COMMUNITY BASED SENSE OF HOME RESEARCH PROJECT

THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOME

Insights gained from the lived experiences of Indigenous people facing homelessness in Kenora

NeChee Friendship Centre

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Ne-Chee Friendship Centre (NFC) Community Based Sense of Home (CBSH) research project conducted in Kenora, Ontario engaged community partners and people with lived experience of homelessness in conversations about localized perspectives on the meaning of 'home'. In addition to particular housing needs, the project explored how urban Indigenous community members experience homelessness in relation to culturally and geographically specific definitions of home.

As an urban Indigenous organization, the NFC was well positioned to understand and respond to the self-voiced needs and priorities of those experiencing homelessness in Kenora. For 44 years, the NFC and other Friendship Centres in Ontario have been practising and delivering a responsive and wholistic continuum of services in urban contexts. In addition, NFC programs and activities have been shaped by the local cultures and the composition of the NFC staff reflect the Indigenous Nations in the territory.

The NFC CBSH Research Team focused on the best ways to use the research process to develop and implement community-driven solutions to address homelessness at a local level. We engaged with over 80 community members who were experiencing homelessness, were at risk of homelessness, and precariously or unsafely housed. The intent of this was to obtain their perspective and input into an understanding of "home", into barriers to obtaining housing, and support services required.

Through learning from the expertise of Indigenous people in Kenora with lived experience of homelessness, this self-voiced report provides a summary and analysis of the responses received and data collected. The findings indicate that for Indigenous homeless people in Kenora, home is more than a building/shelter. A place to live should be affordable, sustainable and linked to the ability to access support services as needed. A sense of safety is paramount, and 'home' was seen as a gathering space for family and friends.

The findings reinforce the limitations of using exclusively mainstream service approaches and methods to assess and determine appropriate responses to the needs of Indigenous people experiencing homelessness in Kenora. Identified barriers to accessing housing included high costs, long waiting lists for social housing, as well as a lack of mental health and addiction support services. In addition, the findings suggest a need for greater coordination amongst mainstream services (e.g.: housing, mental health, employment, social services, etc.).

For the aforesaid coordination to properly respond to the needs identified by Indigenous people experiencing homelessness in Kenora, a more focused, localized, urban Indigenous lens is needed. In addition to the hard reality of building and/or making available more housing options, solutions require wholistic, support services led by those that work with this population. These services should increase access to affordable, safe and supportive housing units and increase access to culturally sensitive addiction and mental health services – including after hours services.

Through offering the reader an opportunity to connect with the lived experiences of Kenora's Indigenous homeless population, it is hoped that this research offering makes a positive contribution to increasing the community's ability to find a responsive solution to the issue of homelessness.

INTRODUCTION

The city of Kenora is situated on beautiful Lake of the Woods located within the traditional territory (Treaty #3) of the Anishinaabe. The old saying, 'There's no place like home', resonates true for over 61 of the Indigenous people experiencing homelessness we met within Kenora considering that 41% considered Kenora home and 77% are within their traditional territory. Current socio-economic factors such as high costs of housing, low vacancy rates, and worldview tensions between the Indigenous and settler population make it extremely difficult for our community members who are homeless and 'living rough' in Kenora to access adequate housing.

In Kenora, there is currently a lack of coordinated, community driven, Indigenous designed and implemented support systems that can appropriately address the complex issues that lead to Indigenous homelessness. For workable solutions to be found, it is imperative that all community stakeholders in Kenora work together to clarify their shared and individual responsibilities in a way that more directly responds to the needs of this population. The NFC as an urban Indigenous organization is well positioned with respect to understanding and responding to the self-voiced needs and priorities of those experiencing homelessness in Kenora. As a result of a long and sustained presence in the community, the NFC has built trusting grassroots relationships through serving and interacting with this population. The NFC is 44 years old and continues to grow. Ne-Chee translates from Anishinaabemowin to "a close friend or brother" and the organization which is one of the 29 Friendship Centres in Ontario that were created to respond to the community-

driven needs of urban Indigenous people in Ontario.

This research report begins with providing some contextual background about the origins of the research project and a brief overview of the current housing/homelessness realities in the city of Kenora. After the intent of the research project is explained from the perspective of the NFC, the methodology and accompanying methods that were used throughout the project are described. Next, the research results and analysis are presented in a way which gives meaning to participants' 'sense of home' in the past, present and in the future. The report concludes with a broader discussion about the findings and some recommendations.

BACKGROUND

The Ne-Chee Friendship Centre (NFC) was one of two communities who collaborated with the Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centre (OFIFC) to conduct the local community driven "Community Based Sense of Home" research project. The second community involved in the project was the Ottawa Aboriginal Coalition.[1]

Before applying for funding, discussions with Traditional Knowledge Keepers who work within Friendship Centre communities in Ontario revealed a culture based framework for the research at the proposal stage called *Tsi: iakwanakere*. *Tsi: iakwanakere* is a Kanien'kehá:ka word for building a community based sense of home. It is rooted in the older concept of *Tsi: ionkwatahskwarn:nion* referring to a deep and unconditionally safe sense of home. This is significant in the sense that a shift from a deficit-based approach (homelessness) to a strength based one (community based sense of home) was present before the respective research project unfolded. This approach allowed for needs around housing to be self-voiced by urban Indigenous community members (rather than assumed externally), including those with lived experience of homelessness. Culture-based frameworks rooted in Indigenous Knowledge about 'home' can reveal wise practices that improve community relations and uncover systemic influences that perpetuate urban Indigenous homelessness.

An Indigenous definition of homelessness was established by the Aboriginal Standing Committee on Housing and Homelessness (2012) which described the experiences of Indigenous people. Homelessness

[1] More information about OAC's research project can be found at: https://www.ottawaaboriginalcoalition.ca/homelessness-project

is, "…more fully described and understood through a composite lens of Indigenous worldviews. These included: individuals, families and communities isolated from their relationships to land, water, place, family, kin, each other, animals, cultures, languages and identities. Importantly, Indigenous people experiencing these kinds of homelessness cannot culturally, spiritually, emotionally or physically reconnect with their Indigeneity or lost relationships." (Aboriginal Standing Committee on Housing and Homelessness, 2012). The definition does not only determine an individual or family's relationship with a physical shelter, but rather determines both the individual and collective relationship with a confluence of spiritual, ecological, social, historical, and political factors caused by the processes of ongoing settler colonialism (Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centers, 2018; Thistle, 2017).

Within the paradigm of ongoing settler colonialism, the challenges for culturally safe practices addressing Indigenous homelessness include ongoing geographic displacement, marginalization, and surveillance in urban environments; criminalization of mental health and addiction; racist exclusion from urban rental markets; and everyday oppressions and micro-aggressions in interactions with urban settler service institutions (Belanger, 2012; Bird et al., 2013; Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centers, 2018; Walsh et al., 2013). Christensen (2013) described these pathways as more than just the binary effect of "shelter and no shelter" but rather signified both the individual and collective physical, social, spiritual, financial, and political violence associated with a lack of emplacement. In essence, current 'post-colonial' approaches continue to perpetuate a colonial mindset through piecemeal approaches to policy and programs, a lack of recognition for urban Indigenous self-determination and state paternalism.

Cultural safety and security, in particular, is defined by Indigenous Knowledge Keepers as practices that are historically informed, safe, equitable, respectful, caring, and do not undermine, diminish, or demean the cultural identity of an individual or collective (Bird et al., 2013, pp. 6–8). Among Indigenous communities, cultural safety in housing provision includes sovereignty over the design, location and provision of a home, a healthy home ecology, and a sense of safety and security that does not transform into surveillance and/ or discriminatory policing. Specific to the service delivery aspects of urban Indigenous housing and homelessness, principles of cultural safety and sovereignty also include development, delivery and evaluation of housing programs for urban Indigenous people by urban Indigenous housing and service providers.

