A Sociological Analysis
of Root Causes
# of Aboriginal Homelessness
in Sioux Lookout, Ontario

By

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Sioux Lookout, Ontario, has its first Transition Program, assisting individuals to move forward

with their lives. The interviewees shall remain nameless, but we are forever, and ever, grateful.

Sioux Lookout Anti-Racism Committee (SLARC)

SLARC works to ensure that all community residents have an opportunity to learn to work and live together. The mandate of the Committee is to identify and eliminate discrimination that may prevent any community member from reaching his or her full potential and to encourage, develop and support initiatives, programs and activities that promote respect, understanding, acceptance and cooperation in the community.

Sioux Lookout Homelessness Committee

Sioux Lookout Homelessness Committee (SLHC) consists of concerned citizens interested in working collaboratively to address root causes of and solutions to homelessness in Sioux Lookout. Its mission is to plan, develop and implement specific strategies to address gaps in services addressing the immediate needs of the homeless, and to address long term root causes of homelessness in Sioux Lookout.

SLARC and SLHC formed an excellent partnership in order to meet the research objectives of this project.

Preface

The homeless are visible on the town's main street, where they often congregate in the park and along the sidewalks to socialize and share alcoholic beverages. The homeless population is often referred to as "problems," "vagrants," "lazy" and "drunken Indians" (Sioux Lookout Anti-Racism Committee, 2000). In 2000, The Front Street Improvement Project Committee, a municipally appointed committee, released a discussion paper that was aimed at articulating strategies to address "social and environmental issues," which included homelessness (Front Street Improvement Project Committee, 2000). Some of the proposed solutions focused on removing the "problem," which would entail either moving the individuals back to their home communities or moving the liquor store. The *Front Street Report* (2000) acknowledges that there is an obvious need for community education on the causes of homelessness in Sioux Lookout, and particularly on the causes of Aboriginal homelessness.

This research paper is an attempt to generate knowledge and understanding of root causes of Aboriginal homelessness in order to: 1) develop effective relevant policies and programs and 2) move discourse from racism and prejudice to action to address the issues. The language used in order to take up the issue of Aboriginal homelessness must consciously reflect its social and historical context. This is imperative if politicians, policy-makers and program developers are to formulate and implement social policies and programs that will appropriately and effectively challenge the growing incidence of homelessness among Aboriginal people.

Executive Summary

This research project was implemented in order to gain a deeper understanding regarding the reasons that over than 99% of the people on the streets of Sioux Lookout are Aboriginal. Where any ethnic group or race is that disproportionately represented, there indeed must be structural factors to consider.

This research project began with the work of SLHC's first Project Coordinator, Laura Calm wind, who spoke with Elders, Chiefs and Councillors in northern First Nation communities. Her work, and the work of SLHC, was pivotal to gaining understanding of the issues underlying homelessness in Sioux Lookout. Local Elders, and Chiefs and Councillors, describe people on the streets as "lost souls" who experience a sense of hopelessness and despair because of past abuses and injustices. Their presence on the streets, say Elders, is a direct impact of residential school abuses and displacement from the land. This research project examines these hypotheses.

The issues are complex. In this report, the reader is first given some background of the history and demographics of the Sioux Lookout town and District. Literature on homelessness, Aboriginal homelessness and residential schools is then explored. Risk factors for homelessness are then described in detail, starting with general risk factors and moving to factors affecting Aboriginal persons in particular. Risk factors that place the mainstream population at high risk of homelessness include: 1) lack of affordable housing, 2) poverty and low income, 3) mental health issues, 4) addictions and substance abuse and 5) domestic violence. Aboriginal people

experience each of these risk factors at higher rates than the rest of the population, placing them

at higher risk of homelessness. Additional risk factors mentioned in the literature include: 1)

migration, 2) asset impoverishment, 3) welfare dependency, 4) prejudice and discrimination and

5) negative outcomes of the residential school system.

The report then moves to a description of research methodology. This research project

relied on field research based on participant observation to substantiate various theoretical

claims presented in the literature about Aboriginal homelessness. No other known empirical

study on Aboriginal homelessness previously existed. For the purpose of this study, the

researcher spent several months with participants and informants in order to learn personal

stories and factors contributing to homelessness in Sioux Lookout. Informants disclosed

backgrounds of: 1) violence and abuse, 2) childhood sexual abuse, 3) mental health issues, 4)

addictions, 5) housing shortages and 6) releases from jail as factors contributing to

homelessness. Through oral histories and a review of relevant literature, this report seeks to

situate Aboriginal homelessness within a context of historical social processes that produce

social inequalities leading to homelessness. The report's recommendations take into account

these historical factors, real life experiences of people who end up on the streets and suggestions

put forth by local Elders and service providers.

This report concludes with recommendations regarding the type of concerted actions

needed to systematically address the issues associated with Aboriginal homelessness. Already,

the Sioux Lookout Homelessness Committee (SLHC) has taken steps to follow up on these

recommendations through its new Transition Support Program specifically targeting people on

the streets of Sioux Lookout, Ontario. If there is anything the reader will take away from this

report, it is the conviction that grassroots initiatives are key to effective program and model

development. The voices of the people most directly affected by any social issue must be heeded,

for it is their intimate knowledge and experiences that will show the way forward.

Section 1 – Sioux Lookout: A Backgrounder

1.1 Sioux Lookout: Location and Demographics

To the newcomer, this small northwestern Ontario town seems relatively isolated, situated sixty-five kilometers north of the TransCanada Highway, almost midpoint between Thunder Bay, Ontario and Winnipeg, Manitoba, and approximately three hours southwest of Pickle Lake, Ontario's most northerly town accessible by all-weather road. To the Anishinabe (meaning "original men" in the Ojibway language) of the twenty-four northern communities of the Sioux Lookout District, it is a major service centre, supplying everything from medical care to retail services. Most of the surrounding communities are accessible only by air or winter road, frozen lakes and rivers opening up the land for ground transportation. It is this relationship with the twenty-four northern First Nations communities that enables the town to support larger urban centre type amenities, otherwise not found in a town of approximately fifty-two hundred people, just one third of the northern Anishinabe population.

