

Street Life in Edmonton: Stories of Resilience

FINAL Report

A Research Project by:

Paradigm Consultants Ltd. & CIETcanada

Acknowledgements

We would like to express our thanks to our study participants, Harvey, Carole, Dale, Chris, Sam, Clifford, Belle, Beatrice, Steve, Sharon, for telling us what it's like, and to the managers, David, Cecelia, Dave, Bob and Gail, for sharing their thoughts and experiences. Thanks also to Linda Dumont for her advice and assistance; to Carrielynn Lund for conducting and checking the interviews, and working on the report; to Ann MacDonald for transcribing the data, to Evan Whittaker for her editorial assistance, and to the staff of the Boyle McCauley Health Centre for providing space for the interviews. We are grateful to Homeward Trust for funding support.

Funded by the Government of Canada's Homelessness Partnering Strategy through Homeward Trust Edmonton's Community Research Projects funding. The opinions and interpretations in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the Government of Canada or Homeward Trust Edmonton.



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Executive Summary

This research is designed to address the question: ***What are the gaps in current services as identified by individuals over 40 with extensive street experience, and continuing challenges?***

This report is based on interviews with 10 residents of Edmonton, Alberta, who are over 40 years of age, and who have extensive experience of homelessness and living on the street. The results reflect the blend of hardship and resilience, of daily courage and challenge that characterises the high risk of life on the street. Many services are in place and well-used, and the participants appreciate the kindness of many Edmontonians and the City Police. The recommendations reflect the need to strengthen the philosophical shift towards more accepting and non-judgmental approaches.

The study participants were recruited in partnership with Alberta Street News, a local newspaper that many of them sell on street corners. The participants generously shared their stories, guided by the researcher's open-ended questions. Each interview was approximately one hour, and the participant received an honorarium of \$20. The study was funded by Homeward Trust.

Once the interviews were completed, and with the permission of the participants, the data were analysed for themes. This research report is structured around these themes (in italics), including discussion, and related recommendations. The first theme, daily living, illustrated the common pattern of regular routines and priorities in each day. The theme of finding food was not viewed by the participants as a problem because of the wide range of meal providers in the downtown area. For the participants, keeping warm was an accepted part of life in a winter city. They described a full range of income strategies. Other themes, such as finding a place to sleep, emphasized the generosity of Edmontonians who helped with contributions or places to camp. Safety on the street was a constant risk, and participants carried their few possessions in their back packs, and often provided safety for each other in friendship circles. Attitudes towards police were consistently positive. Family support, another theme, revealed complex patterns of relationships, sometimes supportive and sometimes not. Finally, social relationships are a key strategy for support and survival. Each of these themes is described in detail in the full report and illustrated in the stories of the participants. Gaps identified by the participants led to the recommendations from this study:

1. To provide more opportunities/places for gathering together in the day time.
2. To provide day time educational and/or social activities.
3. To re-examine the current housing policy to support shared accommodation.
4. To develop more ways to consult and include street people in policy and program development.

These recommendations were then discussed with five managers of service providing organizations. The insights and observations of the managers generally reinforce and embellish the recommendations.

The principal conclusion of the study is that the persistent gap is the social one; of a homeless person's need for companionship and caring. The recommendations are directed toward filling that gap.

Introduction

In their annual survey in October of 2012 homeward trust volunteers counted 2,174 individuals with no permanent bed to sleep in that night in downtown Edmonton. More than 400 (19%) were over the age of 55. The study participants are the people you see at the doors of markets and supermarkets selling Alberta Street News. They may ask for spare change in parking lots or on the street; some may be napping on a park bench in the summertime. You may notice their tents in the river valley.

Previous studies list many causes for homelessness: Men may mention relationship breakdown, substance use, and transition from institutions (prison, hospital etc.). Homeless women may list physical or mental health problems or escaping a violent relationship, among other things. For youth the causes may include family conflict, severe economic hardship, foster care, prison/juvenile corrections experiences, systemic abuse, substance use in the home, substance use by youth, pregnancy, sexual orientation, unaffordable housing, neglect, and mental illness.

The purpose of this study is to go beyond the causes and gather stories that illustrate the reality of street life. We chose to meet and to listen to older people who have lived on the street for a number of years, to explore with them what their life is like, and what the gaps might be from their point of view.

Structure and Purpose of the Study

This study explored potential opportunities to strengthen policies and programs for older Edmontonians facing continuing challenges on the streets. We collected the stories of ten such people plus the insights of five service delivery managers.

The research question:

What are the gaps in current services as identified by individuals over 40 with extensive street experience, and continuing challenges?

To answer to this question we asked ten individuals to share their experiences in a semi-structured narrative interview format. The interviews were then transcribed, verified with the participants and analysed using the method of qualitative thematic analysis. This form of analysis uses the transcripts as data, and extracts recurrent issues and novel insights to create a cohesive picture. We have clustered participants' quotes to illustrate each of the ten themes. (See Appendix B)

The research team:

The Principal Investigator is John Whittaker, retired professor and senior consultant with Paradigm Consultants Ltd., Edmonton. Nancy Gibson, Senior Researcher with CIETcanada (McGill University) advised on methods, and Carrielynn Lund, an experienced researcher, conducted the interviews and contributed to the analysis and report.

The research process:

The criteria for selecting the ten participants were that they were over 40, and had lived in the inner city for at least five years. Our initial entry to the community was through Linda Dumont of the Alberta Street News. Consequently the majority of the participants had some involvement with that organization. As defined in the original proposal, the participants are “hard core” homeless people who have interacted with current social services and community programs. All participants had experience with sleeping rough, sleeping in the shelters, and interacting with the current social programs.

They are a group of semi-stable and self-aware individuals. Most of them want a better life, but can't see how to get it. They have been surviving on the streets for years. They are not looking for someone to come and rescue them, but they know there is a need for improvement in the quality of their lives. They recognize their limitations and have adapted to them. In the interviews we asked the participants to recount both a good and a bad memory. Their good memories usually involved the friendship and kindness of others. Most of them couldn't recall anything that they would consider a really bad memory.

At the beginning of the research program we developed and piloted a series of open-ended questions. The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The participants reviewed their transcripts if they wanted. The first questions collected baseline data such as age; education, etc. (Please see Appendix A.) Then open-ended questions led to conversations and stories that became the qualitative data, later analysed for the themes. The interviews were conducted by researcher Carrielynn Lund either in private rooms in the Boyle McCauley Health Centre or at the coffee shop at the U of A Campus on Jasper Avenue, comfortable and familiar environments for them. Consent forms were reviewed and signed, and all participants were paid \$20 per session for their time. Most consented to the use of their names, while a few chose pseudonyms. The participants agreed to publication of their stories in this report and in Alberta Street News.

The participants:

Their stories illustrate the many routes to the street. Some people were born there and know no other community; for some of them there is a domino effect - broken relationship led to drinking - drinking led to homelessness - homelessness led to chronic drinking - (not always in this order - many had drug involvement). The term, *multiple diagnoses*, can mask the complexity of these individuals who may have a mental disability or other incapacity, mixed with substance dependency. The table below summarises the participants' demographic backgrounds.

