



for
Homelessness Partnering Secretariat, Human Resources and Social Development
Canada (HRSDC)

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Executive Summary

This study was unique in that it was designed to address the knowledge gaps related to homelessness in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan through engaging Aboriginal homeless individuals in the discussion. Aboriginal homeless individuals who visit the Saskatoon Indian and Metis Friendship Centre shared and interpreted their experiences for the researchers. They identified issues which were vital to their lives. Through in-depth interviews, they spoke to the staff of the world of Aboriginal absolute and hidden homeless in this western Canadian city.

Supported by the staff at the Centre, the participants explored their experiences with service organizations, their movement and mobility patterns, their relationships as hidden homeless individuals with the households that gave them shelter, the relationship between their urban homelessness and the lack of and or the condition of housing in their rural or reserve communities, and particular elements which created homelessness for them and within Aboriginal populations.

Saskatoon is currently involved in an economic boom. Over the past few years housing prices have risen, apartments have been converted into condominiums resulting in people being displaced from affordable rental accommodation, rents have increased, and the vacancy rate is very low. There is a scarcity of low rent accommodation in the city. In the bullish real estate market of the last year, many modest houses were purchased, torn down and replaced with more expensive housing.

Saskatoon is a community which attracts Aboriginal individuals for employment or education. Many First Nations are involved in business enterprises in the city. The city has an urban reserve. Saskatoon offers numerous Aboriginal-specific educational opportunities as well as having SIAST, First Nations University of Canada and the University of Saskatchewan attracting students from Aboriginal communities throughout the province. Students have had more and more difficulty finding suitable housing on their limited budgets. It is known within the Aboriginal community of Saskatoon that many Aboriginal people are homeless. Some suffer absolute homelessness and many more who are without their own homes are resident on the couches and in the basements of friends, relatives or community members. This study looked at the nature of Aboriginal homelessness in Saskatoon.

The research was multifaceted. Two sets of one on one interviews using open-ended questions were undertaken with homeless Aboriginal individuals, one set in fall and one in winter. This part of the research used a narrative approach which allowed respondents the opportunity to articulate their own viewpoints and to offer their own evaluation of events and their place in them, creating new knowledge. Researchers had the opportunity to listen to the stories that these urban Aboriginal people told about their homelessness experiences and the sense they made of these experiences (Clandinin and Connelly 2000). Friendship Centre staff acted as resources to support both interviewers and participants in the discussion of sensitive material and if difficult situations arose.

More structured questions asked about housing and mobility characteristics, relationships with others in the household for hidden homeless, health conditions, and experiences of trauma

and abuse. The project retrieved information on the culture, background, home community, family background, work experience, schooling, experiences with different agencies, addictions, marital state, children, and personal descriptions of the life of a homeless person in Saskatoon, by individual interviews. Mapping the movement of individual homeless people on a daily and longer term basis was undertaken in order to provide information on where services were used and where services should be located.

In total, forty-four Aboriginal homeless individuals were part of the study. All but one of the respondents consented to have their interview taped and transcribed. A thematic analysis allowed researchers to identify themes that might not have been anticipated in earlier analyses. Closed ended questions were coded and summarized to provide contextual information.

Following the individual interviews, the interviewees were given the opportunity to discuss the issues and solutions in talking circles of four persons each. A facilitator introduced topics which have been identified by research as possible solutions to the “problems” of the homeless. These proposed solutions were discussed among the homeless individuals where possible problems with the proposed solutions were exposed. This activity assisted in pointing policy makers towards solutions which are acceptable to the homeless Aboriginal population of Saskatoon.

The recommendations from the interviews and talking circles were presented to a gathering of service providers and policy makers who worked together to suggest ideas to resolve the problems faced by the homeless individuals.

It was found that forty-three agencies in Saskatoon offer services for the homeless. The homeless themselves indicated that they consistently utilize only a few of these services, primarily: the Friendship Inn, West Side Clinic, the Food Bank, the Salvation Army, the Saskatoon Indian and Metis Friendship Centre, Social Services, Native Circle Ministry, and Larson House. In winter interviews, participants added the Bridge on 20th.

The knowledge gained from the interviews and talking circles held with Aboriginal homeless individuals was presented to the city’s service providers for the homeless. The agencies were provided with an analysis of what the homeless individuals identified as services that they needed to make their lives better. Using this information, the service providers brainstormed ways of meeting the real needs of these individuals.

Section 1.0 Introduction

1.1 Description of Project and Methodology

The objectives of the study were to address knowledge gaps related to Aboriginal homelessness. The uniqueness of the project was that it encouraged Aboriginal homeless people to share and interpret their experiences from their own perspectives, rather than relying on the perspectives of service providers and others who interact with homeless populations. The focus is on homeless Aboriginal individuals who regularly visit the Saskatoon Indian and Metis Friendship Centre (SIMFC). The following lists the main study questions for the project.

- What are homeless Aboriginal people's experiences with service organizations?
- What are their movement and mobility patterns including the location of services they use regularly?
- What are the relationships between hidden homeless individuals and the households that give them shelter?
- What is the relationship between urban homeless individuals and lack/condition of rural/reserve housing?
- What are the particular elements, issues, traumas and factors that create homelessness in Aboriginal populations?

The research coordinator familiarized herself with information about homelessness in Saskatoon in particular and contacted various organizations to determine what services were available to homeless individuals in the city. In collaboration with key informants including SIMFC personnel familiar with Aboriginal homeless individuals, an elder, and academic partners, the research coordinator/interviewer created an open-ended interview schedule and guide for the interviews. The guide as well as the letter of information and consent form is included in Appendix A.

The research coordinator completed one on one interviews with 17 homeless individuals in the fall of 2008. In January 2009 another 27 homeless individuals were interviewed. Because there is no reliable information about the characteristics of the entire hidden homeless population, it is difficult to use evaluate the representativeness of the SIMFC interviews.¹ The purpose of this study was not to obtain a representative sample of hidden homeless populations, but to gain some understanding of their situation and how they understood it.

Both sets of interviews were done on a first come first served basis with homeless individuals who regularly visit the Saskatoon Indian and Metis Friendship Centre. The interview process was open-ended. While there was a guide, the research coordinator allowed the participants to describe their lives and experiences in their own way and in their own words. The interviews were between 1 and 1 ¼ hours long. Interviews were taped and transcribed. Only one respondent refused to have the interview taped. Participants received an honorarium in recognition of the time they spent talking to the interviewer.

¹ Some researchers have suggested strategies for producing estimates of homeless populations, but these were beyond the scope of this study (Salganik and Heckathorn, 2004; Faugier and Sargeant, 1997).

Materials from the transcripts were used to write a draft description of interview results. The draft was edited and presented to participants and service providers. The analysis of background information (demographic information about housing and mobility characteristics, relationships with others in the household of the hidden homeless, physical and mental health conditions, and experiences of trauma and abuse, culture, background, home community, family background, work experience, schooling, contacts with the law and experiences with different agencies, addictions, marital status and children) was written. The daily patterns were summarized and maps were produced providing a perspective on the mobility, life space and activities of participants.

The interviews provide information about the characteristics in homeless individuals who use the Saskatoon Indian and Metis Friendship Centre and their movement and mobility patterns including the location of services they use regularly. The interviews also describe the relationships between the hidden homeless individuals and the households that give them shelter and the particular elements that create homelessness among Aboriginal people including the relationship between urban homelessness and lack/condition of rural/reserve housing.

Working with key informants including Saskatoon Indian and Metis Friendship Centre personnel familiar with urban Aboriginal homeless individuals, an elder and academic partners, the interview/research coordinator created a guide for five Talking Circles to elicit participants' knowledge of and perspectives on a variety of services and programs available to them in Saskatoon. The guide as well as the letter of information and consent form is included in Appendix B.

The research coordinator organized five Talking Circles involving sixteen homeless individuals. The Talking Circles provided participants with the opportunity to systematically evaluate programs and services designed to assist homeless individuals in Saskatoon. As elder was involved, and there were two note-takers to record participants' answers. Sessions were also recorded so that the content of the conversations could be double checked if there were questions relating to the notes. The level of use of services and programs was summarized. The perspectives of the homeless on these programs and services were recorded.