At latitude fifty degrees north and longitude ninety-two degrees west, numerous lakes and rivers, etched out of the early aged glaciers, connect the north to the south and play a major role in the history of the area. "The Sioux Lookout District encompasses a total area of 87,000 square kilometers, of which 25,000 square kilometers is covered by water" (Corporation of the Town of Sioux Lookout, 1999, p. 12). Sioux Lookout itself is situated at Pelican and Abram Lakes on the Lac Seul–English River System.

Census data indicates a demographic shift – a large influx of First Nations persons – that local residents largely contribute to northern Anishnabe migrating to Sioux Lookout for employment opportunities. Census data (Canada, 1961) for 1961 lists forty "native Indians"

within Sioux Lookout's total population of 2,453. Stymeist (1972, p. 56) estimates the number to

be between 60 and 70 individuals in 1972. By 1999, Aboriginal persons accounted for 970, or

20% of the total population of 4,415 (Corporation of the Town of Sioux Lookout, 1999).

1.2   The Sioux Lookout District

Lac Seul First Nation, located thirty-eight kilometres west of Sioux Lookout, is the oldest

reserve in the District. Lac Seul is also one of two First Nations in the district accessible by all-

weather road, along with Mishkeegogamang, a three-hour drive northwest toward Pickle Lake.

The Sioux Lookout District is made up of twenty-four reserve settlements delineated by the

Federal government. Most northern communities range anywhere from 200 kilometres to 400

kilometers in distance from Sioux Lookout, while Fort Severn, the land of the polar bears and the

most northern community in the province of Ontario, is an hour and a half air flight from Sioux

Lookout, and nine kilometers from the mouth of Severn River, where it drains into Hudson Bay.

These surrounding First Nations communities are reserve settlements, prescribed by the Federal

Government following signings of Treaties 3 (1873), 5 (1875) and 9 (1905). The Anishinabe,

who had for centuries traveled this vast land as hunters and gathers, and later as fur traders, were,

for the purposes of economic development for non-Aboriginal concerns, moved to the reserves,

which have land bases anywhere from five square kilometres to 135 square kilometres. It is this

dislocation of Anishinabe from their traditional lands that local Elders identify as one of the

factors directly related to the number of people on the streets today (Sioux Lookout

Homelessness Committee, 2002a).

1.3   Sioux Lookout: A Transient Community

Today, northern residents travel to Sioux Lookout for health and medical services, mental health and counseling services, dental and eye care, business meetings, retail services, recreation, social and family visits and gatherings, chronic care, employment, education and training (Corporation of the Town of Sioux Lookout, 1999; Sioux Lookout Homelessness Committee, 2002a, p. 5; Stymeist, 1972, p. 62-63). As well, Shibogama First Nations Council, Windigo First Nations Council, Independent First Nations Alliance and Northern Nishnawbe Education Council are based in Sioux Lookout, as is the Wawatay Native Communications Society, which produces the bi-weekly Wawatay Newspaper and radio communications. Several other smaller offices are set up to meet the needs of Aboriginals who reside in Sioux Lookout, providing services ranging from parent support, early childhood education, geared-to-income housing and traditional teachings.

More than thirty years ago, anthropologist David Stymeist observed that Sioux Lookout's proximity to the surrounding areas is evident in the amount of transportation one sees at any given time: float planes overhead, logging trucks through the town, trains coming and going and, in general, vehicles up and down the street. This remains true today. It is Sioux Lookout's connection to the north and its resources that sustains its economic base (Corporation of the Town of Sioux Lookout, 1999, p. 1).

In addition, several small airlines fly patients in and out of Sioux Lookout for medical, mental health, crisis counseling and family and social services. People visit Sioux Lookout for

numerous reasons. During discussions with the Sioux Lookout Homelessness Committee, Elders,

community members and people on the streets explained that the necessity to frequent Sioux

Lookout leaves northern reserve members vulnerable to street life. "First Nations people from

the surrounding area visit the town, for whatever reason, and do not have the resources to return

to their home communities" (Sioux Lookout Homelessness Committee, 2002a, p. 5).

Section 2 – Problem Statement: Homelessness in Sioux Lookout, Ontario

2.1 Introduction

Aboriginal persons make up less than 4% of the population of Canada's population, yet 10% of homeless people are Aboriginal. Aboriginals are consistently over represented among the homeless across the country. In Calgary, for instance, 14.5 % of the homeless are Aboriginal (City of Calgary, 2002, p. 6). In Hamilton, Aboriginal people make up 2% of the city's population, but make up an estimated 20% of people experiencing homelessness (Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton-Wentworth, 2002, p.10). In Winnipeg, 80% to 85% of the homeless population consists of Aboriginal persons (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 2004). In Sioux Lookout, the percentage rises to greater than 99.9% (Sioux Lookout Homelessness Committee, 2002a).

The overrepresentation of Aboriginals among the homeless population in Sioux Lookout may be indicative of the overall transient nature of Sioux Lookout. Of the two hundred sixty-nine people who utilized Sioux Lookout "Out of the Cold" services in 2000, a time when the shelter was only open four nights a week, 254 were transients, returning to their home communities after just a few days. More than half the people (53%, or 146 of the 269) using the shelter stayed no more than one night, while a large majority (82.5%) stayed anywhere from one to four nights (Sioux Lookout Homelessness Committee, 2002a, p. 25-26).

It is important to note that Sioux Lookout "Out of the Cold" Shelter statistics do not account for all people who end up on the streets of Sioux Lookout, nor do statistics account for those at risk of becoming homeless. In 2000, due to lack of funds and a shortage of volunteers in a small town, the Sioux Lookout "Out of the Cold" Shelter was not open four of seven nights a

week. People, therefore, ended up sleeping on the streets or bunking with friends or family. Also,

the data does not reflect the number of street youth in Sioux Lookout. Sioux Lookout "Out of the

Cold" Shelter serves only the adult population and to date there is no data or written report about

the prevalence of youth on the streets in Sioux Lookout, nor does this study attempt to examine

the topic. The data, however, do raise the question: Why are Anishinabe people

disproportionately represented on the streets of Sioux Lookout?