CITY OF KENORA'S HOUSING & HOMELESSNESS REALITY IN 2018

Kenora District Service Board (KDSB) executed its first Homelessness Enumeration in 2018. The finding of 393 individuals (223 in Kenora) found homeless is concerning as the results are one of highest rates of homelessness in the Province.

For the District of Kenora, 90% of homeless individuals surveyed self-identified as Indigenous.

Through KDSB's 2018's findings, it is demonstrated that homeless is a complex issue with many facets such as trauma, addictions and mental health challenges. It has also been unequivocally demonstrated that the lack of safe, adequate and affordable housing in the Kenora District's Municipalities has a significant impact on the ability to achieve other health, justice, education, and employment outcomes.

Addressing housing needs across the Kenora District is the key to life stabilization and community safety and well-being planning.

These excerpts from the Kenora District Service Board (KDSB) Annual Report – A Place for Everyone" (KDSB, 2018) provide some insight into Kenora's housing and homelessness situation.

These findings are even more significant when one considers Kenora's current high housing costs, low vacancy rates and long waiting lists for social housing. "The KDSB reported that between 2014 and 2015, the waiting list for rent-geared-to-income housing in the District surged by 121 percent" (KDSB, 2018). It was also noted that combination of high rental rates in private developments and a long waiting list for social housing, creates higher risks of homelessness, particularly for low income households (2018).

On the positive side, there are new social and supportive housing developments earmarked for Kenora including a $4.5 Million investment in supportive housing through Ontario Aboriginal Housing Services, a bail bed facility, a remand centre, and reforms to probation and parole. That said, demand for adequate housing and treatment options will likely continue to far outpace need in Kenora into the foreseeable future. It will also take significant time and effort to stabilize these new initiatives (including the proper application of an Indigenous lens that can respond more directly to the self-voiced concerns of Indigenous people experiencing homelessness). Furthermore, in Kenora as a whole, staff recruitment and retention are major challenges due in part to lack of affordability and low-vacancy rates. While KDSB has a good handle on overall situation, it remains unacceptable that 90% of Kenora's homeless population are Indigenous. This emphasizes the need for Indigenous led solutions that include an Indigenous housing/homelessness lens and more active Indigenous homelessness/housing leads. Responsibilities of these leads could include the development and implementation of a community-driven plan which wholistically responds to housing needs through the greater inclusion of culture-based program supports.

INTENT OF THIS RESEARCH PROJECT

With the goal of being able to better serve Indigenous people experiencing homelessness in Kenora, the NFC wanted to: understand more about urban Indigenous perspectives on what 'home' means; learn about the barriers Indigenous people experience in making a home; and better understand the supports Indigenous people in Kenora need to find and maintain a sense of home.

While engaging with members of our community experiencing homelessness, we intended to simultaneously expose these research participants to the wide variety of support services provided through the NFC and/or their community partners. Insofar as it presents an opportunity to more directly meet the needs of the Indigenous population experiencing homelessness in Kenora, it was the intent of the NFC to remain open to partnering and sharing responsibilities with other community service providers during this research project and beyond.

Finally, NFC's CBSH research project aimed to ensure the views of the Indigenous community members with lived experience are heard. It is hoped that the knowledge gained from their experience will help assist community members and decision makers in informing the future planning and implementation of culturally appropriate housing support services. In the longer term, it is hoped that the insights gained will ripple out to have positive impacts within Indigenous community and the community of Kenora as a whole.

METHODOLOGY

Indigenous research processes are "organic and responsive to their geographical context" (Absolon, 2011). NFC's grassroots relationships within the urban Indigenous community in Kenora, coupled with its experience in delivering a continuum of wholistic programs and services, was central to genuinely engaging this often hard to reach population.

This project was ethically grounded in the OFIFC's USAI Research Framework (2016, 2nd Ed.) and the NFC CBSH Research Team utilized this Framework as its methodological foundation. Ethical 'groundedness' in community-driven research originates in the strength of the relationships between those doing the research and research participants. In Kenora, this ethical 'groundedness' arose from NFC's numerous pre-existing interactions with Indigenous homeless people through the continuum of programs and services that they offer. Utilizing USAI ensured that identified factors such as barriers to housing, necessary supports and the meaning of 'home' were self-voiced by the Indigenous community members with lived experience of homelessness.

Developed by the OFIFC in consultation with Traditional Knowledge Keepers and endorsed by 29 Friendship Centres in Ontario, USAI is particularly useful when applied in urban Indigenous contexts. USAI has broad based principles that are congruent within Indigenous traditional value systems. This allows for a responsive research implementation plan which is often necessary in the facilitation of a community driven approach. USAI is responsive to community needs within the research project rather than reactive. Recognizing what is relevant in a 'moment

in time' involves mindfully considering locally accumulated relevant Indigenous knowledge of the past and applying it in ways that are useful within contemporary contexts.

As a methodology, USAI effectiveness stems from the very deliberate consideration of the community-driven aspect of the research project. Resulting from the implementation of USAI as the methodological approach, this research project was able to incorporate the flexibility necessary to account for any changes in methods of engagement that occurred during the research process. Allowing for this flexibility acts as a safeguard to ensure that conceptual elements in research design continue to align with what is happening 'on the ground' in the community.

For this project, the Indigenous community driven lens/methodology described above was applied across all research activities. Examples of these activities included: a review of recent Indigenous Homeless/ Housing studies and best practice models; engagement with front line Service Providers to gain their perspective into types of housing challenges experienced by Indigenous people; recruitment and training of Community Based Researchers (which included orientation and training on the concept and application of USAI and specific NFC CBSH research project operational procedures, goals, work-plan and tools to enhance their skills and confidence level); and engagement with Kenora's homeless, precariously or unsafely housed via individual interviews, sharing circles, an interactive group exercise, survey administration, unstructured conversations, art expression and video filming.

METHODS

The NFC CBSH Research Team incorporated a variety of community driven methods to obtain first-hand input and participation from Indigenous people in Kenora who were currently homeless, at risk of being homeless or were living in housing that is not adequate in terms of safety, affordability and/or state of repair. Local service providers that support the homelessness population and some NFC program participants (e.g. long-term care) were engaged in the earlier stages of the project, primarily through individual interviews and focus groups. This information proved valuable content in helping to further substantiate other aspects of home that accompany a physical structure. These insights are highlighted in the next section of this report under the subheading: *Urban Indigenous Community Based Sense of Home: Local Context.*

Central to this study was the design and delivery of a three part survey that asked those experiencing some form of homelessness to talk about 'home' in the past, present and future.[2] Methods used are described below with respect to survey development, survey delivery, analysis and "completing the research circle".

[2] For further inquiries about the design and delivery of the survey, please contact an NFC CBSH Research Team member through the NFC.

Survey Development:

Utilizing grassroots knowledge from their accumulated experiences of relating to Indigenous people experiencing homelessness in Kenora, NFC Executive Director and NFC Staff worked with the NFC CBSH Research Team to determine the intent and content of the survey. It was noted that the perceptions and attitudes pertaining to Indigenous people in Kenora experiencing homelessness were essentially described with the question, "Why don't they go home?". This contrasted with the perceptions and attitudes of 'homeless' people who largely felt that they were home. Discussions also highlighted the need to gain more information about what jurisdictions homelessness people were coming from, why they chose Kenora and the circumstances that led them there. From these initial discussions, it was also determined that self-voiced considerations from this population would be most useful because this would guide and shape how NFC would do their housing planning in the future. Essentially, NFC front-line staff wanted to add to their expertise regarding urban Indigenous homelessness realities in Kenora through gaining more understanding about participants' sense of home in the past, present and future. In addition, the survey process was designed in a way to gain insight into this population for the benefit of garnering greater understanding within the Indigenous community in Kenora, and greater awareness about the complexities of this situation within the mainstream.

The survey was divided into 3 phases that asked participants about their sense of home in the past, present and future. In Indigenous contexts, reciprocity is important and asking for something without giving something in return violates this principle. Therefore, a small incentive (gift card) was given after each phase to acknowledge the valuable information that participants provided. An art based activity was incorporated into the survey, providing an opportunity to express their community based sense of home in creative ways (illustration, diagram etc.) Before the survey was delivered to participants, members of the NFC CBSH Research team piloted it, which resulted in some further minor adjustments.