The study was governed by Tri-Council principles for ethical research, including informed consent, the ability to withdraw from the research at any time, assurance that a decision to withdraw will not affect provision of services, and confidentiality. Participants were not identified personally in research results. Where possible, participants were given an opportunity to respond to interpretations of their interviews contained in the research results. This was not always possible as some individuals were not located after the research was undertaken. The Saskatoon Indian and Metis Friendship Centre provided a support system for participants throughout the process. The involvement of Friendship Centre staff and an elder ensured that research protocols were culturally respectful.

1.2 Review of the Literature

Attempts to count homeless individuals in particular cities – Toronto, Winnipeg, Saskatoon, Calgary, and Winnipeg – have found large Aboriginal homeless populations (Ambrosio 1992; Arboleda-Florez and Holley 1997; Caputo et al 1994; Hauch 1985; Kinegal 1989; City of Calgary 1996). Many studies (Beavis et al 1997; Begin et al 1999; Golden 1999) conclude that Aboriginal people are over-represented in the homeless population. While most of these studies have focussed on the population on the streets or in shelters of various kinds, there are some studies that show that many Aboriginal individuals are “hidden homeless” – people who use informal mechanisms (e.g. friends and family) to reduce absolute homelessness (Rivard and Littlejohn, 2000; Distasio 2004; Robillard and Peters 2007, SIIT 2000). There is very little work that engages with homeless people themselves, to explore their perspectives on issues that affect their lives (but see Rivard and Littlejohn, 2000; and Robillard and Peters 2007).

While there is a substantial literature available about homelessness, there is very little available that describes urban Aboriginal peoples’ experiences of homelessness with the exception of the study done in Saskatchewan’s cities by Littlejohn and Rivard (2000). This research looked at the lives of Metis homeless individuals in Saskatoon, Regina and Prince Albert. It was to follow up on this ground breaking work in Saskatoon that the present study was conceived. The available literature suggests some useful areas to explore, but this material needed to be supplemented with perspectives from Aboriginal homeless and hidden homeless people themselves.

The literature on homelessness suggests there are various personal factors that enable or act as barriers to individual’s abilities to exit from homelessness (Allgood and Warren 2002; Dworsky and Piliavin 2000; Piliavan et al 1996; Wong et al 1998; Zlotnick et al 1999). Personal characteristics commonly associated in the literature with moving out of homelessness include human capital (education, training, employment history) and social networks (access to informal support). Personal characteristics commonly identified as barriers to becoming homed include personal disabilities (i.e. physical and mental health status, substance abuse) and acculturation to homelessness (i.e. homeless history). Some of these elements are also identified in literature on Aboriginal homelessness (Beavis et al., 1997). However, additional factors identified in work on homeless Aboriginal people include the effects of family violence, lack of housing on reserves, and the process of making a transition to the city (Beavis et al 1997; Distasio 2003; Golden 1999; LaPrairie 1994, Peters and Robillard 2007). Some research on service needs and service provision to urban Aboriginal populations emphasizes the fragmentation of services between different levels of jurisdiction and the lack of central sources of information (Rivard and Littlejohn, 2000; Hanselmann 2002; SIIT 2000).

Individual’s personal characteristics interact with interventions and opportunities that may act as catalysts for changes in housing situations. Available studies focus on three main areas of intervention (Allgood and Warren 2002; Early and Olsen 2002; CMHC May 2003; CMHC July 2003; Klodawsky 2003b; Orwin et al 2003; Piliavan et al 1996; Stojanovic et al 1999; Zlotnick et al 1999). One area has to do with the provision of a variety of social support services, including services that address physical and mental health and additions, housing information and advocacy, anti-violence programs, and training and assistance with finding employment. A second area has to do with increasing individual and family income, through

employment or the availability or increased levels of social assistance. A third intervention addresses the increased provision of subsidized or affordable housing. While these factors are also identified in the limited literature on Aboriginal homelessness, this material adds the importance of culturally appropriate support services, spiritual healing from the effects of colonial histories, and the importance of increased Aboriginal control over housing initiatives (Beavis et al 1997; Golden 1999; Lobo and Vaughan 2003; Obonsawin 1999; SIIT 2000). A recently completed survey of First Nations homeless people in Prince Albert found that, in the context of high levels of chronic and mental health, and addictions issues, First Nations peoples' use of service seemed low (Robillard and Peters 2007). The study suggested that participants' relationships to service providers should be explored in more detail.

Section 2.0 Methodology

2.1 Data collection

The data collection methods for this research were multifaceted. Initially the researcher identified, collected and reviewed documents related to the characteristics of Saskatoon's homeless population. The results of this review were used to assist in drafting the interview instruments for eliciting information from the homeless research participants.

Saskatoon Indian and Metis Friendship Centre is a location where homeless individuals come for coffee on a regular basis. The staff at the Centre, are familiar with the regulars and the homeless individuals are comfortable in the environment. The Centre invited these homeless individuals to contribute their ideas to the study. The research subjects were chosen on a first come first basis. It was voluntary and in the first interview sessions, 17 individuals (14 men and 3 women) came forward.

The homeless individuals were given an information sheet explaining the process. The interviewee signed a consent form which stated that they understood the study and consented to participate. The interviewer/research coordinator signed that the confidentiality conditions would be adhered to. One copy of this document was kept by the SIMFC while the participant received the other copy. This contract formed the basis of the trust relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee. The researcher asked for permission to tape the interviewee's responses. In all cases but one, permission was granted. Individuals were given an honorarium in recognition of the time they spent talking to the interviewer.

The prototype for the open-ended interview schedule was created through a collaboration of SIMFC staff familiar with the homeless individuals who visited the Centre, the academic advisors, an elder and other key informants. This instrument was designed to allow participants to provide their own perspectives on homelessness. It used the narrative approach. The researcher listened to the stories that the urban Aboriginal people told of their homelessness experiences and the sense they made of these experiences. The researcher tape recorded the interviews.

More structured questions asked about housing and mobility characteristics, relationships with others in the household for the hidden homeless, physical and mental health conditions and experience with trauma and abuse. Information was retrieved on the culture, background, home community, family background, work experience, schooling, experiences with different agencies, addictions, marital state, children and personal descriptions of the life of a homeless person in Saskatoon. The movement of homeless individuals on a daily basis was mapped in order to provide information on where services were used and where they were located.

The target was to interview between 20-30 homeless individuals. In fact, interviews were undertaken with 44 homeless individuals (17 in the fall and 27 in January) who came to the SIMFC for coffee. Although accurate statistics on the homeless in Saskatoon are hard to find, a recent survey taken in May, 2008 found 260 individuals (Star-Phoenix, October 17, 2008) in shelters or on the street. Of these homeless individuals, 46% were Aboriginal. The SIMFC

sample represents a fairly proportion (17%) of the May. Because there is no reliable information about the characteristics of the entire hidden homeless population, it is difficult to use evaluate the representativeness of the SIMFC interviews.² The purpose of this study was not to obtain a representative sample of hidden homeless populations, but to gain some understanding of the situation of these groups.

The individuals volunteered to participate in the project. In-depth interviews were done in the fall and in the winter to determine seasonal differences in the lives of Saskatoon's homeless Aboriginal population. Collecting the interview data was done respecting the homeless person's confidentiality and accepting the boundaries set by the interviewee. The pace and extent of the interview were determined by the interviewee. The interviews took place over a series of coffee sessions as the researcher became known to and trusted by the participant.

While some studies have found it difficult to win the trust of homeless individuals enough to elicit their stories, a deep and caring relationship has been established over the years between the SIMFC and the homeless Aboriginal people of Saskatoon. Coffee is available every morning for those who wish to come. Snacks and some meals are offered. A Christmas dinner is served to all those homeless individuals who can attend. Evening meals are available on a weekly schedule. The staff members are well known to the homeless individuals and the reception is warm and welcoming. This is the appropriate environment according to the literature (Carter, 2003) to invite participation of homeless individuals in research. Carter's research with Winnipeg Aboriginal migrants indicates that keys to success are supportive relationships, solid researcher training and close supervision.

Interviewer training was provided to ensure that issues addressed in the interview which might present difficulties to the interviewees could be examined in a sensitive manner. Friendship Centre staff acted as resources for both the interviewer and participant if difficult situations arose.

The analyses were presented to the interviewees in a series of Talking Circles. The homeless participants were asked to help to identify services, processes, approaches and changes which would assist their lives. These Talking Circles consisted of four participants each. A facilitator introduced topics which had been identified in the research as possible solutions to the homeless individuals "problems." In the discussions that followed among the homeless individuals, problems with the proposed solutions were revealed. However, the input of the participants provides information necessary to assist policy makers towards solutions acceptable to the population to be served.