2.2   Local Input

In the fall of 2000, Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC) and Ontario Federation of

Indian Friendship Centres (OFIFC) entered into a joint agreement to provide services aimed at

improving the situation of urban Aboriginal homelessness in twelve communities. The OFIFC

and HRDC selected twelve communities to which funds would be allocated for the planning,

development and implementation of these services. Sioux Lookout, Ontario, was one of those

twelve communities. Funding came at a time when the community of Sioux Lookout, as

acknowledged in the *Front Street Report* (Front Street Improvement Project Committee, 2000),

had little understanding of Aboriginal homelessness. At that time, with approval from OFIFC,

Nishnawbe-Gamik Friendship Centre in Sioux Lookout proceeded to undertake a research

project that would give a voice to the Elders, Nishnawbe-Aski Nation Chiefs and Councillors,

and people on the streets. The Sioux Lookout Homelessness Committee (SLHC) formed as a

sub-committee to the Nishnawbe-Gamik Friendship Centre Board of Directors to gather input of

Elders, Chiefs and Councillors, service providers and residential school survivors. The overall

goal was to gain understanding of issues underlying Aboriginal homelessness in Sioux Lookout.

Hundreds of individuals provided valuable input.

To prepare for a regional conference and to hear comments and concerns of area Elders,

Chiefs and Councillors, the newly formed Sioux Lookout Homelessness Committee hired a

Project Coordinator to visit northern First Nation communities to gather input. Focus groups held

in Muskrat Dam First Nation, Lac Seul First Nation, Ojibway Nation, Keewaytinook

Okimakanek, Cat Lake First Nation, Kingfisher First Nation, Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inniwug,

Wapekeka First Nation, North Caribou First Nation, Wunnumin First Nation and Sachigo served

to facilitate awareness of the new Committee's objective to address underlying issues and to

document concerns and suggestions. Following consultations with community Elders, Chiefs and

Councillors, Sioux Lookout Homelessness Committee, in cooperation with Sunset Women's

Aboriginal Circle of Sioux Lookout, held a meeting of area leaders (including Sioux Lookout,

nearby Lac Seul First Nation and several northern First Nation communities)1 to seek further

input before proceeding with a more comprehensive research study.

2.3   Hypothesis

So what do area Elders, Chiefs, Councillors and residential school survivors suggest are factors

contributing to Aboriginal homelessness in Sioux Lookout, Ontario? They discuss social

consequences of the residential school system (Sioux Lookout Homelessness Committee, 2002a,

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1 Chiefs or representatives from seven (North Spirit Lake, Wunnumin Lake, Kasabonika, Muskrat Dam, Pikangikum, Wapekeka, Mushkeegogamang) northern communities plus Sioux Lookout Mayor attended the May

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p. 18):

- People on the streets have "given up on life," have "no will to live" (Sioux Lookout Homelessness Committee, 2002a, p. 18)

- There is a "gradual deterioration of Anishinawbe people, their culture, and traditions" (Sioux Lookout Homelessness Committee, 2002a, p. 18).

- People have lost their language, families, identity and the ability to feel.

- Some people have been ordered, by way of band council resolution, to leave their home communities because of violence or violations of social norms.

- Some people travel to Sioux Lookout, Thunder Bay, Kenora and Red Lake, Ontario to drink as a means to escape pains of past abuses.

- Some people are escorts or patients who fail to make their medical appointments because they end up on the streets drinking and are therefore without a return trip home (Medical Services will not pay return fare for someone who missed a scheduled appointment).

- Some people flee home communities because of family violence and other abuses.

Elders, Chiefs, Councillors and residential school survivors insist that what is witnessed on the streets of Sioux Lookout, Ontario, are social consequences directly linked to the residential school system and to the displacement of Aboriginal persons from their traditional lands (Sioux Lookout Homelessness Committee, 2002b; Sioux Lookout Homelessness Committee, 2002a, p. 18).

28, 2002 *Leaderships' Dialogue on Homelessness* - held at *Third Pelican Healing Gathering*, at Pelican Falls First Nation High School, site of the old residential school in Sioux Lookout, Ontario.

Section 3 – Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The objective of this study is to attempt to understand why Aboriginal people are

disproportionately represented on Sioux Lookout's main streets, with the intent that what is

learned may be shared to give people the language to talk about Aboriginal homelessness from a

sociological perspective, combat stereotypes and racism and propose appropriate and effective

strategies to address root causes. It was clear from the onset that a grassroots project was needed

to fully comprehend the extent of homelessness in Sioux Lookout. Program developers needed

to hear from people on the streets, their experiences, their histories and their own

recommendations. Prior to the fieldwork, a review of existing literature contributed to a general

understanding of the issues. A review of historical literature also contributed to an understanding

of local history. A participant observation type study followed, providing opportunity for

unstructured conversation with approximately three hundred people on the streets and in-depth

and structured interviews with nineteen people. Interviewing and participant observation was an

opportunity to learn some of the life experiences of participants and informants and how those

experiences contribute to where they are today. An historical perspective was gained from oral

histories provided by local Elders and literature about the history of the area.

3.2 Literature Review

The literature on Aboriginal homelessness is limited. Beavis, Klos, Carter and Douchant (1997)

prepared a report for the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation examining literature

reporting causes of homelessness across the mainstream population, identified risk factors in

Aboriginal homelessness and outlined services to address the issues. *Residential School Abuse and Aboriginal Homelessness in Canada, A Review of Relevant Literature* (Thatcher, 2002) is a must read for anybody serious about understanding the structural causes of Aboriginal homelessness. This review forms an excellent basis for informed discussion about the topic. Both of these reports are referred to extensively in the body of this paper. Various reports about residential school issues, social and health conditions of Aboriginal people and homelessness in general frame the discussion about Aboriginal homelessness in Sioux Lookout. The literature review provides an understanding of risk factors contributing to disproportionate rates of Aboriginal homelessness across the country. A body of the literature on the history of Sioux Lookout attempts to examine historical factors that may contribute to Aboriginal homelessness in Sioux Lookout, Ontario.