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Survey Delivery:

NFC's knowledge of the urban Indigenous population in Kenora and their relationships with those experiencing homelessness within this population was leveraged in the survey delivery process. With the privacy of participants in mind, the recruitment process was discreet in that no posters or other advertisements were used. Recruitment was direct and the NFC CBSH Research Team and NFC staff met participants where they were at on the streets of Kenora. From there, awareness about the research study spread by word of mouth in the homeless community congruent with the snowball sampling method (Johnson, 2014). Snowball sampling is a well known, non-probability method of survey sample selection that is commonly used to locate a hidden population. This method relies on referrals from initially contacted respondents to other persons in the targeted community.

The surveys were conducted in such a way that allowed for the flexibility necessary to adapt to participants' needs. Since it was not feasible to have a 1-2 hour collective group discussion, individual interviews were conducted in 3 phases. Already having familiarity with the community, and relationships with the client group participating, adjustments to the survey delivery were made organically and were tailored to match participants needs at every phase. Also, of note, safety was prioritized in that interviews were not conducted past 2:00pm each day and *Anishinaabemowin* speakers from the Research Team increased the comfort level of older participants.
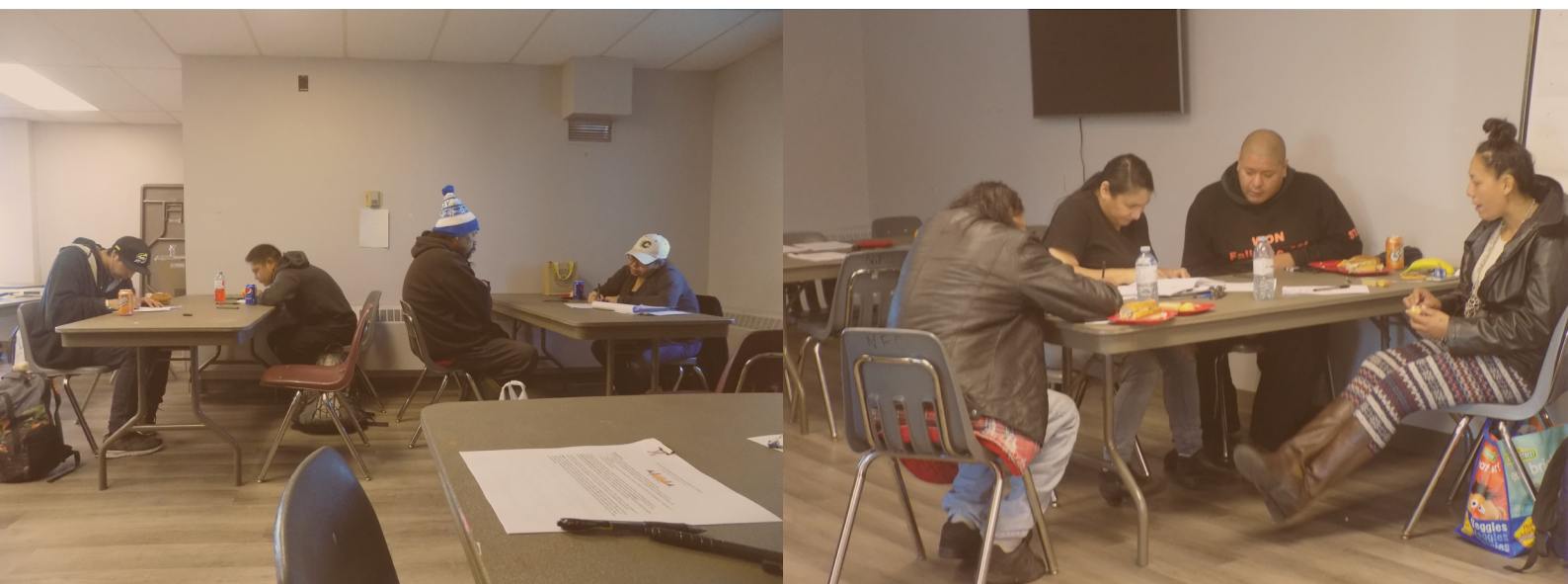
Analysis:

The relationships NFC have made through being in the community for 44 years, played a central role in reaching the study population in a way that they have never been engaged with before. NFC's connections and deep knowledge of the population was critical to inform the in-depth, continuous analysis process of this study.

The Framework Method (Srivastava, A. & Thomson, S. B., 2009, Lavrakas, P. 2008) approach was utilized to code and analyze focus groups, one-on-one interviews from 25 people and information from meeting materials. The IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26 was used to analyze 61 responses to the three part survey (gauging an Indigenous 'sense of home' in Kenora in the past, present and future) through descriptive and inferential statistics.

Unstructured conversations between community researchers and participants before and after surveys further contextualized the survey findings.
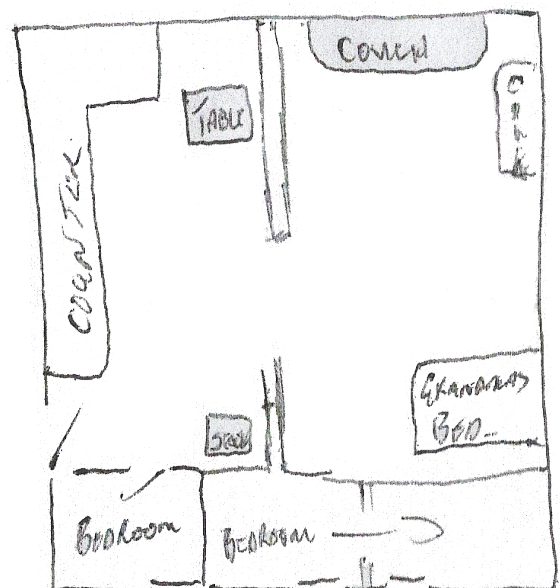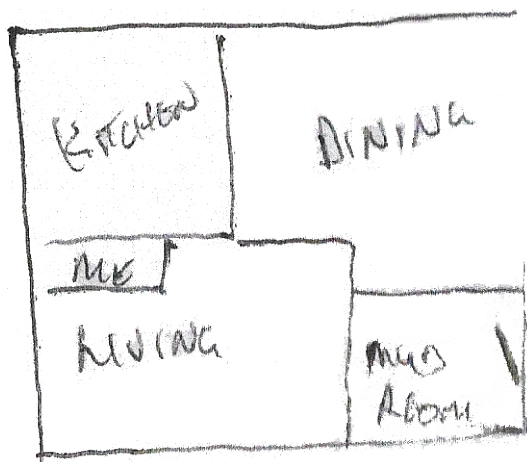
Completing the Research Circle:

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A COMMUNITY BASED SENSE OF HOME

PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

This section offers a demographic overview of survey participants and presents the research project results and analysis. As mentioned, the central research activity in the project engaged 61 Indigenous people in Kenora with lived experience of homelessness in a three-part survey asking them to describe "home" in the past, present, and future. The purpose of the survey was to better identify factors that promote and/or inhibit a 'community based sense of home' for Indigenous people experiencing homelessness in Kenora.

Demographic characteristics of survey participants:

The three part survey contained the responses from Indigenous 61 participants in Kenora. Their age ranges are from 20 to 66 with an average age of about 38. Most participants were between the age of 26 and 49. Two-thirds of the participants (67%) identified as male with the other one- third identifying as female.[3] The majority of participants (77%) who provided responses were from local Anishinaabe territories (including Kenora). Half of the survey participants lived in Kenora for less than 10 years and the other half lived in Kenora for more than 10 years.