The results were validated with feedback to the participants on December 5, 2008. Difficulty arose in attempting to locate the original participants. However, three people attended the feedback group and all of the participants agreed with the findings. They provided additional updated information on one of the service agencies and told the researcher that a new service had opened.

² Some researchers have suggested strategies for producing estimates of homeless populations, but these were beyond the scope of this study (Salganik and Heckathorn, 2004; Faugier and Sargeant, 1997).

2.2 Data analysis

Interviews of 43 of the 44 interviewees were tape recorded with the permission of the interviewees. These records were transcribed and the transcripts formed the basis for the analysis of the research questions. The closed ended questions were coded and summarized to provide contextual information.

2.2.1 Results of data analysis

2.2.1.1 Demographic Characteristics

The total number of participants was 44 (17 in the fall interviews and 27 in the winter interviews). Those who participated in the interviews were overwhelmingly male (82.3% in fall and 77.7% in the winter). The participants ranged in age between 24-56 years. Almost all of those interviewed considered themselves to be single even though nominally they may be married. However, the vast majority have children. Within the winter group, the homeless individuals reported having 57 children. These individuals then are people with families.

The educational levels of participants ranged from Grade 6 to some university. In the two groups, 32% had credentials beyond high school including various trades and certificates as well as partial degrees. Very few of the participants considered themselves to be employed. In both the summer and the winter surveys, most of the participants were First Nations.

One in ten (11.4%) of the participants reported that they had no source of income. One half of all respondents had an income of less than \$5000.00 per year. A total of 65.9% receive the majority of their income from Social Services. More participants were able to work in the summer than in the winter. In total, almost one in five (18%) earn their income through employment. One individual (2.2%) combines Social Assistance and employment. Family or friends provide income for 6.8% of participants. One individual (2.2%) received provincial training allowance. Two individuals, almost 5% of the participants reported “Other” sources of income.

Table 1 Summary of Characteristics of Interviewees

	Fall Interviews	Winter Interviews
Total number of interviews	17	27
Male	14 (82.3%)	21 (77.7%)
Female	3 (17.6%)	6 (22.3%)
Age Range	28-56	24-55
Males	28-56	24-55
Females	36-54 av. age 45	28-52
Average Age	43 years	41.5 years
Males	43 years	42.5 years
Females	45 years	38 years
Marital Status		
Single, separated or divorced	16 (94.1%)	27 (100%)
Married	1 (5.9%)	
Have Children	16 (94.1%)	22 (81.5%)
Education Beyond High School	47%	22%
Males	33%	16.6%
Females	50%	83.3%
% Employed		
Male	0%	15%
Female	29%	0%
Aboriginal Status		
First Nations	14 (82.4%)	92.5%
Metis	3 (17.6%)	3.7%
Not		3.7%
Health Status		
Excellent/very good	23.5%	11.1%
Good	17.6%	40.7%
Fair/Poor	58.8%	44.4%
Can't Say		3.7%
% reporting Addictions	76.4%	51.8%
Income Level		
0	11.7%	11.1%
0-5000	52.9%	51.5%
5,001-10,000	29.4%	33.3%
10,001-20,000	5.9%	3.7%
Sources of Income		
Social Assistance	47.0%	77.7%
Employment	29.4%	11.1%
SA and Employment	0.0%	3.7%
Family/friends	17.6%	0.0%
Other	5.8%	3.7%

This research found that Employment statistics are misleading when applied to this population without elaboration. Those who are unemployed can be divided into four categories: unemployed because of health, injury or disability, the discouraged unemployed who no longer look for work because of a repeated rejection, unemployed who are actively looking for work and working when possible and those who are going to school. When looked at in this way, in the winter interviews, those who are discouraged and unemployed make up slightly over half of the group (55.5%). About one in five (18.5%) is actively looking for work. Another one in five is in school and the remaining 7.4% are unable to work for physical reasons.

Further to this is the fact that a number of the participants present themselves every day at Labour Ready. This allows them to work on a daily basis and get paid on a daily basis. However, they would not be classified as “Employed.” This form of employment is suited to their lifestyle and is preferred to such an extent that some show up for work on weekends as well as week days and could in fact be recognized as full-time workers if employment statistics were collected in a different way.

This study revealed that Marital Status tells very little because people on the street report that they are single even if they have been/are married. Significant however among the findings of this study was the large number of children reported by the interviewed individuals. Of the winter sample, 22 people reporting children indicated that they had 57 children. This begs the question as to who is looking after these children. Where are they? Are their needs being met?

Questions on health status and addictions depended on self-reporting. Approximately one half, of all those interviewed, reported poor to fair health. Those considering themselves in excellent or very good health in the winter interviews were all male. Addictions were reported by 76.4% of those interviewed in the fall and 51.8% in the winter sample.

2.2.1.1. The Face of Aboriginal Homelessness in Saskatoon

The Aboriginal face of homelessness at the Saskatoon Indian and Metis Friendship Centre is a man in his early forties. He is single or considers himself to be single because he is separated or divorced. However, he most likely has children. He may have some training beyond school. He may be employed every day as a day labourer but in his mind he is unemployed. He may have a disability or injury from previous employment which makes him unemployable or he may just have given up on looking for work.

Homelessness is only one state of these individuals. They all have individual stories which reveal complex lives. Most are parents, have work experience, have relatively good educations, some have trades and skills, and most have addictions. Homelessness adds to the other conditions because an address is a basic requirement for many services and is important in finding housing and employment.

2.2.1.2 Current Housing Conditions

Participants' housing conditions were often very poor. In the summer, some participants lived outside, sleeping in parks or under the Broadway Bridge. In the winter, some participants lived in abandoned buildings. Others lived with a large number of others who stayed together in order to afford the rent

"I usually, sleep underneath the riverbank." (Male, 34)

"I'm staying in an apartment, an old abandoned apartment block. You know when I think, like you know, and I might be a big guy and everything, but I'm not a criminal no more. I don't drink anymore, can't afford to drink, who can afford to drink?...There's eight people staying in that apartment building." (Male, 37)

"Mine is horrible where I stay. I'm staying with a couple of friends of mine up in the hood. Because they're all on drugs and alcohol I can't sleep at nights. Every single night of the week they're up all night long and my bed is in the laundry room there and there's no door on my little room there and I can't sleep at all through the night but I don't wanna get a job yet until I get a peaceful place to live. I fall asleep around midnight. And that's if it's peaceful enough to fall asleep, which is hard. I gotta bury my head under my pillows every night." (Male, 32)

A few even spent the night outside, walking around and staying in ATM's to get warm.

"Sleeping around. Mostly at, sometimes at the bank I sleep. And sometimes at my whatever friends I've got and I go sleep there. Yah, the Royal Bank is open all the time and I go sleep there and I sleep cause it's nice and warm in there. They got a good heater I guess in there. And it's warm there." (Male, 46)

Not only do the homeless have to keep changing where they can sleep for a few hours but they have to be concerned about their safety. Many are chased out of the places that they have found to keep them from the cold.

Where the fire that happened my mom and them were staying there. They used to rent there and it caught fire two months ago and I stayed in there for the month. Yah they kicked everything out, yah and then they come, they have the sign on there where nobody can be in there right and you can't live in there. Yah. And everyone will take off if they see them coming there and sometimes they come there and stay all night. Sometimes you have to wander around all night. (Female, 32)

Some get sick.

"Some of us sleep outside, for instance in a box or in an alley or where boards are made into something and all that. I used to do that with boxes. I used to go and get blankets in there to sleep outside. I even slept outside here in the winter time. That wasn't too good. I was cold and I got sick from it and had to go to the hospital." (Male, 37)

For those who stay in the shelters, they are required to leave for the day. This is a hardship for some.

"I told the Salvation Army that I told my worker and I said, "Look , I have a concussion and you guys are sending me out to walk around all day on a broken leg which at first wasn't so bad and now I need surgery" and I told her about that and my dizziness, the head injuries I've had but she said , "No, there's nothing I can do." (Male, 37)

Other individuals are "couch surfing", moving between friends and family in order to find a place to sleep.