Name	Gender	Age	Aboriginal	In relationship	Current Sleeping Arrangement	Street News Vendor	Years on the Street	Educational Level
Harvey	M	55	Yes	No	SRO	Yes	Life-time	Maybe grade 6
Carole	F	41	Yes	Yes	Rough	No	10+	Maybe Grade 6
Dale	M	57	No	No	SRO	Yes	10+	Grade 11
Chris	M	45	Yes	No (recent widow)	Rough	Yes	23	Grade 8
Sam	M	64	No	No	Shelter	No	40	Grade 10
Clifford	M	63	Yes	No	Rough	Yes	6	2 yr University, heavy equipment operator
Belle	F	54	Yes	Yes	SRO	Yes	15+	Native Adult Instruction Diploma(NAID),

Beatrice	F	54	Yes	Yes	Rough	Yes	35	First year university
Steve	M	44	Yes	Yes	SRO	No	6	Journeyman Autobody tech
Sharon	F	56	Yes	Yes	Shelter	No	10+	Maybe Grade 6

SRO = Single Resident Occupancy

Rough = outdoors in a tent, shelter, car, or box

Although there were only ten participants, the diversity in background and approach was sufficient to dispel any preconceived notion of a “standard street person.” Our group ranged from highly educated to uneducated, from skilled crafters to people with major physical limitations, from middle class origins to poverty and from leaders to followers. Four of the participants were female, and six male. The average age was 53. They are introduced in the following paragraphs. Please see Appendix B for more information about the participants.

Themes from the Data

Although the street people in our study said they are happy most of the time, generalizations about people who live on the street hide the lack of security, their ingenuity, and their strategies for dealing with the complexity of their lives. The narratives were analysed to identify key issues, then we clustered these issues into larger themes using qualitative methods. The themes are not presented in any order or priority, since we found that they are interconnected in the reality of the people’s lives. The numbering is simply for easy reference.

When you are not sure where you will sleep tonight, and you live from your backpack, in an environment where petty theft, assault, and extortion (from other inner city people) are common, and your friends, mates and possibly yourself are either addicted or mentally handicapped, or both, your planning horizon is necessarily only about one day long. Nonetheless, the participants emphasised that they enjoy almost every day.

For this report we returned to the interview data and selected participants’ descriptions to illustrate each theme. Their own words are the best evidence; please see Appendix C for thematically clustered moments from the participants on each of these themes.

1. **Daily living:** A routine that involves earning one’s keep is a key component of daily life. Living on the street can mean camping, sleeping in a shelter, or having occasional access to rental accommodation. This theme brings together a picture of the general structure of a day on the street for these people. Their days include a series of activities relating to getting the money they need to support their addictions, and visits to a range of places to find food. There a sense of routine, with a short day-to-day planning horizon.
2. **Finding food:** Obtaining food is not a problem. Because of the soup kitchens, food banks, kindly grocery and convenience stores and generous citizens, people need not starve on the streets of Edmonton.
3. **Keeping warm:** Edmonton’s weather often looms large in discussions of homelessness; but with these participants it did not seem to be a major concern. They were all from Edmonton or the north, and the weather was just another fact of life.
4. **Income strategies:** Panhandling, carting, picking bottles and selling the Street News are street

peoples' employment strategies. The participants in this study do not see themselves as drunks, or vagrants, or charity cases. Some may receive some form of welfare or medical support as well. They see themselves as people with a range of options. Carting, and bottle picking, pan-handling and selling the Street News are not seen as begging. They are jobs, no different from the jobs the more able sometimes get at Labour Ready or the Bissell labour exchange. And to do these jobs they are up early, mapping out routes for bottle collection, knowing the routines of the city waste collector, and the disposal and recycling habits of the local population.

5. **Places to sleep:** The shelters, a friend's place and often a tent in the river valley can provide a warm refuge for sleep. Sleep is a necessity, and the resourcefulness of many of these hard core homeless people is admirable. Some gaps are evident in this theme, which is divided into three strategies from the data--shelters, camping and homes.
6. **Generosity of Edmontonians:** The hard core homeless are at heart independent and willing to work in a certain way in order to provide for their food and basic needs or habits. Yet many emphasised that the generosity of fellow Edmontonians often makes the day a little easier.
7. **Safety on the street:** The usual perception of personal safety is radically changed when you are always outside and always vulnerable. Actual objects for potential theft are significantly reduced, but all the more precious as everything you own is in a backpack or shopping cart. Friends often watch your back.
8. **Attitude towards police:** Comments on the police were generally mature, respectful and kind. Participants recognized that the police had their job to do, and most of them had a story of an act of kindness from a police officer.
9. **Family support:** Family support is often the cornerstone to the difference between surviving and living. But family support comes with its own complex background, childhood, and emotional issues.
10. **Social Relationships:** The participants stressed the importance of their social circles as the key to a good day. The social circle goes beyond the limitations of each person, with non-judgmental acceptance of the individual regardless of each person's range of personal challenges. This was a key finding. Non-judgmental acceptance of personal complexity can be strengthened and supported in program design.

Discussion

The participants shared a remarkable capacity for endurance. They did not complain, rail against the injustices of the system or, lament their low status. On the whole, they were grateful that they managed to find some joy and happiness in every day. Maintaining, nourishing and sustaining this capacity was their social circle: their friends, partners, buds people who would share their last bottle, give them clean clothes, share their warm place, and whose presence would protect them. When asked for a pleasant memory of street life, every participant recounted some episode involving their social circle, the friendships and sharing.

The social service agencies, Bissell, Boyle, Hope, Refuge, McCauley Senior Drop In Centre (Club 55), Marian Centre and others, provide the basics of life—friends provide the quality of life. This is why these people are classified as “hard to house” – any program that forces them to choose between their friends and their comfort will lose out to the friends. They enjoy the benefits of programs such as Housing First, but if the price of the bed is cutting off your partner or friends, some may choose the street instead, because, as our data illustrate, when you get housing you may have to exclude your friends to protect your apartment.

Institutionalization, through the mental health or the criminal justice system does not work for these people. Their needs are too complex, complicated and varied to be addressed by our compartmentalized caring system. Further, these people know that we do not yet have a supported living system that will accommodate their particular needs and challenges. They get on with carving out a life. They provide for each other with the social, caring, warmth, love and concern that an institutional setting cannot provide or sustain.

It is clear from our interviews that Edmonton has developed a system that looks after the physical person. The food agencies, health centres, drop in places and shelter, look after the body. It is difficult to starve or freeze to death on the Edmonton streets. The hard core homeless have constructed a social system that looks after their souls. Our next steps are to reinforce it rather than undermine that support system. We must allow long established couples to stay together. We must recognize addiction for what it is - a medical problem and not a failure of will. We must explore ways that help the homeless to help each other. Social relationships are key to survival on the street, affirmed by several participants.

I got a lot of homeless friends but they're my true friends now and they won't try to rip you off.

I just love meeting people, they're everything to me. And it's not just about the papers, it's about being in the community and trying to help somebody out, who needs a little bit help, you know, whatever, because I've been through a lot in my life.

I try to buy my own food from bottle picking or panhandling or friends, we help each other, we chip in, buy a little groceries, go have a little picnic. I used to have a frying pan at one time and I used to cook up for everybody. What's for supper, what can we afford to buy? Let's check it out, so we'd end up making stews and whatever we could manage to make, we survived, it was good, it was fun.

I've known them for quite a few years so I feel comfortable with them, I feel safe, but other than that, like I said, I don't travel alone, it's too scary.

I guess drinking with the boys is always probably one of my good memories, I mean – yep, I guess drinking with the boys, you know.

Until the recent arrival of Housing First and harm reduction programs, our participants had no choice but to live on the streets or, at best, in slums. They have accepted that. The accommodation of choice for many is often a camp somewhere in the river valley or the ravines to preserve independence, or life with a friend or partner. To the extent of their abilities, they are ambitious and resourceful people. They have active daily routines and supportive social groups. The social services in Edmonton provide for basic survival needs: food, clothing, and temporary shelter from inclement weather. The street people have proven practices: carting, picking, panhandling, and selling street newspapers, that often provide them with enough money for cigarettes, snacks, and to feed their addictions. Most are generous and sharing with what they have. They respond to acts of kindness with warmth and appreciation.