3.3   Participant Observation

Participant observation, conducted over a one-year period, permitted time to build trust and rapport as well as incorporate both unstructured conversation and structured interviews in the participants' own environments. The researcher respectfully and unobtrusively demonstrated a willingness and ability to listen to and observe the things that were sometimes unrelated to the study, in an attempt to completely understand individual choices. The researcher established, in the words of Lofland and Lofland, "a many-sided and relatively long-term relationship" with the participants (1984, p. 12). Small gifts such as coffee, cigarettes, a hot bowl of soup, a referral to a doctor and other small services were offered by the researcher to express approachability and

build rapport.

Research intentions were always made known, and confidentiality maintained; only where individual consent was granted are stories disclosed and repeated in the narrative analysis. It is important to note that each and every person asked to consent to an interview granted consent. Support for the project was profound.

3.4   Interviewing

Each of us is a product of our experiences. Our ideas, values, beliefs and norms reflect the culture into which we are born. This begs the question – to what extent can we suspend our cultural beliefs and values to remain objective? This is indeed one of the reasons Aboriginals and ethnic minorities resist white researchers studying their own people. Hedican (1995, p. 66) suggests that anthropologists and sociologists, aware of ethnocentric values and beliefs, have the ability, and perhaps even a social responsibility, to gather and present culturally relative data and information.

For this researcher, a Metis woman and town resident, I believe that the key to learning is the ability to listen. The interview is, therefore, an opportunity for the informant to be heard and an opportunity for the researcher to learn. Too often in cross-cultural exchanges participants walk away from a conversation interpreting entirely different meanings because we come from different experiences, different world views. In a research process, questions asked by a researcher may demonstrate ignorance of the informant's culture and experiences and that ignorance may stifle the research process, create animosity and flaw results. In conducting

interviews for this research project, I simply chose to ask the informant to try to help the

researcher understand why he or she ended up on the streets. "Help me to understand. Me. A

visibly white woman, who has never spent a night on the streets... Help me to understand why it

is that you end up on the street?" This type of interviewing, accepting interview responses "as

narratives or stories" (Mishler, 1986, p. 67) rather than asking specific questions allowed the

informant to be heard. The process helped build further trust and rapport and educated the

researcher, meaning that more informed questions could be asked at the next interview.

3.5   *Historical Research*

Eight interviews with Elders provide an understanding of the history of the area, implications of

Federal policies and the legacy of the residential school system. Discussions with Elders and a

review of relevant literature on the history of the area reveals how the combination of

historically political, economic and social conditions played a causal role in bringing about the

homeless situation in Sioux Lookout.

Section 4 – Literature Review

4.1 Introduction

This literature review was developed to address the central research question: Why are

Aboriginal people disproportionately represented on the streets of Sioux Lookout? The reader is

first provided with definitions of homelessness that are relevant to Sioux Lookout. Second, risk

factors contributing to high and disproportionate rates of Aboriginal homelessness across the

country are identified. Identified in the literature are causal factors that include a lack of

adequate and affordable housing, poverty, physical and mental health issues, addictions,

domestic violence, reserve-urban migration, asset impoverishment and welfare dependency,

prejudice and discrimination and negative outcomes of the residential school experience. Third,

to narrow the focus to historical and structural factors of the Sioux Lookout area, an examination

of documents about local history is presented.

4.2 Defining Homelessness

If there is one glaring inconsistency in the literature on homelessness, it is in the definition itself.

"Just about everyone who has written about homelessness in Canada has used a different

definition" (Layton, 2000, p. 23). Clearly, this is due to the complexity and depth of the problem.

Yet, there is nothing more important than an accurate definition. Layton adds, "These definitions

become tools that justify action or inaction, depending upon who is doing the defining" (2000, p.

23). In other words, the basic rules of problem solving must be applied: To propose accurate

solutions to a problem, one must first accurately define the problem.

Many researchers have adopted the United Nations definitions of homelessness,

"absolute" homelessness and "relative" homelessness, referring to both the roofless and those living in dwellings that do not meet basic health and safety standards. There are several categories of the term "relative" homelessness in the literature. Simply, the "relative" are those at risk of becoming homeless. There may be income situations, mental health issues or social or family circumstances that place the individual, or family, at risk. It is the "relative" homeless that is difficult to define.

The "relative" definition can be broken down to include the "situational homeless," the "episodic homeless," street youth, the "proto-homeless," and the "chronic" homeless. For the purpose of this study, street youth and the "proto-homeless" (those who double up in residences) are not taken into account. Instead, as a result of what was learned from interviewing people on the streets, this study relies on Brundridge's definitions of situational, episodic and chronic homelessness (1987, p. 15).

A brief description of each definition as it applies to the "homeless" of Sioux Lookout is presented:

- *Situational homelessness*: Refers to those individuals who end up on the streets because of an acute life crisis. Family violence, eviction, divorce or release from jail is some examples of why individuals may end up on the streets, without shelter. These individuals have no place to go, but they are not among the chronic - or long term - homeless. These individuals generally access supports and may settle in Sioux Lookout, return to their home communities or take up residence in another community.

- *Episodic homelessness*: Refers to those individuals who visit Sioux Lookout for one of

  several reasons, a medical/family services appointment for example. Or, they travel to

  Sioux Lookout for recreation purposes, or to visit family, or they specifically visit the

  community "to drink." Regardless of the reason for the trip to Sioux Lookout, persons who

  end up on the streets generally choose to extend their stay to meet with others on the street,

  to drink. Some individuals stay for a day or two, while others remain in Sioux Lookout for

  up to a month. They alternate between being sheltered (while in their home communities)

  and being unsheltered (while in Sioux Lookout). Some individuals, however, find shelter

  on the sofas of friends or family.

  - Also included in this group are the individuals who travel to Sioux Lookout

    specifically to drink, but unlike the episodic homeless they remain in Sioux

    Lookout indefinitely. They have residences to return to in their home communities,

    but they choose to stay on the streets. Each with his or her personal reason chooses

    not to return home.

- *Chronic homelessness*: Refers to individuals (or families) who, without the provision of

  emergency shelter, would have no place to live. They live in makeshift shelters, tents,

  abandoned cars and buildings and "in the bush."

