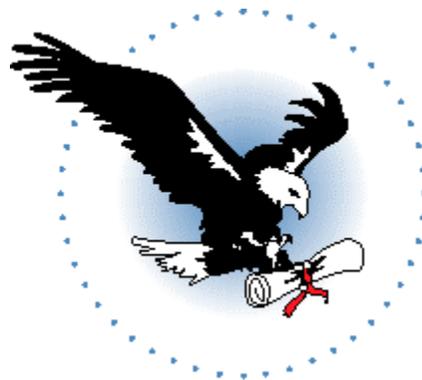


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Urban First Nations People  
Without Homes In Saskatchewan

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INDIAN  
INSTITUTE OF  
TECHNOLOGIES**

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# Urban First Nations People Without Homes In Saskatchewan

- Final Report -

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# Urban First Nations People Without Homes In Saskatchewan

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# Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies

The Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies (SIIT) is a First Nations-controlled post-secondary training and education institution.

SIIT serves First Nations adults by providing vocational and technical employment programming, as well as educational services for continued career growth.

With seven campuses located throughout Saskatchewan, SIIT is equipped to deliver training programs in a variety of service sectors directly linked to graduate employment.

Over the last several years, SIIT has steadily increased its capacity for conducting research, and developing and implementing certified and other types of educational programming and training. SIIT employs a staff of researchers, writers, and curriculum developers. First Nation ideals and perspectives are included in the development of curricula and programs.

## 1.0 Executive Summary

*“Homelessness is a process involving a loss far greater than a house... [a loss of] a sense of belonging, a psychological sense of home” (Bauman & Grigsby, 1988, [www.cyfc.umn.edu/Other/understanding.html](http://www.cyfc.umn.edu/Other/understanding.html)).*

There are homeless First Nations people in urban and rural Saskatchewan. The homeless population is diverse - single men and women, male and female youth and young children, elders, mothers with children, and two-parent families.

The profile of homelessness varies. Some people have been homeless for many years and others are newly homeless. Some homeless people are elderly; others are young children. Some people have limited education; others have post-secondary education. Some people abuse alcohol and drugs; others abstain from alcohol and drugs. Some people are employed; others receive government assistance. Some people have money, but not enough to pay rent; others simply have no money.

In urban Saskatchewan, the homeless First Nation population can be divided into three groups: the visible homeless, the hidden homeless and, those who live in overcrowded and temporary housing.

Some highlights from this research project are:

- Over half of those interviewed wanted education and employment.
- Two-thirds of those interviewed receive some form of government assistance (i.e. social services, unemployment assistance, pension).
- 18% of those profiled were employed.
- People were living with family members, in overcrowded conditions, and were uncertain of their ability to stay for an extended time period.
- People have some knowledge of services and programs but are not accessing, or are reluctant to access, services and programs due to many barriers experienced in the quest to access programs and services.

Efforts to meet the needs of the homeless, and those at-risk of becoming homeless, involve developing a coordinated approach to delivering program and services as well as the development of programs and services to fill the needs gap.

## 2.0 Introduction

First Nations homelessness crosses rural and urban boundaries, political and governmental jurisdictions, and gender and age boundaries. First Nations, young and old alike, experience homelessness in both rural and urban centres. Homelessness is affected by and contributes to poor social and mental health, damaging family dynamics, family violence, racism, addictions, employment and education status, and access to suitable housing. Homelessness is a complex issue.

Some individuals and organisations suggest that homelessness is not a problem, yet there are First Nations citizens that do not have homes, or they live in crowded, unsafe, unhealthy homes. The hidden homeless, without homes of their own, move unnoticed from place to place, often living in homes of relatives and friends, in shelters or on the streets. Those individuals at risk of becoming homeless live in overcrowded conditions, often with many families living under the same roof, and sometimes living in unsafe, sometimes condemned, housing.

The Royal Commission On Aboriginal People (RCAP) in its Gathering Strength report (1996) documents the extent of the housing crisis faced by Aboriginal people:

- Standards of Aboriginal housing are measurably below what is required for basic comfort, health and safety.
- Problems include the need for major and minor repairs and new units for households occupying unfit or overcrowded dwellings.
- The major obstacle to meeting housing needs is the gap between incomes and costs, that is, affordability.
- On reserves, and estimated 84% of 74,000 households have insufficient income to cover the full cost of housing. The housing policy terms, they are in 'core need'. Half of this 84% are able to contribute to the cost of housing.
- Among all Aboriginal households (owners and renters), an estimated one-third is in 'core need', compared to between 11 and 12 percent of all Canadian households.
- Substantial government contributions of housing construction on reserve over the past decade have had minimal effect due to the rapid deterioration of relatively new housing stock.
- Urban and rural housing programs targeted to Aboriginal people have made significant contributions to quality of life and community relations. They are in jeopardy because of the termination of new investment by governments (RCAP 1996 WWW document <http://www.indigenous.bc.ca/v3/Vol3Ch3s1.4Part1.asp>).

Homelessness issues are familiar to people who work in social and community programming and service delivery; however, it is difficult to access information on homelessness. Limited information is published on First Nations homelessness, yet First Nations homelessness exists; we see our people, young and old, male and female, on 'the streets'. This report attempts to contribute to the existing knowledge base on First Nations homelessness.

## 2.1 Purpose

The purpose of this research is to gather information on First Nations homelessness in the Saskatchewan urban communities of Prince Albert, Regina and Saskatoon, in order to determine the extent of First Nations homelessness and to determine the gaps that exist in program and service delivery to address homelessness. The resulting information will be used to inform and educate the public about First Nations homelessness in urban communities in Saskatchewan.

The focus of this research is First Nations homelessness, though reference may be made to 'Aboriginal' homelessness. The distinction in terms may be used when citations are made from documents that specifically use the term Aboriginal. Within the context of this document, the term First Nations people refers to those individuals who are registered as Indians (including status and treaty) under the *Indian Act*.

The next section examines a profile of Saskatchewan First Nations people and discusses: a profile of Saskatchewan First Nations, some definitions of homelessness and housing, homelessness in rural communities, and factors that may contribute to homelessness.

## 3.0 Project Background

### 3.1 Profile of Saskatchewan First Nations

This report focuses on homelessness among First Nations living in the urban centres of Prince Albert, Regina and Saskatoon. The following data relies on figures from the 1996 Statistics Canada census survey. Census data is dated and should be interpreted accordingly; the numbers may be higher due to migrations and mobility.

In Saskatchewan, the off-reserve population lives primarily in larger urban centres, 33% live in three cities of Prince Albert, Saskatoon, and Regina. Approximately half of the total band populations live off reserve (Peters 1996:306).

In Saskatchewan, the First Nations population comprises eight percent of the census population. First Nations populations are highest in the cities of Regina and Saskatoon. In the city of Prince Albert, approximately sixteen percent of the city population is of First Nations status. In Regina, approximately five percent of the population is of First Nations status. In Saskatoon, approximately four percent of the population is of First Nations status. The following table depicts approximate numbers of First Nations and Aboriginal people in Prince Albert, Regina and Saskatoon.

**Table 1: Saskatchewan Population by Gender and Race**

Location	Characteristics	Total	Male	Female
Prince Albert	Total-all persons	41,705	20,460	21,245
	Aboriginal population	10,090	4,715	5,375
	First Nations population	6,650*	3,125**	3,525**
Regina	Total-all persons	193,650	93,950	99,710
	Aboriginal population	13,605	6,515	7,090
	First Nations population	8,945	4,202**	4,743**
Saskatoon	Total-all persons	219,055	106,335	112,720
	Aboriginal population	16,160	7,600	8,560
	First Nations population	9,670	4,545**	5,125**
Saskatchewan	Total-all persons	990,235	489,425	500,815
	Aboriginal population	111,245	54,465	56,775
	First Nations population	75,205	35,347**	39,858**

[Adapted from 1996 Statistics Canada's Internet Site <http://www.statcan.ca/english/Pgdb/People/Popula.htm>]. Printed from website June 2000.

\* This figure is an approximation (66%)

\*\* These figures are approximations based on a 47% male/53% female split in the Aboriginal population.

According to Statistics Canada (1996) data, children and youth between the ages of 15 to 24 and adults between the ages of 25-34 comprise the largest

cohorts of the population - approximately 43% combined. The median age of the First Nations population is 22 to 23 (Norris 1996:194-5).

Among First Nations that live off reserve, there is a high mobility rate (movement within communities) within the female population between the ages of 15 to 44 (Norris 1996:210). Approximately 75% of the population is mobile. Migration (movement from rural to urban, or urban to rural communities) is highest among the 15 to 24 years age group (Norris 1996:211). Off-reserve migration accounts for approximately 30% of population movement. The high mobility rate generally reflects “movement within the same community as well as from different communities” (Norris 1996:210). Hyper mobility – movement to and from urban communities and within communities - attributes to fluctuations in First Nations populations in urban centres.

First Nations people move to the city for a variety of reasons - to attend educational institutions, access employment opportunities, seek medical assistance, access services that are unavailable in small, rural centres, leave an unhealthy environment - the reasons are many. As well, many First Nations people living in urban centres are second and third generation citizens – they have been living in the cities since the 1950s and 1960s.

... a lot of the families in the 1960's especially had moved off the reserve to get out of the desperate situation the reserves were in, in the 1960's and 70's to seek a better life in the cities. Better housing [was available] for one thing and better than what was on the reserve (Pelletier, 2000).

The resulting urban First Nation population experiences a high unemployment rate, low income, and mobility patterns, coupled with discrimination and other social and economic factors – factors that contribute to the difficulty of securing safe, affordable housing. A brief discussion on the factors that may contribute to homelessness is included later at the end of this section.

The following section discusses definitions of homelessness.

## 3.2 Defining Homelessness

Of the many First Nations individuals that were interviewed in the course of this research, few would say they were homeless. The word ‘homelessness’ conjures up images of bag ladies and skid row bums sleeping outside or in abandoned buildings. These images are stereotypic depictions of the extreme definition of absolute homelessness and are not the experiences of all homeless people. This section discusses some varying definitions and descriptions of homelessness. The definitions were explored and discussed by the researchers in order to develop an operational definition of homelessness that would guide their research.

The Canadian Public Health Association position paper entitled *Homelessness and Health*, authored by Shah and Hodge (1997), adopts the United Nations definition of homelessness. Homelessness encompasses both absolute homelessness and relative homelessness.

Absolute homelessness includes individuals living on the street, those using shelters or shelter-motels, and those who are victims of disaster (lost their homes). Relative homelessness includes individuals who lived in houses that are generally considered substandard. The United Nations also identifies five basic standards of housing: housing must provide adequate protection from the elements (usually outdoor environment), housing must offer safe water and sanitation, housing must offer security and safety, housing must be accessible to employment, education and health care opportunities and housing must be affordable [WWW document <http://cpha.ca/cpha.docs/homeless.eng.html>]

The Calgary Street Speaks Report describes homelessness as:

- Those who have no home and who live either outdoors or in emergency shelters or hostels, and people whose homes do not meet the U.N.'s basic standards of housing (noted above).
- People who have problems with their housing adequacy, suitability and affordability and who spend more than 30% of their household income on suitable housing (originally cited by Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation).
- People who do not have a permanent residence to which they can return whenever they choose to do so (originally cited by Horizon Housing Society, 1989).
- People who do not currently have a room, apartment or house of their own, or have not been in their own place within the last thirty days (originally cited by L. McDonald and T. Peresinni, The East Village community Study, 1991).
- The total absence of shelter - absolute or literal hopelessness (Number of people using downtown social service facilities or observed sleeping in the street- 615//note: this number includes those who find regular shelter on the street or in emergency facilities and are 'situational homeless' - those who are fleeing from dangerous or traumatic situations) (originally cited by Dept. Social Services, 1996). [Dept. of Social Services 1996 WWW document <http://www.gov.calgary.ab.ca/81/housing/ssdefinitions.htm>]

Access Toronto (1999) in their *Taking Responsibility for Homelessness: An Action Plan for Toronto*, describes homeless people as 'those who are absolutely, periodically, or temporarily without shelter, as well as those who

are at substantial risk of being on the street in the immediate future (originally cited by Gerald Daly in *Homeless*. New York: Routledge 1996:24)'. "This definition includes: people living in overcrowded or inadequate housing or in housing that is extremely expensive relative to income; people who lack privacy, security, and tenure rights such as those in emergency shelters and hostels; and low-income households who are currently housed but require protection from threats of violence, abuse, or eviction. This definition is broad enough to include most in need and most at risk but, at the same time, is not so broad and unmanageable as to hinder the possibility of finding solutions (Access Toronto 1999:203-204)."

In the report *Literature Review: Aboriginal Peoples and Homelessness* (1997), Beavis, Klos, Carter and Douchant provide two broad definitions of relative homelessness. The definition of homelessness, as cited in Brundridge (1987, p. 15), suggests that there are three groups of homeless people:

- situational homeless, who are homeless temporarily due to an acute life crisis (e.g. family conflict, divorce, eviction, release from prison);
- episodic homeless, who alternate for different periods of time between being sheltered and unsheltered (e.g. skid row residents, runaway youth, prostitutes); and the
- chronic homeless, who are homeless for extended time periods (e.g. "bag ladies," chronic substance abusers, de-institutionalized mentally ill) (Beavis et al, 1997:6).

Beavis et al, include in their discussion, the United Nations definition of homelessness as individuals "who have no homes and those whose shelters do not meet U. N. standards" (Beavis et al, 1997:6).

In order to conduct the research for this project, the researchers determined that it was appropriate, if not necessary, to broadly define the parameters of this research in order to capture the population that is absolutely homeless and those at-risk of becoming homeless. As a result of the research, the following definition of homelessness, adapted from a sampling of the above definitions, guided the research for this project:

First Nations homelessness encompasses: those individuals who are visibly or absolutely homeless (i.e. may live outdoors); those who are the hidden homeless because they are situationally, temporarily homeless (i.e. may have left a dangerous or traumatic situation, may have recently moved from one location or community to another – in both cases rely on the services of an emergency shelter or hostel); and, those that are at-risk of becoming homeless (i.e. live in overcrowded housing, inadequate housing, unsafe housing, unaffordable housing).

While the focus of this research is First Nations homelessness in urban centres, it is necessary to define homelessness that exists in rural communities, because homelessness in rural communities may influence migration and mobility in urban centres.

### 3.3 Homelessness in Rural Communities

Research on homeless people in rural areas is scant, but homelessness does exist. In First Nations rural communities, some houses are crowded, are unsafe and in need of repair, do not provide for basic necessities and are therefore unhealthy, and are insufficient in number for existing community members – all qualities that parallel some First Nation housing in urban centres.

McLaughlin (1987) and Aubrey et al (1996) state,

Some of the most substandard housing in the country exists in rural towns, particularly in native communities, leading some researchers to believe that there are a large number of relative homeless persons living outside of urban centers (McLaughlin, 1987) (Aubrey et al 1996: 6-7).

Beavis et al (1997) add, “many rural Aboriginals live in conditions well within the U.N. definition of homelessness” (Beavis et al 1997:21). According to information posted on an Indian and Northern Affairs Canada website, the limited lifespan of houses on reserve:

... is the result of minimal construction standards, lack of maintenance and overcrowding. For these reasons, about one third of the new houses built each year on reserves simply replace existing homes that have fallen into disrepair. At present, more than half of the houses on reserves are in substandard condition. (WWW document: [http://www.inac.gc.ca/pr/info/info104\\_e.html](http://www.inac.gc.ca/pr/info/info104_e.html)).

In addition to the substandard rural housing, overcrowding exists in rural First Nations housing.

There is an ever-increasing demand for housing in First Nations communities. Having too few houses results in overcrowding – a problem that has far-reaching consequence. Overcrowding not only reduces the life-span of a house, it also worsens social problems in communities, such as poor health conditions and family tensions and violence. (WWW document : [http://www.inac.gc.ca/pr/info/info104\\_e.html](http://www.inac.gc.ca/pr/info/info104_e.html)).

Regarding the demand for on-reserve housing and the subsequent strain on resources, T. Pelletier (2000) adds,

... families have expressed a desire to move back to the reserve and pressure the reserve to respond to that need. It's very difficult to adjust to when the funding is only addressing the on-reserve population and doesn't really reflect our off-reserve people (Pelletier 2000).

Accessing services and resources in rural communities for the homeless is difficult at best, as services for homeless individuals in rural communities are scarce.

Rural areas may lack services that are specifically for the homeless, or they may take a different form. The absolute homeless in rural areas may be small in comparison to the relative homeless (McLaughlin, 1987) (Aubrey et al 1996: 6-7).

Lack of access to services in rural communities is cited as one of many reasons why individuals leave rural communities for the urban centres. Beavis et al (1997) add, "Third World conditions on reserves are often cited as the primary reason for rural-urban migration... ' (as cited by Morrow, 1990b: Scott, 1993)" (Beavis et al 1997:21).

The SIIT Urban First Nations Without Homes in Saskatchewan research project examined rural First Nations homelessness on the reserve community of the Cowessess First Nation in southeast Saskatchewan. An excerpt of the research, appearing below, paints a picture of homelessness in a rural First Nation community.

Sometimes when the children grow up and they are staying at home past 18 years of age and they have a spouse by the time they are 19 and raising a family, that's how we end up with 2 or 3 families in a house. So the funding first of all, doesn't address the backlog that I have and it certainly doesn't address the future problems that we are going to have with housing. Out of 240 people in the next 4 years, if you are asking if a quarter of them are going to be past the age of 18, going to be young adults. In the 4 years after that, so 8 years total another 60, that's another 120 adult persons, just on the reserve. If half of those 120 have a child, that's another 60 or so in the next 8 years, that's 180 and the housing situation is allocated to 6 houses every second or third year. There is no way that it will keep up with the demand we have now. There is absolutely no way that the units that are in need of repair can ever be upgraded. Even minimally, unfortunately those units are going to be on Cowessess for a long time and people are going to consider them liveable because that's the standard on the reserve. Those units if they were in the city would have been condemned a long time ago, but we still have people living

in those units. Everyday apparently, someone moves into those units. There is almost nothing we can do to prevent people from moving in because as much as we bug them or anything else, they still need a place to stay, there are desperate for a place to stay and they will just move in like that. So on the band owned houses, that's what we call the houses built before 1984, that's a whole other half of the issue. Again I see no end in sight to that, not with the amount of money that we are currently are getting to maintain them. If you have a large family, and there are a lot of large families on this reserve living in a single unit, when there is that many people living in a house with no work for that family, they are living on social assistance and the reserve doesn't have the resources to maintain that unit. The maintenance on a unit that is housing that high a number of people is non-existent. There is no way we can maintain that unit, and there is no way that the tenant can maintain that unit" (Pelletier, 2000).