Positive Approaches

Our services provide for physical, medical and some housing needs. Let us re-examine our programs to support a sustainable quality of life. The major thing that the interviews show was that the service gap is about philosophy and approach. Mike Rowe, the Public Television producer of “Dirty Jobs”, recently gave a TED talk in which he explained how people with really dirty physical jobs have a high level of job satisfaction. http://www.ted.com/talks/mike_rowe_celebrates_dirty_jobs.html

The magazine, The Economist, had an article on the high level of success achieved by an international organization that dealt with poverty by giving money directly to poor people. <http://www.economist.com/news/international/21588385-giving-money-directly-poor-people-works-surprisingly-well-it-cannot-deal>

Portland Oregon managed to transform a squatters' tent city into a Dignity Village where the homeless become citizens. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dignity_Village

The connection between these three examples is responsiveness and imagination: in each instance there was an assumption at the outset that the people involved were rational individuals whom circumstances had presented with a limited range of options, and that when these people were provided with other options, they used them responsibly.

In the Edmonton social programs system there is not a lack of caring or resources, or leadership, but there is a need for more imagination. Every situation presents an opportunity. For example, Edmonton showed imagination in 2006 when confronted with a homeless tent city; they responded with security and sanitary facilities. Our participants had warm memories of their summer in the Edmonton tent city. In contrast Abbotsford BC, when faced with a similar problem, sprayed the tent sites with manure. What if either municipality had gone a bit further, like the City of Portland, and created a “Dignity Village?” To generalize about our participants is impossible; however, there is a range and complexity of challenges - inability to work in a regular job; mental illness (e.g. schizophrenia/bipolar disorder, etc.); addictions; broken relationships (e.g. death of a partner); physical challenges; chronic illness (blind eye, heart condition); a history of family violence; lack of training; lack of family support; lack of impulse

control. The interconnectedness of these factors is part of the street scene, and any solutions must respond to some or all of these elements of reality.

The most important theme in the transcripts was the strength of **social relationships**. Our respondents survive because of their non-judgmental group of friends and family. These are the people that fill their day, provide an essential social link, protect them, nourish them, and share their food, substances, tobacco, money, and sleeping accommodation. One man talked about how his group protected his space at the Herb Jamison. However, others observed that the need for a social circle can also be a problem in the current social housing programs. With a warm, safe place to sleep, it is only natural to share this with your friends. Mental illness and addictions can be challenging to a partner or friend, and put your accommodation at risk. Again, friends provide support that is not available anywhere else.

There's nothing actually hard to comply with, it's just her frame of mind, you know, like do I want to do this, do I want to do that, like keeping appointments that type of thing but that's pretty hard when part of her illness is like clothing disorder, sleeping disorder, all that type of stuff, there's not a lot you can do. And then so when that happens I see that the services are just kind of like faded away from her just because of the illness.

Not just with food but counseling because life is hard out there and sometimes they just need a listening ear.

We also heard of the positive impact of practical programs that put real cash, gift cards, food or clothing, or bus tickets into the hands of street people, without complex application procedures. Short term solutions can help people whose planning horizon is only one day long.

Recommendations

The participants were unanimous in commending the Edmonton agencies and charities for the work that they are doing. Throughout the hours of interviews, we did not hear any criticism of the police, the health, social workers, service providers, the street workers or the volunteers.

Our recommendations, however, come from interrelated observations, that the “hard core” homeless are a community, and that they would like opportunities to sustain the quality of life that is supported by a group of friends, or a partner. The participants’ interview data support the need to explore strategies to recognize and reinforce this sense of community.

1. **Place:** Therefore, our first recommendation is to provide **more opportunities/places for gathering together in the day time**. The environment created at Club 55 is clearly welcoming, as is the Edmonton Public Library. A warm place with showers and laundry facilities, and activity options, for those under 55 is still a gap. Outside spaces, like parks with public washrooms are appreciated.
2. **Activities:** A second recommendation is to develop activities in the inner city that can attract street people in their social circles, and provide educational and/or social activities and entertainment. For example we can increase the introduction of free university level courses, which has been well-received in the past. The writing workshop at the Bissell was well received and well-remembered.
3. **Housing:** The social interactions between the members of this community are deep and enduring. Therefore, another recommendation is the **re-examination of the current housing policy to include partnerships**. Some couples lived in tents or in a car with lots of extra blankets, all winter. Blankets, clothing and food are readily available. When it gets really cold, some couples will panhandle all day till they have enough money for a hotel room for a night. Shelters do not offer joint accommodation for couples. Is a secure, year round camp-ground with toilets and showers a possibility?
4. **Inclusion:** The final recommendation is to develop ways to **include street people in policy and program development**. They are often wise and their experience can lead to more effective and appropriate housing and other programs. As advisors, and as workers in short and longer term programs, street people are an underused and available resource.

The thematic analysis provided the clients’ view of the available services; that of the service providers is another perspective. Once these recommendations were developed, John Whittaker had a series of separate conversations with the managers of five of the agencies with which our participants interact. These conversations reinforced the themes provided by the participants. The notes from the service providers’ conversations are in Appendix D.

Positive strategies that respond to this Edmonton community must be a priority – secure housing where people and couples with addictions and mental illnesses can live safely and securely. Our policies and services can include building a sustainable quality of life as an essential element in our services.

Conclusion

At the outset, we started with the research question:

What are the gaps in current services as identified by individuals over 40 with extensive street experience, and continuing challenges?

The gap remaining is the social one, a person's need for companionship and caring for each other. To the extent permitted by their limited resources and abilities the older homeless have created community. Now it is the obligation of the rest of us to recognize those communities with places, activities, appropriate housing, and including their voice in policy and program development.

References

“HT References” – Formatted with Hanging Indent

Bowpitt, G., P. Dwyer, E. Sundin, & M. Weinstein. (2011). Comparing Men’s and Women’s Experiences of Multiple Exclusion Homelessness. *Social Policy and Society*, 10(4), 537-546.

Appendix A: Pavement Stories: Life on the Streets After 40 Interview Guide

1. Gender/age/what education do you have/how long have you lived in Edmonton?
2. How did you end up living on the street?
3. What is an ordinary day for you?
4. How long has it been this way?
5. Can you tell me a good memory of life on the streets?
6. Can you tell me a bad memory of life on the streets?
7. How do you manage to get food and a place to sleep?
8. Where did you sleep last night?
9. Where do you live now? And with whom?
10. What did you do this morning?
11. Where do you eat?
12. Can you think of any other services that would make life better for you?
13. Do you have a friend or group of friends who help you?
14. Do you have a gathering place in the city?
15. Is there a person outside the city who occasionally supports you somehow or sends you some money?
16. What is your experience with the police? How do they make you feel?
17. If you could learn anything what would it be?
18. Is there anything else you would like to say
19. Do you have any questions to ask me?

Appendix B: In Their Own Words, Introducing the Participants

Harvey

is Edmonton born, raised in foster homes, group homes and juvenile detention centres. He is now writing his life story, to be published in this year's editions of Alberta Street News.

Well even in my story I say I'm no angel because when I used to run away from home when I was a kid and stuff like that, well, I had to steal, I didn't know anything else, but I used to get away with it. Well, you know, a lot of times it was lonely, you know, because we would be wishing, like, we'd be walking down the street and we would see these lights on in a house, a nice yard and things like that, gee, I wish we had that. But then on the other hand, you get so used to living the street life, that at the end of your day of picking and stuff like that, you're happy, you've got food, we've got our drinks, whatever, we've got plenty of water, even though it was pretty hard to keep water in the winter time.

Carole

had complications in her life resulting from incarceration:

Until I met Pete I had two jobs. I had a vehicle. I had a rented house. I had my kids. I lived in a small town. I came to Edmonton. My kids' dad went to jail for the weekend and the boys stayed with me. His uncle came and took them back home and their dad was already on the bus. I couldn't go because I was on probation so I just stayed here so I just met Pete and everything went downhill for me from there.