"Well I'm homeless so, you know, I bounce around from friend to friend there, you know, couch surfer. You know I've slept in, slept in a park or at the river bank or, you know." (Male, 38)

"My housing? I don't have a place to stay period. Like I said, I'm just camping out wherever I can, whoever will put me up for the any number of days I feel comfortable with them...all I got is the clothes on my back but I got other clothes and I travel around in bags. As for blankets and that I got nothing. Like I got, I rely on the generosity of family members and friends that I know on the street but you got a place that, you know, but you can't always go there because they have kids and stuff like that, you know and I don't really wanna impose that much on people." (Male, 54)

Some of the women responding to this survey admitted to experiencing sexual abuse when they do find a place out of the cold. They expressed frustration and helplessness at their situations.

"Right now I'm staying at a friend's place in the [structure]. It's, it's a run down building but it's a shelter over my head. I have a knife because I'm afraid that someone's either going to take advantage of me when I'm sleeping or someone's just gonna break down my friend's door and do whatever. Haven't been able to sleep in pretty much....I don't know. I find it kinda hard because he, he asks me to do things with him and, and I'm not into stuff like that like usually he tries to demand sexual favors and stuff and I just tell him to go, pretty much go fuck himself... Like my first night there I woke up to him violating me.... Yes, he raped me and I never told police because I needed a place to stay." (Female, 36)

Section 3.0 Discussion

3.1 Relevance of Research

The objectives of the study were to address the knowledge gaps related to Aboriginal homelessness, in particular knowledge gaps in relation to the Aboriginal homeless population of Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. This research approached the issue in a unique way. The project encouraged Aboriginal homeless individuals to share and interpret their experiences from their own perspectives. The site for the research was the Saskatoon Indian and Metis Friendship Centre where the participants were accustomed to go regularly for coffee.

While other studies have found it difficult to engage homeless individuals in discussion, the setting and the positive relationship of the participants with the staff and surroundings of the Saskatoon Indian and Metis Friendship Centre resulted in a response far exceeding expectations. It was proposed that 20-30 people be interviewed and in fact 44 homeless individuals offered their input. This reinforces the assumption made at the outset that if the homeless individuals were in a comfortable place in the midst of people they trusted, they would contribute their ideas on making their own lives better.

3.2 Research Questions

3.2.1 What are homeless Aboriginal people's experiences with service organizations?

Figure 1 shows all of the service organizations participants knew about and had used. While many are clustered around the 20th Street area, many are found in more dispersed locations in the cities. Despite the fact that 43 agencies were identified that provided services and programs for homeless populations in Saskatoon, in the fall and winter of 2008-9, there were only a few that most individuals used regularly.

Figure 1 Service Agencies Working with the Homeless in Saskatoon

Friendship Inn
Westside Community Clinic
Saskatoon Food Bank
Salvation Army
Saskatoon Indian and Metis Friendship Centre
Social Services
Saskatoon Housing Authority
Central Urban Metis Federation Inc. (CUMFI) –Wellness Centre
Labour Ready
Native Christian Church
Peace Tree Healing Lodge
McLeod House
Larson House
Rainbow Community Centre
Cross Roads

YMCA/YWCA
Quint Youth Lodge
Bridge
AIDS Saskatoon
White Buffalo Youth Lodge
Saskatoon Sexual Assault Centre
Interval House
Infinity House
Rentalsman
Metis Addictions Council (MACSI)
Equal Justice
Mobile Crisis
Community Addictions Service
Catholic Family Services
Building a Nation
Egadz
Avenue Community Centre
City of Saskatoon Police
CANSASK Employment Services
Ombudsman
Human Rights
Hospital Emergencies
Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technology (SIIT)
Persons Living with AIDS
Person to Person Ministry
May's Kitchen
Native Circle Ministry
The Lighthouse

The Friendship Inn and its services were known to all the participants and used both fall and winter. The vast majority of the homeless interviewees go there for a meal. It is seen primarily as a source of food and a convenient place to meet with family and friends. One individual noted that it had kept him alive for 35 years. A small number use the Friendship Inn to get winter clothing, and counselling (for addictions and other things).

All participants were aware of the West Side Clinic and recognized it as a medical facility. Many of the participants go there to see a doctor or the nurses, receive prescriptions, medical attention or for the needle exchange. Others used the West Side Clinic as a drop-in centre for coffee, use the phone, clothing bin, meet people or have snacks on Wednesday and Saturday. Overall the response was that people felt comfortable there, the location was accessible and their medical needs could be attended to if necessary.

Everyone is aware of the Food Bank. They all knew that it was a place to go to get food and some knew the educational services it provides. However, they were not aware of the other services that were offered and they tend not to use the service. It was a concern that they were required to have an address and a health card every time they used the facility. Many were not able to give an address.

The Saskatoon Indian and Metis Friendship Centre offers food, use of a phone, fax machine, or a computer, clothing depot, housing information, cultural activities and many support services. It is a place to get a cheery "*Good Morning*" and a cup of coffee and place to warm up on a cold day.

In the winter sample these four again were the most regularly used services along with the Salvation Army, Social Services, the Bridge, the hospital emergency ward, and Native Circle Ministry. Each of these organizations provide specific basic services that the homeless access.

The Salvation Army is an agency that the homeless access for services in both fall and winter. It is a place where participants go for shelter and food. It is a place to get hygiene products, showers, coffee on Friday and Saturday, taxi service to the hospital, and bus tickets. However, the participants had a number of concerns about the service. Safety was one concern. It was stated that parolees are preferred because the jails provide funding for the parolees. The policy of making people leave first thing in the morning is difficult for individuals when it is -40. Women cannot get a place for overnight.

Social Services did not directly offer food, clothing, transportation, and shelter to the participants but was a primary income support and means for individuals to access services of other agencies.

The Bridge on 20th, the hospital emergency ward, and Native Circle Ministry were agencies which participants mentioned more often in the winter interviews. Each of these organizations provides specific basic services that the homeless access such as food, fellowship and spiritual support.

Other agencies that the respondents listed often were: Larson House as a place to detoxify and Labour Ready for daily employment as well as YWCA, Aids Saskatoon, White Buffalo Youth Lodge, Rentalsman, Metis Addictions, Equal Justice, Mobile Crisis, Building A Nation, Egadz, Saskatoon City Police, Cansask, Ombudsman, Human Rights, Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies, CUMFI, Community Addictions, the Lighthouse and The Rainbow Community Centre.

Services that are used rarely included Quint Development Corporation, Persons Living with AIDS, Native Friendship Church, YMCA, Building a Nation, Soup Kitchen, Person to Person Ministry, Saskatoon Housing Authority, Peace Tree Healing, the Outreach Van and ANS.

There were many services available in Saskatoon that were not mentioned by the participants. Specifically, various housing organizations do not seem to be used by those needing housing most. An initiative to increase awareness of services to homeless individuals accessible to those individuals may be an important investment.

3.2.2. What are their movement and mobility patterns including the location of services they use regularly?

Part of the intent of the research project was to map the daily mobility patterns of homeless individuals and compare winter and summer patterns/early fall, in order to evaluate how their needs might change. Initially we had hoped to re-interview the same participants in summer and winter. Because this is an extremely mobile population, this proved impossible, and we were able to re-interview only three individuals. However the results still provide an indication of the changing needs of homeless participants who use the Friendship Centre, in different seasons.

Although the sample size is too small to make generalizations, it seems as if there are clear gender differences in sleeping arrangements. None of the women slept outside in either summer or winter. They were all staying with friends or family. While none of the participants indicated this explicitly, it seems likely that sleeping outside is extremely unsafe for women. Some of the men noted the violence, dangerousness, and drug abuse associated with sleeping outside, which suggests that it might be even more dangerous for women. As the experience of one women, described above in the “Current Housing Conditions” section illustrates, staying with other people did not necessarily mean that the women were safe.

Table 2: Sleeping Arrangements in Summer and winter				
	Summer		Winter	
Couch-surfing	3 (21.4%)	3 (100.0%)	18 (85.0%)	5 (83.3%)
Outside	7 (50.0%)		2 (10.0%)	
In a shelter	4 (28.6%)		1 (5.0%)	1 (16.7%)

In both seasons only a minority of both men and women used shelters for the night (Table 2). Some participants felt uncomfortable staying at a shelter. Others noted that there were charges after they had stayed one night for free. Staff attitudes and policies that individuals had to be drug and alcohol free were also mentioned as reasons why individuals did not use shelters.

“I mean it’s a roof but it’s not a home, you know. You don’t, you don’t, you can’t be yourself. You can’t have comfort, you can’t have peace of mind, at least I can’t, being with all them people in one big room. I just don’t, I don’t trust people after being stabbed.” (Male, 45)

“I tried to use \$30/night when someone else paid and then they didn’t let me in one night later when I went to use it.” (Male, 27).