The following section explores some common definitions of housing found within a broader definition of a housing system model.

### 3.4 Defining Housing

Various definitions of housing may appear in this report; therefore, definitions of housing as determined by the Saskatchewan Housing Corporation (SHC) (2000) are examined in this section.

#### *Housing System*

The SHC defines the housing system as "part of a broader social structure involving the health, social services, education and economic systems all which affect neighbourhoods and communities" (Saskatchewan Housing Corporation, 2000). A housing system model was developed to explain the four subsystems in housing and how they interact. The four housing subsystems are: market housing, affordable housing, social housing and housing with support services. The subsystems are described below.

#### **Market Housing**

Market housing is supplied by the private sector, although the public sector plays an influencing role. Market housing may involve rental or ownership accommodation as well as other forms of tenure such as life leases, condominiums, co-operatives and reverse mortgage.

#### **Affordable Housing**

Affordable housing is lower-cost housing supplied to lower- to moderate-income households. These households often have difficulty accessing adequate, affordable housing in the traditional private market.

## **Social Housing**

Social housing is subsidized housing targeted to low-income households who would otherwise not be able to afford safe, secure shelter. Social housing tenants pay rent calculated on a sliding scale to a maximum of 25 percent of their income.

## **Housing with Support Services**

Housing with support services is a complex set of connected interests whose main purpose is to provide permanent residence for individuals who require more than shelter to retain an independent lifestyle.

The housing system in Saskatchewan is under strain due to an increased demand for affordable and social housing. A result of the imbalance in the housing system is the risk of becoming homeless or actual homelessness. The next section discusses common factors that may contribute to homelessness.

## **3.5 Housing Needs**

### *Provincial Housing Need*

The growth of the urban population creates a housing demand that in turn pushes rent up, often out of reach of families in need. Low income families facing the daunting prospect of having to meet the financial demands of rent at market value is central to the issue of overcrowding and unsafe housing conditions. Conflicting values of profit, driven by market value for rental units, versus needs, limited by financial resources, attribute to the gap between ability to pay rent and market expectation.

A lack of affordable housing and the limited scale of housing assistance programs have contributed to the current housing crisis and to homelessness. A gap exists between the number of people needing affordable housing and available social and affordable housing.

The Saskatchewan Housing Corporation has calculated the need for new housing stock based on a core need model:

- affordability - housing costs as a portion of household income
- adequacy - condition of the unit, and
- suitability - household composition and the number of bedrooms.

The last core need figures, based on the 1996 Census, indicate there are 46,000 households in need in Saskatchewan. An additional 8,500 students

and 10,800 other households are on the margin of core need and may experience problems accessing affordable housing.

In the year 2000, these numbers are projected to reach 8,500 and 13,600 households (Saskatchewan Housing Corporation, 2000, p.4).

### *Change in Housing Policy*

The 1990s saw major changes in housing policy, federally and provincially. In 1992, CMHC placed a cap on funding for new social housing. In February 1993, the federal government froze the CMHC budget and declared that the federal government would no longer be financing any new non-First Nations social housing. The transfer of social housing programs from federal to the provincial control created speculation that the housing in Saskatchewan would either revert to low-income, segregated projects of the past, or as the *Disappearance of Affordable Housing in Regina* suggests that Saskatchewan may be moving towards market rents (McNeil & Warnock, 2000).

In 1999, provinces and municipalities engaged in National Round Table Discussions around social housing. This national dialogue about what homelessness means in different parts of the country, and accessing affordable and adequate housing as a basic human right, helped characterize homelessness and housing as a social and political movement across Canada. The release of the Toronto Action Task Force Report confirmed the findings of the round table discussions - that there is a national crisis in Canada for affordable housing.

The Toronto Action Task Force report further examined the process of devolution of social housing, from the federal government to the provinces, and noted,

Aboriginal issues fall primarily under federal jurisdiction. The Toronto Task Force believes that, where federal government policies and programs have had a direct impact on specific sub-groups of the population, notably Aboriginals, immigrants, and refugees, it should take responsibility for preventing and reducing homelessness” (Access Toronto 1999:22).

The Federal Government announced the release of monies towards alleviating and preventing homelessness in Canada; however, Saskatchewan was not recognized as having a homeless problem. Meanwhile, the housing shortage continued to claim victims of homelessness, among the poorest and most disadvantaged in the country.

## 3.6 Factors Contributing to Homelessness

This section focuses on factors that may contribute to homelessness or may place people “at-risk” of becoming homeless.

Many First Nations people experience the following factors, but not everyone that experiences these factors will become homeless. Factors that may contribute to homelessness include: poverty, housing, urbanisation, cultural realities, racism/discrimination, alcohol and substance abuse, domestic violence, various social factors (including mental illness) and policy change.

### *Poverty*

People who are homeless and at-risk of becoming homeless tend to live in varying degrees of poverty as a result of unemployment, under-employment, low wages, cuts to social assistance benefits, welfare dependency, lowered employment insurance benefits, lack of educational opportunities, and lack of access to support services. People, who do not have adequate income, do not have the purchasing power to seek nor maintain adequate housing.

According to Shah and Hodge (1997),

... poverty and housing market conditions, are linked inextricably to shelter, as it's the largest single item expenditure for most Canadians. While a very small number of persons choose to have a homeless lifestyle, the majority of people are there because of economic fall out (WWW document <http://cpha.ca/cpha/dcs/homeless.eng.html>).

In the First Nations population, employment in urban centres is low comparable to the non-First Nations population. Peters suggests that,

... .the “urban aboriginal population tends to be younger than the total urban population, with a higher proportion of women, particularly in the main childbearing years. Unemployment rates are much higher for aboriginal people [23.4%] than for total metropolitan populations, and many more aboriginal people had relatively low incomes” [compared to the non-aboriginal population] (Peters 1996:306).

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal People in its *Gathering Strength* (1996) report estimates that 50% of Aboriginal children are living in poverty. Aboriginal people are the poorest population in Canada and the principal cause is unemployment.

In larger urban centres, Aboriginal people have an unemployment rate of 23.4 percent and 48.4% of Aboriginal adults have an income of less than \$10,000 (Peters, 1996:306-8). According to Peters, due to “low incomes, aboriginal people are more likely to live in poor housing” (Peters 1996:307).

Furthermore, stubbornly high rates of unemployment have increased the tenuousness of many people’s shelter, and have contributed to adverse health effects. (as cited by Shah CP, Mai V. Noseworthy L, et al. CPHA Health Digest, Spring 1994). As a result, poverty rates in Canada have risen over the last decade, particularly among women and children (ibid).

Generally, the poverty rate among Aboriginal people in urban centres is high. Lee (2000) suggests that proportionately, Aboriginal people represent a small segment of the city population, though they possess “the highest poverty rates of all the groups [ethnic and cultural groups]. In cities, the average Aboriginal poverty rate was 55.6 per cent... ” (Lee 2000:83).

In Saskatchewan, in the two largest cities - Saskatoon and Regina - the “proportion of Aboriginal people... was connected to the city’s overall poverty rate” (ibid, p. 83). In Saskatoon (in 1995) the poverty rate for the Aboriginal population was 64.9% for Regina (in 1995) the poverty rate was 62.8% (ibid, p. 40).

Most of the cities with the highest proportions of Aboriginal people were also those with the highest Aboriginal poverty rates. In Regina, Aboriginal people accounted for 24.3 per cent of the poor population – more than three times their proportion of the total population. Saskatoon also had a large share of Aboriginal people among its poor population – 22.5 per cent of all the poor in that city (ibid, p. 39).

In Prince Albert, based upon the percentage of Aboriginal people occupying the city and in the surrounding First Nations communities, the poverty rate can expect to be at least the same, if not more than Regina and Saskatoon.

Inadequate income (due to low minimum wage, underemployment, and unemployment) contributes to homelessness and places people at risk of becoming homeless. Further, the minimum wage and the social assistance shelter allowance have not increased in proportion to the inflation rate. According to MacNeil and Warnock (2000),

In most provinces the shelter allowance for those on social assistance has been cut or frozen as part of the government reduction in social programs. It is common knowledge that the shelter allowance does not pay for rental housing and that social assistance recipients have had to use allowances for food, clothing, personal and household items to cover rent (MacNeil & Warnock 2000:10).

As a result, food banks and homeless shelters are seeing a growth in the numbers of people who access their services. “Food money is needed to pay the rent; indeed, emergency food use is a key housing indicator” (ibid, p. 11).

Poverty and housing are intricately linked.

## *Housing*

The issue of housing has a number of dimensions: availability, safety and size suitability.

In Saskatchewan, the supply of rental properties has decreased. The vacancy rates of rental properties is low, for example, in Saskatoon and Regina the vacancy rate is between 0-1%. The result of a low vacancy rate is an increase in the price of rental property due to demand for the property. The supply of affordable housing has similarly decreased, resulting in competition for limited properties and increased wait lists for social housing. The federal government proceeded with plans in the late 1990s to devolve responsibility of housing to provincial control. As a result, the province assumed responsibility for social housing development and maintenance. Concurrent with the devolution of housing, was a cap on funding for social housing, further resulting in limited growth in social housing. In an era of capped funding and limited growth, social housing development has not kept up with the demand.

A house must be safe and impart a sense of security for its occupants. Older homes that have not been maintained and are in need of renovation to upgrade to acceptable standards, pose danger to the occupants. Fire hazards, electrical and sewage malfunctions, can present serious health and safety problems. Given the state of demand for housing and the restricted availability of suitable and affordable housing, some unscrupulous landlords offer structurally unsound houses for rent, knowing that the houses will be rented by those who both need the housing and can afford the rent.

Security is an issue for all individuals, but particularly for women, children and the elderly. When doors and windows are not properly secured, repaired or replaced, it creates a safety risk for its occupants and instils a sense of insecurity of their surroundings.

Faced with the possibility of absolute homelessness, renters with limited dollars walk the fine line of tolerability in order to have a roof over their heads and four walls surrounding them. The winners are the landlords who receive the rent because they know someone needs the house regardless of its state.

For larger families, size is an issue when seeking housing. Most rental properties consist of three bedroom bungalows and one to three bedroom apartments. Often, rent increases with the number of bedrooms in a unit.

In order to live in a house that provides the amenities required of a larger family, one or more families live together to share of the costs of renting a large house, resulting in overcrowding.

### *Urbanisation*

Urban Canada is a magnet for Canada's Aboriginal peoples. Since the 1950s, First Nations have been migrating to the cities in search of opportunities, programs and services. For example, Prince Albert, Regina and Saskatoon possess educational institutions such as technical and trade colleges and universities and employment services opportunities such as those offered by tribal council offices. The 1980s and 1990s saw the largest growth in urban populations by Aboriginal people (Peters 1996:312-14).

Rural to urban migration can place people at risk of becoming homeless due to the insufficient availability of suitable housing. As well, alternation from urban areas to reserves on a regular basis (city in winter and reserve in summer) necessitates regular searches for accommodation.

### *Racism/Discrimination*

The discussion on racism and discrimination frequently occurs in literature on homelessness, although the extent and seriousness of discrimination and how it contributes to homelessness is difficult to determine and measure.

Beavis et al (1997) discuss the use of housing audits to determine if and how discrimination of Aboriginal people occurs with respect to housing. In an audit, researchers, White and non-White, posed as prospective renters, searched for accommodation, and took note of their treatment by the landlords or realtors. The researchers were matched for similar characteristics such that their ethnic/racial background was the only characteristic that separated them. Researchers found that Aboriginal people were consistently treated in a discriminating manner, for example, receiving different housing listings, referred to poorer neighbourhoods, given limited time and opportunity, and told that places were rented when they weren't (Beavis et al 1997:10-11).

According to Beavis et al, comments received from service providers discussed discriminatory practices and treatment of Aboriginal people.

Aboriginals and the Aboriginal homeless are easy targets of discrimination in the housing market. There is a common perception that aboriginals on the streets are all drunks. Perceptions can discourage landlords from renting to needy Aboriginal tenants.

Discrimination may be a bigger problem between Aboriginals looking for housing and landlords of certain ethnic origins (ibid, p. A9).

### **Cultural Realities**

In the city of Victoria, some work has been done on the causal linkage between cultural realities and homelessness. Thrasher and Mackay (1999) discuss the historical connection between residential schooling and cultural trauma and the corresponding loss of cultural knowledge and practises as contributing factors in First Nation homelessness.

The cultural loss coined as “cultural bereavement” (as cited by Eisenbruch) and “historical unresolved grief” (as cited by M. Braveheart) in Thrasher and Mackay’s *First Nations Homeless Adults in Victoria* is the connective thread shared by Aboriginal people. The authors contend that examining the generational historical cultural loss cycle and the role it plays in historical and current social problems will help service providers and the general public to understand the problems experienced by Aboriginal peoples.

While some researchers suggest that the problems experienced by homeless First Nations are similar to non-First Nations, the cultural background or ethnicity of First Nations sets them apart from other homeless people (Beavis et al 1997:A5).

The common, shared history of First Nations and the experience of racism and discrimination serve to further aggravate social problems experienced by First Nations that are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.

### **Social Factors**

Social factors such as home environment, lack of life skills, lack of job skills, dependency issues, family dynamics, abuse issues, and health issues were also noted in the literature as contributing factors to homelessness. Specifically, though this section will focus on home environments of youth, physical health and mental health as possible contributing factors to homelessness among First Nations.

### **At-risk Youth**

An unstable home environment is the greatest at-risk factor for youth and children becoming homeless. Youth seeking safety from unhealthy, unstable or abusive environments leave in search of something better, often to find themselves living on the streets. This is particularly true for youth whose home environment experience includes multi-generational abuse.

The numbers of youth sleeping on the streets or utilising emergency shelter is on the rise (Chamberlin & Saskatoon Youth Resource Network 1999). Many youth drop out of school and as a result, experience low educational levels and subsequent limited access to further education or employment. Some homeless youth are engaged in illegal and sexual activities as a means of acquiring incomes.

### **Physical Health**

The stress associated with living in poor housing conditions, or living on the streets, or living on an income that does not meet basic family needs accompanied with the demands of external socio-economic forces, greatly increases an individual's health risks.

Individuals who cannot afford medical coverage or whose coverage runs out may find themselves at risk of homelessness. "When illness or disability leads to loss of income, economic opportunities and family problems" (Beavis et al 1997:13), "a downward spiral into homelessness... [begins with the lost opportunities], depletion of savings [or income] to pay for care, and eventual eviction" (Shah & Hodge & CPHA WWW document <http://cpha.ca/cpha.docs/homeless.eng.html>)

The linkage between homelessness and health status is cyclical - poor health can precipitate homelessness and homelessness can cause poor health.

... homelessness leads to increased rates of illness, accentuated by the difficulties of providing health care services to homeless persons. Death by freezing, frostbite, injuries and accidents, substance abuse, suicide from overdose and alcoholic liver disease, tuberculosis, AIDS and HIV infections, hepatitis, arthritis, dental problems, sexually transmitted diseases (Shah & Hodge & CPHA WWW document <http://cpha.ca/cpha.docs/homeless.eng.html>)

Asthmas, obesity, anemia, injuries, burns and developmental delays, Tuberculosis, otitis media, ear infection upper and lower respiratory tract infections, pneumonia, gastrointestinal disease skin infections, cancer due to second-hand smoking and deaths due to fire are greater in Aboriginal population than the rest of the Canadian population.

Overcrowding causes an increase in mortality, a rise in airborne infections, neurotic stress and chronic and persistent depression (MacNeil & Warnock, 2000:21)

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal People (RCAP) in its Gathering Strength report identified three dimensions of community health as particularly important to Aboriginal People:

- Poverty and social assistance.
- Adequacy of the built environment, primarily in reference to shelter, water and sanitation facilities, but extending to community infrastructure more broadly; and
- Environmental conditions, including all forms of pollution and land and habitat degradation. (RCAP, WWW document <http://www.indigenous.bc.ca/v3/Vol3Ch3s1.4Part1.asp>].

The effects of ill health are wide ranging, but certainly affect housing.

### **Mental Illness**

Many of the socio-economic risk factors - poverty, overcrowding, lack of suitable housing, racism, physical health, alcohol and substance abuse, violence, residential school experience - affect mental health, which in turn becomes a contributing factor to homelessness. Mental health ailments include: depression, suicide, feelings of helplessness and hopelessness, as well as psychiatric disorders (Beavis et al 1997; Shah & Hodge and CPHA WWW document; Capponi 1999).

The mentally ill are another group of people who are categorized as the difficult to house, simply because the mentally ill often require additional supports and services to allow them to be independently housed.

In situations of overcrowding, mental health is also affected by the lack of privacy (MacNeil & Warnock, 2000:21).

### *Alcohol and Substance Abuse*

Alcohol and substance abuse (including prescription and illegal drugs, and inhalants or solvents) are frequently cited as contributing factors to homelessness.

Individuals who use or abuse alcohol and substances can rapidly deplete their income required for housing and sustenance. For those who have a dependence on alcohol and substance use, homelessness or the risk of becoming homeless can become reality.

At the Calgary Urban Project society, violence (at home, on the street), substance abuse and mental health issues are prevalent among the aboriginal and non-aboriginal clientele. Aboriginals, in particular, are heavier on the substance abuse side and less on the mental health side, although there are secondary mental health problems that stem from substance abuse (Beavis et al 1997:A5).

Homeless individuals caught in the web of alcohol and substance abuse require additional supports though obtaining and maintaining suitable safe housing remains a primary need.

Some research also indicates that gambling addictions also contribute to homelessness (Beavis et al 1997; Dept. of Social Services 1996).

### *Domestic Violence*

Homeless women and children are often victims of domestic violence. According to Beavis et al (1997) “eight out of ten Aboriginal women have suffered family violence” (p. 12) and research (cited by Beavis et al) by the Canadian Council on Social Development (1984) found a high incidence of family violence, sexual assault and incest among Native women and runaway youth (Beavis et al 1997:12-13).

A woman fleeing with her children to the safety of a shelter, only to be turned away because it is full, can be found without shelter and safety. Youth and children may also leave dangerous living conditions for the presumed safety of the streets relative to the situation they’ve left.