Part of the tension that exists around Indigenous homelessness in Kenora is that mainstream perceptions equivocate homelessness with being transient, 'not belonging' or existing outside a community because they do not have an acceptable form of shelter. This contrasts with the

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[3] In retrospect, it has been noted that future surveys should allow participants non-binary identification options. This is particularly significant for youth as between 25 and 40 per-cent of homeless youth in Canada have identified as 2SLGBTQ+. (https://www.homelesshub)ca)

demographics of our research that illustrate the majority of Indigenous people in Kenora indicated that they are home already. Additionally, when conducting interviews, the CBSH Research Team's members' sense about participants was that they felt they were home. In addition to lack of housing stock/availability, homeless people in Kenora experience difficulties obtaining housing for complex reasons. (KDSB, 2018).

Home in the Past: Growing Up Environment

Figure 1 indicates that the majority of participants identified that as children, they grew up outside of the care of their families; Children's Aid Society (33%), various places (15%), group homes (2%), on the streets (3%), in residential school (3%), or were adopted out (3%). Only 12% of participants explicitly indicated having grown up with family.

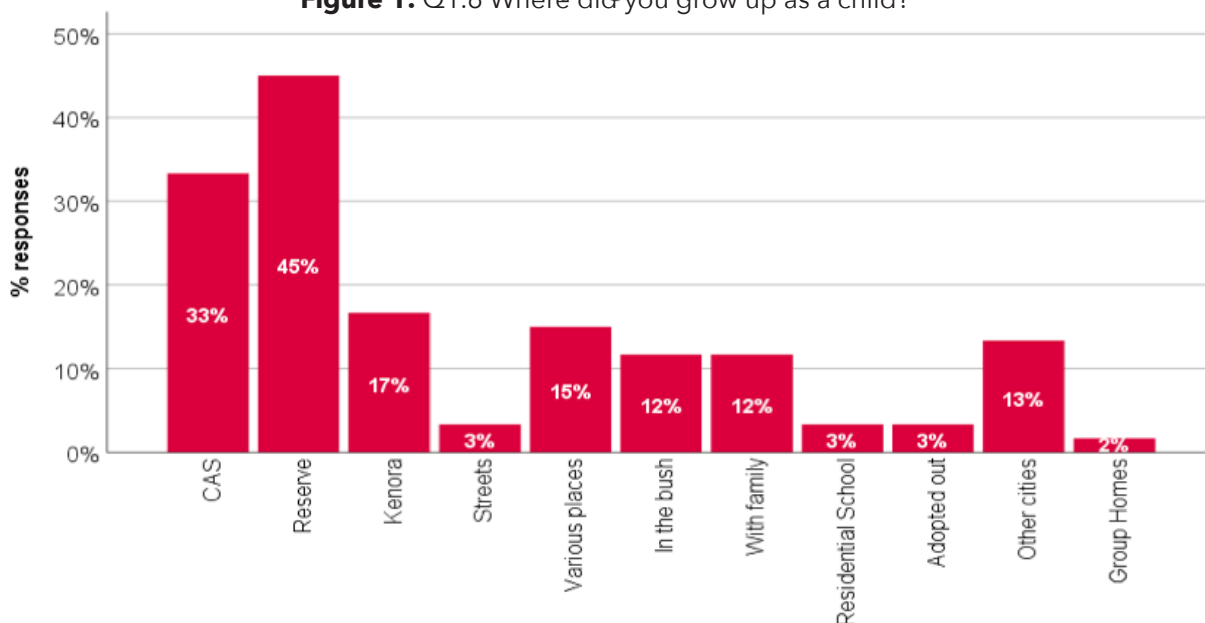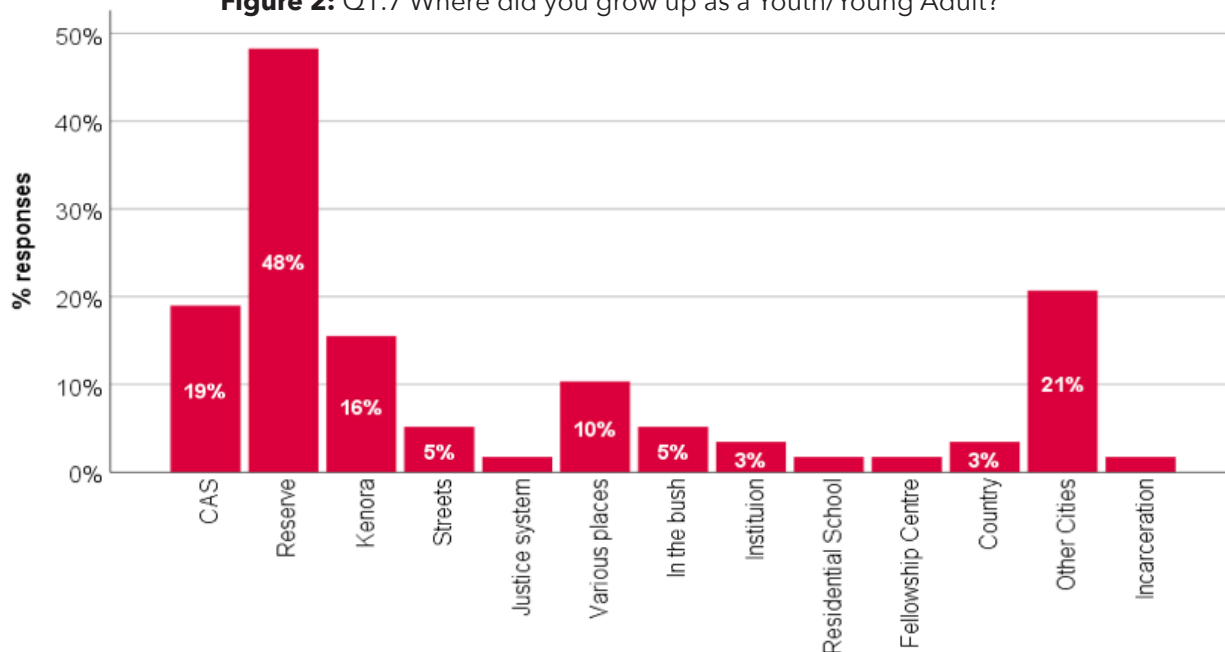**Figure 1:** Q1.6 Where did you grow up as a child?

Figure 2: Q1.7 Where did you grow up as a Youth/Young Adult?

As youth or young adults, Figure 2 indicates that 30% either remained in CAS, on the streets, in residential school, or had been institutionalized, incarcerated, or in the justice system more broadly.

The breakdown of Indigenous roles and responsibilities within traditional extended family structures is a significant factor in current social and health disparities that we see in Indigenous communities (Indigenous and Northern Affairs, RCAP Highlights, 1996). As a child, youth or young adult, a healthy 'growing up environment' requires a sense of stability and a sense of connection to community. Considering that over half of participants reported not growing up at home as a child or youth means that they may not have had opportunities to be exposed to people that could instill a sense of purpose and/or consistent role-modelling that demonstrated what it meant to have a good life.

Home in the Present:
Current living environment and duration of homelessness

On average participants have been without housing for 4.5 years. About half participants reported being homeless for less than 3 years with the other half for more than 3 years. The least amount of time that participants reported going without housing was 1 year with the longest duration being 25 years. Whereas the average of 4.5 years can be somewhat attributed to the averaging in of the longest duration of 25 years, the fact that half of participants were homeless for more than 3 years is unacceptable. This high number can be in part attributed to unaffordable housing prices and lack of availability of housing stock in Kenora.