Dale

is from Edmonton/St Alberta, a taxi owner who also worked for restaurants and volunteered helping the homeless:

When I went to work as security for the warming centers, that was my step into homelessness because people at the time were telling me about this girl that needed help and they wanted to know if there was anything I could do for her. And then when they brought her to me, they introduced us, I just couldn't believe it, like she was mental illness, schizophrenic, off her meds I think for about a year at that time and then I'm looking at myself, I'm saying how could people let someone like her run around loose on the streets. Like, a very special person, talented, and so anyway I put her back in Alberta Hospital and we've been together ever since.

Chris

was a construction worker who came to Edmonton in 1990:

I have nothing but one blanket, and that actually keeps me dry. I got a little bit wet, that one day it came - whoa, did I get soaked then. Wake up just brrrrrrr, cold, especially on the weekend you've got nowhere to go. I usually go to the Farmer's Market on Saturday and Sacred Heart on Sunday. I got a lot of regular people that know me there.

In the winter I sleep in the shelters, even though I don't like them, I have no choice. But that one time CTV did a documentary, I had a Volvo and at least ten or fifteen blankets. I survived all winter then, me

and my ex, my late girlfriend. So I'm used to it. I go bottle picking in the morning before everyone beats you because there's a lot of bottle pickers so you've got to get up early and I go cash in and by that time the liquor store is open. I'm a chronic alcoholic, I buy alcohol, I make sure I buy food too first, then I buy alcohol.

Sam

is a policeman's son:

Ah, my dad was a police man after the World War 2 and then he went back in the army and went to Korea as a military policeman, he's always been in law enforcement. I grew up respecting policemen, always have, except there was that one little time in 1970. I did something stupid and I went to jail for four months but other than that, I have always respected policemen. If I get stopped by them, I am civil to them and it just blows them away that here's this guy with long hair and a beard and he's being polite and it makes me laugh. Thank you sir, you're welcome officer, you know. No, I grew up respecting policemen.

Clifford

was on his way to a career as a social worker:

I've got two years university in Regina ... studying Native Studies, to be a social worker. I'm a cook, I have my Heavy Equipment tickets, I have firefighter tickets but I can't see out of my right eye so that kind of throws everything off kilter, so I sell Alberta Street News. My lady at the time relocated to the Yukon and then from the Yukon we went to Chilliwack so I never came back to return to university. Well I got into a little bit of trouble with the law and from there you know I was put on probation and I couldn't leave BC and so I started to gamble instead of coming back to Regina.

Belle

was a teacher with a Native Studies specialty:

I don't teach anymore because I'm losing my vision and ever since I came to Alberta, my life has changed, totally changed. How I live. I used to be a cook up in camp because I could not teach anymore because of my vision. And after that I had twelve heart attacks and I had a quadruple bypass and I could not go up to camp anymore and so after my twelve heart attacks, I just sell my papers, that's the only thing I have going for me is my papers, and how I meet people. My life has just been incredibly hard. When I was born I was only two pounds and six ounces and so I was born with Wolf-Parkinson-White Syndrome, a condition of the heart and then I developed Stevens-Johnson Syndrome is the result of the high internal combustion and so I've been... and then I had a brain aneurism five months before my twelve heart attacks and I got the operation done. I had a forty percent chance of living with my brain surgery and with the heart surgery I had ten percent chance of living. During the time with my brain surgery I was homeless and I went and slept under this gazebo on 97th Street here in Edmonton and 102A Avenue and I slept there for a couple of months, time to get better. The resources in Edmonton are very minimal for people who are older, I never got any help at all. I had to get out and do it on my own.

Beatrice

feels safer because of her friends in the neighbourhood:

Family breakdown, I lost my parents, depression. I just feel safer with my friends because back home, life is so different, it's long, boring but here on a day to day basis I find different people to hang out with if I get bored and I can just move on, find something to do, whereas in the country, it's not like that. It's very routine but here you can find different things to do, I do anyways. Different people to hang out with.

Steve

acknowledges the challenge of his addictions:

I think because I'm a raging alcoholic and I think that's what caused me to lose some jobs and kind of lose interest in pursuing them. I think the addiction kind of got the better of me in a lot of those instances.

Sharon

was training to be a receptionist and helped with the family business:

I took a receptionist training course in 84/85 and I was also helping my dad, my sisters and I would help our dad because he was blind so we used to have to read to him and be like his secretaries, write out for him, and then he taught me how to dispatch cabs, be a cab dispatcher. I worked in the bar, I was a bartender, barmaid, bouncer and I worked as a clerk at the Bay back home, worked as a flag girl, I just did jobs like that. I was living with my ex for ten and a half years and then he kicked me out and so I stayed with my daughter for a few months and she ended up in gaol so I ended up over at Reach.

Appendix C: Themes from the Data

For this report we returned to the interview data and selected participants' descriptions to illustrate each theme. Their own words are the best evidence.

1. Daily living

This theme brings together a picture of the general structure of a day on the street for these people, as illustrated by their comments:

If I have a drink, that's the first thing I'll take in the morning and then I try to find a washroom to wash up and then I'll start bottle picking or, try to make money anyway, panhandling, or checking out friends and we chip in and we start making the rounds, try to find something to eat.

Ordinary day? Get up, go get coffees for us both, then if she's still sleeping, then I either go, if I had papers, I'd go sell my papers, the street papers or I go panhandling, one of the two, just to get us dinner.

If I don't have papers, we're panhandling, right, or pushing carts, that type of thing. And that goes on all day long.

Pretty early. I'll say we got up this morning about 6:30 and we come down and found the rest of the crew and so we started off there. At ten o'clock we hit the liquor stores and after that it's just, how we bide our time, having a drink or I come to work over here on 103rd and Jasper and the other boys they go down by Sobey's over there. Keeps us going.

First I go for a coffee at the Bissell, I have to go to the drug store, I'm on the methadone programme. And then I just come back here and hang around and go up to people, say hi and just walk to the Bissell or go see my niece, the odd time I go see my mom and that's it, I just walk back and forth.

If I wasn't working, there's a place down the street here called the Friendship Centre for 55 and over, for seniors. I'd go down there play cards, play pool, watch TV, ah do my Pro align. I like doing figure work with my head, keeps the mind sharp.

I wait for the liquor store to open, and if I don't have no money, I go sell these papers.

Like we're not stealing or anything we're actually going out and making a living for ourselves whether we're picking bottles, doing papers, whatever, we're not doing anything against the law.

Well my doctor is here at the Boyle Centre, the Boyle McCauley. I see him once a month. I have an appointment coming up. I do my meds. I sit here all day sometimes. Walk around. When it's raining everyone comes inside.

Just get up at six when you get kicked out of the Hope, the Hope Mission, so then we usually just go over to the Bissell Centre, wait until seven o'clock and have coffee, or else go to the Breakfast Club Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday from seven to nine and then breakfast over at the Hope at eight and then just like I've got appointments to make, I want to go see people at Housing and just whatever I can get done, doctors' appointments, and then you get lunch at the Hope again and so if I'm not doing anything and if I am drinking that day, I'll drink and then go for supper at five and then wait until eight-thirty so there's a lot of waiting, a lot of standing in line. Go have a shower in one of three or four places but a lot of it is just visiting with people, having coffee, you know, coffee or tea, or just walking, go the library, go to the mall.

You get so used to living the street life, that at the end of your day of picking and stuff like that, you're happy, you've got food, we've got our drinks, whatever, we've got plenty of water.

A good memory was at the Bissell Centre down here they asked us to write, they get people involved in activities and one was a writing session and I just decided to sit down there and that was a really good memory because I sat down for the first time and I wrote and I used to write my journals since 1983, in fact I don't know how I kept my book but I still have that book from 1983. And so I wrote an article, a paper, on a lady, what it was like to be a lady on the streets and I titled it "Lady".