In rural or reserve communities, there is limited access to emergency shelters, requiring individuals who are experiencing abuse or at risk of experiencing abuse to either leave for a city to access the services or stay in the abusive situation.

T. Pelletier (2000) recalls a situation where a woman that left an abusive relationship, moved into a vacant, condemned house on the reserve.

... before we could [board up the house], this lady [desperate for a house] moved into there with her ten children. In that instance because we had intended to board the house up, there was simply no way we could allow people to live there. Since she was living in there we had a dilemma on our hands in not having the type of money we need to upgrade the house for her, she waited for a few weeks, not seeing any hope in terms of us adjusting her situation. She had no choice but to go back to the abusive situation that she has just left. That’s a typical scenario, it doesn’t just happen on the reserve, sometimes when a woman is seeking shelter from this type of relationship, they will go to a shelter. That’s not just on this reserve, it’s other reserves... .[With a lack of available shelters] they have no choice a lot of the time but to come back to that situation, there is no place else for them to go (Pelletier 2000).

In leaving domestic abuse situations, the choices to access emergency shelter are limited. Many shelters, originally designed to fulfill short-term needs, have become long-term residency units with little or no vacancy, or they require payment for use. For some individuals fleeing violent situations, they've left with their children and the clothes on their back and no money; thereby, limiting their access to some shelters, hostels or hotels. As a result, they've become the temporary homeless.

### *Policy Changes*

Major changes in social and economic policy over the past 25 years are contributing factors to homelessness and the increased crisis in housing for low-income people. According to MacNeil and Warnock (2000) "the pressures of social change and the demand by previously undemanding groups of underprivileged created a strain the governments systems" (MacNeil & Warnock 2000:21).

In 1992, the federal Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) placed a cap on funding provided for new social housing starts (ibid, 31). In 1996, the Minister responsible for CMHC "announced that the administration of all social housing would be transferred to the provinces" (ibid, 31). Similarly, the federal budget for social housing would be phased out and a cap would be placed on existing expenses for social housing. The responsibility for housing on reserves would remain with the federal government, though related expenditures were frozen at 1995-1996 budget levels (ibid, 32).

The devolution of housing responsibility from federal to provincial and municipal control combined with the decline in "affordable housing, a shrinking rental market and rising rents, lifting of rent control" (ibid, 34), and lack of policies to address affordable housing have resulted in a crisis in housing for the poor and the homeless.

The next section discusses the methodology employed in conducting the research for this report.

## 4.0 Methodology

### 4.1 Theoretical Framework – Continuum of Care Model

The continuum of care model is a model or system where an individual's needs are assessed and the resources or services available to meet their needs are presented to the individual. The premise behind this model is that a coordinated effort in determining and providing services is a more efficient means of moving someone from homelessness to permanent housing and maximum self-sufficiency. Alm (2000) proposes that,

Communities first establish an effective community based planning process, which brings together a broad array of stakeholders that includes government agencies, non-profit organizations, financial institutions, neighborhood groups, housing developers, businesses, foundations, and individuals who are homeless. They next collect data on needs, take an inventory of their current resources, and analyze gaps in facilities and services. They then identify relative priorities and develop short and long term strategies and an action plan (Alm 2000:47; Daly 1996:196-97).

The SIIT urban homelessness project team members employed this model as mean of framing their research and providing a theoretical balance and perspective in researching homelessness, discussing homelessness with homeless people and those who could provide services to the homeless, and creating a profile of agencies, programs and services to determine the existing gaps in service for homeless people.

The strength of this model lies in its ability to bridge groups or communities in order to enhance services delivery. Organizing and developing collaborative strategies serves to build partnerships whose common goals include the provision of effective and efficient service delivery.

According to V. Watson (1997) in *State Model Programs*, this model has the following fundamental components:

- Prevention – activities to prevent homelessness.
- Outreach, intake, and assessment to identify an individual's or family's service and housing needs, and link them to appropriate housing and/or service resource.
- Emergency shelter and safe, decent alternatives to the streets.

- Transitional housing and supportive housing to help people develop the skills necessary to sustain permanent housing including support services to meet medical care, substance abuse and mental health treatment, job training, child care and transportation.
- Permanent housing.

The continuum of care approach is predicated on the understanding that homelessness is not caused merely by a lack of shelter but involves a variety of underlying, unmet needs– physical, economic, and social. Dealing effectively with the problems of homelessness requires a comprehensive system of housing and necessary services for each stage, from emergency shelter to permanent housing, as well as a strong prevention strategy. The continuum of care system strives to fulfill these requirements so that communities can develop seamless homeless systems that assist individuals and families in achieving independent living. The continuum of care... provides multi-point access and linkages among settings and service providers [Watson 1997, WWW document <http://www.coscda.org/care.htm>]

Prior to conducting the research, the project team familiarized themselves with the continuum of care model as a starting point for critical analysis and research planning. The focus was to create a common understanding of the dimensions of homelessness and of homeless people in order to creatively, yet respectfully research First Nations homelessness.

The project team conducted orientation sessions with tribal council researchers hired by Prince Albert Tribal Council (PAGC), Regina Treaty Status Indians Services (RTSIS) and Saskatoon Tribal Council (STC) to research homelessness in each respective city. The topics in the orientation sessions consisted of: the continuum of care theoretical perspective, conducting general research activities such as community and public forums, and personal interviewing.

## 4.2 Methods of Obtaining Data

The research project team conducted a literature review, community forums, community profiling and documenting stories of First Nation homeless people some of which were included in a video study. The methods of obtaining data are discussed below.

### *Literature Review*

Casual dialogue with homeless First Nations people grounded the need to define the parameters of the homelessness research. Further to defining the parameters of homelessness, researchers created a list of questions guided data acquisition.

A preliminary examination of national and international literature on homelessness was carried out prior to further development of the research project in order to gain a broad perspective on homelessness issues. With this broad perspective at hand, researchers focused their efforts on reviewing literature about the Saskatchewan First Nations homeless experience. Researchers found limited direct information on First Nations homelessness.

In reviewing the literature, researchers discovered that the term “homelessness” was used in both a narrow (absolute) and broad context (relative), depending upon the scope of the defined research. Researchers sought to reach beyond the narrow definition of homelessness to one that grasped the full experience of homelessness experienced by First Nations – both the absolute and the relative or at-risk of homelessness experience.

The literature review, in the previous section, captures information on the definitions of homelessness and housing, the factors that may contribute to homelessness, consequences of homelessness, the continuum of care model that guided this research, gaps in services, and obtaining research data on homelessness. The literature review aided researchers in developing the interview guide (discussed below) and in structuring the community and public forums and documenting findings obtained from all sources.

### *Community and Public Forums*

In each city, representatives from service organisations that were involved in some respect with housing and homelessness were invited to attend workshops to discuss the issue of homelessness in the urban centres. The community forum process allowed service organisations to speak to how they could assist homeless people and to identify gaps in services. A secondary purpose of the forum process was to encourage the organisations to begin the process of community planning of an agenda to address homelessness.

In Prince Albert, the PAGC co-hosted a Town Hall Meeting comprised of service providers from various social support programs and agencies. In Regina, RTSIS engaged service providers to gather to discuss issues in housing.

In Saskatoon, public forums allowed for homeless people, and people at risk to voice their issues about housing adequacy. Public forums further allowed researchers to interview participants on a one-to-one basis following the forum.

### *Personal Interviews*

In each urban centre, researchers contacted existing programs and services to assist in identifying individuals who would agree to be interviewed in a one-to-one format.

An interview guide was developed and used to structure the interview process and document information obtained from the interview. A copy of the interview guide appears as Appendix A. PAGC, RTSIS and STC utilized the interview guide to document and gather the stories of the homeless in order to assess the needs, services, program development, housing and gaps within the services provided in Prince Albert, Saskatoon and Regina. Researchers also conducted interviews on the street, under bridges, at soup kitchens and at food banks. 472 personal interviews were conducted.

Prior to conducting the personal interviews, researchers discussed the need to be sensitive about the homeless and homelessness; and hence, sensitised themselves about the homeless person's situation and the researchers' demeanour and language in addressing the homeless.

### *Community Profiling*

Organizations were asked to fill out a survey (see Appendix B) to assist the tribal council researchers to identify services as well as gaps in services for homeless people. 109 community surveys were gathered from Prince Albert, Regina, and Saskatoon. From the results of the surveys, community forums and personal interviews, a community profile for each city was developed which details available services to address homelessness.

## *Video*

Following the personal interviews, researchers proceeded to capture the “face of homelessness” in a video production on First Nations homelessness. The video captured what the written report could not – the spirit of survival and determination of people living without adequate and affordable housing. See Appendix C for a copy of the Videotape Consent Form and Appendix D for a copy of the Interview consent Form.

Community researchers identified individuals willing to participate in a videotaped interview about their homeless experiences. Researchers and the camera crew were witness to the poverty and desperation of First Nations who lived on the streets, who live in overcrowded conditions, who live in unsafe and unhealthy conditions, who live under threat of eviction, and who generally just live ‘on the edge’. In each city, researchers were sometimes prevented from seeing where some individuals lived for fear of exposing their ‘homes’ to others who might unscrupulously destroy or take over their shelter.

In order to connect the issue of mobility and migration, researchers determined that it was necessary to depict the linkage between urban and rural First Nations homelessness. In Saskatchewan, First Nations have been dealing with the issues of inadequate housing and overcrowding on their reserves for many years. SIIT interviewed two chiefs and band members from the Lac La Ronge and Cowessess First Nations who discussed the nature, level of need and problems related to housing issues on each respective First Nation and their connection to First Nations urban housing problems.

### 4.3 Tools Used in Obtaining Data

For the purpose of this research project, we utilized two primary methods of information gathering on First Nations homelessness. These tools are described below.

#### *Researchers*

A primary instrument of gathering data was the research team. Researchers dialogued about the issue of homeless, researched homelessness in the literature, participated in training, facilitated group discussion, and interviewed individuals in one-to-one formats.

The research team was comprised of academic researchers and individuals hired specifically to conduct the community-based research. Research team members included those who experienced homelessness first hand and those who had limited experience with homelessness.

#### *Interview Guide*

The interview guide was the other instrument of research. The guide was developed by the project team based upon information gathered from the literature review and discussions with service agencies. The guide was tested and further refined in conjunction with the project team and the tribal council researchers.

The guide included questions designed to obtain information about common patterns in the homeless experience by documenting both current situations and past situations. Further, questions were elicited from interviewees regarding the services people accessed and the need for additional services.

## 5.0 Review of Findings

### 5.1 Research Activities

Researchers from three organisations – Prince Albert Grand Council, Regina Treaty/Status Indians Services, Inc., and Saskatoon Tribal Council – were given the option to conduct one or all the following activities:

- Community/public forums
- Community profiling
- Identifying individuals to participate in a video

The community/public forums and community profiling activities were undertaken to:

- Determine the impact of homelessness in the respective communities.
- Identify existing gaps in services for First Nations homeless people.
- Identify the at-risk-of-homelessness population of First Nations people.

PAGC and RTSIS conducted community forums while Saskatoon conducted a public forum. All three organisations identified individuals willing to participate in the video on homelessness.

472 personal interviews were conducted in Prince Albert, Regina and Saskatoon.

#### *Limitations*

SIIT supplied an interview guide as a tool for researchers to conduct research. All three groups used a minor variation of the research instrument, but common information was summarized into a profile.

Three audiotapes (six hours) obtained by Saskatoon researchers were unusable in the video due to poor audio quality. Sound clips could not be copied (displayed) on the video, though the information was still audible by assessors and was deemed usable for document analysis.

Time was a factor in obtaining information from the respondents (homeless people). Researchers needed to gain the confidence and trust of the respondents in order to obtain required information. Some respondents discussed their distrust of the process and of their experience with being researched, with the researchers; others displayed their distrust primarily through non-participation.

### *Some Initial Comments*

In the course of identifying homeless First Nations, we determined that it was key to expand the meaning of homelessness to include the wide range of experiences and lived situations of those individuals who were without a home and those living at the threshold of constant risk. The significance of expanding this definition was that it recognized and incorporated the large body of temporary and hidden homelessness experienced by many urban First Nation families. First Nations families suffer from the stress of issues related directly to at-risk factors associated with homelessness. While we may not be able to measure precisely absolute First Nation homelessness, in significant numbers absolute homelessness does exist among the First Nations population.

The significance of being homeless, and at-risk of becoming homeless, was not lost on the research team. Addressing and working with those in crisis - while respecting their situation and desire to remain dignified - required patience, respect, compassion, and internal strength by the researchers. We hope we've captured the essence of their stories and presented a respectful portrayal of their needs.

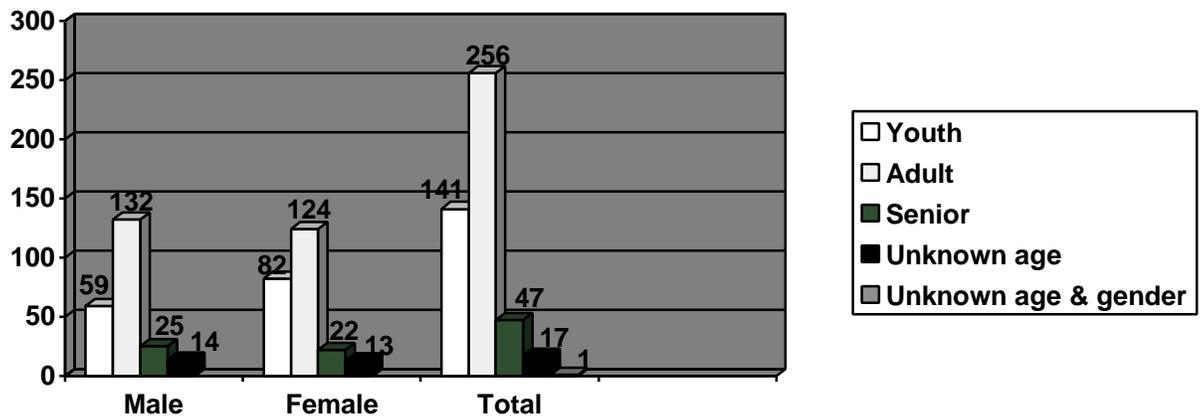
What follows is a compilation and analysis of findings from the course of this research.

## 5.2 Characteristics of Urban First Nations Homelessness in Saskatchewan

### *Characteristics of Urban First Nations Homelessness in Saskatchewan*

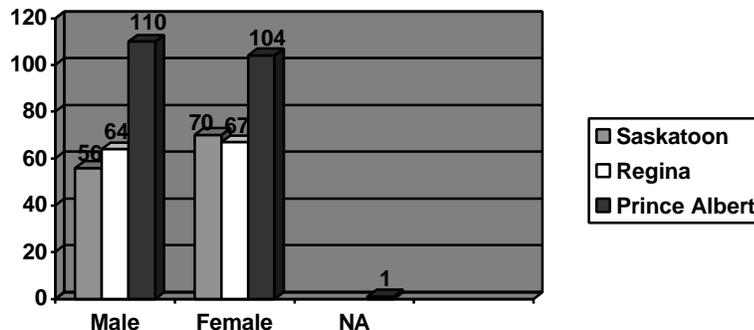
The following graphs and text depict general characteristics of the Saskatchewan urban First Nations homeless population in Prince Albert, Regina and Saskatoon based upon participant interviews.

#### Gender and Age of Respondents



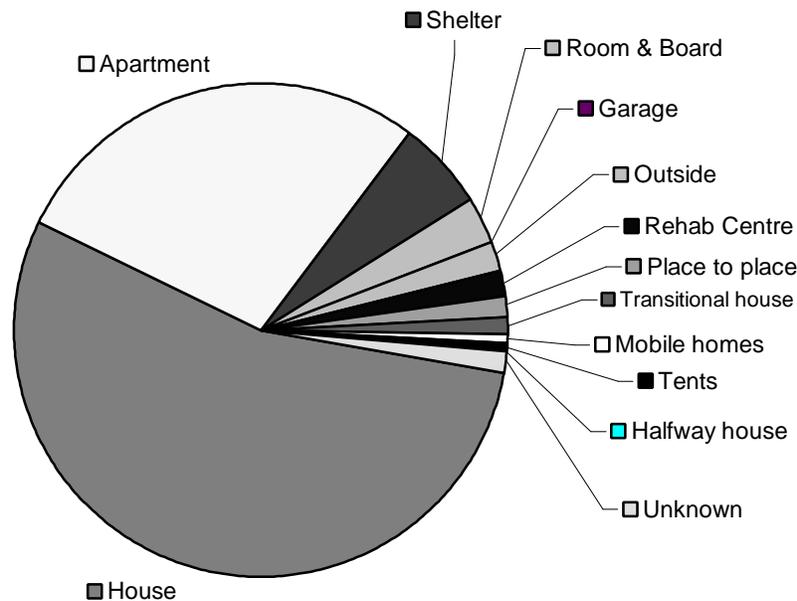
Respondents ranged in age from 12 to 82 years of age. The total youth interviewed was 141, who ranged in age from 12-24 years. The total adults interviewed were 256, who ranged in age from 25-54 years. The total seniors interviewed were 47, who ranged in age from 55 years to 82 years. The total number of participants interviewed whose age was unknown was 17, with 1 unknown age and gender. The total number of respondents interviewed was 472.

#### Gender by City



In Saskatoon, the total number of respondents was 126; Regina, the total number of respondents was 214; Prince Albert the total number of respondents was 131. The total number of males was 230 and total number of females was 241 with 1 unknown gender.

### Type of Place in which Respondents Live

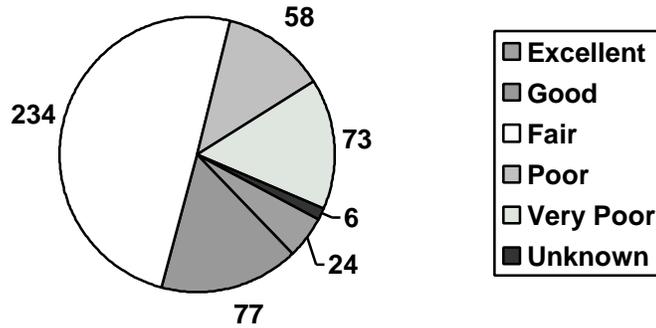


Participants were asked what type or kind of place that they currently live in. Of the 472 responses, respondents shared the following:

- 55% (257) of respondents live in houses
- 29%(132) of respondents live in apartments
- 6% (28) of respondents live in shelters
- 3% (14) of respondents live in room and board
- 0% (1) of respondents live in a garage
- 2% (9) of respondents live outside
- 1% (7) of respondents live in rehabilitation centres
- 1% (7) of respondents live place to place
- 1% (5) of respondents live in transitional housing
- 1% (3) of respondents live in mobile homes
- 0% (2) of respondents live in tents
- 0% (1) of respondents live in a halfway house
- 1% (6) of respondents did not indicate where they live.