4.3   Aboriginals are at a Higher Risk of Homelessness than Non-Aboriginals

A general overview of the number of homeless people, without specifically focusing on

Aboriginal people, shows that homelessness is rising all across Canada. It affects men, women, youth, families and people of various races, though no studies in Canada explicitly examine race as a contributing factor. In Toronto, the number of people accessing emergency shelters "rose from 22,000 in 1988 to nearly 30,000 in 1999 – an increase of 40%" (City of Toronto, 2001, p. 4). Calgary reports a 34% increase over a two-year period, 2000-2002 (City of Calgary, 2002, p. 6). Barrie recorded a tenfold increase in the number of people seeking shelter between 1988 and 1993 (cited in Layton, 2000, p. 80). Peterborough records "almost a 100 percent increase in the same five year period for their men's and family shelters" and "Mississauga had a 41 percent increase in shelter use between 1994 and 1998" (cited in Layton, 2000, p. 82).

Aboriginal people are glaringly over-represented in all categories of homelessness (Fallis and Murray, 1990, p. 23 and 28-29). The Aboriginal population in Canada is just less than 4% of the entire population (Ottawa, 2001), yet over 10% of the homeless population is Aboriginal. That number is as high as 25% in some larger urban centres (Thatcher, 2002). Haunch (1985) estimated that approximately 72% of the homeless men on Winnipeg's skid row were Aboriginal. In Sioux Lookout, 99% of those accessing emergency shelter services are Aboriginal (Sioux Lookout Homelessness Committee, 2002a).

Factors contributing to homelessness in general are lack of accessible, adequate and affordable housing, low income and poverty, mental health and addictions issues and domestic violence, to name a few. Literature specific to Aboriginal homelessness is limited to two articles. Thatcher (2002) provides a thorough and extensive review of the literature, provoking thought and further inquiry. Beavis et al. (1987) outline a profile of the Aboriginal population, risk factors

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in Aboriginal homelessness and a profile of the Aboriginal homeless. Both studies make it clear

that Aboriginal people are at higher risk of homelessness because they experience more profound

rates of poverty, unemployment, mental health issues, domestic violence, addictions and sexual

abuse than the mainstream population. Each of these variables places anyone at risk of

homelessness; however, the chances of an Aboriginal person experiencing any one or more of

these risk factors is far greater than it is for the mainstream population.

4.3.1   <u>Lack of Adequate and Affordable Housing</u>

It is almost a given that the provision of accessible, adequate, and affordable housing figures

prominently in any discussion about key ways to address homelessness (City of Calgary, 1996;

Social Planning Council of Winnipeg, 2001; Thunder Bay Community Planning Group, 2000;

City of Toronto, 2003). The housing crisis is largely due to the abandonment of social housing by

the federal government in 1993, and by the Province in 1995, when dramatic shortages of vacant

rental housing grew along with the increasing numbers of homeless people (Layton, 2000).

For Aboriginals, both on and off-reserve, shortages mean more and more persons crowd

into available units (Ottawa, 1993). A recent report indicates there is a shortage of "about 8,500

houses on reserves [while] about 44 percent of the existing 89,000 houses require renovations"

(Ottawa, 2003). Aboriginal households on reserve are more than twenty-five times more likely to

fall below adequacy and sustainability standards than non-Aboriginal households (Ark Research

Associates, 1998). Housing on reserves north of Sioux Lookout is over crowded and in need of

repair. One community in particular reports seventeen family members living in a three-bedroom

home, attests federal NDP candidate Susan Barclay in a personal interview (Barclay, 2004).

Off reserve, 44.2% of Aboriginals live in core housing need, compared to 35.2% of non-Aboriginal persons (Beavis et al., 1997, p. 8). Despite federal government contributions through Indian and Northern Affairs Canada and Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, program cuts have severely impacted access to housing among the Aboriginal population as a whole (Thatcher, 2002, p. 42). Lack of adequate and affordable housing in general places any person at risk of homelessness. Overcrowding and extreme housing shortages on reserve place Aboriginals at higher risk of homelessness than non-Aboriginals.

4.3.2. <u>Poverty and Unemployment</u>

Thatcher reports that the average household income, both on and off reserves, for Aboriginal persons is 74% of non-Aboriginal persons (2002, p. 32). "For Aboriginal males, the median income for 1991 was $15,875 compared to $25,571 for the total population; for Aboriginal females, the median income was $10,338 compared to $13,565 for females in the remaining population" (cited in Beavis et al., 1997, p. 2). Further, Aboriginals are four times more likely than non-Aboriginals to experience poverty (Lee, 2000, p. 39) and Aboriginals experience unemployment rates at more than double the rates for the non-Aboriginal population (Ottawa, 2000).

Largely contributing to poverty and unemployment are low levels of education across Aboriginal populations. Fifty percent of the Aboriginal population over fifteen years of age does not have a high school diploma, compared to 38% of the non-Aboriginal population (Beavis et al.,

1997, p. 2). This factors negatively for persons migrating from reserves in search of employment

(Thatcher, 2002, p. 32). On reserves in the Sioux Lookout District, an average of eighty-four

percent report having less than a grade nine education.2

The root of poverty among Aboriginals, according to an Ontario Federation of Indian

Friendship Centres (OFIFC) report, extends beyond low levels of education and unemployment.

The report roots poverty "in multi-generational experiences of residential schools, wardship

through the child welfare system, and economic and social marginalization from mainstream

Canadian society". The report further adds, "For reasons none other than [being Aboriginal],

Aboriginal people have, for generations, grown up poor" (OFIFC, 2000, p. 21).

Poverty is a major causal factor of homelessness; therefore, impoverished conditions place

Aboriginals at high risk of homelessness.

4.3.3. <u>Physical and Mental Health Issues</u>

Mental health issues are prominent factors contributing to homelessness in general (Thunder Bay

Community Planning Group, 2000, p. 11; Winnipeg Social Planning Council, 2001, p. 13; City of

Calgary, 1996). Shelter House in Thunder Bay, Ontario, reports that up to "75% of its residents

have serious mental illness" (Thunder Bay Community Planning Group, 2000, p. 11).

Recognizing that mental health is a contributing factor to homelessness, it is clear that

Aboriginals, who face mental health issues at rates unknown to the rest of the population, are at

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2 The average percentage reflects the average of the First Nation communities listed as showing relevant 1996
Census information. The First Nation communities include: Deer Lake, Fort Hope, Fort Severn, Kasabonika,

greater risk of homelessness (Beavis et al., 1997, p. 8-14).