2. Finding food:

Obtaining food is not a problem. Because of the soup kitchens, food banks, kindly grocery and convenience stores and generous citizens, people need not starve on the streets of Edmonton. Again, in the participants' words:

In Edmonton you could never, ever starve. You could actually gain weight living in Edmonton and going from soup kitchen to soup kitchen. You eat your breakfast, your lunch and your supper and then you have snacks, which is awesome.

The Breakfast Club, it's a church on 96 and 110A Avenue and it's a Lutheran church and they have breakfast, they serve pancakes, toast, porridge and sometimes they've got pastries or boiled eggs and they have coffee, juice and water, so you get to go over there and you have your breakfast. It's opened until nine o'clock and whatever is left like in the way of toast and pancakes, they put them in bags for the last people, whoever wants it. Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and then you get breakfast over at the Salvation Army at seven-thirty I think until eight-thirty.

I spend I guess a lot of time at the Boyle Street Co-op. I usually go over there for coffee, they have coffee at ten, they have lunch there at 11:30 and then I go over to the Hope Mission, there's a few other agencies around downtown that offer lunches and stuff so I'm never hungry which is good, it's kind of nice.

Usually we're pretty good at feeding ourselves but every once in a while it's like we know some dumpsters where we can go where at a certain time, they put them in the dumpsters and you're standing there with your Pepsi case, here we go. And they give it to you without having to go into the dumpsters. Like some places, one place in St. Albert, every time at a certain time, they get rid of their pastries and we'd be right there, so that was pretty cool. And then some food banks, like they know you're in a tent, they load you up pretty good, so getting food when you're homeless is not that hard, like there's lots of services around that help provide that.

7-11 dumpsters but the same day it expires is the same day they throw it out so if you get there early enough just when they throw it out and then they used to let me use the microwave to heat it up and stuff like that, so like it's still fresh as far as I am concerned.

If you're drunk, The House of Refuge or Hope Mission (paper bags) will feed those kinds of people and when you are addicted like that you are so sick that you need your alcohol sometimes to survive.

But I learned how to survive, at least I try to eat once a day, sometimes I go without eating three or four days, alcohol keeps me alive. Crazy but I got to eat sometimes. I don't know. I think why I like to drink, so I can sleep. I've got insomnia so I'm usually up all night and the mind keeps running and I can't sleep so I drink, I pass out, I have a good sleep. And I wake up three or four in the morning, I can't sleep.

Yeah, we'd use those services, also sometimes it was just too cold to go picking anything, so we would come down here and go to the Soup Man and stuff like that, like House of Refuge, Hope Mission, have meals there. McCauley Drop In, they have meals there, so it's pretty impossible to starve out here, even if you are homeless, it's impossible to starve because there's so many organizations now.

3. Keeping warm:

Edmonton's weather often looms large in discussions of homelessness; but with these participants it did not seem to be a major concern. They were all from Edmonton or the north, and the weather was just another fact of life.

Anybody that's living on the street, if they don't know how to dress, well then they're not a street person. You have to dress accordingly, just like it's minus 40 out, you're not going to go without a jacket, it's that simple. So yeah, like services, when I found that out, that was a blessing. But even that, we were both drinking so that money didn't last very long so we would be back out doing the same thing, picking bottles, sometimes panhandling on the side, you know, but everything was legal, world felt good.

Find air vents and lots of blankets, maybe three blankets, stay warm that way.

Sometimes winter months is, well of course when the wife was alive, we had a small dome tent, it was almost like an igloo, we had blankets over it and everything so it could be minus 40 outside, but we had these little candles in glass, right, we had about four of them going, so it was nice and toasty inside that tent.

And our laundry, we would take it to a laundromat, especially in the wintertime, sitting in a nice warm laundromat and at the same time we're doing our laundry.

I use the Bissell to get clothes, the Bissell Centre, or I go to the Mustard Seed on 105 and 114th or St. Vincent de Paul and there's a church that opened up not too long ago called Father's House and I guess they have clothes there too. And you can go to a few places for coffee, coffee or tea or just to sit and visit or rest.

4. Income strategies:

Panhandling, carting, picking bottles and selling the Street News are street people's employment strategies. A routine that involves earning one's keep is a key component of daily life. Living on the street can mean camping, sleeping in a shelter, or having occasional access to rental accommodation.

The participants in this study do not see themselves as drunks, or vagrants, or charity cases. Some may receive some form of welfare or medical support as well. They see themselves as people with a range of options. Carting, and bottle picking, pan-handling and selling the Street News are not seen as begging. They are jobs, no different from the jobs the more able sometimes get at Labour Ready or the Bissell labour exchange. And to do these jobs they are up early, mapping out routes for bottle collection, knowing the routines of the city waste collector, and the disposal and recycling habits of the local population.

It's where you could ask somebody to return their cart for them and you keep the dollar or the twenty-five cents. There's a lot of pushing carts. If you push forty a day you know you've had a

good day. With me, I'm pretty lucky too because I've been selling papers for about fifteen, sixteen years and then over the years a lot of people know me at Chapters, they know our situation, like I've had times where people just run up to us and just give us \$20. Unbelievable.

We were pretty much self reliant. Like we knew what we had to do and if we didn't get out there doing it, it wasn't going to come to us. That part of survival really meant something. If we didn't go out and do it, we didn't go out picking or whatever, right, it wasn't going to walk to us so this gave us something to look forward to.

I just sell my papers, that's the only thing I have going for me is my papers, and how I meet people. I just love meeting people, they're everything to me. And it's not just about the papers, it's about being in the community and trying to help somebody out, who needs a little bit help, you know, whatever, because I've been through a lot in my life.

I've been a street vendor for about, oh, at least since, Spare Change, Our Voice, now it's Alberta Street News.

I've been here for about 6 years now, maybe around 6 years and it's very hard. Like you know, I never drew welfare. I was working for what do you call these little job opportunities.

A lot of the homeless have their own little territories and a lot of them don't like it when we move in on their territory but most everyone has an understanding like who's there, who's where, that type of thing. Oh yeah, and here in the city, like each area of the city the homeless are different in each area of the city. Like if you're out there you can see it, like each community treats its own homeless in the community and it's quite interesting.

Some people use the temporary labour (eight hours plus travel time) market (Labour Ready) but this involves getting up a five AM and waiting in line for hours for a possible day-long job.

Sometimes I go by Whyte Avenue there, sometimes over by DMO, sometimes over by Tim Horton's, sometimes Southgate, sometimes Northgate, sometimes over here on 149 and Stoney Plain Safeway so I kind of move around a little bit, you know, because if you're in one spot too many days in a row well everybody in that area has already bought the paper so it's only right that you move to a different spot, like you've got people that haven't bought it yet. I had a conversation with Linda this morning, she was talking about this over here on the north side on Saturdays so I'm going to try that out this coming Saturday, something to look forward to, you know, so like it's not boring, I make myself, I tell myself okay, this is something to look forward to. Just like every day I get up and I figure okay where am I going to go today because I never really plan for the next day. First I wake up and then I decide from there.

Ah, in the mornings I usually get up at eight o'clock, go over to the Boyle Street Co-op for a coffee and then I go over to the Hope Mission for breakfast. If I'm not injured I usually give my Bud a call, the person who I'm doing some renovating work for and he usually comes to pick me up at around 11 o'clock and then I go to work at his place helping him doing his renovations. He brings me home and if I get paid I usually go get a six-pack, a pack of smokes, grab my weed, sit at my place and have some beers and smoke a joint and that kind of, I guess that's really my day, I kinda like try to get some work, make some money, buy some beer, some weed, cigarettes and that's my day.