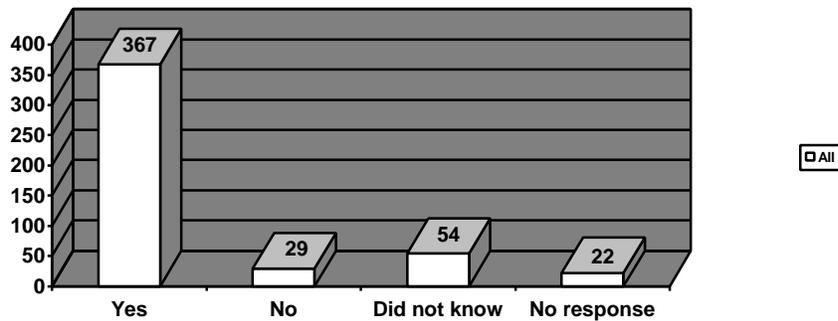
### Condition of Housing

Participants were asked about the condition of their housing based on their current housing condition; however, this question did not reflect respondents' past experiences. Respondents did share with the interviewers that conditions in past housing were unsuitable.



Of 472 responses, 50% [234] of respondents said their housing was fair, 16%[77] of respondents said their housing was good, 16%[73] of respondents said their housing was very poor, 12%[58] of respondents said their housing was poor, 5%[24] of respondents said their housing was excellent, while 1%[6] of respondents did not respond.

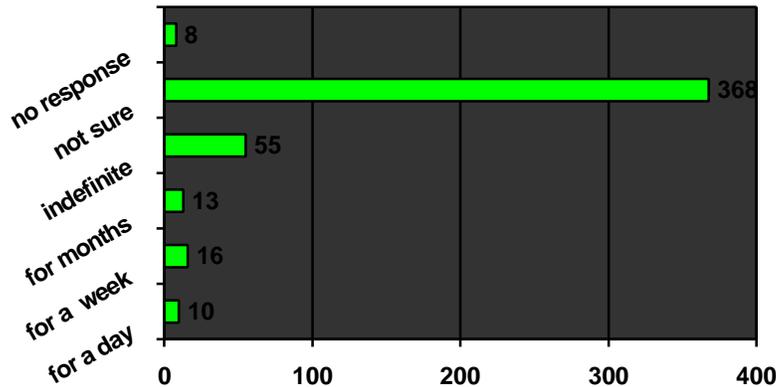
### Continuous Shelter



In terms of securing shelter for an extended period, we asked respondents the question, “Can you sleep there without being asked to leave?” 80% of participants responded yes to having shelter, while 20 % responded no to having shelter.

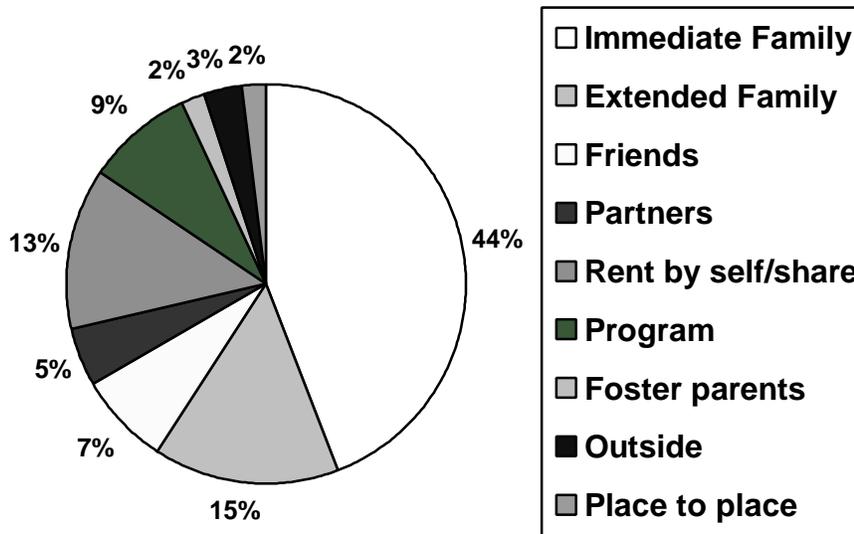
In asking this question, respondents suggested that while they had a place to stay at the time, they were unsure of how long they could stay at their current location. Below appear the subsequent findings based on a question of length of stay at current location.

## Length of Stay



86% of respondents were unsure whether they could stay at their current location for an extended period, while 14% indicated that they could stay for an extended period of time. The respondents were unable to answer how long they could stay there, due to situations with the family, overcrowding, etc.

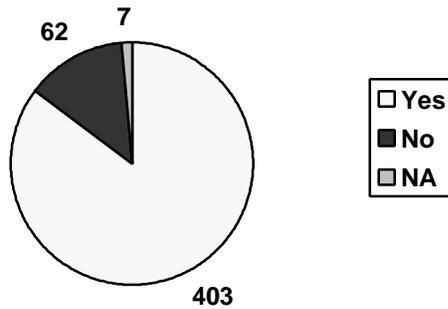
## Whose Place Is It?



44%[114] of respondents were living with immediate family, 15%[39] were living with extended family, 7%[19] were living with friends with a total of 66% of the respondents living in overcrowded conditions (relative homeless), while 5%[12] indicated they were living with a partner, 13%[34] of respondents were paying rent with some indicating a roommate, 9%[22] indicated a program, with 2%[5] indicating a foster parent(relative

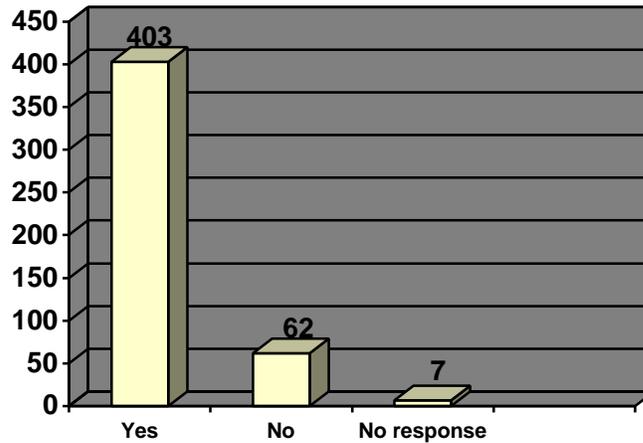
homeless), with the remaining 5% being absolute homelessness - 3%[8] living outside and 2%[5] living from place to place.

### Sufficient Space



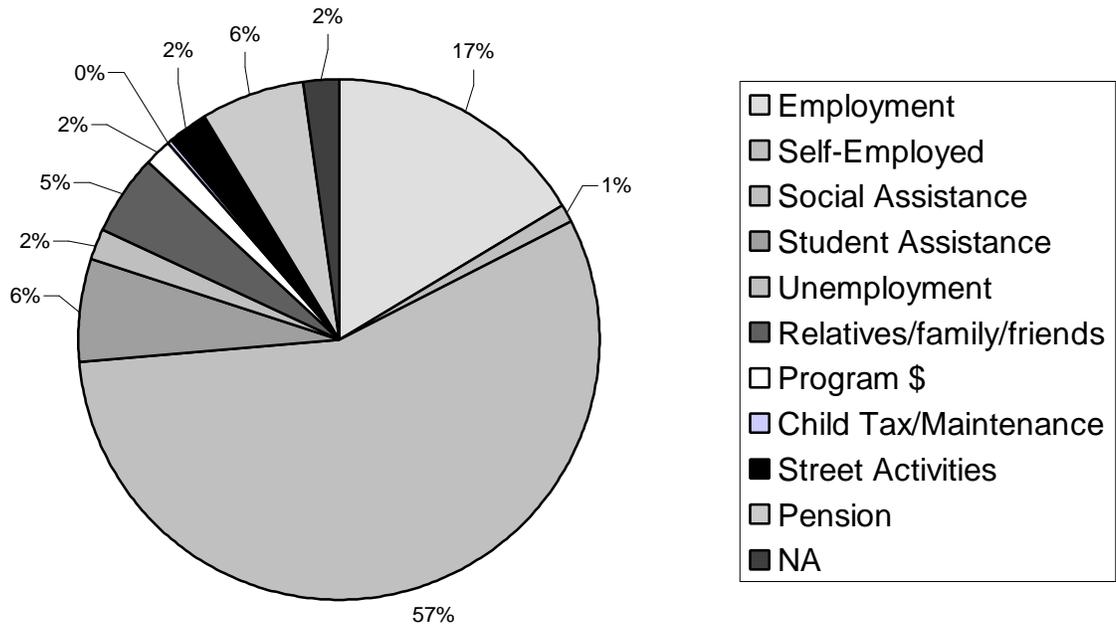
Respondents were asked the question, "Do you have enough room for the number of people who live/stay with you?" 85% of respondents indicated yes they had sufficient space, while 15% responded no. When indicating yes, respondents also indicated that they share the space with others, such as partners and children.

### Own Room/Bed/Small Space/Flooring



Participants were asked, "Do you have your own room/bed/small space/flooring?" 85% responded yes, while 15% responded no. When indicating yes, respondents suggested that they share the space with others such as partners and children.

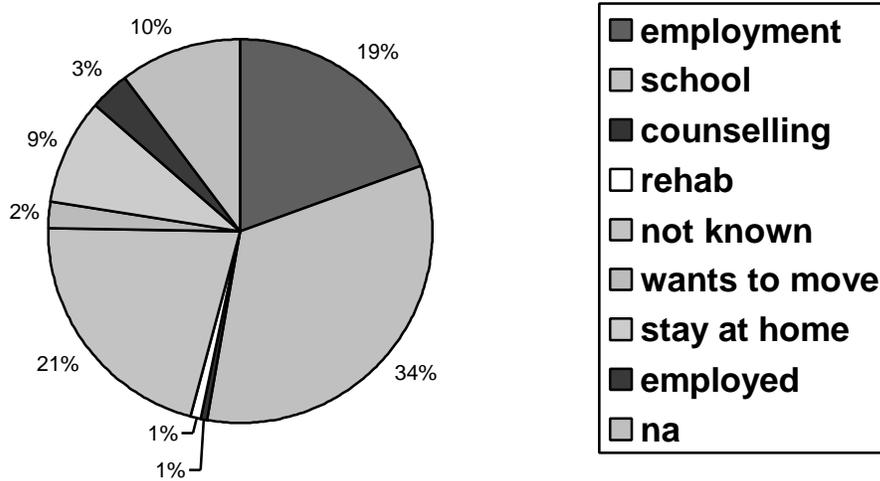
## Income



Participants were asked about their source of income. Of the 472 respondents,

- 57% (265) received social assistance
- 6%(29) received student assistance
- 2% (10) received unemployment
- 5% (23) were helped by relatives/family/friends
- 2%(8) were on a program
- 0%(2) received child tax/maintenance
- 2% (11) responded to being involved with street activities
- 6% (30) were on pension
- 2%(11) did not indicated where they receive money
- 17% (77) were employed
- 1% (6) were self-employed

## Future Plans



When asked about future plans, of 472 responses,

- 19% (92) wanted employment
- 34% (157) wanted education
- 1% (3) wanted counselling
- 1% (4) wanted rehabilitation centres
- 21% (99) did not know
- 2%(11) wanted to move away
- 9% (42) wanted to stay at home
- 3% (15) would stay employed
- 10%(49) did not respond

## 5.3 Current Use of Support System

In order to determine the relationship between availability and use of public support systems, respondents were asked about the services they would like to obtain, but currently were not receiving.

### *Using the Support Systems*

In urban Saskatchewan, the following themes emerged and are presented with examples from each of the three cities studied.

## **Transportation**

- Travel to units
- Travel to work, work later at night
- Elders' mobility
- Look at housing
- Get to food bank
- Attend ceremonies
- Disabilities
- Travel school for self and children
- Bus tickets

## **Employment**

- Job help
- Job placement, work referrals, work options
- Job positions
- Life skills
- Paying jobs
- Training services

## **Childcare**

- Services to watch children while looking for a place
- Child/daycare
- Daycare subsidies

## **Food**

- Help with food money
- Three meals a day and food money (increase)

## **Clothing**

- Grants for self and family

## **Furniture Grants**

- Grants for furniture and appliances

## **Medical**

- Doctor check-ups, dental, bath aids
- Eye glasses
- None stated

## **Counselling**

- Alcohol and drug rehab, detox, therapy, counselling, mental health services, family support services and support groups
- None stated

## **Money**

- Need more money in general, more resources for low-income people

- Either lower rents or more money from Social Assistance/Services for rent/housing and basic allowance
- Financial aid

### **Youth**

- Support/services for youth
- Houses that will rent to youth (not discriminate due to age)

### **Recreation**

- Recreation for family and children
- Recreation programs for all

### **Education**

- Funding and waitlists
- Access to school – grade 12

### **Spiritual**

- Elder services, traditional healing help
- None stated, nothing

### **Housing**

- Information and access on: housing available, hotels, rentals man and First Nations advocates, low income for singles, programs for singles, hostels, low income housing, finance options, no emergency help/hot line
- Housing services, available and affordable housing, permanent housing, low-income housing available if employment/school need access
- Waitlists, lack of low-income housing,
- Need more low-income housing groups, co-op housing, information about co-op housing, co-op First Nations, tenants association,
- Protection for abuse discrimination, advocacy in finding a decent place to live, need help in finding suitable living conditions, housing lists
- Suitable affordable housing for special needs
- Subsidized housing for disabled and elderly
- Student housing for young families and young moms
- Accommodations for singles/couples, community housing

The common thread in the urban centres was the waitlist for social housing; no emergency shelters for families, women and children; and transitional housing. There are limited organizations that provide housing – most organizations can only refer their clients to social housing. There is no housing for males or crisis housing for families in need.

## 5.4 Barriers to Access

In each city, participants were asked questions regarding their experiences of encountering barriers to accessing programs or services.

### *Barriers to Programs and Services*

Participants contributed their comments regarding barriers they met in accessing programs or services. The following common barriers to access emerged.

#### **Programs and Services**

- Programs and services are short staffed
- Clients have multiple needs
- Lack of resources

#### **Clientele**

- High-risk clientele
- Demanding of services
- No employment
- No services for aboriginals
- Not knowing
- References
- Addictions
- Transportation
- Lack of information

#### **Service Staff**

- Stressful work
- Finance – more dollars
- Lack of volunteers/workers

#### **Housing**

- Inadequate housing
- Low-income housing
- Slum landlords
- Housing waitlists
- Shelter rates
- Shortage of housing
- Substandard housing
- Renovations
- Large families – hard to house

## **General**

- Politics
- Racism
- Poverty issues

## *Barriers to Obtaining Shelter*

Similar to the discussion in the previous section, the following categorised lists consist of general barriers experienced by individuals in their attempts to seek housing, shelter, and accommodation in Prince Albert, Regina and Saskatoon.

## **Access, Information**

- Lack of transportation
- No phones
- People do not know rights
- Not knowing what is available in terms of services – need to coordinate delivery approach

## **Accommodation, Housing**

- Fear of eviction
- No references for housing
- Lack of availability of adequate housing
- Need for low-income housing for people
- Low vacancy rate
- Overcrowding conditions

## **Family**

- A lot of children are affected – barriers for parents when they have to many children
- Family dynamics
- Lack of access to daycares

## **Resources**

- Lack of money to pay for damage deposit, hook-ups, utilities
- Access to food is limited
- Social services viewed as enemy
- Lack of education hinders on employability and training opportunities

## **Rules, Restrictions**

- Need to be employed or going to school in order to access social housing
- Rigid rules and structures

## **Support**

- No places to stay during a crisis – especially for males and youth
- People fall into a gap of no support when migrating from reserves to cities
- Hard to develop a sense of belonging without a home
- People are surviving in spite of conditions and do engage in activity that is necessary for their survival

People sharing their experiences in order for us to understand some of the barriers they faced in obtaining shelter humbled us. The children, the youth, the adults and the old - held on to hope that their situation would become better if people heard their stories. We found resilience and survival despite the adversities and challenges in accessing housing and an improved quality of life.

## **5.5 Gaps in Services**

In each city, participants were asked questions regarding perceived gaps in services. The following gaps in services emerged in all three cities.

### *Services Currently Not Receiving*

The participants contributed the following responses regarding the services they need, but are currently not receiving.

#### **Child Care**

- Assistance with children; someone to watch the children while looking for a place-daycare

#### **Housing**

- Access to housing information
- Housing that is available, adequate, affordable and pest free, a warm bed
- Better housing
- Housing for single women with no kids
- More homes for young students, need safe places for kids to stay
- Lack of affordable housing, permanent housing
- Need 24-hour shelters in every area of the city (west, east, north, south) that cater to emergencies. Such as:
  1. persons exposed to abuse, neglect, etc.
  2. persons in need of food, water, rest, etc.
  3. persons who need temporary relief; somewhere to go.This is only a fraction of the need. These shelters should also accept “runaways” men, women, and children, anyone who has no place to rest their head.

## **Transportation**

- To be able to go and look at housing, most people walk wherever they must for housing, food
- People with disabilities need access to transportation; people need rides for medical, eyes, dental, physician care, etc.
- Transportation for ceremonies
- Transportation for people who have to work at night
- Transportation for families to work and children's school

## **Food**

- Food to eat; three meals a day
- More grocery money
- A place to eat on weekends
- To be comfortable enough you have enough that you don't need the services

## **Grants**

- Furniture grants, clothing grants, special needs

## **Employment**

- More options for work
- Need a job

## **Counselling**

- Addictions, abuse-rehabilitation programs, life skill program, mental health disabilities
- Child psychologists
- Play therapy

## **Spirituality**

- More access to elders
- Spiritual help, traditional healing

## **Elder Care**

- Elder/senior care for yard work, recreation, bath aides, meals on wheels, purified water

## **Family Support**

- Family services, family support services

## **Recreation**

- Recreation for children
- Fun things to do that would help in keeping fit
- Supports for pow-wows, family fun nights, sports, and taking care of mother earth

## **Youth**

- Age is a big problem; youth are discriminated against
- Rental housing for people who have a fixed income so that there is money left over for food.