“They don’t allow you to spend the night if you have a drop of alcohol in you.” (Focus Groups).

“You’re being treated like prisoners, yelled at, bullied, kicked out. It’s a guard vs. prisoner mentality.” (Focus Groups).

In the summer, a large number of the men slept in areas not usually meant for sleeping: under the Broadway Bridge, in alleys or back yards, in garages or sheds. They did not seem to sleep outside every night, but rotated between shelters, staying with friends and sleeping

“rough”. In the winter, two individuals indicated they had spent the night outside the previous day. One individual did not sleep but walked around, using ATM’s to doze off. Then he napped at various organizations the following day. Another slept in his brother’s garage, noting that the heater was not adequate.

For most individuals, sleeping arrangements in the winter involved staying with friends, family, or acquaintances. For participants whose housing was very tenuous, the surveys displayed a high level of anxiety associated with finding a place to stay for the night in winter. Some individuals started canvassing places to sleep in the late afternoon, noting things like “going door-to-door” to find a place to sleep, or that “a stranger let me stay” for the night.

“I go to my sister’s but her too, she’s in, she’s got like grandchildren, she fosters grandchildren and I feel like I’m in the way, you know, and she’s got such a big responsibility there and I just feel like I’m just adding on to her, her group you know...I just walk back and forth, back and forth and hope that I run into somebody that will help me out so that I have a place to sleep and that’s when I start worrying and I’m wondering where I’m gonna sleep tonight.” (Female, 54)

“About 3 (p.m.) on I’ll start asking out where I can sleep, eh?” (Male, 50).

“I don’t really have a home. I usually just walk from house to house and just see if I can stay at their place, maybe sleep on their couch. Sometimes they don’t even let me stay there. I have to go walking around and find a place to sleep and it’s pretty hard, it’s pretty cold out in winter time.” (Male, 24).

In these marginal situations as well as in situations where individuals were staying with family or friends, respondents noted that they tried to reduce the tension of the situation by leaving in the morning and not coming back until it was bed-time. They recognized the need for privacy for their hosts and their vulnerability if the situation became unpleasant. Presumably in the summer, these tensions can be ameliorated to some extent by sleeping outside. In the winter, though, this is not an option.

There are also more challenges associated with being out of the house in the winter. The amount of time participants spent in daytime outside activities varied substantially between summer and winter. In summer, almost all (85.7%) of the participants spent time outside. Most walked. Others panhandled, collected bottles, visited with others on the street, or sat outside. In the winter, the opportunity to spend time outside is clearly more limited, and less than one third (34.6%) indicated that they had spent time outdoors. In the winter, participants indicated that they spent time in the library, walking in the mall, or sitting in the bus depot. These places were not mentioned in the summer surveys.

The inability to be able to stay outside in the winter, either during the day or in the night, puts additional pressure on participants who are attempting to manage the tensions associated with couch-surfing (see the following section). Participants attempt to maximize the privacy of their hosts, but there are more limited places for them to go. While participants did not mention this aspect, it also seems clear that in the winter, homeless individuals have almost no chance for

privacy. Most are staying with others during the night, and during the day they spend their time circulating through various organizations.

Table 3: Percent of Participants Using Organization for Food and Shelter in Summer and Winter in Their Daily routine		
	Summer	Winter
Friendship Centre	14 (82.4%)	18 (66.6%)
Friendship Inn	14 (82.4%)	18 (66.6%)
Westside Community Clinic	8 (47.1%)	3 (11.5%)
Salvation Army	4 (23.5%)	12 (44.4%)
PLWA ³	3 (17.6%)	1 (3.8%)
Native Circle Ministry	3 (17.6%)	8 (30.8%)
Bridge on 20 th	1 (5.9%)	9 (34.6%)

Participants used seven main organizations for obtain food, socialize, gain access to services, check newspapers for employment and accommodations, and use the phone (Table 3). The summer/winter differences cannot be interpreted to show changes in use patterns, since the sample size is small, and the winter survey seemed to catch more Sundays. Some individuals noted that Sundays were difficult because there were few places to go. Where individuals are staying in accommodations that make staying “at home” unattractive, it seems likely that Sundays are challenging. There were some participants who indicated that they used services in the downtown (Labour Ready, CanSask) or across the river (Sarcen, PLWA). We do not have the address of where participants who were couch-surfing stayed at night. In the summer, the geography of daily use included the Broadway Bridge for many, but in the winter, the day-time path was primarily on 20th Street, between Wall Street and Ave. N (Figure 1). In the winter, daily routines are extremely localized. Services have emerged to meet the needs of this population in the area of 20th Street, and individuals are, for the most part, able to spend their days inside. While the location of services in a localized area means that homeless people have walking access to them, it also means that they are unable to escape from this environment. This was a matter of concern to participants who wished to make some changes in their lifestyles.

3.2.3. What are the relationships between hidden homeless individuals and the households that give them shelter?

Some of the participants move from place to place for various reasons. Many are able to find shelter at family and friends for short periods of time.

I'm staying with my friend. About two, two and a half weeks. I've been at my other cousins and I've been with my other sister. Just like staying at relations and stuff like that but I don't wanna like burden you know. Like I don't wanna be like a pest like, you know. I wanna be on my own but independently but, you know, in my own housing and stuff, and my own privacy and because I know how it is when people, when they have their own house. (Female, 44)

³ Persons Living with Aids Saskatoon

For some people, their medical conditions make it difficult to remain in homes with other people.

"Yah sure in my situation. I have HIV and I have Hep C right. In my situation I have to, in order to get a place I have to rent with somebody, you know they've upped a one bedroom is six hundred dollars and they don't cover that, eh. So I have to rent with somebody and then but the people that help are well at risk, they're aware that I have HIV so they have to have HIV or else, you know. Where am I staying, I'm a surf cou cher. Yah. I stay at my sisters and cousins and friends and it's really hard. And it's really hard because I'll pay them. Like if I'm there for a week I'll give them sixty bucks or whatever. And then they'll kick me out. You know ... yah and then I have to go to another place and I'll pay them and the same damn thing, so." (Male, 50)

Many spoke of the problems and concerns that they have with their temporary accommodation with friends or relatives.

"Oh well, housing is horrible 'cause there's so many people that do drugs. And you know, I really don't like living in that area. And like you know sometimes if I go to sleep at someone's place I know they're doing things. Yah, "Cause I don't do that. And the other part too it's been more dangerous to live in one, that area. That's so violent 'cause I went home that one, well many times I went to go home. If I have the home that's means I go to apartment. I go crash out. And you see needles and violence. It is. Sometimes they kick me out well I say at least I had a few hours of sleep. And I even said, "I'm not violent." He said, "Well don't come back here again." The next thing you know four days later I go back to the same place because it's warm." (Male, 44)

"I'm at my brother's and he has a really small house. I don't like getting in their way so, I sleep in their garage. There's lots of blankets in there. It's warm with all the blankets." (Male, 40)

"'cause that's where my sister is staying with them. She got kicked out of her place on avenue, on 22nd street. Now she's staying at the same place my niece is staying there too. And that's where I used to stay too before my daughter went nuts, before I went back to my daughter's. When.... that aah, I don't know how many times my daughter kicked me out of my place. Like I'm sharing rent with my daughter, with my daughter. And that's how come she says I wasn't paying enough for that place over there where we were renting. So then she kicked me out 'cause she was paying \$555.00 and I was only paying \$135.00 (Female, 48)

While "couch-surfing" provides participants with shelter for the night, it is not a good substitute for a place of their own. Over-crowding creates tensions and the possibility that individuals will suddenly find themselves out on the street. Participants attempt to contribute to the household by doing chores, buying food, or contributing to the rent.

"Yah river banks, parked cars, abandoned buildings, friends' houses 'til they get tired of you. But I tell 'em yah I say like 'I got no place else. Do you mind if I, you know, stay with you and

then, you know, I'll clean up, I'll do dishes, do the yard, whatever', right, you know, to try pay my way..." (Male, 49)

"And then I think it all, yah, not comfortable and just stay out as much as I can until at night and help out with the dishes and stuff and if I bring food in, you know things like that. I try to help my best, you know, and I'm trying to look for a place but it's the prices are dangerous" (Female, 44)

During the day, many participants stayed out of the house, walking around outside during the summer and going between different service organizations in the winter, in an attempt to minimize tension. Staying out of the house was particularly challenging on cold winter days.