Figure 3 indicates that most participants were living on the streets, in

Figure 3: Q2.6 What is your current living environment like?
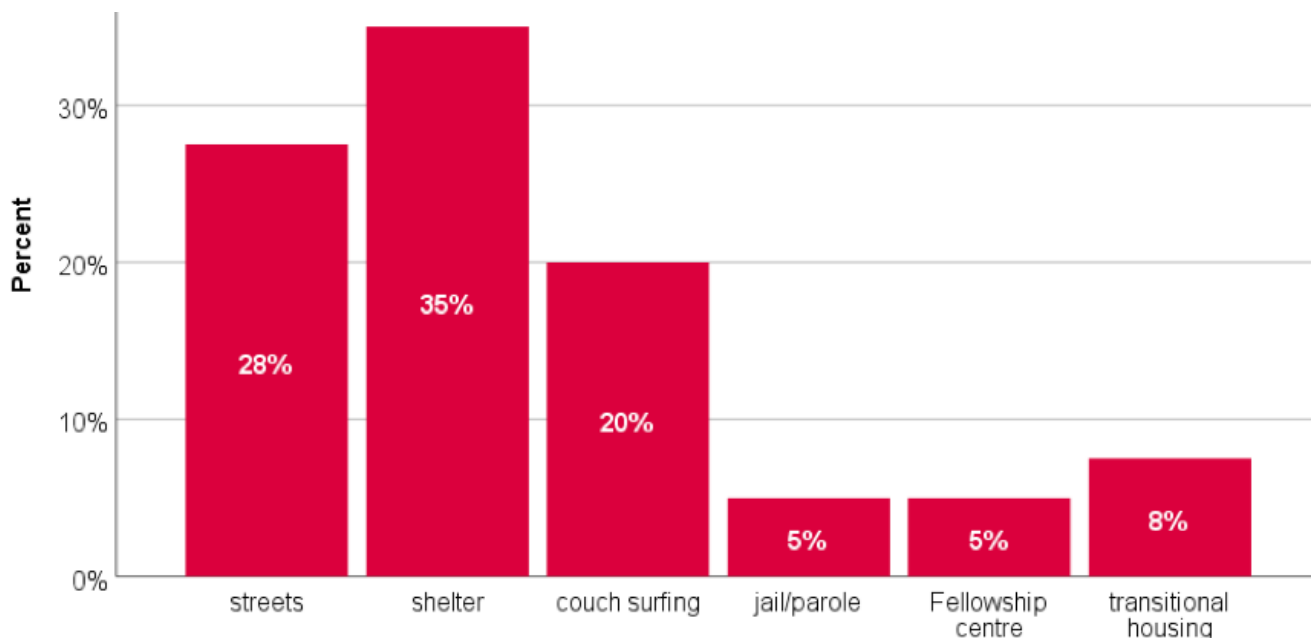
a shelter or couch surfing. Couch surfing depends on the good will of others and is, therefore, an unstable and temporary living arrangement. Therefore, in the current environment, the combined 48% of those living who are living on the street and couch surfers indicates that almost half of this population is currently displaced. One reason that this number is so high is related to the unavailability of housing stock (i.e.: there is physically no other place for them to go).

Even though only 8% of participants indicated that they live in transitional housing, lack of housing stock would seem to imply that there is often no place for these people to 'transition' to.

For those getting out of jail or on parole, the 5% of those surveyed in Figure 3 does not tell the entire story with respect to its magnitude or seriousness. During an engagement session at NFC around Justice issues in the community (January, 2020), it was noted that bringing people in from locations as far away as Red Lake for incarceration, results in additional burdens when they are done serving their time and sometimes released to the streets of Kenora (OFIFC, 2020). For the NFC, it was noted that some staff sometimes graciously use their own vehicles to drive people back home to their communities. The NFC is currently attempting to try and fill this service gap without having appropriate resources to do so (OFIFC, January 2020). In addition, when people that are not from Kenora are released onto the street after being incarcerated, it is a logical implication that they can become more susceptible succumbing to unfortunate circumstances such as, violence, addiction, prostitution and/or gang life.

Although only listed at 5%, The Fellowship Centre is worth describing here as well because, aside from the NFC, it is the most important organization to Indigenous people experiencing homelessness in Kenora. The Fellowship Centre serves those living in poverty, working poor, seniors, and people living with physical and mental disabilities of all ages. It is known as a place where people facing homelessness can feel safe. While the Centre is part of the National Native Ministry Council, they do not exclusively serve the Indigenous population. (https://fellowshipcentre.wixsite.com/kenora).
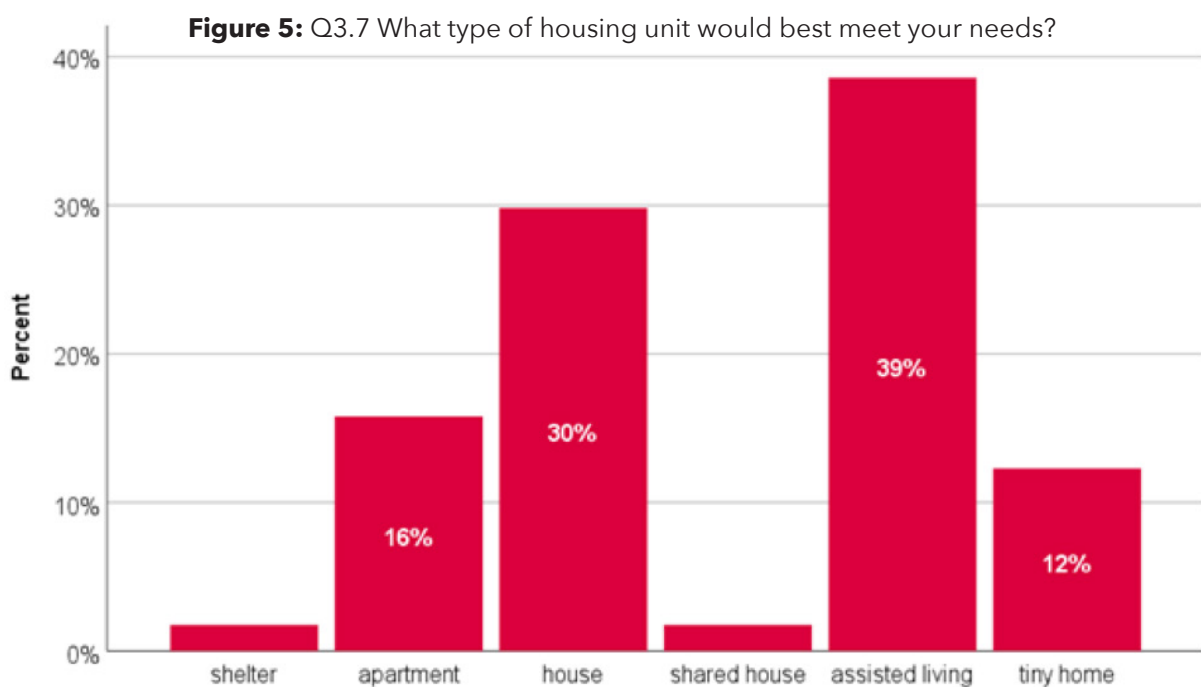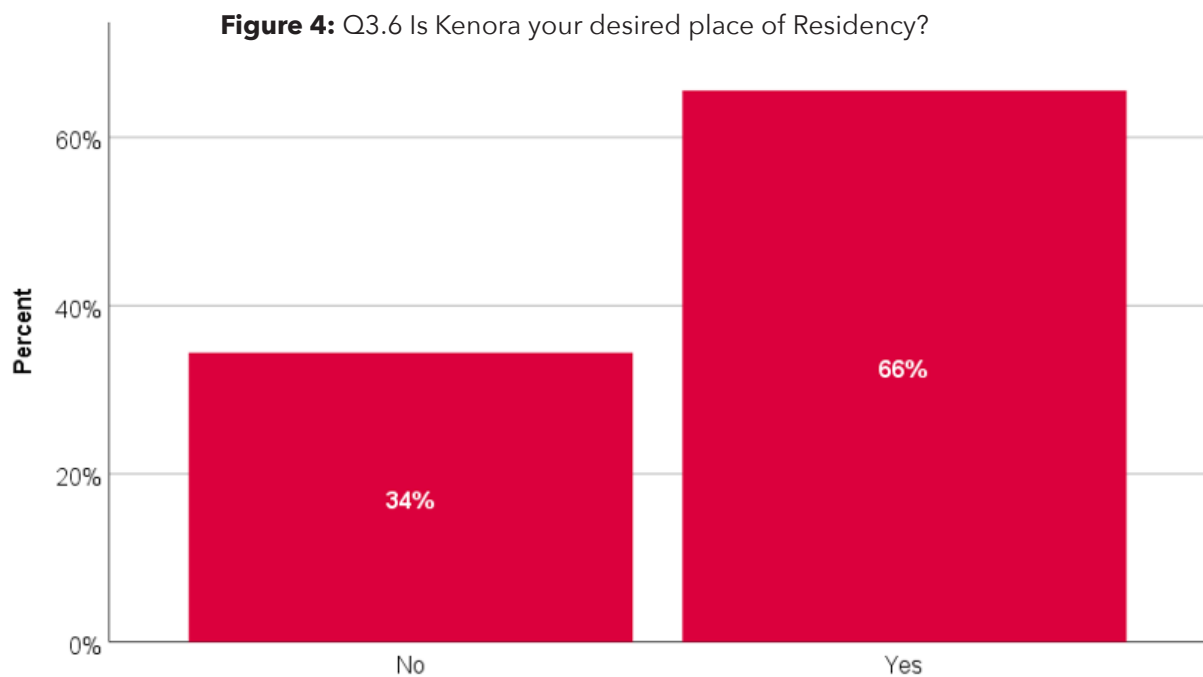
Home in the Present:
Current living environment and duration of homelessness