## **Education and Training**

- Education-funding
- Job training

## **Advocacy and Support**

- Rentals man inquest to proper living conditions
- First Nations advocates in housing or rentals man-need someone to protect tenants from abuse and discrimination when trying to find a suitable place
- Need more help to find suitable living arrangements
- Advocacy, subsidized housing for disabled and elderly, more accommodations for singles and couples

## **Resources and Information**

- More resources are needed for low-income people, co-op housing among First Nations people, own aboriginal people in real estate industry and information on financing your own home
- Increase social allowance for housing, more low-income housing, rent controls, better regulations, emergency hot lines, and shelter services for young singles

## *Available Organisations to Obtain Help*

The respondents contributed the following replies in response to a question on their knowledge of available, helping organisations.

- Not sure
- None
- Not enough awareness
- People need to know their rights
- Need more advertisements in social services

Specifically, in each city, respondents contributed the following:

## Prince Albert

- Friendship centres
- Social Services
- A.A.
- Aboriginal women
- PACADA
- YWCA
- Share a meal
- Grand Council
- Churches
- Kinsmen
- Community centres
- Food bank
- Soup kitchens
- Urban services
- Salvation Army
- West flat Community Centre
- Riverbank Development Corp
- Addictions
- Wonska
- PTA
- Band
- Youth centre
- Northern Spruce Housing
- NCC
- ISKEW
- Mobile Crisis Unit
- Kateri House
- Gospel Outreach
- Treatment centres
- Schools
- Odd job squad
- First Nations organizations
- Some government agencies

## Regina

- Salvation Army
- Ranch Ehrlo
- Social Services
- Workers compensation
- Women of the Dawn
- Rentals man
- Circle of Life
- Casual labour
- Blue Mantle
- Souls Harbour
- Marian Centre
- Gay and Lesbian Community
- Food bank
- IMCF
- Safety Services
- Chili for Children
- Donahue Centre
- Charmiceal's
- First Nations employment
- Elders
- Counsellors
- Spirituality
- Healthiest Babies Possible
- Peyokwak
- Rainbow Youth
- Community Life Project
- YWCA
- SWAP
- Soup kitchen
- Street Worker Advisory Project
- Christian Life
- Aids Regina
- All Nations Home
- Victim Services
- Clothing banks
- Aboriginal Family Support Services
- Mental health
- Good Food Box
- RICA
- Silver Sage
- Gabriel Housing
- Churches

## **Saskatoon**

- Cress Housing
- Salvation Army
- YWCA
- Social services
- Adelle House
- Bethany home
- Renter's rights
- Schools
- Churches
- SMHC
- Some co-ops
- Metis Society
- Saskatoon Housing Authority
- STC Family Centre
- Sask. Native Rentals
- Property managers for housing lists
- IMFC
- Westside Clinic
- Aids Saskatoon
- Tamara House
- Crisis
- Food bank
- Youth services
- Mental health
- Lawson house
- YMCA
- Family Support Centre
- Sweats
- Healing circles
- Spirituality
- City of Saskatoon-leisure services
- EGADZ
- Building a Nation
- K of C

Additionally, respondents added that more organizations are needed in the community; people need a renter's guide; people need to know their rights as tenants/landlords; people need to be educated and understand.

## *Organisations that Participants Would Not Access*

In response to a question regarding organisations that respondents would not access, respondents replied:

- Not sure
- None
- Not enough awareness
- Band-waitlists are too long

More specifically in each city, respondents supplied the following comments:

## **Prince Albert**

- Social Services
- City Police
- Jail
- Mobile Crisis

## **Regina**

- Ranch Ehrlo
- Social Services
- Mobile Crisis
- Non-Native Organizations
- Souls Harbour
- Friendship Centre
- City Police
- Child and Youth
- IMFC
- Political offices
- Correctional Service of Canada
- YMCA
- Salvation Army
- Mental Clinic
- Hospital

## **Saskatoon**

- Social Services
- Child Crisis – apprehension
- Salvation Army
- Hands on Ministry
- Jehovah Witnesses

Additionally, respondents contributed that:

- Social Services should to help their clients finding a place to live and help with paying the high rents. In accessing Social Services, there are too many forms, it takes to long, they are strict and the money you receive is not enough to support you, there is too much hassle going to social services, there is a poor client worker relationships, there are under-qualified workers, and pride prevents people from accessing Social Services.
- Low house rentals are good for students going to school, but are too high (price) for those who are working, thereby making housing unaffordable.

## 5.6 Reluctance to Use Services

In general, many First Nations do not use existing programs and services primarily due to: lack of knowledge of available programs and services, and discomfort in unfamiliar surroundings resulting in the likelihood of people to turn away before entering the doors of a particular program or agency.

### *Reluctance to Use Services - Top Ten Reasons*

Below are our 'top ten' reasons why First Nations people are reluctant to use existing services to combat homelessness:

- Family dynamics – look after our own – running our own shelters already
- Fear of eviction
- Transportation
- Rigid rules and structures
- Not knowing what is available, in terms of services – need to coordinate delivery approach
- No references for housing
- Lack of education – hinders on employability and training opportunities
- Lack of access to daycare
- Language barriers
- Pride

Reluctance to utilise existing services, lack of knowledge about existing services, fear and suspicion – creates and sustains a conspiracy of silence. As a result, First Nation families tend to live together, pooling their resources and tolerating the overcrowded conditions in order to survive. First Nations are reluctant to turn away family members and friends from having a place to sleep and eat, and hence, some First Nations homes become portals of entry to the urban centre.

## 5.7 Discussion of Saskatchewan First Nations Homelessness by City

### *First Nations Homeless in Prince Albert*

There was scant literature available on First Nations homelessness in Prince Albert; however, we assessed homelessness in Prince Albert using the public forum (town hall style) meetings hosted by the Prince Albert Grand Council (PAGC) Urban Services, and the City of Prince Albert Housing Sub-Committee.

PAGC coordinated a public forum inviting programs and services to engage in dialogue on homelessness. Of 125 invited community service organizations, 35 attended the one-day public forum, in Prince Albert. The community service organizations were asked discuss, identify and offer suggestions on how to address the issue of housing and homelessness for the city. In groups, participants discussed homelessness as it related to their organisation and provided PAGC and the City of Prince Albert with ideas and recommendations.

Based on respondents' information, we found that there is no shelter available to men and the YWCA is the only shelter available for women. There is no shelter available for women and children or families in crisis. Hotels are used as shelters in Prince Albert.

In particular, the following needs emerged:

- Emergency shelters
- Transitional housing
- Permanent supportive housing - low-income housing, cooperative housing
- Permanent housing - home ownership program
- Any other type of shelter that First Nations people could benefit from

The round table discussions focused on three areas:

1. Memberships of the PA housing subcommittee to address homelessness
2. Stakeholders working together
3. Networking to bridge existing services to reduce homelessness

These areas are discussed below:

## **Membership of the Prince Albert Subcommittee on Housing**

With regard to the structure of the City of Prince Albert's Subcommittee on Housing, particularly membership of the subcommittee, participants felt that a lot more programs and services (agencies) need to be more involved to deal with homelessness and people who are at risk of being homeless.

## **Stakeholders Working Together**

Regarding the question, "How could stakeholders work together to reduce homelessness in the city of Prince Albert?" responses included:

- People should be provided with the tools needed to take more responsibility over their lives so there is less dependency on the system.
- There should be a more pro-active approach in dealing with youth.
- Provide counselling in addictions.
- Form partnerships with other community service organizations.
- Education to be provided to renters and landlords for a mediation process/dialogue to be in place.
- Lobby for increase housing dollars.
- Lobby for increasing housing allowances from Social Services.
- Form joint ventures.
- Develop long and short-term goals.
- Develop a community vision on homelessness and let the community as a whole know about it.
- Examine the issues that put people in homelessness or at risk situations.
- Set in training: life skills, addictions, find the underlying problems.
- Housing policies for the city: state values and quality, mechanisms for setting up housing.
- Have the city set aside 10% of the land available to be sold for housing for low cost (affordable housing).
- Bring agencies together, and define what our Social Vision is in regards to life-skills and education.
- Better integration of services.
- Form a group for men's shelter.

## **Networking to Bridge Services**

With regard to networking to build bridges in existing services, to provide key interventions for poverty reduction to reduce homelessness or at-risk situations, the following was discussed:

1. meeting basic needs: physical security-health and mental health
2. removing barriers: access to transportation, child care
3. building skills: life skills, job training, literacy/numeracy, job search

4. promoting economic development: access to capital, self-employment, job creation/retention

Responses to this discussion included:

- Have an anti-poverty strategy in place-governments need to more involved in dealing with poverty.
- Social services to provide home maintenance program to teach renters the basics of home maintenance.
- Teach parenting skills.
- Transition home should be in place to help young mothers with babies.
- Depot where used furniture/clothing could be dropped off and distributed to families in need.
- Depot for repairing used furniture and equipment.
- Develop community gardens.
- Set up community kitchens to show people how to cook, can, and preserve food.
- Networking among all organizations.
- Men's shelter with programming.
- Develop an out-of-the-cold program, such as opening your basement as shelter to the people who don't have anywhere to go in the winter; also offer them a good meal and maybe a place where they can clean themselves up (shower, bath).
- More safe houses could be built or old buildings renovated.
- Kateri House could expand their facilities, as it is a good place to go for the homeless.
- Address the need for facilities for men - nothing is offered in P.A.
- There should be a better daycare system for those people trying to educate and work for themselves.
- Service providers need to be more understanding of their clients and their situations.
- Work with business to hire more people with disabilities-including the Chamber of Commerce and non-profit organizations.
- Encourage youth to stay in school.
- More career development in schools.
- Provide on going life skills programs.
- Create a centralized one-stop shopping information centre that lists information that each service providers offer.
- Provide training seminars to the public on the Tenants Act and building and home maintenance for the renter.
- Develop a new Youth Futures Program with a cross cultural components added to its content.
- Develop an Elders counsellor position that could be accessible to those requesting the advice of an elder.
- Provide rentalsman information to clients.
- Cottage industry - working from home.
- Promote cooperatives.

- Get the business sector more involved in job creation programs.
- Joint ventures with corporations, financial institutions, and other small business.
- Develop odd job squads for youth.
- Develop the use of bartering services.
- Have career workshops for the public.

The community service organizations attending the public forum were committed to the process and welcomed the opportunity to continue the dialogue.

In addition to the public forums, PAGC conducted interviews with community service providers in Prince Albert. PAGC interviewed 80 service organizations that provide a diverse range of services in addictions, housing, employment, health, education, law and spirituality. In the area of housing, landlords, housing authorities, and real estate agents indicated that they do not keep a waitlist due to amount of transient people in the city. Many of the organizations provided more than one service.

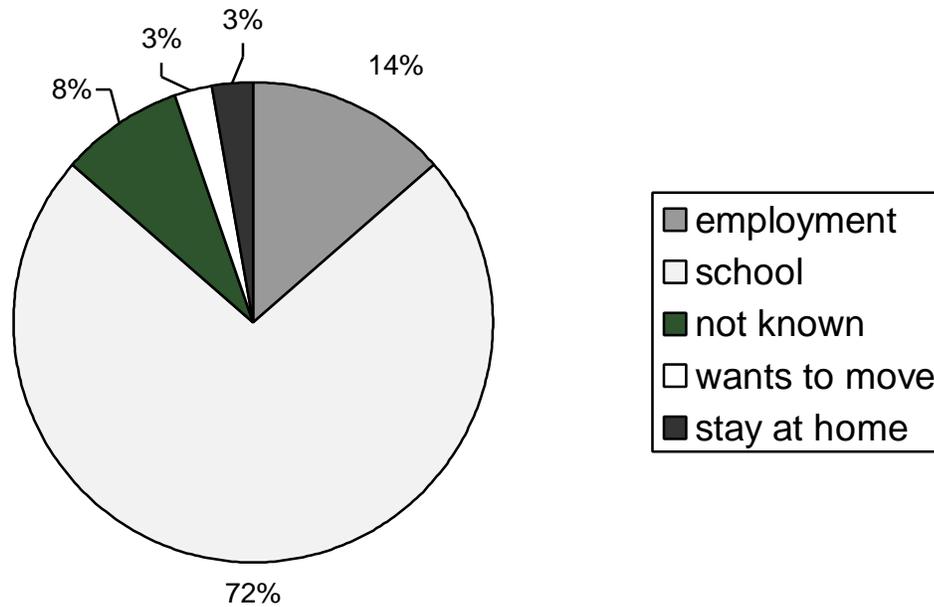
A break down of the services appears below:

- 6 housing organizations=998 units
- 7 homes=293 beds for seniors and people with disabilities
- 16 organizations providing food
- 55 services provided safety services and education
- 60 organizations that offer counselling services
- Northern Spruce Housing-waitlist=130 families

## Future Plans-Prince Albert

Respondents were asked about their plans for the future. Responses are charted and explained below.

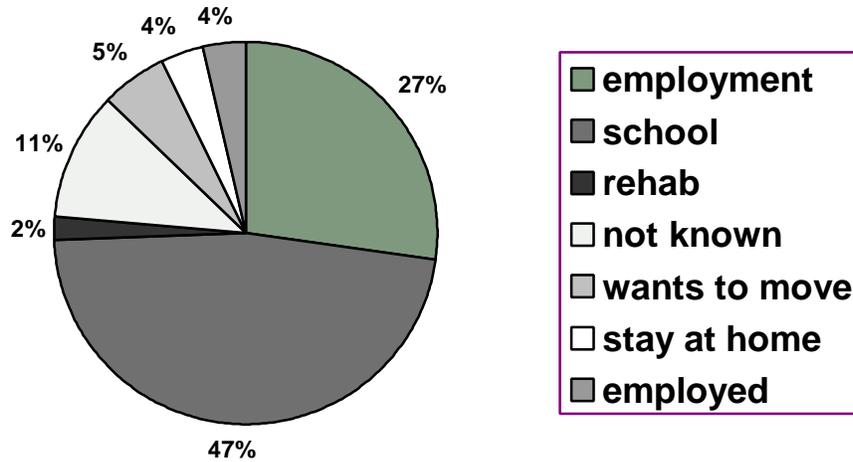
### Prince Albert Youth



When asked about future plans, of the 37 youth interviewed,

- 72% (27) indicated that they wanted to go to school
- 14% (5) indicated that they wanted to be employed
- 8% (3) indicated that they were not aware at the time of interview
- 3% (1) indicated that they wanted to move away
- 3% (1) indicated that they want to stay at home

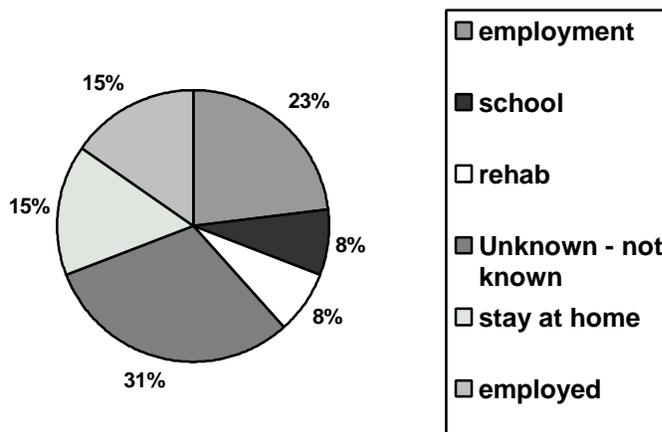
## Prince Albert Adults



Of the 55 respondents interviewed about their future plans,

- 47% (26) indicated that they wanted to go to school
- 27% (15) indicated that they wanted employment
- 11% (6) indicated that they did not know at the time of interview
- 5% (3) indicated that they want to move away
- 4% (2) indicated that they want to stay at home
- 4% (2) indicated that they would stay employed

## Prince Albert Seniors

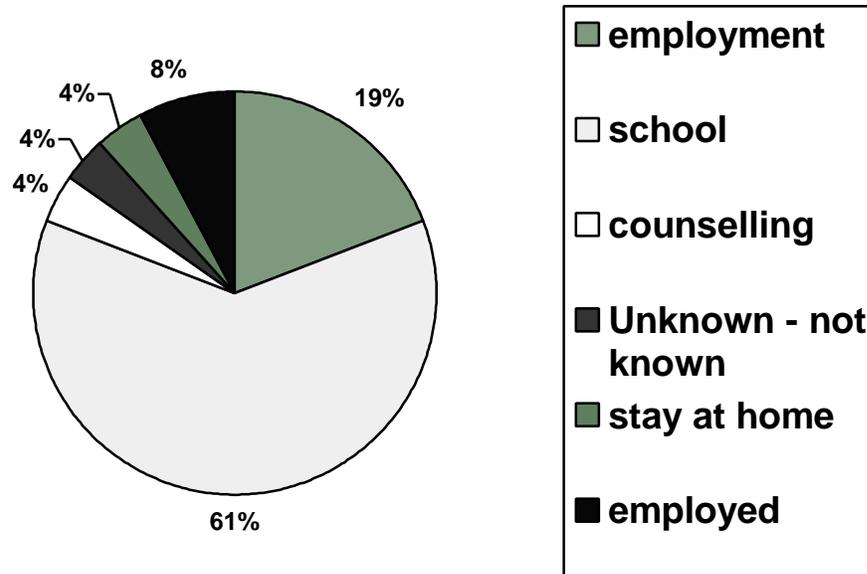


Of the 13 respondents interviewed about their future plans,

- 31% (4) indicated that they did not know about their future plans at the time of the interview

- 23% (3) indicated that they wanted the skills to be employed
- 15% (2) indicated that they wanted to stay at home
- 15% (2) indicated that they would stay employed
- 8% (1) indicated that they wanted to go to school
- 8% (1) indicated that they wanted to go to rehabilitation

### Prince Albert Unknown Age/Gender



Of the 26 respondents interviewed about their future plans,

- 61% (16) indicated that they wanted to go to school
- 19% (5) indicated that they wanted skills to be employed
- 8% (2) indicated that they would stay employed
- 4% (1) indicated that they wanted counselling
- 4% (1) indicated that they wanted to stay at home
- 4% (1) indicated that they were not aware at the time of the interview

### *First Nations Homeless in Regina*

Regina engaged in public forums and community service profiling. The forums took place at Circle of Life, Rainbow Youth Centre, Indian and Metis Friendship Centres, Parolee's, Chili for Children, and Pathfinders.