3.2.4. What is the relationship between urban homeless individuals and the lack or condition of rural or reserve housing?

The research revealed that the majority of the homeless respondents left their home reserves many years ago. They did not leave the reserve because of housing conditions on the reserve and they do not own housing on the reserve because they have become urban First Nations residents.

"I was born in Muskoday. My parents died when I was young. I lived in a foster home just outside Muskoday." (Male, 37)

"I was born in Onion Lake. I came to Saskatoon when I was in my teens. I lived 24 years in Saskatoon. I've been gone so long from the reserve I would probably have to wait a couple of years before I would get a house of my own but I don't have my kids with me so I don't know if I have a chance. It's easier to get a house when you have kids." (Female,

"On Day Star I asked for a house but no. I never got one for years. I asked for a house about 10X but I never had no answer." (Male, 30)

"I am from Yellow Quill. I don't have a house there because I haven't lived out there for a long time. Over the summer I was out there, the first time since I was 12, 11 years ago. It was pretty good the only thing I hated was there was no work and you kinda have a car to get around." (Male, 24)

Almost all have lived in a variety of cities. Saskatoon is not the first urban centre they lived in. For many, it is the third or fourth urban experience. The interviewees have lived in Regina, Prince Albert, Yorkton, Edmonton, Toronto, Winnipeg, Vancouver, Calgary, Chilliwack, and Ottawa. One described himself as an "Army Brat."

"Well, 0-10 I was living all across Canada. I was living everywhere, Vancouver to Ottawa. I lived with my Grandmother in Ottawa." (Male, 24)

Most have lived away from their reserves since they were children. They do not regard their First Nation as “home.” Most have no intention of returning to or living on their First Nation. One Metis individual grew up on a First Nation but has not lived there in years.

“I was born in 1957 in Saskatoon. Then lived in PA till I was about 11 and well our family split up when I was 11 so I went into foster homes for 2 years then I took off and grew up in Regina. I lived in Vancouver for 4 years and Edmonton for five.” (Male, 49)

“I grew up in army camps Chilliwack from there Surrey to Banff then PA well until my family broke up then Kilbourn Hall, Ranch Erhorlow, boy’s school and then jail.” (Male, 50)

The respondents are from a number of different First Nations: Ahtakakoop; Kawacatoose; Cumberland House; Mistawasis; Onion Lake; Yellow Quill; Kinistin; One Arrow; Daystar; Little Pine; Misquito; Starblanket; Sakimay; and Black Lake. They are culturally diverse as well: Dene; Sioux; Saulteaux/Ojibway; Cree; Metis; Cree/Nakota; and Cree/Saulteaux/French. While most were band members, the fact that they had been away from their reserves for a long time, many for their entire lives, meant that they did not have access to housing on reserve.

“I don’t go to Yellow Quill which is my reserve because I don’t know anyone. I wouldn’t get housing there because I haven’t been there since I was a kid.” (Male, 48)

“If you’re out there (Starblanket) you have to be on the waiting list to get a house and you got to be living out there too—in the wait you have to live with family or rent or something.” (Male, 46)

“I didn’t live on the reserve for over twenty years.” (Female, 48)

“I could have got a house on the reserve but I didn’t want to live there. It’s too quiet.” (Male, 40)

3.2.5. What are the particular elements, issues, traumas and factors that create homelessness in Aboriginal populations?

There are as many reasons for homelessness as there are homeless individuals. Some made the decision to get out on their own. Others had alcohol and/or drug abuse. Almost one in five (18.5%) of the winter sample admitted that their addictions had caused them to loss their home.

“Well a lot had to do with, with addictions. You know I was sober for such a long time and when my mom passed away on Mother’s Day and I was, like we had a whole, a whole thing going like we had a smudge every day, we were sober and once we had that perfect – we were eating healthy and everything but once that happened it put a tiny dent in my wheel and it just got worse. I won’t smudge. I won’t go to meeting and I just put everything off and before you know it I was just like a zombie and that was it. It was the mother that raised me...and she was always there for me and so it was pretty tough.” (Male, 37)

“I have no incentive to go, go and look for a place of my own right now anyway, so you know. It’s my life style. I’m an IV drug user and there’s not many people really that trust me being around their possessions, you know.

Many of those who are without a home in the winter were evicted, often due to relationship problems and break-ups resulted in some people becoming homeless.

“Well I had my own place and me and Jim were together and we were sober and I had a good life last summer. Well I was going to school and Jim was working and then we broke up. And he ended up in jail. I had to support myself and I couldn’t do it on my own. Yah, evicted.” (Female, 27)

“Yah, and then I had a dispute with my common law so there goes half that rent for his side.” (Female, 44)

For others, physical impairments and disabilities have prevented individuals from working or finding meaningful employment, or finding full-time employment or from being able to find a home that is affordable and comfortable.

Sometimes they have lost their home as a result of their own violent lifestyle.

“We had a place, were into, getting into fights. So they kicked down our door and he tried to attack us but we were ready and so the landlord put up a notice. I got evicted right away.” (Male, 47)

Sometimes it was the violence and partying of friends and family members that ended in them being put on the street.

“I had a place like four and a half years before I was homeless but anyway I got booted out of there because I went to go visit my daughter in Ft. Qu’Appelle and when I came back the lock was changed so I called my landlord. To make a long story short he said they had a party there and that’s why they shut it down and I told her I wasn’t there and she wasn’t aware of that but she says no. She wants to change locks and all that everything was out already so what the hell. I asked her if she could find me a place. She said, “Well yes, yah I think. But she didn’t help.” (Male, 50)

Others do not have enough money to find appropriate housing because they don’t receive enough rent subsidy.

“I’m on Social Services. I get a basic allowance and it’s \$60 or something like that and I’m trying to find a place since the Barry closed down.”

In such instances, some family members took advantage of them and kicked them out of their homes. Others lost their residences as a result of the building in which they were renting an apartment being sold or a rent increase beyond their means. The real estate boom, with house sales and rent increases, in Saskatoon in the last year has left some people homeless as has the closure of the Barry Hotel.

“Well, I got the..., they evicted us from, they evicted us from that place on Avenue N because the caretaker was saying that they’re gonna turn it into condos.”

“Well, my landlord, I don’t know, I was renting on G north. I didn’t even get a chance to move in there and he was renovating. I don’t know, next thing I know, I hear he went and sold the house, and I was, I was renting that house.” (Male).

For some, homelessness is the way it has always been and they consider it part of their lifestyle. Fire, condo conversion and building demolition were other factors leading to homelessness.

In another couple's case incarceration of the one of the partners caused the imbalance of finances and the other partner lost their apartment. The pain was too great to accept and they turned to alcohol and drugs to cope.

Some have had to face a life of loss and trauma.

"I came to Saskatoon 'cause there was so much violence with my mother. My Mom used to get a lickin' from my older brother. And my Dad didn't do anything. He defended him. I defended her. I was going to start to leave her alone there but finally she went and seen her sister in Pelican Narrows. (Male, 44)

"I was living in Calgary and I knew that my Mother was sick. They couldn't do nothing and I told the doctor to pull the plug. I'm the youngest one. My sister was crying there and said, "No!" I said to my sister, "We're all grown up." I signed the documents and let her go. My Dad wasn't even there. I said, "Dad come over," and he didn't. Yeah. He said, "No." She is out of pain but I'm in pain now." (Male, 44)

"I was in a foster home around PA, in that area and I kept running away and they sent me to the boys' school until I was 16 and I more or less screwed up that, went back home from 16 on." (Male,

Other reasons for homelessness include discrimination by landlords because of race and/or surnames, physical confrontations with family resulting in the person not being allowed back in the premises or a 24 hour eviction notice resulting from a family member's actions. Two participants have been incarcerated and had no where to turn after they were released from prison while another cleaned herself up and found employment, but could not find a place to stay. She kept running into dead ends, became depressed and gave up. A few participants reported finding themselves trapped in a cycle of homelessness and poverty.

When those who were homeless in the winter were asked where they had lived last summer, 8% responded that they had had their own place then. Another 20% had had a place with family, boarding or at the Barry.

The rest had been homeless always.