5. Places to sleep:

The shelters, a friend's place and often a tent in the river valley can provide a warm refuge for sleep. Sleep is a necessity, and the resourcefulness of many of these hard core homeless people is admirable. Some gaps are evident in this theme, which is divided into three strategies from the data, shelters, camping and homes:

Shelters:

Wait until five to nine at night and then go over to the Hope Mission and buy myself my little corner. Like we got it set up pretty good there now, like guys will hold a mat for me. I like sleeping in one area, and they'll hold a mat for me so it's pretty good.

Well, see sometimes it would get extremely cold and we would happen to be downtown so yeah, we used Hope Mission, so a couple, like, on the main floor, you sleep head to head, women on this side, guys on this side.

If you can't sleep at the Hope, well you can go to the Spady and if you can't sleep there, if they're full, then you can't do anything, you just walk the streets, go sit in a bus shelter. I had to do that and I went to the Royal Alex Hospital one time and sat there but then you get kicked out there too. So there's really nowhere, you just walk.

I try to avoid the hostels or the shelters. Everybody's farting and got stinking feet, we try to avoid them places. I do go to Club 55, that's where I go and have a shower and change of clothes, also I go to John Howard Society and I get help from them.

Camping:

Ah, well that wasn't the only camp I had, I had another one out on Highway 16, another one on the southside, that was by a ravine. I had quite a few camps actually but you knew how to set it up. Depending on the weather, you just insulate it more, like more blankets over top and when you go picking you always find extra blankets you can throw over a tent right, so you're never out of material. There's always something out there that you can use, especially blankets, pillows, things like that. We just took them to the laundromat, wash them up and then bring them to the tent.

Last night I slept behind that white church didn't know it was going to rain, it really came down. It's the same spot every day. As long as we keep it clean and taking it down. See me and Jacquie, when we pitched our tent, we'd stay like two or three months and then move on. Even if it was across the field, you know, because when you pitch a tent, you just can't pitch it there and keep it there all year round, people are going to complain and everything. Plus with our tent, we usually kept ours pretty clean, take out the garbage every day. Yeah, and take it down by eight o'clock in the morning.

Home:

Oh I sleep at home, because we got involved with the Housing First, now it's with Homeward Trust.

It's actually worked pretty good for me but because of Jacquie's illness, she doesn't usually comply to everything so, well, they did drop her and then her nurse got her into another place just over there, it's the Church of Healing Hearts towards sobriety but right now, it's okay. I still keep an eye on her just because of the neighbourhood and her nurse is working on something for her too to get her into a better place.

I'm with Housing Homeward Trust, I've got a beautiful place but then right now I can't have her over there until she starts breaking certain habits. Oh, like coming and going when she feels like it. She needs to learn how to pick up after herself, stuff like that. See, she spent like 17 years on the street and when I met her, well at first I said okay, you just come stay with me so I can keep an eye on you and see what we could do for you. Put her in Alberta Hospital, then I wound up getting evicted because I was letting her stay with me and then I remember the day I was up to the hospital, was telling her doctor you just wait a few days before so I could get things organized

to get us a place into right, no, the doctor said you want to go now, you can go. So they let her go and I went to my brother's place because I had a tent there and we went and pitched a tent over by Westmount. We were there for about three or four months. People were actually pretty good to us.

Some people you'll never be able to house them because they're so used to being on the street. Then some of them when they do get into a place, guaranteed it will be destroyed within a month or two.

People down here on the streets don't know where I live and I don't want them to know where I live because I used to let people in who are homeless because I have a big heart and I used to get evicted because of them, well this time it's not going to happen.

6. Generosity of Edmontonians

The hard core homeless are at heart independent and willing to work in a certain way in order to provide for their food and basic needs or habits. Yet many emphasised that the generosity of fellow Edmontonians often makes the day a little easier.

This is what Edmontonians are all about. I know about Edmontonians, they will bend over backwards for you. Like my parents' house burned down in 1970 of January 15th. January 15th was a bad day for me and my family. I went to jail the same day that my parents' house burned down and the community of St. Albert, they just bent over backwards helping mom and dad and my two brothers at the time.

All over the city, people in general, because they see us down and out, they see us in a tent, like I've had times when me and Sally in the tent and people drove up and handed us \$20, \$30.

7. Safety on the street

The usual perception of personal safety is radically changed when you are always outside and always vulnerable. Your actual objects of potential theft are significantly reduced, but all the more precious as your backpack or shopping cart is all you have.

When you're living out there you've got to always watch your back

I got Colin, he's a street worker and he is trying do his best to find a residence for us but it's hard sometimes, it's really hard, losing our stuff, you know, we get drunk and fall asleep and lose our baggage, we lose, my sister-in-law she got robbed the other day, just the other day, for her wallet and everything, you know. She had money in her wallet but she went to sleep alone.

If other street people know you have money, you may not be safe. If you have a group of friends, they may watch your back, but if you had a job for the day, or have received cheque, you are at risk.

It's pretty good like you know. I'm with the boys all the time, and they have seizures, and some of them fall down and some of them just shake but I got a phone, I've got the only phone out of the crowd so I stay with them. There's about four men and there's two women and we're always together. But I left them down at the bank, they were going to try and get their bank cards because one was robbed and the other one, who knows, I don't know, it's hectic when you live on the street, you've got to watch yourself every night, got to be careful who you invite into your

camp but it's an all right life you know. That's why we travel four or five together. Because we defend each other.

8. Attitudes towards police

Comments on the police were generally mature, respectful and kind. Participants recognized that the police had their job to do, and most of them had a story of an act of kindness from a police officer.

I did have trouble with the city police once, EPS, had told me, had warned me, next time we catch you with a tent, you're going to receive a large fine, he said, it's illegal, you cannot set up a tent, but you can have a lean-to, but you also have to clean your mess and leave early in the morning. I've had police officers tell me you can stay here because you're keeping it nice and clean so the ones that are getting chased out, you should see some other camp, they're pretty messy. We had a frying pan and everything and we had plenty of wood to make a fire, a little fire, right, not a big fire but a little fire and the one time there this field was open. There were clumps of bushes but basically it was open so the police could drive across there easy. So the late wife and I we were cooking up and we just finished buying of all things pork so the cop comes and asks us, he says, hi, how are you folks tonight. The man cop he was real nice, the lady cop she says, we have to move by the next day. Okay, whatever, so the man cop asks us, he says, well what are you cooking for supper. Pork, of all things, right. So anyways that was good, so I went to sleep, we both went to sleep and then I went panhandling over at the WalMart there and I'd be darned if I didn't see this male cop, he was with his son, he was off duty then, he was going into WalMart, he says, you wait right here, he says, I'll be right back out. Him and his son were going shopping so he come out and he give me a couple of big bags of groceries, like stuff like non-perishables because he knew we had our camp fire, we could cook up things and things like that and he gave me a twenty dollar bill to boot. And he said, you stay in that camp as long as you want, he said, I'm her superior, I will let her know that. Because he said you keep the camp nice and clean, that's what I like, that's the most important thing he said. And he said I was polite, you never refused me your identification or anything, you know, he said you're not hiding obviously. So yeah, he turned out to be a nice police officer, the lady cop I guess maybe she was a rookie compared to him, right, you've got to move in twenty-four hours. He told me, he said, you stay there as long as I'm around he said, you know, but he was a nice police officer so there's good cops and bad cops out there. They're not all bad, there is ones that do have hearts, you know, because I've got this job, right, and this guy's got nothing, but yet he's not stealing or anything, just leave them alone, keep my camp nice and clean.

I've had a lot of drunk in public tickets or open liquor. I don't pay them, I'd rather spend the night in jail, that's all you get. I tried working out fines, one time, and I couldn't do it. I end up doing time anyways, what's the use. I tell them, why give me a ticket, you know I'm not going to pay it, you know.

I don't bother them, they don't bother you, I've done time, you know, but once in a while they come along and make us dump out our beers but really nothing bad.