According to INAC, there is a seven-year gap in life expectancy between Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals that can be explained by a number of physical and mental health factors (Ottawa, 2000). The infant mortality rate for Aboriginal babies was 11 per 1,000 in 1993 (Ottawa, 2000), approximately twice the national average (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP), 1996b). The rate of incidences of tuberculosis on reserve is 58.1%, compared to 6.5% across the total population (Ottawa, 2000). Suicide rates of registered Aboriginal youths are eight times that of the national rate for females and five times that of the national rate for males. The suicide rate for Aboriginal Canadians as a whole is approximately three times higher than that of the general population (RCAP, 1995, p. 11). In the Sioux Lookout District, the rate is reportedly two to five times the national average (Sioux Lookout District Hospital Negotiating Committee, 1995, p. 7).

These statistics corroborate with Thatcher's findings from a community health survey in First Nations reserves in Saskatchewan, which demonstrated there is "an extremely high number of incidences of life stressors, anxiety, depression, extreme anger, bouts of mental idiosyncrasy and self-destructive and suicidal thoughts" (2002, p. 43). Each of these stressors is a factor of mental illness and thus increases the risk of homelessness.

4.3.4   Addictions

Sixty-two percent of Aboriginals aged fifteen and over perceive alcohol abuse as a problem in their community (Ottawa, 1993) – another factor contributing to the over representation of

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Kingfisher 1, Lac Seul, Pikangikum, Poplar Hill, Sachigo 1, Sandy Lake, Summer Beaver, Weagamow, Webequie,

Aboriginals among the homeless. In studies on homelessness, alcohol and substance abuse are

frequently cited risk factors of homelessness (O'Reilly-Flemming, 1993, p. 39; Floyd, 1995, p.

16-17; Thatcher, 2002, p. 44). In Thunder Bay, 50 to 60% of residents at Thunder Bay's Booth

Centre report addictions issues (Thunder Bay Community Planning Group, 2000, p. 11).

"Research undertaken in Anchorage, Alaska (Travis, 1991, p. 248-49) found that Aboriginal

homeless surveyed had a much higher rate of alcoholism than the ethnically mixed samples of

homeless persons studied earlier in Portland (1983) and Seattle (1989)" (as cited in Beavis et al.,

1997, p. 11).

4.3.5   <u>Domestic Violence</u>

Service providers in Thunder Bay also list domestic violence and physical and sexual abuse, as

key factors contributing to homelessness (Thunder Bay Community Planning Group, 2000, p. 22;

Social Planning Council of Winnipeg, 2001, p. 14; Social Planning & Research Council of

Hamilton-Wentworth, 2002, p. 27). High rates of violence are reported to negatively impact the

physical and mental health of Aboriginal communities and individuals.

Thirty-nine percent of Aboriginal adults reported family violence as a problem in their

community, while 25% reported sexual abuse and 15% reported rape as problems (Ottawa, 1993).

In 1989, the Ontario Native Women's Association reported that eight out of ten Aboriginal

women suffered from family violence, compared to one out of eight to one out of ten on a

national scale. Aboriginal women, due to the lack of women's shelters on reserve, either flee to

and Wunnumin 1.

urban communities to seek refuge or tolerate the abuse at home.

The women experience feelings of confusion when confronted with the impact of living in a small community, where it often seems that everyone in the community knows of the abuse but does little or nothing about it (Native Women's Association of Canada, 1995, p. 9 and 18).

The Government of British Columbia's (2001) literature review indicates that backgrounds of domestic violence and family dysfunction place individuals at high risk of homelessness. A background of abuse, according to the study, is common to individuals seeking shelter services.

4.4 Additional Risk Factors Contributing to Disproportionate Rates of Aboriginal Homelessness

Five additional risk factors that contribute to disproportionate rates of Aboriginal homelessness are discussed here. Thatcher (2002) provides a thorough review of the literature pertaining to each factor, discussing at length the concepts of migration or "hypermobility," "asset impoverishment," prejudice and discrimination and assimilation policies (Thatcher, 2002, p. 25-42, 44 and 51-99). Each of these factors is specific to Aboriginal people and highly probable factors in the disproportionate rates of Aboriginal homelessness. These factors must be explored if Canadian policy-makers are serious about addressing the real issues.

4.4.1 <u>Migration</u>

There has been a significant increase in migration from reserves to urban centres over the past

two decades (Clatworthy, 1996; Trovato, Romanic and Addai, 1994). Several writers (Brody 1971; Falconer, 1990; Morrow, 1990 and Reeves and Frideres, 1981) argue that rural-urban migration patterns are social consequences of depressed conditions, lack of jobs, poor housing conditions and lack of housing on reserve. Thatcher (2002, p. 35) suggests geographic proximity may be a factor in mobility patterns. Travato et al. (1994) describe more of a "push" and "pull" framework rather than a mere reserve to urban migration. On the one hand, individuals may leave a reserve community in search of a job for example, or to be with family, or vice versa. On the other hand, government policies, land claim issues or a desire to return to family, may "pull" people back to reserves.

Whether individuals are making permanent moves or shifting to and from reserve communities, significant numbers of Aboriginals are taking up residence in nearby urban centers. Thatcher (2002, p. 34), refers to his own Saskatchewan study, a community health survey of "adult on reserve status Indian residents in Central and Southern Saskatchewan," noting that one-third to one-half of the adult population resided up to 40% of the previous year off the home reserve, usually taking up residence in a nearby city. "In some reserve communities in the central and southern parts of Saskatchewan, this pattern describes as much as half of the adult population" (Thatcher, 2002, p. 34).