3.3 Potential significance of research results

The interview results have the potential of helping the Saskatoon Indian and Metis Friendship Centre, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada STC Urban Services Centre and other First Nations groups, Metis organizations other service organizations and governments create better policies and programs for First Nations homeless people. The responses will help all agencies working with the homeless in Saskatoon to understand the needs of homeless people better.

Through the process of this study, service providers and agencies working with homeless Aboriginal people in Saskatoon were brought together. The findings from the interviews, the perspective of the homeless people interviews were presented to the organizations. It gave the agencies a chance to work together, to look at who is providing what services to the homeless and to rationalize the services offered.

Further, the needs expressed by the homeless themselves were discussed in light of deciding what service might be provided by one of the agencies to fill the gap in services identified by the homeless people themselves.

3.4 Linkages and Partnerships with or Within the Homeless Community Resulting from this Project

The research coordinator contacted a large number of service providers to find out what services currently exist for homeless individuals in Saskatoon. These included:

Table 1
Friendship Inn
Westside Community Clinic
Saskatoon Food Bank
Salvation Army
Saskatoon Indian and Metis Friendship Centre
Social Services
Saskatoon Housing Authority
Central Urban Metis Federation Inc. (CUMFI) –Wellness Centre
Labour Ready
Native Christian Church
Peace Tree Healing Lodge
McLeod House
Larson House
Rainbow Community Centre
Cross Roads
YMCA/YWCA
Quint Youth Lodge
Bridge
AIDS Saskatoon

White Buffalo Youth Lodge
Saskatoon Sexual Assault Centre
Interval House
Infinity House
Rentalsman
Metis Addictions Council (MACSI)
Equal Justice
Mobile Crisis
Community Addictions Service
Catholic Family Services
Building a Nation
Egadz
Avenue Community Centre
City of Saskatoon Police
CANSASK Employment Services
Ombudsman
Human Rights
Hospital Emergencies
Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technology (SIIT)
Persons Living with AIDS
Person to Person Ministry
May's Kitchen
Native Circle Ministry
The Lighthouse

As a result of the research, the SIMFC researcher is developing an informational binder with the names and addresses of service providers in the community who offer help to the homeless population. The binder contains the programs and services each organization has available to the homeless individuals. The researcher has held meetings with the service providers to create service /program packages. With each meeting the researcher informed the service provider of the upcoming focus groups scheduled for January, 2009.

These organizations provided information on their programs and services. They received invitations to attend a Service Provider Information Session where the results of the research to date were given. The organizations were asked for their comments and suggestions in providing better services and programming for the homeless population.

As a result of this study and the liaison work of the research coordinator at the Friendship Centre, the various organizations in Saskatoon had an opportunity to sit together, to discuss and examine the issues raised by the homeless individuals and together seek solutions to the problems homeless individuals face. This led to many interesting new approaches being offered by the agencies. Hopefully these organizations with a common interest in the welfare of the homeless in Saskatoon will continue to collaborate and integrate their services.

Section 4 - Conclusions and Recommendations

This research provides a model as to how homeless individuals can be empowered to find solutions to the problems in their own lives. The study provided an opportunity for homeless people to describe their lives, examine what is needed and offer suggestions as to what could be done to improve their lot. It was encouraging to hear the voices of those in need and their desire to express their recommendations.

Further, the study brought together service providers for the homeless and asked them to come up with ways that the needs identified by the homeless could be served by one of the agencies. Thus, the helping agencies in Saskatoon were able to discuss and examine the real issues in the lives of the homeless and offer their help in resolving problems identified by the homeless themselves.

In many ways the homeless individuals were not aware of services which might make their life better. They were involved in meeting the basic needs of shelter, clothing and food on a daily basis and their routine centred upon the places that they knew would provide their immediate needs for that day. In the winter, the additional need of a warm place to come in out of the cold dictated their routine. An initiative to increase awareness of services to homeless individuals may be an important investment.

The lack of affordable and emergency housing is a growing issue in Saskatoon and the effect of this is to leave those most vulnerable in the most desperate need of housing. We have evidence that a portion of the Aboriginal homeless population were the victims of the boom real estate market in Saskatoon in the last year. These are people who were evicted because their building was sold or to be turned into condos or their rent increased beyond their means. The closing of the Barry Hotel also created homelessness for at least one of the participants.

4.1 Recommendations made by Participants

The homeless have many helpful ideas about making their situations better and it is these ideas that may bridge some of the gaps in services.

As might be expected the primary concern of these homeless individuals was housing. For them, homelessness is the result of a lack of homes. These are not people who want to be homeless. They recognize clearly that there is a problem in the availability of affordable and low-income housing. They also emphasized the need for affordable, appropriate housing for single men and single women. One participant suggested that First Nations should invest in apartment buildings in the city to house their off-reserve populations. Another individual stated that housing for single individuals should not have stipulations restricting renters with addictions. More housing for individuals with long-term illnesses should be available.

Emergency housing was of concern to many of the participants. People released from jail were named as one group who needed emergency or transitional housing to allow them to reintegrate into the community.

The dominant subject during the interviews was the problems they experience in applying for houses and apartments. Some of the concerns in this area were the lack of financial means to rent an apartment or house that would be appropriate for their needs. The interviewees would like to see a larger increase in their financial assistance in order to afford the recent rental increases. Remarks were made about the lack of low income housing along with the need for lower rents. A participant recommended that they need rentals that are safer and cleaner as well as affordable. The need for more men's shelters was recommended by both fall and winter interviewees. The participants would like to see shorter waiting lists for affordable housing and treatment centers. They suggested that affordable housing applications could be made more applicable to their specific needs. Another never ending request throughout the research project was the crucial need for higher rent subsidies and better availability for those in need. Although there are shelters in Saskatoon the participants would like to have more shelters built specifically for families and couples.

Another theme that emerged was the need for support and advocacy when applying for housing. Sometimes their special needs make it difficult for them to fill out applications. Advocacy could also include better communication between bands and social services when clients are adjusting from rural to urban or visa versa. It was noted that an advocate could also help find more information about affordable properties and service agencies.

A common opinion of the interviews was that of racism and discrimination. Many of the participants have been victims of these hurtful acts, especially when attempting to apply for housing. The stigma surrounding issues of HIV and Hepatitis C prevent some landlords from making an unbiased decision on appropriate renters. The participants stated repeatedly they would like to see "less judgement" from landlords and the general public. One participant stated that he suffered because of his last name with the bad reputation of other relatives following him. Still others claim the appearance of being poor or visibly native is an obstacle to the acceptance of their rental application. An interviewee felt that the service providers tend to blame the victim and they would like to see more understanding on this issue from them because the participants deal with these service providers on a daily basis.

Many ideas were presented regarding Social Services and the way that these programs are run. Although the monetary support is very much appreciated by many of the participants, they find that the monthly allowances still do not cover the amount needed to secure a decent home for themselves, despite the recent increase in rental allowance. Another area of concern was a lack of individualized support from this government agency. People find that current policies do not consider special circumstances, especially when the homeless need emergency shelter for more than one or two nights. One area of concern that also surfaced during interviews was the difficulty in finding a home without regular employment and the difficulty finding employment without the security of a home. This is a cycle that many of the participants find themselves in.

Ideas on employment included the need for more training programs (through organizations such as the Friendship Centre) and a place where participants can receive phone calls for interviews as well as transportation to interviews when necessary. Participants also believe that the Friendship Centre could serve as a reference for employment and housing.

Provincial work programs and a government-run casual labor office in Saskatoon were also suggested.

The remaining remarks were related to a variety of needs such as food and daily living activities. Comments were made about a healthier daily menu other than soup and sandwiches. They would like to see a variety of foods offered. Another comment was the accessibility of food vouchers. Food vouchers shouldn't be so difficult to access. On the topic of daily living skills one participant stated he could not go home to his reserve because of the methadone program he was on. Therefore, more flexibility in the methadone program would work for him. This particular situation has created a state of homelessness for this person. Another participant shared his frustration in the lack of more shower facilities. This individual would like to be able to do better self care. The homeless participants generally walk to their appointments and a recommendation made was that some of the services should be closer for accessibility. This is especially noticeable during the cold winter months. The last area of concern was the comment on the needed increase in wages to match the cost of living. The participants find it difficult to keep up with the rise in price of housing, food and utilities.