With respect to geographical location, the findings in Figure 4 emphasize the fact that most of the Indigenous community in Kenora experiencing homelessness want to stay. In the introduction to this Research Report, as well as in the next section, it is noted that 41% of

participants considered Kenora to be home. The fact that Kenora is the desired place of residency for 66% (Figure 4) infers that, whether they be from local Anishinaabe territory or other places, there are likely several additional people that would like Kenora to be their home.

Among those who did not want Kenora to be their desired place of residency, British Columbia (38%) and Thunder Bay (38%) were the most frequently mentioned places participants wanted to live.

Figure 5 illustrates that the most frequently mentioned types of housing units that would meet the needs of survey participants which were: assisted living (39%), house (30%), apartment (16%).

Figure 4: Q3.6 Is Kenora your desired place of Residency?

Figure 5: Q3.7 What type of housing unit would best meet your needs?

For 'type of housing' desired, 39% indicated that they would require 'assisted living'. Of importance, housing program and services distinguish between assisted living (i.e.: medical support usually for the elderly) and supportive living (i.e.: help structuring their lives). In this particular study, the NFC and CBSH Research Team understood through unstructured conversations during the interviews that for the majority of participants, these 'terminological' differences were not necessarily distinct from one another. Therefore, when participants reported they require 'assisted living', it is important to be mindful that they could simply mean they require 'support' with structuring their lives (so they do not fall back into behaviours that led them to being homeless). 'Assisted' living to participants in this study and the broader population experiencing homelessness could easily be taken to mean, "I can't do it alone".
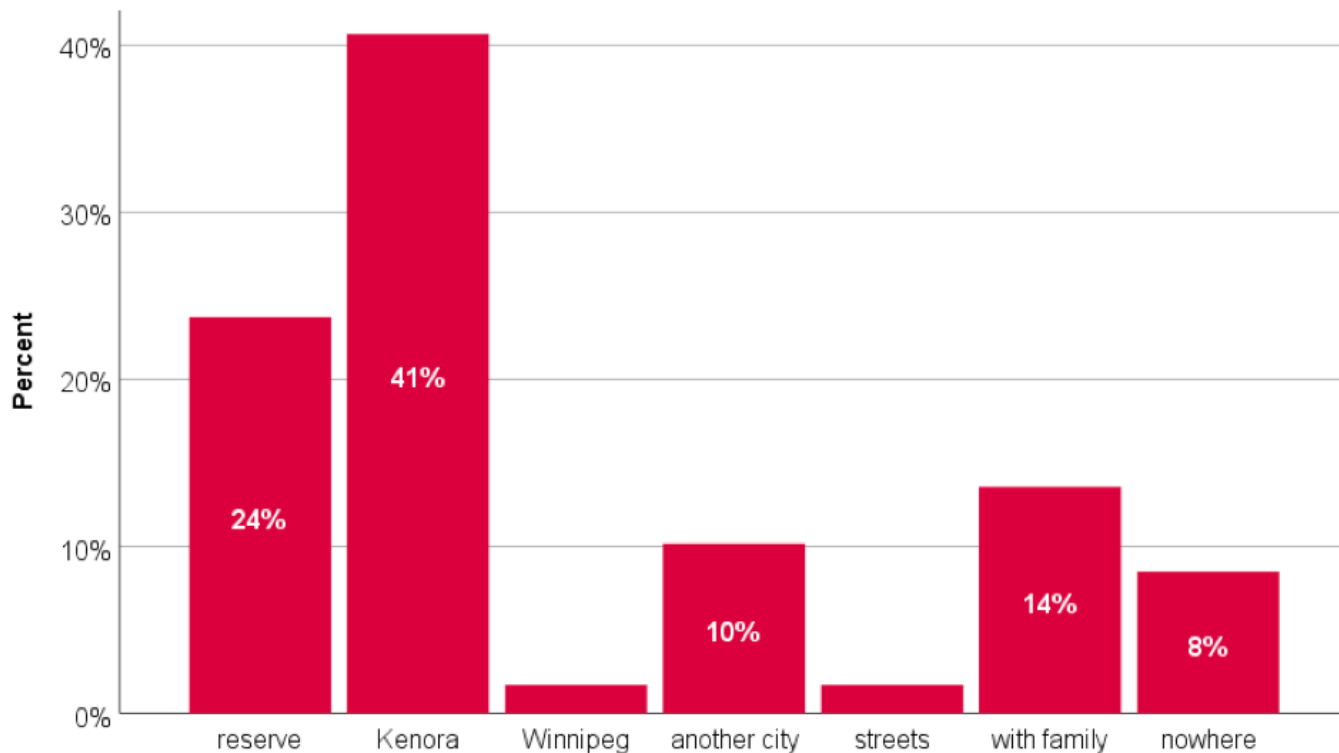
URBAN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY BASED SENSE OF HOME:

THE KENORA CONTEXT

As denoted in Figure 6 41% of respondents consider "home" to be the community of Kenora and about a quarter (24%) consider it to be their First Nation community.

Figure 6: Q1.8 Where did you consider "HOME" to be?

There is of obvious importance in the finding that 41% of participants saw Kenora as their geographical home (i.e.: reinforces need for available and affordable housing stock). In addition, conversations with survey participants combined with an interactive data gathering activity that also occurred within the project, reinforce aspects of community belonging and 'family' (including nuclear family, blood relatives, extended family, friends and 'street family'). In one conversation, with a project participant, it was noted that their sense of connection to community was more important than the physical structure. The participant indicated they would rather be sleeping on a couch with people they knew than in an apartment with no community connection. The notion that 'home' includes elements in addition to physical shelter was further clarified during an interactive data gathering activity that occurred before the administration of the three-part survey.

For the interactive activity, the NFC held an Open House for community partners and members of the public on May 31, 2018 from 2:00 p.m. until 8:00 p.m. The CBSH Research Team used this opportunity to ask those who attended the open house to share their thoughts on home, the root causes of homelessness, and what a healthy, inclusive community looks like. This was done by asking people to share what "home" means to them by writing their thoughts on paper "leaves" and

putting their leaf (or leaves) up on a "tree". Visitors were also asked to share their thoughts on the root causes of homelessness and write their responses on one (or more) of the stones provided. Finally, they were asked to share what a healthy inclusive community looks like by again writing their ideas on a paper leaf (or leaves) and putting their leaf up on a different tree. 16 of the people who participated in this activity self-identified as Indigenous.