When they see a back pack on you, they look down on you, they knew that you were homeless and they would keep an eye on you at all times. I would go into a store and people would be watching me and I don't steal anything, not even a candy bar but you would see these eyes looking at you and watching you, every corner that you took, every aisle that you went down, they were watching you and they would watch you until you left the building. had any problems with them, I haven't been in there, maybe half a dozen times, that's about it, I've never really, they've

let me go, only because they're, what do you call them, misdemeanor charges, nothing criminal, usually it's public intoxication or open liquor, stuff like that, or failing to appear, other than that, I got impaired years ago, back in the eighties but other than that, that's about the only criminal charge I've only ever had.

Well, actually I feel good when I see the police around our area, there's a lot of people, like people smoking crack, all the crack-heads around there in that area, some days I don't feel very safe walking out the front door because there's all these crack-heads around. I just like to avoid people like that. To me it's just bad news, I don't want to get involved in their world so it's kind of good to see the cops around, I think.

They're okay, you know, they do their job. On the whole, the policemen are pretty nice, as long as you're obeying the law of course but other than that, they're not bad

Well actually, you know, me and Sally have actually developed some good friendships with EPS and the RCMP. That's what blew me away. Now mind you there's some like, hey, this is the law, guys, we have to do this today, our supervisors are coming down on us, and now we have to come down on you, so that's okay with me. They've got their jobs, they're just like everybody else, we're being a thorn in their ass as well and so it's time to get up and move. And then we got to talk to a lot of EPS and RCMP too. See, when you get a person with mental illness like schizophrenia and stuff like that, what happens when they wind up on the street, they also wind up into drugs too and a lot of people with mental illness will turn to crack cocaine just to get rid of the voices and stuff like that, and then what happens when they're doing the crack, it's counteracting their injections, their medications, so it's not working and then if they've got a compulsive disorder like has, then it's nonstop until you totally crash. Thank God for the ACT workers, they'll come wherever we are, like we could be in a tent in the boonies somewhere, they'll come find us. Of course I always let them know where we are and report our drug use to them and stuff like that too. So it's pretty good.

9. Family support:

Family support is often the cornerstone to the difference between surviving and living. But family support comes with its own complex background, childhood, and emotional issues.

My sister, she helps me a lot. I was thrown out of a 4-story building and she's the one who got me walking again. I took my first steps for her. I had a crutch. She helped me off of that. There have been hard times in my life. There were days I wanted to give up but she wouldn't let me. She's a very special part of my life. She calls me mom cause I raised her cause my mom's an alcoholic. I could go up to Fort Vermillion, live with my sister or I could go to Regina and stay with my daughter, you know, I don't want to put any pressure on them you know.

Basically the best people that can help me are my parents and when they're in town I always call them up every week to see how they're doing and say hello and sometimes I go over there to have dinner or something, go over there for a visit, so I always like when they're in town just to communicate with them.

10. Social Relationships

The participants stressed the importance of their social circles, as the key to a good day. The social circle goes beyond the limitations of each person with non-judgmental acceptance of the individual, regardless of each person's range of personal challenges. This was a key finding: Our services are often designed to

respond to the need of a specific gender, age group or addiction. Non-judgmental acceptance of personal complexity can be strengthened and supported in program design.

Like a lot of people that are homeless actually work in teams. Two or three, well your partner. I've seen guys, like two or three guys, they're all working together and then they pool together whatever they got and then they make their decisions from there. It's not like somebody gets \$2 and goes spends it right away, like it's a job, when you make up some money, try and keep everything you can during the day so you know how much you've got at night so you can kind of half ass plan your evening or your next day.

I got a lot of homeless friends but they're my true friends now and they won't try to rip you off. There's a lot of people that will try to rip you off and steal off you, even though you're homeless. I got quite a few good friends, yeah, would never do that.

Yeah, I got to meet a lot of good people. The people down here realize you know you just mind your own business and you treat people with respect and you'll get respect back and it's good this way because you get to see people helping other people. If they have something that they can't use or they think that you could use then they'll give it to you and then they'll help, they helped me to know where to go for help and so they're pretty good.

When I went to work as security for the warming centers, that was my step into homelessness because people at the time were telling me about this girl that needed help and they wanted to know if there was anything I could do for her. And then when they brought her to me, they introduced us, I just couldn't believe it, like she was mental illness, schizophrenic, off her meds I think for about a year at that time and then I'm looking at myself, I'm saying how could people let someone like her run around loose on the streets. Like, a very special person, talented, and so anyway I put her back in Alberta Hospital and we've been together ever since, ten years now. A good memory? Every time I'm with my partner, that's a good memory. We count on each other. We probably had more good times than bad times because that's the way we wanted it, that's the way we made it, right.

I recently lost my girlfriend of fourteen years. I still can't believe it.

There are some good people that I would associate with on a daily basis and there's other people that if you got 5 bucks in your pocket, they'll want that. You know, they'll BS you the best they can to try to convince you that they're your friend but I've been down here for so long that I can more or less tell who's telling the truth or who wants, who wants to get in my pocket.

Appendix D: Response to the Research by Service Providers

The Service Providers

The thematic analysis provided the clients' view of the available services; that of the service providers is another. Once the recommendations were developed, John Whittaker had a series of separate conversations with the managers of five of the agencies with which our participants interacted. The basis of the conversations were the four recommendations and for each recommendation the managers were asked the following three questions:

1. What do you think of the recommendations?
2. How can they be best achieved?
3. What else would you suggest?

As with the previous interviews, ethical protocols were observed and each manager was provided with the opportunity to review and approve Dr. Whittaker's notes from the conversation.

In alphabetical order, the people and their agencies were:

David Berger, Deputy Executive Director of *Boyle Street Community Services*. Boyle Street Community Services began as a street-front agency in Edmonton's inner city in 1971. Since then, BSCS has helped many people meet basic needs, develop life skills, and better engage with the larger community. The mission of Boyle Street Community Services is to build and provide community support for people with multiple barriers to inclusion.

Cecelia Blasetti, Executive Director of *Boyle McCauley Health Centre*. BMHC is the only non-profit community owned and operated health centre in Edmonton and area. Their team strives to strengthen community by improving health and saving lives.

Dave Martyshuk, CEO of *Martyshuk Housing*. Martyshuk Housing specializes in housing individuals who are homeless or at-risk of becoming homeless.

Bob Vandergriff, *House of Refuge Mission Board Member - Gospel Minister*. The House of Refuge's Mission is to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, and to minister to those in need of physical, emotional and spiritual support.

Gail Sopkow, Executive Director, *Operation Friendship Seniors Society*. The Society's mission is to offer services to improve the quality of life of clients who are seniors in need over 55 years of age.

Comments and Reflections of Service Providers

Recommendation #1 Place:

More places for gathering together in the day time, especially for those under 55.

Mr. Berger:

Yes, but you could possibly look at segmenting the population even more. Two very underserved groups in this regard are the “at risk youth” and “women.” Women, especially are an underserved population.

Also we have homeless people all over the city—not just in the inner city. We are finding with our bus that we serve many of the city’s neighborhoods. There is a need for places all over the city.

Ms. Blasetti:

Yes, but there is also a need for choices in what kind of service works best for people. Some individuals are very vulnerable and they are intimidated by the big centres like the Boyle and the Bissell. Very large drop in centres can be overwhelming, particularly for those with mental health issues.

Mr. Martyshuk:

There should be more to do in the evening! The current situation has people in the existing centres to keep warm but with little to do except drink coffee. The difficulty of thinking where and how they will sleep that night increases the anxiety with the consequence that they become seriously sleep deprived. Obviously we need more drop in centres. But they should be 24 hour centres with some activities.