Persons who relocate from reserves to urban centers face several barriers to a smooth transition to urban life. One, the shift to a technology, computer and information based specialized economy has decreased the need for unskilled workers; fifty percent of Aboriginals, according to Beavis et al. (1997, p. 2), living either on or off-reserve do not have a high school

diploma. These individuals with little or no education have difficulty finding jobs. Two, race may

be a barrier to employment. Stymeist (1972, p. 77 and 81), in his study of race and ethnicity in

Sioux Lookout, observed that "mechanisms of informal exclusion" negatively impact upon an

Aboriginal person's ability to obtain employment in Sioux Lookout. Stymeist observed at the

time of his study that notice of jobs and rental housing are spread by word of mouth, thus

protecting a limited supply for the benefit of locals (1972, p. 77-81). In a more recent study of

Sioux Lookout respondents, 35% of respondents claimed racial discrimination exists in the

workplace today (Sioux Lookout Anti-Racism Committee, 2000). A Winnipeg report asserts that

racial discrimination is a barrier to employment and housing, placing individuals at risk of

homelessness (Social Planning Council of Winnipeg, 2001). Three, persons migrating to urban

centers face a general shortage of affordable housing. Aboriginal housing programs off reserve

are inadequate to meet the need (RCAP, 1993, p. 85) and, with the off-loading of federal and

provincial responsibilities for social housing, affordable housing across the country is unable to

keep pace with demand.

Whether the trend is more of a reserve to urban shift, or "push" and "pull" type of

occurrences (Trovato et al., 1994), Aboriginal migrants face employment, race and housing

barriers that place them at a major risk of ending up on the streets of urban communities.

4.4.2   Asset Impoverishment and Welfare Dependency

Aboriginals are more likely than non-Aboriginals to experience "asset impoverishment"

(Thatcher, 2002, p. 26) because of limited potential for home ownership and widespread welfare

dependency.

Typically, for the mainstream population, one's house is the largest and most important asset acquired over a lifetime. A house may be used to secure personal and small business loans and ensure financial, personal and retirement security; yet, the nature of home ownership on reserves is precarious, to say the least. The Indian Act dictates that an individual may finance his or her own home on reserve, but not own the land. Land is allotted by Council and approved by the Minister, who issues Certificate of Possession of the Land. Under these terms, should one choose to sell or relocate, legal possession of the house could be transferred, but not the land. Therefore, few people choose to finance their own home. Most on-reserve Aboriginals occupy social housing units, which are technically owned by the First Nation, but not really, because reserve land is held in trust by the Federal government. Home ownership on reserve is simply not a practical option for residents (Thatcher, 2002, p. 25-26).

Further, a declining demand for unskilled and semi-skilled workers limits potential for employment, increasing unemployment and welfare dependency. "Public income transfers combine with marginal economic markets in rural and northern area reserves and blighted inner-city neighborhoods to virtually ensure widespread dependency" (Thatcher, 2002, p. 27). Many Aboriginal persons are virtually caught in a welfare trap that further inhibits potential to accumulate assets and wealth (Thatcher, 2002, p. 27-31).

According to a Sioux Lookout Area Aboriginal Management Board report (Angeconeb, 1998) on human resources in the District, the average percentage of individuals on either employment insurance or social assistance in the District stands at 30.8%, with percentages

reading as high as 47.8% in Wawakepewin First Nation and 44.8% in Pikangikum First Nation. In

Pikangikum, the rate reaches 61% in the winter months.

A notable American study concludes that several decades of transfer programs, though

easing personal hardships, have not permanently changed for the better the lives of recipients

(Danziger and Plotnick, 1986). Thatcher adds:

> While welfare policy has sustained the weak, it has done little to make them strong
> – and many Aboriginal leaders and Elders in Canada will say that this is their
> major objection to welfare. Indeed, many Elders will go even further, saying that
> welfare policy has sustained Indian people in poverty, and weakened their spirit by
> encouraging dependence rather than self-reliance – and self-reliance was a trait
> that virtually defined both the individual members of traditional Indian economies
> and the communal groups and families in which they lived (2002, p. 27).

In reality, adds Thatcher, social assistance rates will always be at or below the lowest average

annual working wage. He refers to the Law of Less Eligibility, formalized in the Elizabethan Poor

Laws of 1834, based on the principle that legalized charity will always be less than the wages

earned by the poorest worker (Thatcher, 2002, p. 26). "That means that long-term dependency on

social assistance is to effectively assume a lifestyle of 'guaranteed annual poverty'" (Thatcher,

2002, p. 25), limiting any potential to accumulate assets and break cycles of intergenerational

poverty.

Most Aboriginal persons, particularly on reserve, lack potential to save income necessary

to accumulate assets; even with an income, there is limited opportunity for home ownership on

reserve. This point is extremely important to discussions about Aboriginal poverty and

homelessness: Individuals lacking potential to acquire assets and subsequent potential to possess

their own home are at a huge risk of becoming homeless.

4.4.3   <u>Prejudice and Discrimination</u>

Prejudice and discrimination are cited as barriers to housing, placing Aboriginals at higher risk of

homelessness than non-Aboriginals (Social Planning Council of Winnipeg, 2001, p. 25). A

standard social science research project conducted in Winnipeg supports claims of racism and

prejudice in the rental housing market. For the study, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal

university students were asked to seek rental accommodations, and "almost invariably the non-

Aboriginal is more likely to be viewed as an acceptable tenant" (as cited in Thatcher, 2002, p.

44). In Hamilton, Aboriginal people and immigrants face blatant discrimination by some

landlords who make assumptions about who makes a good tenant (Social Planning & Research

Council of Hamilton-Wentworth, 2002, p. 4).

Aboriginals also risk evictions from landlords who lack understanding of an Aboriginal

concept of sharing. Comments from Calgary street persons, noted in the *Street Speaks Report*,

shed some light on the risk of eviction Aboriginal persons experience.

> "I have a big family and my home is theirs, this is part of our sharing and caring,"
> writes "Lady". "Jay" adds: "So when I had family over they always complained,
> 'Oh look at the Indians living there.' So I was accused on many occasions of
> having people living at my house and it's not true... I'm a very caring person and
> when I do have my own house if somebody is homeless like that - I tend to keep a
> lot of people, like I'll help people out. Native culture requires that one share with
> one's brothers and sisters. This is not negotiable. The larger society needs to
> understand this (City of Calgary, 1996).

In short, blatant acts of racism and risk of eviction place Aboriginal persons at high risk of

homelessness in urban settings.