Thematic analysis of this exercise indicated that, in addition to the physical structure of a house or apartment, 'home' included elements of safety, physical comfort, healthy food, feeling valued and accepted, happiness and a gathering space for family and friends. In addition to physical shelter and the aforementioned factors, community 'connection' from Indigenous perspectives can extend to the web of relationships and responsibilities with human and other-than-human kin (animals, plants, spirits, Earth, territories, lands, waters, elements) and connection to cultural knowledge and practices (stories, songs, teachings, names and ancestors). (OFIFC, 2020, pp. 80-81).

Figure 7 illustrates barriers to obtaining housing in Kenora. Most participants (64%) indicated that the combination of high housing cost (46%) and long waiting lists for low-income housing (27%) are the reasons why they experienced challenges trying to get housing/a home. Addiction (48%) and mental health (34%) are the other two major reasons that were stated.

Figure 7: Q2.9 What challenges have you experienced trying to get housing/a home in Kenora?
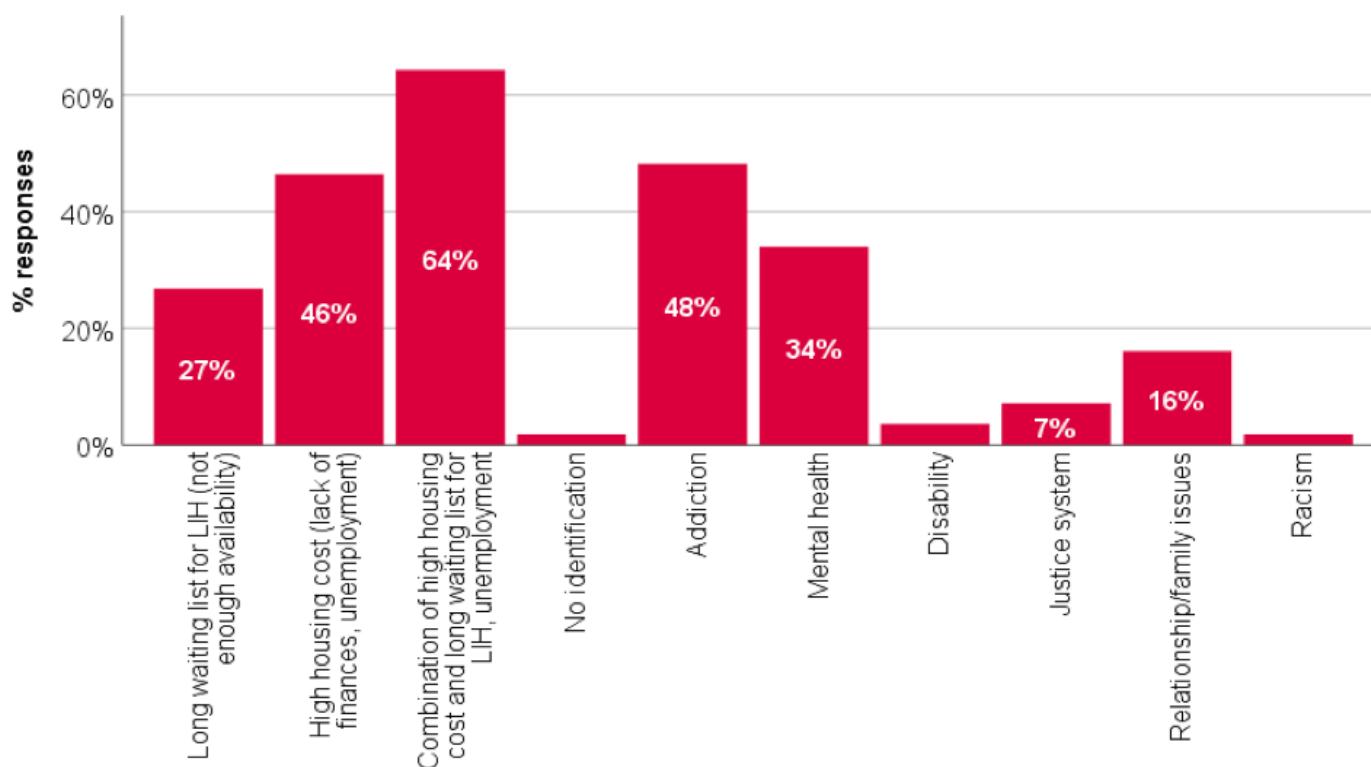
The long waiting lists identified in survey responses was congruent with KDSB's findings that indicated in 2014-2015 "the waiting list for rent-geared-to-income housing in the District surged by 121 percent" (KDSB, 2018).

Participants reported low instances of racism in trying to find housing, but the CBSH Research Team suspects that participants' experiences of racism in this context may have been largely normalized or systemic. This observation is substantiated by the Report by the Urban Aboriginal Task Force: Kenora (2007) where it was noted that racism in Kenora was a problem for all respondents, regardless of income levels. An overwhelming majority of respondents indicated that racism is a problem in Kenora, with 100% of those within the higher income brackets stating that racism is a problem. Those in lower income brackets, though not unanimous, clearly believe that racism is a problem in Kenora (Urban Aboriginal Task Force, 2007, p. 89). With respect to youth and those experiencing homelessness, participants in the Task Force Study indicated that they experienced targeted racism often and most specifically from the Kenora Municipal Police Force (KMPS, 2007, p. 89).

With respect to community support services & programs, Figure 8 shows the NFC (35%) and the Fellowship Centre (30%) are the most frequently mentioned support programs the participants rely on.

Figure 8: Q2.11 What community support services & programs do you currently rely on?
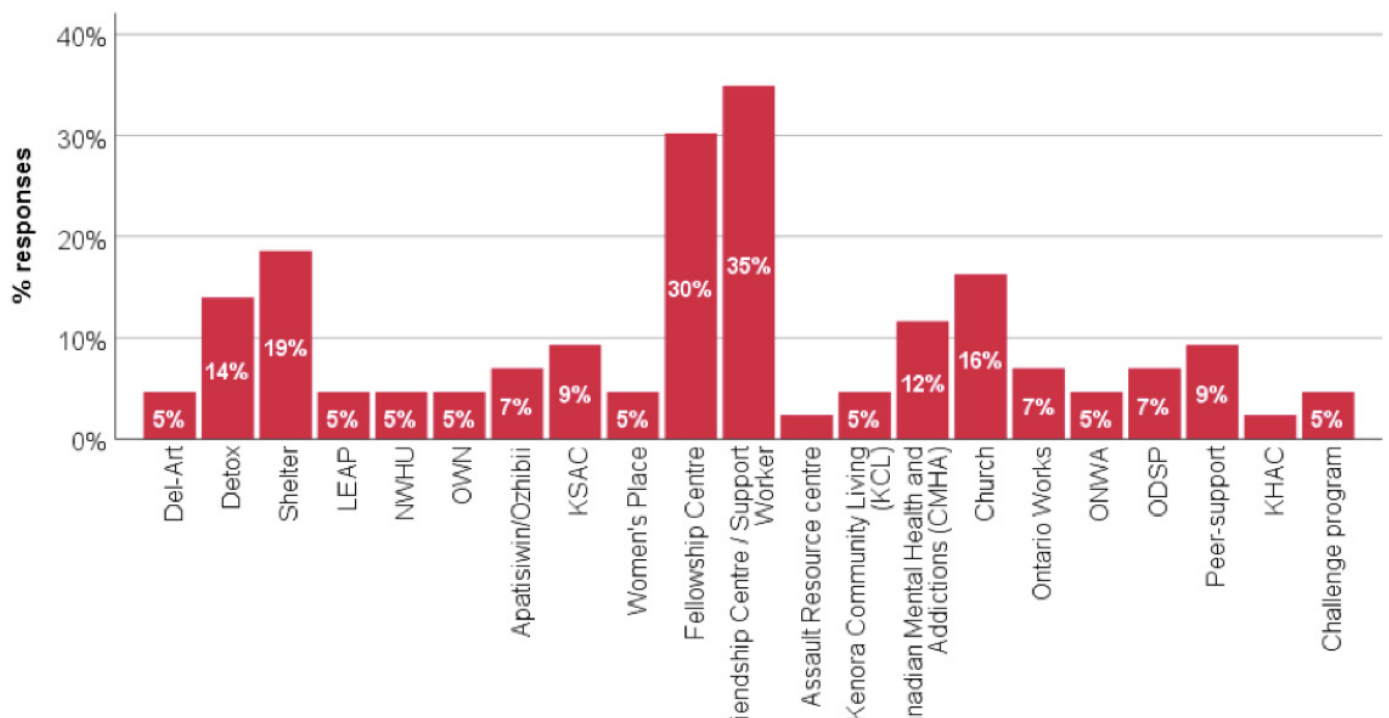
The NFC and the Fellowship Centre in Kenora were the organizations that participants relied on the most. It should be noted that some participants sometimes mixed up the names when referring to these two organizations. Later during the data analysis phase of this study, it was, however, pointed out by the NFC that these two organizations best respond to the needs of this particular population in Kenora's downtown core. This could be among the reasons as to why they were listed by most participants.