This could be accomplished by imaginative use of existing resources. We have 2000+ homeless people sleeping in garages and empty houses while we let the Inglewood Hospital building decay. Why don’t we pay the churches to open their basements and staff the places or use the closed schools? Medicine Hat has just converted a school site into a drop in-centre. Martyshuk Housing was also involved in advising the Vancouver East End and points to the Woodward’s Building as an example of what can happen when imagination is allowed.

Change could also be achieved by taking a more reasonable interpretation to building and fire codes. In the past Martyshuk Housing operated a series of group homes that had been produced from residential houses. It had to close these because the ½” drywall construction did not meet the fire code for Group Homes and the cost of renovation to 5/8” drywall made the projects uneconomic. The fire authorities were not interested in talking about staged plans or anything except strict adherence to the code. Consequently the houses were closed and the people went back in the garages, empty houses and riverbank camps.

Ms. Sopkow:

I cannot answer this for people under 55 because our mission is to provide services for those over 55. However, speaking for our client group which is people over 55 the lack of services is partially caused because people of the streets feel ostracized by the normal (SAGE and such like) services. They are not comfortable in those places and so go to the drop-ins like the Bissel, the Boyle and the Mustard Seed. Our Drop-in centre operates seven days a week, from 8 AM until 6:30 PM

Mr. Vandergrift :

I think it is a great recommendation. They don’t want to feel totally rejected by society. However it is going to require a lot of money and dedication. In our efforts to rebuild our mission after the fire we are running into major stumbling-blocks with respect to city regulations and zoning requirements. It seems that right now the city’s revitalization plans do not encompass the ancient dictum, “We are our Brother’s Keeper.”

In this area, the practices and methods of Dwayne's Home (Harm reduction) were a very positive step.

Recommendation #2 Activities:

Develop activities in the inner city that can attract street people in their social circles

Mr. Berger:

Yes, especially because gathering places are the places where things start. They are the entry points to drop-in services and mental health services. More opportunities for gathering mean more opportunities for listening, for counseling, for therapy. Relationship is where things start.

This is a delicate situation because activity centres are sometimes overwhelmed by people whose addictions are still acute and by people who are still in early survival mode. At Boyle they develop activities and trained staff so that the centre can become a path to mental health and addiction services.

There is a shortage of bathrooms and showers and laundry facilities. In the past such provisions were discouraged as they were viewed as enabling—that attitude is now changing.

Ms. Blasetti:

The homeless are different groups and these groups have specific needs. For example, when we had the funds to keep the Spady Centre open during the day there was a small group of people with mental issues that used to meet there daily. There was time and space for games like cribbage and for informal opportunities to meet people. Similarly, we get a special group at Kindred House (a safe house and resource centre for women and transgendered individuals who are involved in street prostitution that provides a place to enjoy rest and respite from the street in a non-judgmental and caring environment). Meals are provided and women can also access Student Legal Services, STI nurses and other services on-site.

The homeless also need access to quiet spaces where there are special things like computers. These are becoming very important means of contact between people. The Edmonton Public Library is to be commended for its work but we need more, especially on the weekends.

Ms. Sopkow:

At our centre we have wrap around services. We provide 3 meals and two snacks a day, showers, laundry, haircuts, trim your toe nails, some clothing, and a transportation service that will get you to a doctor's appointment, a trip to the bank, or a meeting with some government agency. In addition we have workers who will help you to fill out welfare applications, get government ID, file for pensions, and GST refunds; and we have a worker who will help you get into housing. We also manage 350 housing units, and provide homecare services. Here at the center we have some computers, pool tables, and bingos. We also organize dances and some outings.

We have been in operation since 1969 and have grown to include all these services by being responsive to our clients needs. We see a gap, and we endeavor to fill it.

Yes, we think there is a need to expand these services and offer more—but the obstacles are real and formidable. The City's moratorium on new non-market housing has created difficulties to expansion, and the general government cutbacks on operating funds makes even the maintenance of current services challenging.

For example, we have several funders, each wanting their own reporting cycle, with specialized reports delivered using their own propriety software. But there is rarely in any operating budget an allowance for

the highly trained people to produce these reports and accounts. Similarly, procedure and control systems designed for large organizations can be burdensome and often irrelevant in a small operation such as Operation Friendship

Mr. Vandergrift :

The House of Refuge is a mission and it's central theme is "to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ" and to help people "be educated and experience the life-changing benefits of prayer through Jesus".

Recommendation #3 Housing:

Re-examination of the current housing policy to include partnerships.

Mr. Berger:

David described an experience where the John Howard Society had a group of five mentally challenged people living together in a house as a congregant group. Apparently they functioned well with little management intervention despite having to transfer to a different house.

He recognized the security of the "pod" and observed that in their experience with housing first there was a problem with the human dimension. Although the program provided people with physical security and comforts, they were not able to provide the comfort, companionship, and relationship that the pod on the street had. As a consequence, people are warm, housed and bored out of their minds.

This problem becomes especially acute when the person "graduates" from housing first and the services of the personal support worker are withdrawn.

Also mentioned was the anxiety and fear that some people experienced when transitioning from survival mode on the streets to confronting the infrastructure of the middle class—like being frightened and overwhelmed and not knowing what to do in a super market.

Ms Blasetti:

Accommodation shared with a partner is really important. The current housing policy that splits up partnerships does not recognize the wishes and reality of the social grouping on the street. It sometime appears little more that an attempt to lay middle class values onto the poor and disadvantaged.

I think it is possibly a bias embedded within the question. A homeless person may be asked whether they want a place of their own, or do they want to live in a communal accommodation situation. The alternative of living with a longstanding partner is not presented.

Mr. Martyshuk:

When you have a group of people living on the street who interact as a semi-stable group or pod , why not lease a house for the pod and bring in supports for the group? You can't just focus on an individual. This is a self supporting group who support each other-- If you house one, the others will be invited to follow resulting in an untenable situation, and usually the eviction of the one initially housed. Also, treating only the individual is to ignore a major resource which is the control by the group. At Martyshuk Housing we classify our clients as to disability and exhibited behavior, and then we mix them. It is our experience that, given the proper controls, the quiet, less disabled, will provide a moderating influence on the whole.

Mr. Vandergrift :

There must be regulations and they must be enforced. There must be some control...and these people understand it. They are intelligent and they can comprehend what happens when rules are broken.

Ms. Sopkow:

There is a learning phase that some people have to go through as they journey from the street to permanent housing. Sometimes they have to decide what is important in their lives—their group or a safe secure environment. We have a spectrum of housing options ranging from apartments with no supports to rooming houses where tenants are in clusters of four to full support seniors' lodges. Our experience has been that once you have a stable building or cluster, the tenants themselves take on responsibility for keeping it functioning. We rarely evict people and then only for nonpayment of rent, or for violent behavior, and we allow them to reapply after three months. Our lodges have 24 hour staffing, and the other buildings are monitored through the night by a security company.

Recommendation #4 Inclusion:

Include street people in policy and program development

Mr. Berger:

It is axiomatic to include people in program development.

Ms Blasetti:

Consulting the people is very important.

Mr. Martyshuk:

Yeah – that wouldn't be a bad idea. It would probably be good for building regulators to actually meet with the people their regulations affect. They might learn that although, it is nice to be fireproof, it is also nice to be warm.

They should also know that the knowledge and experience these people have is valuable. Many of Martyshuk Housing's employees were former street people.

Ms. Sopkow:

We are able to do this for programs by holding monthly tenant meetings at each site, plus we yearly hold a satisfaction survey. Any input to policy would have to be either by talking to a board member, or speaking up at the AGM.

Mr. Vandergrift :

I think that this would be a great idea and should be implemented. Many people on the boards and groups that work to help the homeless have never been there. They don't realize that it sometimes only takes one bad turn to put someone on the streets. Putting some street people into the policy roles will help them in their self-esteem and purpose. Only this will help to break the stigma and stereotype of who people think they are.