Participants contributed the following responses:

### **Circle of Life**

- One participant felt that single men and women do not like the confines of the Salvation Army and the YWCA with regard to the church and the rigid structures of these organizations.
- Another shared that during the summer months many people live on the streets and/or near the tracks. They tended to travel and hitchhike more frequently during the summer.
- One man lived in his van for three months because he refused to accept help from welfare. He survived by eating at soup kitchens and church organizations and collected bottles and doing whatever to survive. He admits that his pride was his biggest barrier regarding him being able to ask for help.
- One woman stated that women become homeless or at risk of being homeless when their relationships break up and they are stuck with debt from their partner.

### **Rainbow Youth Centre**

- Youth indicated that they needed to further their education in order to have employment. One youth dreams of being a lawyer but she isn't in school as she helps her grandmother raise her siblings and cousins.
- Another youth described his housing as a 'moveable tipi'. This concept allows him to live on or off the reserve and no matter where he settles he considers it home. His dream is to work with other youth.

### **Indian Metis Friendship Centre**

- IMFC participants thought it was a good idea that people are realizing that there are slum landlords and that this is not acceptable. Wishes for better housing.
- Another participant felt that there is a need for more low-income programs and units to decrease the slum landlords.
- Another participant felt that there is little focus on single people, there is not enough money for food because the money set aside for food is spent on rent, and there are not enough adequate places to rent.
- People who live out on the streets have little resources.
- Housing should be for everyone. Landlords and private housing owners are not accountable. To have better than a minimum wage.
- Better housing and have adequate room for the people who visit. To live in a neighborhood that you feel safe in and not have to worry about being 'beat up' for your 'name brand shoes'.

### **Parolee's**

- One participant shared that a barrier in jail is the need for the inmate to complete an I.Q. test called the Minnesota test. The test

is designed to determine if you have a mental health issue. However, one of the questions that they ask if you talk to spirits. If you answer yes then this indicates that you have a mental health issue. The issue that arises among the Aboriginal inmates has to do with their culture and belief system.

- Another parolee felt that when he reflects back on his life the common thread that many parolees' face is the transition from the pen to the city. There seems to be a lack of organizations that the men can access once they are out which leads to these men falling between the cracks and returning to the streets. The correctional facility offers an ABE program to the inmates however the content is 'white' world focused. He feels that Aboriginal organizations are not recognized and respected by the correctional facility.
- Another parolee felt that due to his little income he has learned to spend wisely. In addition, DSS does give him the run around regarding his financial situation. He feels that it is not easy to find employment when on parole. There are restrictions for parolee's regarding employment because of the bonded question.

### **Chili for Children**

- One participant felt that when reserves classify as people as urban Indians, the chiefs and councils' budgets exclude this population. The issue of jurisdiction contributes to the neglect of urban Indians (the battle between the federal, provincial and tribal/band councils).
- Another participant cited mobility for elders as an issue. She had been using her van and provided transportation to the elders when they need to visit the doctor, shopping, and to other functions. In turn, her van broke down and she could no longer provide the service. She feels that mobility is an area that is lacking in this population and would continue to provide this service freely.

### **Pathfinders**

- One participant's concern was that he had to have a job before he can have a house.
- Another spoke of needing family support in order to have a good house and a job and would like to establish a foundation.
- A concern was the issue of a matched percentage of damage deposit, plus rent, plus utility hook up fees, even before you move into a place. It can become very expensive each time you move.
- Another found that when you have to move for work (from city to small town to reserve), it becomes very difficult to find adequate housing. Tendency to stay in hotels because of the lack of housing; this is very expensive. The majority of his cheque goes to rent.

- Another found it difficult to find adequate housing and affordable low-income housing.

The coordinator for the FHQ/Adult Learning Center-Pathfinders discusses the implication of the lack of housing and the effect on students:

- Housing issues with students occur on a monthly basis, i.e. damage deposits. Students are funded by the Department of Social Services who provides the student with a letter that they are responsible for the damage deposit. However, the time it takes for the letter to be submitted to the landlord is lengthy and students lose their place.
- Students tend to move every two to three months for a variety of reasons, such as inadequate housing, eviction, unable to pay rent and other personal reasons.
- Some people take advantage of student's places, which causes stress and issues regarding school and finance.
- PTA provides \$200 for rent and pays utilities. The living allowance varies from \$480 (single person) to \$885 (family of two). If the student has no children, it is difficult to live on what is provided.
- Internal conflicts between partners or families affect the student's stability. If conflict occurs, then the student has to move which affects their school performance. In some cases, there is a lack of personal space, which can cause stress for students.
- Education is a start, but more social supports are needed, for example, he sells bus passes for \$20 to help students with transportation.
- Pathfinders will move this summer, causing some concern for students, i.e. transportation and change from evening to daytime operating hours.
- Students face discrimination when renting, often due to their youth. He has provided for landlords to offer a character reference for students.
- Some students also don't eat on a daily basis. Once they're in the new facility, they will be able to address hunger.
- Some students have never had a permanent address; they've lived and slept where they could with most completing their program.
- Some students have addiction issues (alcohol and drugs). Students are asked to leave the program if they attend under the influence of a substance, and they can return when they are sober.

### **Assessing Regina**

Current research conducted by the Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies and the Regina (RTSIS) confirmed the above findings. Compounding the problem of having to pay rent while on a low-income is the availability of rental housing and quality of that rental housing. Many

urban First Nations people and others in a low-income situations face these issues on a daily basis.

Regina has been particularly impacted by the move towards a market value housing approach. "While Regina has experienced a decline in rental housing construction and an increase in conversion of rental units for sale, it has also experienced rising rents and a dramatic decrease in vacancy rates for rental apartment units" (McNeil & Warnock, 2000:42). In the *Disappearance of Affordable Housing in Regina* report, the authors state:

While the market may have been deemed fair by the government, the conditions in the Regina rental housing market, since the early 1990's have hardly been fair to those with small incomes. Existing rental properties are being demolished and converted for sale thus shrinking the supply of housing to the point where vacancy rates have plummeted and rents continue to rise some rental owners have taken full advantage as can be seen in the increase concentration of rental housing ownership putting upward pressure on rental housing rates. All of these conditions indicate growing unfairness in the market (McNeil & Warnock, 2000:41).

Clearly, the market driven housing situation found in Regina has created an increasing and substantial pressure on the low-income families who are struggling to provide safe, secure and stable housing for their children.

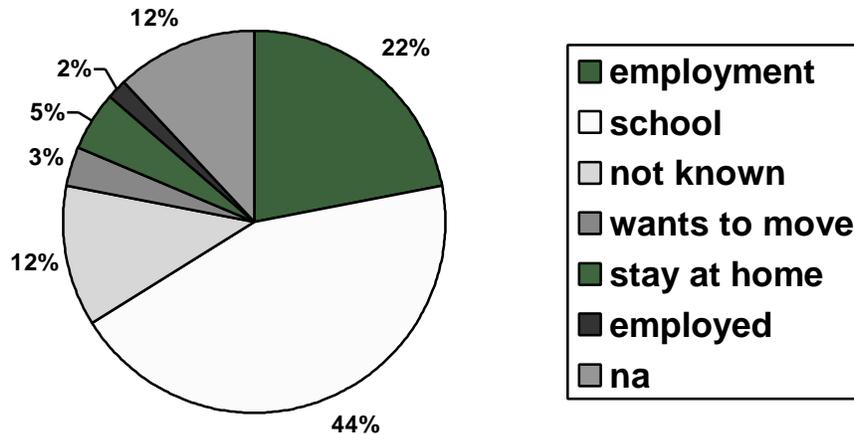
A most serious problem in Regina is the lack of affordable housing for Aboriginal people. Yet the federal government has abandoned its responsibility to Aboriginal people who live off-reserve, cutting all funds for new housing developments and freezing the subsidies to non-profit housing corporations. When negotiating its agreement with the federal government, the Saskatchewan government accepted this policy and has chosen not to funnel any new funds into urban housing for Aboriginal people. The Aboriginal housing corporations most closely meet the needs of Aboriginal people who must, or choose to, rent. In contrast with other social housing authorities, Aboriginal detached housing are far greater than those of larger, multiple units operated by, for example, the Regina Housing Authority. By freezing their budgets at 1995-6 levels, the senior governments seem to be guaranteeing that aboriginal housing corporations will go bankrupt or be forced to convert to market housing. This unacceptable situation must be rectified (McNeil & Warnock, 2000:55).

Essentially, according to McNeil and Warnock, the provincial government must increase its support for Aboriginal housing corporations.

## Future Plans-Regina

Respondents were asked about their plans for the future. Responses are charted and explained below.

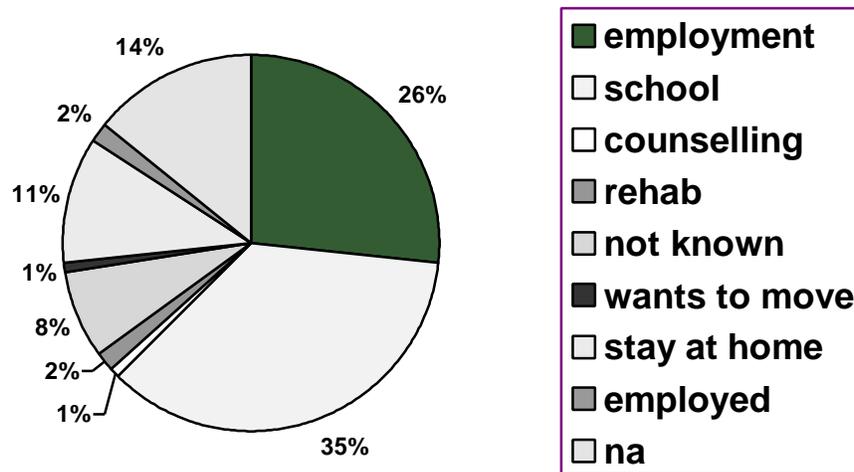
### Regina Youth



Of the 55 respondents interviewed about their plans for the future,

- 44% (26) indicated that they wanted to go to school
- 22% (13) indicated that they wanted employment
- 12% (7) indicated that they were not aware at the time of the interview
- 12% (7) did not indicate
- 5% (3) indicated that they wanted to stay at home
- 3% (2) indicated that they wanted to move away
- 2% (1) indicated that they would stay employed

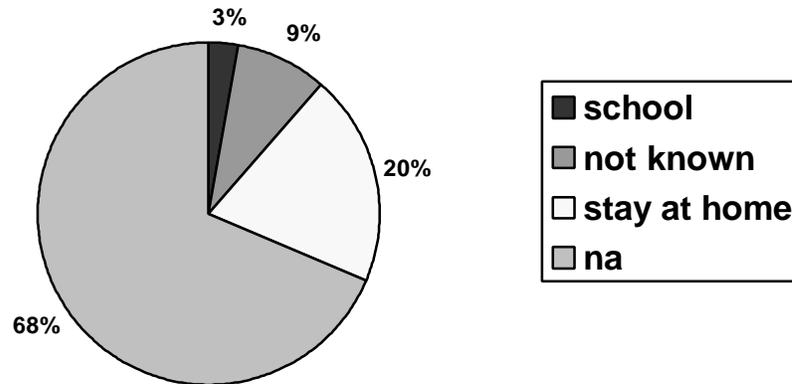
## Regina Adults



When asked about their future plans, of the 120 respondents,

- 35% (43) indicated that they wanted to go to school
- 26% (32) indicated that they wanted employment
- 14% (17) did not indicate
- 11% (13) indicated that they wanted to stay at home
- 8% (9) indicated that did not know at the time of the interview
- 2% (2) indicated that they wanted rehab
- 2% (2) indicated that they would stay employed
- 1% (1) indicated that they wanted to move away
- 1% (1) indicated that they wanted counselling

## Regina Seniors and Unknown Age & Unknown Age/Gender



Of the 35 respondents interviewed about their future plans, 68% (24) did not indicate, 20% (7) indicated that they wanted to stay at home, 9% (3) indicated that they did not know at the time of the interview, and 3% (1) indicated that they would like to go to school.

### *First Nations Homelessness in Saskatoon*

Group forums were held in Saskatoon with the following organisations: Building a Nation, River of Life, and Saskatoon Tribal Council Head Start Program. The following discussion presents information collected, and summarised, from the participants.

#### **The Organisations**

The Building a Nation organisation uses a traditional council circle, involving local people with traditional healing practised and knowledge and mainstream current counselling expertise, to conduct business. Their healing program respects the cultural preferences of Aboriginal people in providing healing, and enhancing, services. Building a Nation specifically provide services to Aboriginal men “living on the streets”. Building a Nation is located on 20<sup>th</sup> street, which is described as the hub of the inner city.

The River of Life – Pentecostal church – is located at 201 Ave. F and it was chosen because its outreach program reaches the homeless and people at risk. It has a “food bank” service offered every Monday and Thursday. This organization also assists people who need furniture and clothing; much of its services are based on donations and the generosity of its members. This organization also provides professional crisis and counselling services to its members and people who come in from the streets.

Both organizations are staff by Aboriginal people who either volunteer their services or are on the payroll of the organizations. Each organization has a high percentage of Aboriginal people using their service in one form or another. These two organizations have a high number of Aboriginal males using their services. The Saskatoon Tribal Council Head Start program works with people who are at-risk, but do have shelter in one form or another.

These sites were chosen because each organisation has a different perspective in their approach to helping people. The organizations have also been successful in delivering services, as homeless people utilize their services on hourly and daily bases.

Many people, who shared their stories of homelessness, felt privileged that their stories would be documented from their perspective. A common thread woven throughout the daily life of the homeless person is that they have hope for a better tomorrow.

The actual number of homeless people in the Saskatoon area is unknown, but as one homeless person talked about the issue, he believes there are over 3000 homeless in Saskatoon. Most agree that the number rises at the end of June when school is out for the summer.

The main day-to-day goals of a homeless person are to find food and shelter, and the occasional change of clothing. Finding work, pursuing medical attention and educational goals are part of their dreams and hopes for a better time.

Not all are destitute, depressed, despondent, discouraged, disheartened and dispirited. The clothes that they wear are reflective of the present status of living conditions: soiled, wrinkled and dirty. Physical appearance varies - some have washed, others have not. Facial appearance is rugged; scarred with the tragic events of violence. Some voices are whispered, low and melancholic. Stature is bent. The older ones show signs of the onset of arthritis; the shoes they wear are ill fitting. Most show signs of degenerate medical conditions. The younger people have the "flight or fight" look of insecurity and mistrust of people. Most people would not talk or were reluctant to talk. A considerable amount of time was spent ensuring that personal information would remain confidential.

The common meeting places are places that will get them through another day - the Friendship Inn (a place where they can get a free meal), Building a Nation (provides various types of services, crisis and referral), and churches (where shelter may be provided, clothing and food distributed). There is no common meeting place, or outlet though, where people can leave a phone number for a job contact, or to communicate with agencies. Employment agencies are seen as a luxurious dream for others, not meant to be part of the life of the homeless.

The culture of the street life is defined through the norms, values and practices of those who inhabit that particular life. The street language that is used is reflective of the activities they engage in, such as “binning” and “swamping”. Twentieth Street is the place where many network for food, clothing and meeting friends/associates; it is usually referred to as the “hub”. The talk of the street is usually about the politics of their life and how agencies, services treat them good and bad:

- Social Services is seen as the enemy with too many hurdles to cross for assistance; most social workers have never seen the conditions of their living state.
- Slum landlords are well known (by name) and by their treatment of tenants.
- The Salvation Army has increased their meals from \$1 to \$3, which is unaffordable by many.
- The Friendship Inn has policies where even the smell of alcohol on the homeless results in meals being taken away for sometimes up to one year.
- Aboriginal governments are look upon as the “haves” and the homeless as the “have nots”. Most were disappointed that officials were not there to hear their stories.

Help is available but services are uncoordinated and assistance is short-term. The organizations that provide long-term planning provide counselling as part of the program, but in most cases, even counselling will not meet their basic needs of shelter and food.

Technology such as computers, phones, and faxes are foreign. There is no need for such technology if you have no home.

The educational level of the homeless is very diverse – some education, skill training and development (i.e. construction), and some post-secondary.

The justice system or legal assistance does not apply to them, because they don't utilize the services. Court appearances are usually done on their own accord or they may have court-appointed legal representation in serious matters. In many cases, charges are looked upon as welcome relief when winter sets in; most look forward to three meals per day and at least have a clean, warm place to sleep for the winter.

### **The Stories**

The focus groups provided a meal and a common place for people to meet and talk. A tape recorder was available to record stories. Mostly men, varied ages, and some teenagers, mostly in their late 20s and up, attended the focus groups. Some women, who were homeless or at risk of becoming homeless within a month, also attended the group discussions.

## **Building a Nation**

When asked the question, “what made an impact on their life when they were homeless or how did that event effect you to this day”, participants shared the following:

### **Male response:**

“At one time point in time when I was homeless I turned to someone and the help I needed was not there... . it brought a lot of anger, feelings of hopelessness, I felt rebellious, I had a depressed feeling. I was shutting down, what affected me was I couldn't think clearly, I was frustrated. The anger inside of me made the situation worse... . I was affected in ways that were unhealthy but I think in my case, every since I could remember from high school. I come from a good family always gave me what I needed; even now they give me emotional support. I have an emotional support system in place. When I was homeless, it just doubled up my troubles.”

### **Male response:**

“I was 14 when I left home. There were three of us, myself, my brother and sister. I walked around for about two weeks – finally I stayed in a broken house, there was a fireplace there that I used. I started hanging around with older guys. I started stealing and digging in garbage cans for foods. The older guys taught me a lot about the street life, I started to steal for them.”

### **Male response:**

“When I first came to the city I slept at my brother's and then my sister's. They helped me out quite a bit but I didn't feel like I was going anywhere, there was angry thoughts when I was looking for a place. I stayed with my friends, then he got kicked out, the landlord just kicked him out, right out, just like that. It was the first time that I was homeless. I tried to hide my feelings for a long time

... .one time I went to Banff, there was so many people that were homeless there. When I was in Banff the first four days I was running out of food. I slept under the bridge. During that time, I spent my time walking around looking for work.

I got into relationships... , then the women would throw me out, then I would become homeless. I was always working when I was with a woman, I looked after them, then they wanted control. The more I gave them the more they wanted, I felt abused. I felt anger, even to this day I still feel that way.”

**Male response:**

“I have been homeless about three or four times already. I kinda had to slip into apartments to sleep to keep out of the cold, or I would go the Salvation Army.”

