Lethbridge, another city in Alberta, the results of this study indicate that it will be important to consider the issues of urban Aboriginal homelessness during Alberta’s efforts to end homelessness. Aboriginal peoples on reserve face a number of challenges around education, employment and housing that lead them to seek opportunities in the cities. Calgary may be a particularly attractive location for those whom returning back is not an option, and therefore the city may experience less mobility of residents back to rural areas. The differences between urban centres call for care that provincial policies and programs are flexible enough to accommodate the needs of different social contexts.

This study reinforced previous work calling for more cultural safety for Aboriginal peoples in the homeless serving sector. The community of the homeless serving sector has begun to address this gap, and has made significant progress towards understanding in the last four years. Increasing the capacity to address Aboriginal homelessness requires advocates and champions, such as, those among the ASCHH. Collaboration across the sector would provide an opportunity to benefit from joint capacity building. Calgary’s homeless sector currently does not have the capacity to deal with an increased influx of Aboriginal peoples who are homeless as well as their children is sufficient. Waiting lists and discrimination in the housing market compound the severity of the situation for Aboriginal peoples. The quantitative analysis in this study indicated that the current housing first programs are serving an appropriate proportion of Aboriginal clients. The needs of Aboriginal children and the relationship of homelessness to child welfare involvement were not addressed in this study and require serious attention in terms of prevention of future cohorts of distressed adults.

This study identifies opportunities for future policy relevant research:

1. exploration of success rates and opportunities for program refinement in housing first programs;
2. assessing and responding to the unique needs of Aboriginal children who experience homelessness;
3. given the high involvement of Aboriginal children in foster care, assessing the role of homelessness;
4. development, dissemination or adaptation of models of collaboration among federal, provincial, and municipal government to address Aboriginal homelessness;
5. investigation into models that funders can use to increase intra- and inter-sectoral collaboration; and
6. exploration of interventions on reserve to prevent urban Aboriginal homelessness in collaboration with reserve communities.
References


Appendix A: Letter from Grand Chief Weasel Head

TREY 7 MANAGEMENT CORPORATION

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Fax: (403) 298-6284

BRANCH OFFICE:
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Calgary, Alberta T2E 4G6
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Fax: (403) 539-0303

September 29th, 2011

University of Calgary
Faculty of Medicine
Dr. Wilfreda Thurston

Re: Letter of Support – Research Aboriginal Homelessness

To whom it may concern,

As Grand Chief of Treaty 7, I would like to offer my support to the proposed Research initiative that is to be undertaken on behalf of the University of Calgary and Treaty 7 to ensure support to Aboriginal people who are currently homeless in the Treaty 7 area.

We are pleased to appoint Arnold Jerry, Treaty 7 Housing Manager as the representative for this Research project and look forward to working together on this project as it proceeds.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Chief Charlie Weasel Head
Grand Chief of Treaty 7

cc: Ryan Robb, CEO T7MC
Arnold Jerry, Director of Housing T7MC
File
Appendix B: Attendees at Intersections of Rural and Urban Homelessness Workshop, June 4, 3013, Wild Rose United Church, Calgary

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<tr>
<td>Aboriginal Friendship Centre of Calgary</td>
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