From a perspective of the NFC's wholistic continuum of culture-based programs and services, it is also important to identify a 'natural balance' between several existing mainstream services (e.g.: shelter, physical health, mental health, housing services, etc.). It also makes sense that more resources should be allocated to where this population is going to most in Kenora for support services (i.e. the Friendship Centre and the Fellowship Centre). As an example, some participants voiced that homelessness is not a 9-5 activity and the need for having after hours supports and cultural services.

CONCLUSION

Indigenous Traditional Knowledge Keepers within our community and across Turtle Island always ask us to know where you come from because it will affect your future. Through framing a community based sense of home for those experiencing homelessness in Kenora from this perspective, the research was able to discuss a spectrum of factors contributing to the problem. Specifically, the study identified differences between a stable and unstable living environment during childhood and youth; current living environment; desired living environment; geographical location; type of housing; barriers; supports; and culture-based perspectives on home.

The Ne-Chee Friendship Centre's Community Based Sense of Home (CBSH) Research project, enabled the NFC to actively engage with many community members who were homeless, at risk of being homeless, precariously or unsafely housed. There was a shared understanding among the Research Team and the NFC that those with lived experience of homelessness in urban centres are best equipped to speak to the realities, make informed recommendations, and advocate for services and supports that respond to their needs. The uniqueness of this study lies in the fact that it was able to facilitate participants' involvement in an authentic, self-voiced, way. The NFC's relationship with many participants and the larger community of Indigenous people experiencing homelessness in their locale, was an enabling factor for the authenticity and self-voicing aspects of the findings. In addition to providing a useful context for future research, we feel there is potential for the information here to be used within the community to better

create and implement collaborative action plans; and improve the structure and delivery of programs.

There were numerous strengths in the study design and implementation. Using a culture-based approach as a foundational ethical guide to study design was essential. During survey delivery, the high response rate resulted from having flexibility guided by NFC's investment in meaningful relationships with this population over many years. By utilizing a methodology that was grounded in the diverse local realities and experiences of the urban Indigenous community, the project increased our understanding of how those experiencing homelessness in Kenora conceptualized home and the experience of homelessness. The accompanying methods used were grounded in local Indigenous worldviews and ensured local protocols were operationalized allowing the NFC CBSH Research team to meaningfully engage research participants in respectful and culturally appropriate ways. This had profound implications for the depth and breadth of the information collected through this research and is illustrative of the benefit of indigenous community-driven research approaches.

The experience of urban Indigenous homelessness in Kenora intersects with a multitude of challenges. These include, but are not limited to addictions, issues with mental and physical health, overrepresentation of Indigenous people in the criminal justice system and ongoing institutionalization through the child welfare system. Taking these realities into account, participants self-voiced a need for culture-based services to address urban Indigenous homelessness. In addition, new programming, community planning initiatives, and supportive housing developments must be wholistic in nature. That is, they should account for the importance of connection in design, implementation, and evaluation phases to help generate more successful housing-related outcomes.

Some of the limitations of the study could be viewed as opportunities for more focused engagement with this population. For example, one limitation noted was that survey participants answered questions on a volunteer basis. This led us to contemplate that sensitive topics like racism, addictions, mental health issues and experience with Children's Aid Society may have been underreported (e.g.: more specific supports might be needed than what was actually reported). Further, the survey sample was too small to run an inferential statistical analysis that demonstrated statistical significance (p- value). At the same time, the richness of the self-voiced data that were collected from a fairly large sample size of this hard to reach population was both useful and significant.

The research findings refute the misconception that people experiencing homelessness "do not belong" or "come from outside" the community. While it may be true that some community members both come from and desire to return 'home' to First Nations or other urban communities, the majority of respondents viewed Kenora as 'home' and desired to remain in the community. The element of 'choice' in service delivery is critical in delivering housing and related interventions to people experiencing homelessness. This is why the Friendship Centre provides transportation to First Nations and other nearby communities, when needed, despite not being resourced or mandated to do so. That said, options to secure adequate accommodation in Kenora are extremely limited almost to the point of being non-existent. Participants spend an average of 4.5 years homeless, which can only be described as a widespread failure of systems and institutions to ensure Indigenous community members have access to this basic human right. Addressing these conditions will require a multi-faceted and community-wide effort that must include resourcing, leadership from urban Indigenous and community service providers, and meaningful efforts to address racism and prejudice against community members that are experiencing homelessness.

20 MINUTE PARKING
FOR
MARKET SQUARE
CUSTOMERS ONLY

VIOLATORS WILL BE TOWED
AT THEIR OWN RISK AND EXPENSE
GODBOUT'S TOWING 548-5050

NOTICE

CAUTION

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468-6

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following three recommendations, grounded in the findings of Ne-Chee Friendship Centre's Community Based Sense of Home three year research project, are suggested ways through which the self-voiced information provided by Indigenous people with lived experience of homelessness in Kenora and insights from other stakeholders can be acted upon and implemented.

INCREASE AVAILABLE, AFFORDABLE, SAFE, SUSTAINABLE AND SUPPORTIVE, CULTURE BASED, HOUSING STOCK.

The research examined 'community based sense of home' among Indigenous people experiencing homelessness in Kenora in the past, present and future. It was fouand that their desired home included aspects stated in Recommendation #1 above, in addition to specific culture-based supports that are trauma informed, mental health and addiction support and services that run beyond the hours of 9am-5pm.

INCREASE RESOURCES FOR SERVICE PROVIDERS AND PROGRAMS THAT INDIGENOUS PERSONS IN KENORA EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS USE MOST OFTEN.

The study results confirmed that the number one and number two organizations that this population utilize the most are the Ne-Chee Friendship Centre and the Fellowship Centre, respectively. The NFC's challenge will be to increase its internal capacity and access to essential resources to continue to meet the needs of Kenora's most vulnerable population. To guarantee that this population continues to have a voice, increased resources are needed to create a homelessness navigator and/or service provider liaison position(s) at the NFC and to increase support for staff providing front-line and culture-based 'wrap around' programs and services.

CREATE STRONGER PARTNERSHIPS AND GREATER SHARING OF RESPONSIBILITIES AND RESOURCES AMONG COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDERS.

It is understood that the situation of Indigenous homelessness in Kenora is complex and that innovative solutions will be required. For this to occur, community stakeholders need to be active participants. 90% of the homeless population in Kenora is Indigenous and most participants in our project perceived Kenora as their home, with a First Nation being second. Speaking from the research project results, a focus should be placed on relationships between the NFC/Fellowship (where this population goes), First Nations, KDSB (region and municipality), Canadian Mental Health and Addictions (highly reported barriers to obtaining and maintaining housing) and Ontario Aboriginal Housing.

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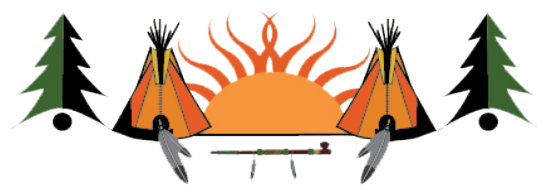
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