**Male response:**

“I was 16 when my dad said I couldn’t stay there any more. I went into the city stayed at my aunt’s. I would get up early to go to work, brought myself a car, then I got into drinking. I had a good job. I do not live in Saskatoon, I don’t have a place to live in. I don’t know where I’ll sleep tonight, maybe the Riverbend.”

**Male response:**

“I will be sleeping in my tent tonight at the Riverbend. When I had a place to live my landlord kicked me out because I had some friends over, they weren’t loaded or anything but the next day I got kicked out and I became homeless. I would sleep in the Hermanson building when things got cold or I would sleep outside when the weather is good.”

**Male response:**

“When you are homeless, what hurts the most is the way that you are viewed by so called “normal” people. Basically what we need is to help build us as a nation. Feelings, I had certain experiences; I will act up sometimes. People who are homeless, who may have the opportunity to turn their life around they turn against you, they forget who and where they come from.”

**Male response:**

“When I was looking for a place the landlords wanted to know right away if you were working.”

**Male response:**

“The Hermanson building is for gays; they discriminate against you if you are not gay. The building where I live in the landlord only wants the Indians to live downstairs and the white people upstairs where it is cleaner. XXX... [the] landlord... has slums all over the place and he charges so much rent.”

**Male response:**

“You know the Friendship Inn should be opened longer so that many people can eat, people could also sleep there.”

**Male response:**

“I think the biggest problem is that there is much drinking. When winter comes along we see the boys getting ready to go to “jail”, they pack all their belongings in their packsack and they are on their way. They stay in jail for the winter and come out in the spring.”

When asked a question about their 'rights', participants offered the following:

**Male response:**

"You know the landlord thing – one needs to know about your rights there. All we know is about Canadian rights – we don't even know about Indian rights."

**Male response:**

"You know if you complain to your landlord, he threatens you that he will put you on the 'black list' and you won't be able to get a place from anybody. This landlord I had stole all my furniture. He is a crooked bum. I put a deadlock but that doesn't keep even work. I was paying \$450.00 for this place, which I shared; with my sister... there is no safety. When we were drinking these guys tried kicking in the door. I couldn't call the police because I had no phone. The landlord would not fix the door we had no protection."

Participants were asked about the number of homeless people living in Saskatoon. Participants offered the following:

- I know about 8 or more that I personally know.
- I know about 5 or 6.

**Male response:**

"I know a lot of homeless people in Saskatoon. Doesn't matter where you go you will find them? We are tired of being studied – we are studied to death by social workers, anthropologists nothing ever happens. People won't off us the jobs, they won't give us a chance. The cycle always starts all over again. Street people are held prisoners by the slums landlords – a lot of "lip service" no one really does anything.

Participants were asked to identify the hopes and dreams that lie within them. The following responses were shared:

- I need a place to stay tonight. I've been in the psych-ward before; I am on medication right now.
- My wish is to have a trailer set down by the river and watch the world go by.
- I want to be a businessperson, I want to own a restaurant made out of logs. I want to be a businessman.
- I want a family, a job- because I am a welder by trade. I want to live in a quite place where I can work on my dreams.
- That's what we don't have in place is a place to crash, a place to sleep.
- Salvation Army charges you \$3 for meal it used to be \$1.

**Female response:**

“I just got out of rehab, just a few weeks ago. I don’t have a place to live or have a place to go. Maybe I will stay with my friends but they all drink... If I didn’t drink, I could change what happen to me. I just have to be positive about things.”

**Male response:**

We need to organize, you need people come to see us, visit us, come and see where we are living. Homeless people have always had things stuff down their throats, one of the reasons why people are reluctant to come here. Someone has got to do things, get things started for those without a home. We need to give people a chance to talk; we need people to tell their personal stories. That’s where people will begin to start, bring agencies let them meet with us, include non-Aboriginal people.”

Participants were asked if they knew of any homeless children. Participants responded that there are a lot of teenagers, on Broadway, or at the Riverbend, as well as many, many homeless children. In the summer there are more children (when school is out).

**River of Life**

Over 40 homeless people showed up at this focus group - many only to eat and leave again after they ate. Participants were asked the same question, as the Building a Nation focus group, as to what impacted their life when they were homeless or how that event affected them. Participants contributed the following responses:

**Female response:**

“My mum and dad were alcoholics, I grew up in a foster homes all my life. I grew up all over the place. When I last saw my mum it was at her funeral. I lost my kids through alcohol and drugs I lost my common-law husband. I live in an apartment, I don’t know how long I will be there maybe two weeks, then I will be without a home. I don’t know how long Social Services will pay for my rent they never said anything to me, but I don’t know how long I will be there. I usually bring homeless people to my place, they sleep all over the floor (this participant asked if she could take an extra piece of chicken for her friend who was living on the streets).”

**Male response:**

“It is kinda hard to say stuff like this – my mum gave me away when I was about three months old, my grandmother raised me. I lived in a shack on the reserve, hot in the summer and cold in the winter... . I never had good clothes... . when I found out about my parents they said they couldn’t afford me. I use

to panhandle, beg for 25, 10 or 5 cents; I was lucky to scrape up \$1. I use to sit behind the Salvation Army; when they threw the food out, I would fill up my 'mason jar' with hot soup. I know I had to change my life too many of my friends have died because of drugs and alcohol. If somehow my talking affects one person then it does somebody good.

Friends helped me to change on the street. When we panhandled we would get together. We use to go binning. You have to watch out for each other. We use to steal liquor or we would roll someone, we never hurt anybody though we just rolled them and left them alone. The cops know me by name. I met this one cop here at the pow-wow, he was surprised that I was still alive."

**Male response:**

"I went through an experience of homelessness. When I went to these agencies they only looked at you and passed you around as a statistic. When I came to Saskatoon it was a struggle... . I didn't want to live in a hostel. I lived from home to home. I came from a good home. I was a housing coordinator for my band, I started helping the people on the reserve the chief and council did not like that, so they got rid of me. I don't see FSIN people here they don't show up when things are happening. FSIN people are living in luxury. Myself, I have a family of 6 – a struggle to make things meet. The only time FSIN cares about people are when politics are involved.

In Saskatoon, I was being pushed from agency to agency. When I started getting things together, it was when I started to do things for myself. We are one nation and we gotta help each other, regardless of our nationality. We need to have one dream but dream together... . but people really need to help themselves. If FSIN does not show they are true leaders then that's the way things go, it will affect the way people are down here. I have always wanted to help people through programs."

**Male response:**

"I have a home but there is lots of racism. I gave my notice. I don't think whites are getting along with the Indians. Most of those suites are \$350 just too much for me. I am not allowed to eat at the Friendship Inn and I do not know why. I don't know why the Friendship Inn turns you away when you smell like booze – they do that all the time."

**Male response:**

"I live in this place; it is just awful, even the rats don't even want to come in."

**Female response:**

"I just got here a week and a half ago. I know what it is to be homeless. I slept down in the back alleys, slept in cardboard boxes. I come to Saskatoon because the welfare is giving me a hard time in Thunder Bay, Ontario... Right now I am homeless. We just found an apartment; we just have to wait until welfare approves. We have been eating at the shelter; people have been showing us where to get free stuff. The only way we survive is by my old man he does the carving."

**Male response:**

"You know the place where I am living you can't even have a drink but the caretaker is a white man and he is a staggering drunk. Why can't we drink? He thinks that we are going to be violent. There is a lot of violence from Avenue X to downtown to 20<sup>th</sup>, they come out from all over, you get beaten up by other Indians no less."

**Male response:**

"I am a homeless person. I was trying to survive on the streets. I started out by binning and I found a tent that would be suitable; I thought it would come in handy in the future. I was always helping out my friends they were alcoholics; I was living with XXX then. I had this tent all winter, I store my stuff there; it served me good. I also found an old bicycle which I use all the time."

**Female response:**

"... . When I was married, then my husband passed away. Out of desperation, I got married again. This one landlord promised me a home, my husband being blond I got the house but when I brought my three native children, I was turned down by the landlord.

I found another place; I asked the landlord to fix things up but he wouldn't. I came home one time and my children were gone and my house had burned down... I am really thankful for the churches for helping me out.

When I stood up for my rights regardless, the more complaints I made the more I would get kicked out of places. If you complain you speak out you get punished. I don't drink, I don't run around but I still get kicked out. People won't rent to you because they try to raise the rent so they don't want you there."

**Male response:**

"I lived on the streets all my life it was when I got most of my education. I am still on the streets I have been in institutions all my life. I am an alcoholic, a drug user, a con artist, this goes with the streets. I am a solvent user, I drink too much

coffee. I have seen people die, stabbed, bled, beat up for nothing. I am a wino, listerino and a beero. I have been in and out of halfway houses, jails, treatment centers because I know that's where your meals are and clean beds.

I have been doing crime all my life. I talk to myself. I had a chance to join a street gang I said "no" because they were all my family. I am used to the streets; I panhandle. I have enjoyed everyone's comments here, we have problems with welfare, justice you name we have problems with them all.

I have trouble right now, I don't have an ID, I went to the Friendship Center but I don't have the money, so what can I do?"

**Elder male response:**

"Before the white man came here this land was our home. I do wood carving this is how I know. The animals were our food the ground was our mattress, the fire came from the rocks, and the branches were our blankets. Now things are different they are changed and I know what it feels like to have no home... . sometimes I crawl into the bus depot to sleep... . we are all brother and sisters we cannot be violent to one another... . it is just like hitting a baby you can't hurt your fellowman."

**Female response:**

"... . as long as I could remember my mum was home and she fed us, now I am homeless. Keep up the good work and fight.. (this lady was too distraught to continue her conversation)."

There was a considerable amount of pain and tears shed at these meetings. People were thankful they were given the chance to speak.

**Saskatoon Tribal Council – Head Start Parents**

The Head Start group of young parents met, mostly mothers with one father in attendance, to discuss their experiences of homelessness. Literature was read to the group to set the tone for the discussion of their experiences in searching for accommodations in Saskatoon.

**Search for Accommodation**

Participants were asked: "If you can recall in your search for a home what were some of the outstanding circumstances that impacted you and your family when you were searching for a place to live?" Responses included:

- "I had two children when I was searching for a home and I was pregnant at the time. What I found most difficult is that there is no homes available for three of us. The income

we receive from Social Services was inadequate. I was given \$410 (family of 3)-most of the rent was over \$500 per month. I am now sharing a home with my daughter and her child, so our combined income helps us pay for the home that we want.”

- “I was out on homes because I did not have the damage deposit.”
- “Friendship Inn supplied most of my furniture because I had to start from scratch I did not have anything - Social Services would not help me out for furniture so I had to look to other places to help.”
- “I have been on the waitlist for Saskatoon Housing. Sask. Housing said to me that with her and her four children they were low priority. Right now I live in a three bedroom place for the six of us.”
- “Technically I have no caretaker, I have to look after everything myself. When I asked the landlord to fix up some things in the duplex, I was told I did not have anybody to do that and that I had to fix it up myself. I live on the corner street right by the railway tracks, there is no fence for my children to go outside. The place that I am living is not safe for my children but I have no other place to go.”
- “The provincial training allowance is not even enough for us to live on in this city. I thought of going to Habitat for Humanity and Quint for help; moving has taken a toll on the kids as well because of the school changes and having to make new friends. I am really scared to set up in my place, to make it like home, something might happen where I would have to move again.”
- “I looked into Bethany House. Social services told me to get a room and board situation for my child and myself. I kept getting refused because of my child. Cress Housing refused me because I was living on Social assistance. I felt that landlords discriminate me because of my disability to be mobile.”
- “I applied with Sask. Housing, Cress Housing and Native housing. I finally got an interview with Saskatoon Housing and they told me that I was put on a 3-4 year waiting list because of the Social Assistance even though I was going to school after the baby was born. I have been given the run around by this operation; Sask. Native housing hasn’t gotten back to me. I felt that I wasn’t treated appropriately

because of my situation. I was living in a two-bedroom apartment with two kids and one on the way. I lived in Confederation, when I was on PTA, I lived on a house Avenue P, I cleaned the house when I pulled the rug out there was worms under the rug. I did all the maintenance , the landlord didn't maintain the house at all. I felt that I was taken for a ride."

## **Housing**

When asked about problems encountered in searching for housing accommodations in the City, participants shared similar responses. Many felt that the income received from Social Services was inadequate as they were only given on the average of \$400 for rent. Also, by having more than two children places some families at a disadvantage for seeking accommodation.

Transportation was another problem in the search for accommodation. No transportation meant that you were resigned to search in the immediate area where you were presently living. To go across town with small children was too difficult, so whatever was available was usually what was taken.

The average respondent indicated that when interviews for accommodations took place; they were told that references needed to be checked out before they were given a response, but many prospective landlords would not call back, or the respondent would have to wait for up to a month before they received a reply. In some cases, prospective landlords would not bother calling back.

About half of respondents were living with another family; others were living with just the nuclear family.

Many found their accommodations inadequate - some were living in a three-bedroom house with three adults and five children; some were living in a two-bedroom apartment with 4-5 tenants. Many housing circumstances were overcrowding, but their situation had been like this for a lengthy time.

Once accommodations were found these places were kept immaculate for fear of eviction. The average respondent felt that they were living under stress, because if damage did occur then it meant they would be evicted regardless of the reason for the damage.

Many felt used by landlords - to clean up their places - because once these homes were cleaned, then the landlord moved them out.

There were others who also had a good housing relationship with landlords and when they moved, they had excellent references from their past landlords.

Many felt that the new regulation for the damage deposit - equal to the first month rent - was unfair because the landlords were abusing the system by hiking up the rents without any type of improvements to the housing.

Racism and discrimination was an underlying problem in searching for accommodation, but this was always difficult to sense, as many did not have the resources or the energy to fight against what was happening to them.

### **Social Network**

The network for people in search of homes is inadequate. Respondents felt that there should be a central place for everyone to go for help in searching for a place to live.

The current housing agencies now discriminate against those who are on assistance. Most housing agencies require that you work or at least attend school. Some respondents have been on housing lists since 1993, with no feedback to their eligibility for a home.

The extended family is usually the source that is used for the social network. Most found, at the height of their problems, they did not seek professional help or did not know where to go for help with many of their problems.

Many express the lack of employment as one of the reasons for inadequate accommodations.

### **Personal**

The break up of families is very difficult; it takes a long time to get back on your feet once a family is ripped apart. Some individuals were living with family members until their mental health improves.

A handicapped respondent indicated that her search for a home was very difficult, as most landlords would not take her and her child. Some of the reasons they gave were that there were too many stairs and that she could not handle these steps (much of this was already decided for her).

One person in particular said that Aboriginal men were very dependent on their own families to the extent of ignoring their own. Others indicated that Aboriginal men were staying with women as a convenience, in order to be provided for, by these women. When questioned as to "why" this may be happening, it was suggested that men experienced more discrimination when it came to seeking shelter/homes.

The break up of families was related to abuse in some form, whether it was alcohol, drugs, instability, gambling, etc. The disintegration of the family unit compounded with inadequate shelter places enormous constraints on the well being of families. Many felt there needs to be more resources for families in need of help.

## **Assessing the Housing Situation in Saskatoon**

### **Vacancy Rates and Rental Increases**

The City of Saskatoon's vacancy rate (0-1%) is among the lowest in the country. Low vacancy rates have been the norm in Saskatoon since 1995. Few additions to the rental stock, conversions of rental units to condominiums and an increasing population (often from rural areas) have contributed to the strain on housing. Since 1994, an estimated 548 rental units were converted to condominiums; most conversions occurred in the higher quality rental properties. In addition, some low-income units are being converted to "market" use (similar to Regina). In 1996, realty investment corporations acquired 304 low-income housing units (under the Limited Dividend Program). Rents in these newly acquired units rose by an average of 45%.

44% of Saskatoon households pay 30% or more on housing (City of Saskatoon, 1996). The contracting rental market is placing pressure on the price of rent, resulting in rental increases.

### **Shelter Use**

The Saskatoon YWCA conducted a Women's Shelter Study (1999) that examined the profile of clients using the shelter and the need for more suitable, emergency shelters. The report defined shelter as "emergency, short-term and transitional housing, often utilized by people during a crisis or transitional stage of their life and for the time being, are homeless." The report presented the following information:

- About 33% of shelter residents are transient (not permanent Saskatoon residents).
- 40% of shelter beds are core-funded (the other 60% are funded, at least partially, on a per diem basis); fees range from \$8-\$40 per night, and up to \$620 per month for certain living arrangements.
- 83% of shelter housing has security.
- 48% has a chapel on-site.
- 100% have some form of counselling on-site (some more than others) (YWCA, 1999).

From the study, the YWCA was able to develop a profile of women accessing shelter services. A large number of Aboriginal women seek shelter at the YWCA (approximately 58%) and the majority are between the ages of 18-35. Most women are from Saskatoon and almost all the women are funded through Social Assistance. The majority of women were referred to the YWCA by Social Services; many have stayed there in the past. Family violence, homelessness, addiction and/or mental health issues are the main reasons that women seek shelter at the YWCA.

The existing shelters are full most of the time and cannot meet current demand. Referral agencies are forced to utilize informal, and often less than appropriate, informal shelters (inner-city hostels). Shelters need to become more flexible in the clientele they serve, or establish more shelters for those groups of people whose needs are not being met (e.g. young males, families). Currently, there are eight shelters with a total of 149 shelter beds serving children, women, single men and families. Approximately, 68% of all shelter users are Aboriginal people. In 1998, 6,700 individuals stayed in shelters; 28% were children. There have been increases in both the numbers of families and children using shelters as well as the number of referrals to shelters from mental health services. Additionally, shelters are being used for longer periods.

### **Affordable Social Housing**

A high population growth, among the lowest income groups, is leading to an increased demand for more affordable housing. The City of Saskatoon (1996, 1999) in profiling the need for affordable housing and the types of housing available, found that there were 1,600 households on the waiting list for social housing (1998) - an increase of 9% since 1996. Half of households waiting for housing were families. The waiting list for housing is long – about three years for a family not in urgent need. Many families do not apply for assisted housing due to the wait. In Saskatoon, two housing corporations support a low-cost home ownership option. The City of Saskatoon is also emphasizing upgrading older houses in the inner city and neighbourhood revitalisation (City of Saskatoon, 1996).