The Aboriginal homeless participants in the study provided a comprehensive list of recommendations for policymakers and service providers. These were:

- lower rent;
- more financial assistance;
- more low income housing;
- less discrimination and judgment from landlords;
- more men's shelters;
- higher rent subsidies and better availability;
- shorter waitlists for affordable housing and treatment centres;
- more safe and clean affordable rental properties;
- more appropriate/applicable affordable housing applications;
- Lower living costs;
- more information about affordable properties and service agencies;
- an advocate to go out with people when they are looking for accommodation;
- more variety in the menu beyond soup and sandwiches;
- more support for people with vision problems in filling out applications;
- more access to food vouchers;
- increase in the minimum wage to keep up with the cost of living;
- less judgment and blame by service providers;
- less judgment from the general public;
- more shelter for couples and families;
- more shelter beds for single men- sectioned off- room for sober people and room for people with addiction;
- more investment in low income housing;
- Bachelor Pads; affordable single men units;
- reduction in stigma surrounding HIV;
- more flexibility for requirements for ID;
- closer locations for certain service agencies;

- more shower facilities for men in more places;
- more flexibility with the methadone program;
- more communication between First Nation government institutions and urban social services;
- anti-gang strategy;
- community based social services;
- support with referrals and references;

4.2 Responses of Agencies

These recommendations were presented to the service providers. The service providers offered the following ideas to address the real needs of the homeless participants.

- lobbying and advocating for the homeless with all levels of government;
- more coordination among organizations
- providing shower vouchers
- showers in both men's and women's facilities
- better integration of services by a newspaper or directory
- centralized service agency map- maybe in the bus depot bulletin board
- neighbourhoods can be more communicative and take responsibility
- abandoned buildings should be renovated to house some of the homeless
- the eastside could help in the homeless situation
- a new definition of "affordable" is needed
- the health inspector should do the inspection with the landlord and social services together
- advocates from faith based organizations
- workshops could be offered to the homeless on understanding ID and credit checks
- pressure political organizations
- core neighbourhood social worker
- more access to transit passes
- Daycare for house hunting
- overnight shelter
- There needs to be a clear statement of what organizations can actually provide. People should not be referred unless one is sure that that agency is really providing the service
- There should be a better understanding between workers and the people they serve.

4.3 Areas for future research

1. We have enough information to assume that addictions are a problem for almost every homeless individual. We really need more research on how the addictions of people who are homeless and addicted can be treated. Presently, agencies that work with the homeless maintain policies which do not allow substance use on the premises. What more could be done to address the basic addictions?
2. What models exist which offer promising success in getting people off the streets and how might they be implemented in Saskatoon?

3. The homeless sample at the SIMFC indicated that less than twenty per cent of the homeless were women. Is this representative of the total population of homeless in Saskatoon or do the homeless women have other places to go or other ways to cope with homelessness?
4. What supports assist the families of the homeless? How are they coping? How can the families be re-integrated?
5. How are those people who are providing support to the hidden homeless coping? What support do these families need to deal with the added pressure of providing for the additional mouths to feed and a person with addictions and other problems in the household?
6. The high percentage of homeless First Nations individuals coming to the Saskatoon Indian and Metis Friendship Centre indicate that services for urban First Nations people are not reaching these individuals. More study is needed into the delivery of services to off-reserve First Nations individuals in Saskatoon.
7. The homeless individuals in Saskatoon are very mobile, moving from city to city. Is there a way to track individuals who are in need of special services between cities? How could First Nations governments be involved? In what ways could a more integrated approach serve the homeless in our midst?

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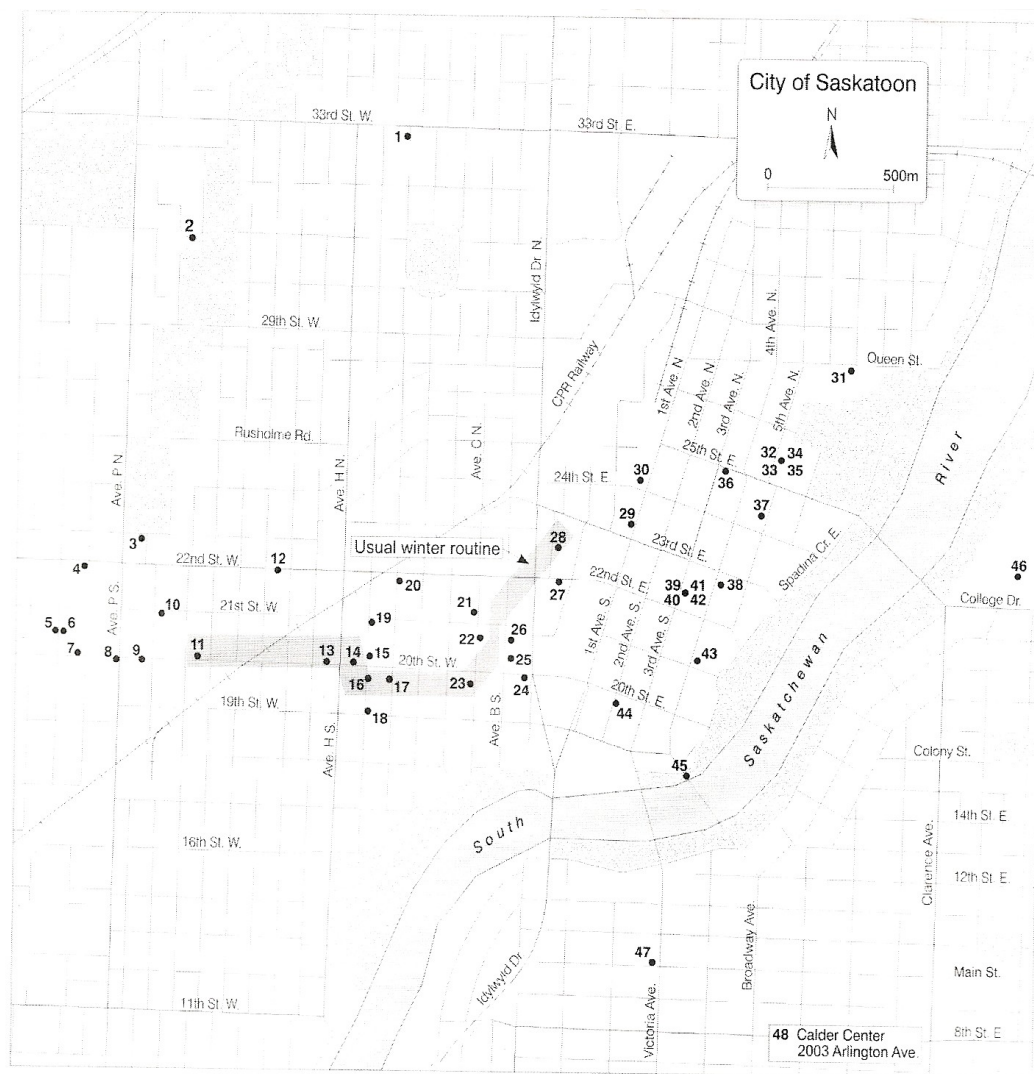
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Resource Locations

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| 1 Aids Saskatoon | 25 Labour Ready |
| 2 Holy Cross Lutheran Church | 26 Aids Network of Saskatoon |
| 3 Native Alliance | 27 YMCA |
| 4 Infinity House | 28 SIMFC |
| 5 Equal Justice | 29 Cansask |
| 6 Quint Development Corporation | 30 Egadz |
| 7 St. Pauls Hospital | 31 City Hospital |
| 8 Love Lives Here | 32 Mobility Crisis |
| 9 Quint Youth Lodge | 33 YWCA |
| 10 Larson House | 34 Saskatoon Sexual Assault & Information Centre |
| 11 The Bridge on 20th | 35 Catholic Family Services |
| 12 Saskatoon Aboriginal Literacy Network | 36 Ombudsman |
| 13 Saskatoon Native Circle Ministry | 37 Saskatoon Housing Authority |
| 14 City Centre Church | 38 Saskatoon Police Services |
| 15 White Buffalo Youth Lodge | 39 Community Addictions Services |
| 16 Westside Clinic | 40 Human Rights |
| 17 Friendship Inn | 41 Rentalsman |
| 18 Metis Addiction Council | 42 Social Services |
| 19 The Rock Church | 43 Sask. Indian Institute of Technology |
| 20 Christ the Healer Gospel Church | 44 The Lighthouse |
| 21 Avenue Community Clinic | 45 Broadway Bridge |
| 22 Food Bank | 46 Royal University Hospital |
| 23 Salvation Army | 47 Interval House |
| 24 Building a Nation | 48 Calder Center |