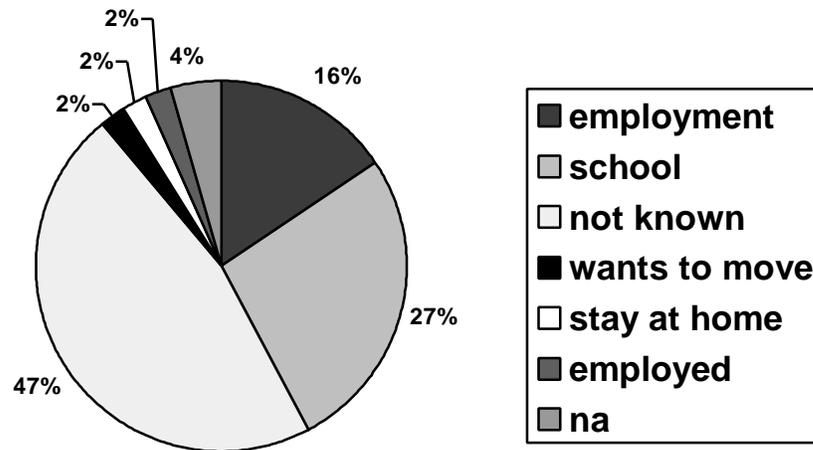
According to the 1996 census statistics, 7% of Saskatoon's 26,320 multiple rental units are in need of major repairs. This number represents 1,735 multiple rental units in need of repair and includes rental dwellings in high rises (5 or more stories) or low-rise apartments (4 or fewer stories), semi-detached dwellings, or row housing (townhouses). A number of units in the core area were built with wood construction and over 200 have been placed under an order for repairs. 477 units have been under some form of repair since January 1997.

Currently, Saskatoon's low vacancy rate impacts everyone - youth, children, women, men, families, elderly people – attempting to access affordable housing. The need to create public awareness and understanding of the issues surrounding affordable housing and homelessness, in the city of Saskatoon, is at a critical high.

## Future Plans-Saskatoon

Respondents were asked about their plans for the future. Responses are charted and explained below.

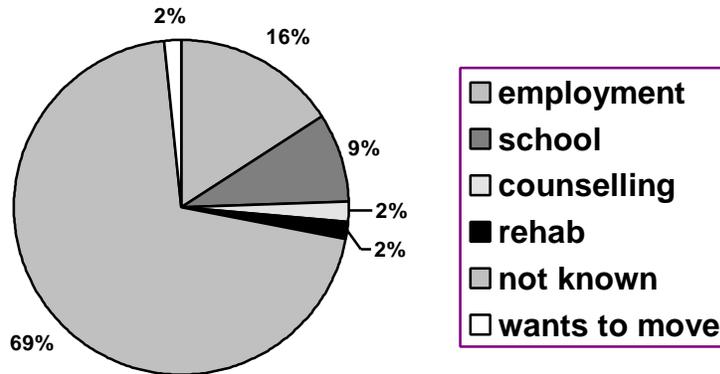
### Saskatoon Youth



Of the 45 respondents interviewed about their future plans,

- 47% (21) indicated that they did not know at the time of the interview
- 27% (12) indicated that they wanted to go to school
- 16% (7) indicated that they wanted employment
- 4% (2) did not indicate
- 2% (1) indicated that they wanted want to move away
- 2% (1) indicated that they would stay employed
- 2% (1) indicated that they wanted to stay at home

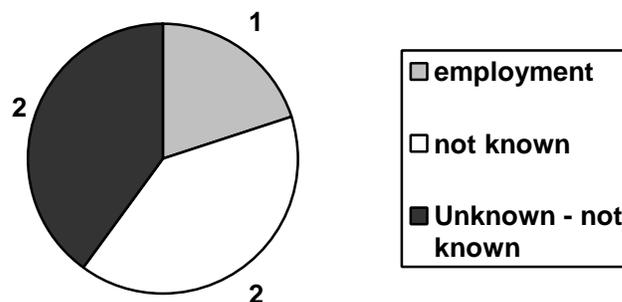
## Saskatoon Adults



Of the 57 respondents who were asked about their future plans,

- 69%(40) indicated that they did not know at the time of the interview
- 16% (9) indicated that they wanted employment
- 9% (5) indicated that they wanted to go to school
- 2% (1) indicated that they wanted counselling
- 2% (1) indicated that they wanted rehab
- 2% (1) indicated that they wanted to move away

## Saskatoon Seniors and Unknown Age & Unknown Age/Gender



Of the 5 respondents interviewed, one person wanted employment, two didn't know, and two didn't give a response.

## 6.0 Recommendations

Throughout the course of this research project, First Nations' experiences were similar when attempting to access adequate and affordable shelter. The following discussion shares information on recommendations, based on research and findings from this project, to assist homeless people and those at risk of becoming homeless, to prevent homelessness. A proposed action plan to combat and prevent homelessness follows the recommendations.

### 6.1 Recommendations from Research

In order to assist homeless First Nations people, and those at risk of becoming homeless, the following needs are recommended; the recommendations arise from participant interviews and the literature review.

#### **Homeless Facilitator**

- Provide an advocacy and information role to assist people in securing safe and adequate shelter.

#### **Shelter Allowance**

- Provide a living allowance that reflects current market conditions.

#### **Transportation**

- Provide access to transportation to assist families while searching for housing.

#### **Access to Child Care**

- Assist families in securing affordable childcare for children of families who are at risk.
- Assist and support families with child care needs while they are searching for housing, employment, etc.
- Provide emergency child care services.

#### **Supportive Housing**

- Provide supportive housing opportunities in concert with coordinated services and program delivery.

#### **New, Affordable Housing**

- Create new, affordable housing units to meet the waiting list needs for housing.

#### **Incentive Funding**

- Provide incentive-based funding to assist families in securing housing.

### **Service Planning**

- Plan and provide coordinated services for population sub-groups such as youth, families, single/abused women, Aboriginal, refugees and immigrants.

### **Homeless Service Information System**

- Create a database of information on available programs and services.

### **Harm Reduction**

- Facilities are needed to deal with substance abuse and should focus on adults and youth.

### **Eviction Prevention Strategies**

- Create a rent bank for emergency use.
- Provide legal services to inform renters about rights.

### **Discharge Policies**

- Create policies regarding: use of hostels, people with mental illness, people with no fixed address, support for women in danger.

### **Community Economic Development**

- Support initiatives to build communities.

### **Self-Help**

- Establish and support initiatives that build self-sufficiency and self-reliance.

Most of the recommendations focus on coordinating available services and programs for effective delivery. The urban centres have a challenge to provide programs and services to a diverse clientele whose needs encompass a wide range of programs and services in order to provide and secure adequate and affordable shelter.

## 6.2 Action Plan

In dialogue with five First Nations urban service delivery agencies of Prince Albert, North Battleford, Saskatoon, Yorkton, and Regina, an action plan was developed for First Nations people living in the urban centres. The context of the action plan is designed within federal options that are available in the area of housing.

In the urban centres, there is a willingness to examine the issue of affordable housing and to meet with other agencies and organisation to discuss housing and homelessness and find possible solutions. In order to create proactive solutions though, partnerships are needed to begin strategic planning to meet the need for affordable housing in urban Saskatchewan.

Program and service needs should be examined to find links or avenues for partnerships with existing agencies and organisations. As well, efforts should be undertaken to coordinate First Nations workers to interface with First Nations clientele to access and use the programs and services. The following proposed Action Plan further outlines some elements and outcomes of a plan to develop and implement coordinated, client-focused initiatives to address homelessness.

### *Proposed Action Plan*

#### **Objective**

To develop and implement client-centred, First Nations managed initiatives that impact on homelessness.

#### **Elements**

Based on the findings, a client-centred action plan to impact on homelessness should have the following elements to address coordination of programs and services:

- Transportation assistance to enable clients to find, maintain and improve their housing circumstances.
- Emergency child care to enable clients to find, maintain and improve their housing circumstances.
- Shelter workers placed at established points of contact with homeless clients, in collaboration with host service providers.
- Specific projects that increase the number of shelter beds and transitional units.

- Community-level, inter-agency coordination to arrange for intake points of service and referral points – provide a linkage to SCPI process.
- Training support for shelter caseworkers.
- Multi-community planning, administrative support, program design, liaison, and evaluation
- Specialized curriculum for caseworkers.

### **Outcomes**

The overall purpose of this action plan project is to have a point of entry for people to access required programs and services. The following outcomes arise from the provision of services.

- Clients receiving transportation assistance.
- Clients receiving emergency child care services.
- Clients assisted in finding, maintaining or improving housing.
- Number of shelter beds created.
- Number of transitional housing units created.
- Number of trained shelter caseworkers.
- Number of points of service established.
- Integration of caseworkers into community service structure.

Based on our research and proposed recommendations, it is necessary to coordinate program and service delivery in order for people to access services with ease, as well as have knowledge of the services that are available to them. Second to a coordinate delivery effort, is the creation of programs and services that reflect that needs of First Nations peoples in accessing adequate and affordable housing.

## 7.0 Conclusion

Homelessness in urban centres is dynamic. With migration, mobility, seasonal changes, and poverty, the ebb and flow in the numbers of the absolute and at-risk homeless population is in constant flux. As a result, it is difficult to accurately assess the numbers of homeless individuals.

The larger urban centres face a larger population and diverse population needs. In all urban centres, there are issues surrounding lack of affordable housing and homelessness. The homeless population is diverse: there are single men and women, single young men and women, mothers with children, and two-parent families. Some of these people have been homeless for many years and others are newly homeless. Some have alcohol or drug problems. Some choose to be homeless; others just need money. Some have money but not enough to pay rent in cities that have a shortage of affordable housing. People who are homeless, transient, staying in emergency shelters, or living in substandard housing or in overcrowded and unsafe housing characterize urban homelessness.

Homelessness or the risk of becoming homeless is often hastened by circumstances beyond one's control, such as losing a job, illness, violence in the family. The losses associated with homelessness reach beyond the material to the emotional and psychological – a sense of belonging, a sense of home. Sometimes this loss is replaced through a process of identifying and connecting with other homeless persons, a process which may result in entrenchment in homelessness (Bauman, et al, 1988:4).

Homelessness is created and supported by the recession, the absence of affordable housing, insufficient supportive housing, high unemployment, and cuts to welfare rates, by cutbacks in programs and services, by overworked and understaffed program support staff, by policies and uncoordinated services, by the absence of affordable housing, insufficient supportive housing, high unemployment, and cuts to welfare rates. The causes are linked to changes in employment insurance and cuts to welfare, lack of affordable housing, and decentralization of services for people who are mentally ill and social factors. Contributing social factors include poor health, mental illness, substance abuse, domestic violence and poverty.

Urban rents consume a large portion of the basic household income. Vacancy rates are low. We find that in cities rents are high. People use their food, clothing, and other resources to pay for their rent. Families and friends live together in order to pool their limited resources. Others engage in street activities to make money to survive. Access to services is limited due to barriers - such as lack of transportation, child care needs, lack of resources, lack of knowledge, fear of reprisal, fear in general – encountered by those seeking the services.

The on-reserve housing situation reflects housing and homeless issues experienced in urban centres – overcrowded, unsafe, unhealthy, inadequate housing. Additionally, those in rural communities lack both the resources and the programs and services to meet the needs of homelessness.

It is difficult to give an accurate number on how many people are homeless or affected by homeless as First Nations homelessness is invisible. First Nations are housing their families, friends and relatives. Everyone should have a home. Many people had difficulty obtaining basic housing that was adequate and ensured acceptable living conditions.

A common experience in this research was the fact that many people were living in overcrowded conditions as an option to homeless, further placing families at risk of eviction. In order to have a place to live, many homes run ad hoc shelters by pooling their resource to assist their families. For many families, the risk of homelessness is an ever-present threat. As we spoke to people, it became evident that their resilience was both overwhelming and humbling. Their ability and drive to survive, despite the barriers they experience, is courageous.

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## 9.0 Appendices

The following documents are referred to in this report and are appended in this section:

- A. Interview Questionnaire
- B. Service Providers Survey
- C. Videotape Consent Form
- D. Interview Consent Form

## Appendix A. Interview Questionnaire

### Part A: Current Situation

1. As of today, what kind of place do you live in? Describe the location and type of place. Who's place is it?
2. Who are you living with? Who do you share that place with?
3. What is their relationship to you?
4. How long have you been there? Can you sleep there for the next month, without being asked to leave?
5. How long are you going to stay there? Do you have enough room for the number of people who live or stay with you? Do you have your own room, bed, small space or flooring?
6. How do you get around? What do you do during the day?
7. Do you currently pay rent? Do you live with someone who pays rent? Does part of your money go to paying rent?
8. Where do you get money to live now.  
(Check all that apply)  
 Employment:  fulltime  part-time  day labourer  
 Self-employed  
 Social Assistance  
 Student Assistance  
 Unemployment  
 Relatives/partner/friends  
 Food Stamps  
 Panhandling/Vouchers  
 Other sources of income: please describe \_\_\_\_\_
9. What are your future plans?

*Part B: Past Situations*

1. Where were you living before that? What kind of place was it?
2. Who did you share that place with? Whose place was it?
3. What was their relationship to you?
4. How long were you there?
5. Did you have enough room for the number of people who lived or stayed with you? Did you have your own room, bed, small space or flooring?
6. How do you get around? What did you do during the day?
7. Did you pay rent? Did you live with someone who paid rent? Did part of your money go towards paying rent?
8. Where did you receive your money to live?  
(Check all that apply)  
 Employment:  fulltime  part-time  day labourer  
 Self-employed  
 Social Assistance  
 Student Assistance  
 Unemployment  
 Relatives/partner/friends  
 Food Stamps  
 Panhandling/Vouchers  
 Other sources of income: please describe \_\_\_\_\_
9. Why did you leave that place? Where did you move to next?

*Part C: Programs and Services*

- In the last month, what services have you used (check as many as apply)? If you are on the waiting list for any of these services – check under wait list:

Services	Received	Wait list	Description (where, when, etc)
Food / soup/ hot meals			
Respite care			
Health care			
Prescription medication			
Financial help – Social Services			
Bus ticket(s)			
Job help			
Rental assistance			
Alcohol/drug Rehab			
Drop in shelters			
Permanent housing			
Transitional housing			
Men's hostel			
Women's shelter			
Storage			
Counselling – <u>1 to 1</u>			
<u>Family</u>			
<u>Group</u>			
Mental health			
Youth centers			
Spiritual help			
Elders			
Traditional healing/help			

- What services do you need that you are currently not getting?
- What organizations do you think are out there to help you? Which organizations would you not go to?

## Appendix B. Service Providers Survey

Community Service Profile/Inventory

NAME OF ORGANIZATION: \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE #: \_\_\_\_\_ FAX #: \_\_\_\_\_

Does your organization mandate include housing? Y \_\_\_\_ N \_\_\_\_

### A.

1. If yes: How many First Nations people do you provide housing services to?  
 \_\_\_\_\_daily    \_\_\_\_\_week    \_\_\_\_\_monthly    \_\_\_\_\_emergency housing
2. What is the average length of stay in each service?  
 \_\_\_\_\_days    \_\_\_\_\_weeks    \_\_\_\_\_months    \_\_\_\_\_yearly
3. What is the number of beds per each service?(please list each service)

	<b>Service</b>	<b>Monthly Occupancy Rate</b>	<b># of Beds (daily/ weekly/ monthly)</b>	<b>Average # of First Nations on waiting list - monthly</b>	<b>% of First Nations</b>
	<b>Emergency</b>				
	<b>Transitional</b>				
	<b>Permanent Supportive (low-income)</b>				

### B.

1. If no: How does your organization respond to First Nations request for housing?
2. Which organization do you regularly refer people to?
3. Approximately, how many First Nations are referred monthly?
4. Do you have a partnership/interagency agreement with a housing agency?  
If yes, please state.
5. Please attach a pamphlet (in lieu of listing):

6. What other services and supports do you provide? Please check)  
Intake/assessment \_\_\_\_; Outreach \_\_\_\_; Mental health treatment \_\_\_\_;  
Basic needs \_\_\_\_; (food/clothing/transportation); medical care \_\_\_\_;  
Life skills training \_\_\_\_; employment assessment \_\_\_\_; job training \_\_\_\_;  
Employment access \_\_\_\_; supportive/transitional employment \_\_\_\_; Case  
management/advocacy \_\_\_\_; substance abuse treatment / recovery \_\_\_\_;  
housing search/placement \_\_\_\_; and/or another type of service not  
previously mentioned. Please advise:

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7. What is your funding source(s)? Please list multiple funding sources
8. What barriers do you experience in trying to access housing services for First Nations?
9. What barriers do you experience in your program that limits access to housing? (ie. Criteria/policy/referral process)

**C.**

1. What First Nations housing initiatives would you recommend?  
(a) that are working?  
  
(b) what initiatives are not working?
2. Has your organization established short or long term goals to address future housing options for First Nations people?
3. Any additional comments:

I WOULD BE WILLING \_\_\_\_\_ WOULD NOT BE WILLING \_\_\_\_\_ TO PARTICIPATE IN A DISCUSSION GROUP/FORUM TO DISCUSS SHORT-TERM AND LONG-TERM STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS THE ISSUE OF FIRST NATIONS HOMELESSNESS.

Thank you in advance for your time and completing the profile/inventory. However, because we minimal time to collect the data, please return by \_\_\_\_\_, 2000.

## Appendix C. Videotape Consent Form

### **Consent to Release Information**

I, \_\_\_\_\_, hereby consent for this interview to be conducted by representatives of the SIIT Research Committee.

FURTHER, I give my permission to the SIIT to use this videotape interview for public broadcast.

FURTHER, that all general information provided will be disclosed for the research.

FURTHERMORE, that my personal information will not allow me any hardship.

Dated in the City of \_\_\_\_\_, Saskatchewan, on this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, A.D. 2000.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name(signature)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name(printed)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Witness

## Appendix D. Interview Consent Form

### **Interview Consent Release Form**

My personal identity will not be disclosed, in agreeing to take part in this interview.

Further, I \_\_\_\_\_ agree to be interviewed by the representatives of SIIT on First Nation Homelessness, with the understanding that the information which I will provide about my current situation will be of benefit in defining a clear specific definition for First Nation Homelessness.

I will (\_\_\_\_) / will not (\_\_\_\_) accept the monitory donation of Ten Dollars (\$10.00) once this interview is completed.

Dated in the City of \_\_\_\_\_, Saskatchewan, on this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, A.D. 2000.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name(signature)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name(printed)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Witness