**A Sociological Analysis of Root Causes of Aboriginal Homelessness in Sioux
Lookout, Ontario**

4.4.4. <u>Impact of the Residential School Experience</u>

Elders of Sioux Lookout District suggest that homelessness is part of the legacy of residential school abuses (Sioux Lookout Homelessness Committee, 2002a, p. 14 and 38). In a preliminary report based on Calm wind's informal discussions with Elders and what was heard from Elders, Chiefs and Councillors at a residential healing gathering in Sioux Lookout, the Sioux Lookout Homelessness Committee report (2002a, p. 38):

> A system that rejected the identity of Canada's first peoples left in its legacy a culture of people plagued with addictions and abuse issues. Many Aboriginal people learned to shut down emotions in order to survive in an alien world, void of parental and community support. This practice has left many Aboriginal people numb to emotion and still struggling to understand their own sense of identity and belonging in a now foreign land.

Based on what was heard from Elders in the Sioux Lookout District, an aching desire to numb the pain of past abuses experienced within the residential school system and the social conditions left in its legacy, contribute to excessive drinking and substance abuse. "These factors, according to some Elders, have a profound impact on the [disproportionate] number of [Aboriginal] people on the streets of this small northwestern [Ontario] town" (Sioux Lookout Homelessness Committee, 2002a, p. 38).

Thatcher (2002, p. 65-87) argues that there is no clear link between residential school abuse and various negative personal and social health outcomes, including homelessness. However, a number of researchers (Caribou Tribal Council and Chrisjohn, 1991; Jaine 1992; and Miller, 1996) assert that poor social conditions of Aboriginal people are directly linked to the legacy of the residential school system, Thatcher (2002, p. 65-87) cautions against an all encompassing model that entirely blames the residential school system for impoverished socio-

A Sociological Analysis of Root Causes of Aboriginal Homelessness in Sioux Lookout, Ontario

economic conditions and the homelessness of Canada's Aboriginal people. "The literature cannot be reasonably characterized as having established clear links between residential school abuse and various negative personal and social health outcomes" (Thatcher, 2002, p. 52). The literature is largely anecdotal and broadly historical. According to Thatcher, a comparison between those who did not attend residential school and those who did is lacking, as is a comparison of the quality of life between those who attended day school and those who attended residential school. No "formal studies meeting scientific standards yielding empirical evidence of the impact of residential school abuse on the rates of homelessness" exist (Thatcher, 2002, p. 52).

Thatcher (2002) concludes in his report that his dismissal of a "residential school syndrome" may upset a large number of people. This writer is indeed one who was disturbed at Thatcher's conviction to cling to "formal studies meeting scientific standards" as "empirical evidence." Yet, the point one must grasp is that it is dangerous to continue to define Aboriginal homelessness as some form of clinical disorder resulting form "residential school syndrome." Negative outcomes of the residential school experience, however, clearly place Aboriginal persons at high risk of homelessness.

Assimilation of children into the dominant society was a clear goal of the residential school system (Titley, 1986). Residential schools erected across the country irrevocably because of paternalistic ethnocentric views of Euro-Canadian public policy-makers who thought it was their right and responsibility to break Aboriginal people of their nomadic ways and resocialize them to assimilate into an agricultural and trades society. RCAP (1996a) notes that the 1879 Davin report declared that the goal of the government and churches to educate Aboriginal

children and break them of their traditional ways was not being met. Many Aboriginal children were not attending the existing day schools. Davin, having returned from a tour of residential schools in the United Stated, proposed a similar system, to remove children from their parents and kin, strip them of their identity, traditions, values and beliefs and produce 'civilized' citizens (RCAP, 1996a).

In 1911, revisions to the Indian Act made it compulsory for Aboriginal children between seven and fifteen years of age to attend school. The Act gave a truant officer the power to "cause the child to attend school" (Section 119.2.1.c), go into one's home and take a child, use force and "take a child into custody" where a parent refuses to send the child (Sections 119.2.2, 119.2.3. and 119.2.6). Any Aboriginal parent refusing to send a child to school was subject to imprisonment (Section 119.3.1).

In the early 1900s, there were eighteen residential schools and thirty-six boarding schools for status Indian students in Canada (Thatcher, 2002, p. 64). The year of the revisions, "there were 54 boarding schools with total enrolment of 2,239 and 20 industrial schools with a total enrolment of 1,612 students, making a total of 3,841 status Indian students enrolled in residential schools.... another 6,784 status Indian students were enrolled in day schools operated by the Department of Indian Affairs" (Thatcher, 2002, p. 64).

In the Sioux Lookout District, Aboriginal children were taken from their parents and families, as far away as the Albany River.

> Unlike the schools situated on, or reasonably near an Indian Reserve, Sioux
> Lookout pupils [were] gathered individually from the vast territory [of 265,000
> square miles]. The children are collected by canoe, train, and aeroplane, while a
> few are brought to the school by their parents. More than in most locations the

fathers are still living in the wilds of the north, and eke out a bare existence by hunting and trapping. A canoe trip of 852 miles down the English and Albany Rivers, taking three weeks, is required to bring in some of the children (Sioux Lookout District Indian Residential School, 1930).

4.4.4.1   Negative Physical Outcomes

Poor health, inadequate sanitation and nutritional inadequacies plagued residential schools. Tuberculosis and other forms of infectious disease viscously spread through schools because of careless administration of health practices and unhygienic sanitation. Inadequate response to the spread of disease resulted in thousands of deaths of Aboriginal children (Milloy, 1999). Sioux Lookout Elders, at a healing gathering of residential school survivors held in May of 2002, speak of numerous children who went missing during the residential school days. Many Survivors say that children are buried in unmarked graves today. Witnessing abuses and numerous deaths of peers surely had to have had a grave impact on residential school students.

4.4.4.2   Language Suppression

What may be the most profound negative impact of the residential school system is the loss of language. Native language was forbidden in residential schools. Aboriginal children were hit and beaten for speaking to teachers or peers in anything other than the English language, destroying students' sense of self and ego (Ing, 1991; Grant, 1996). Children returned to their parents and grandparents unable to communicate.

Their parents, grandparents and Elders were subsequently unable to pass on oral tradition, culture and teachings specific to Aboriginal history, values and beliefs. It may be the case that not

all staff is guilty of this offence, but this type of abuse is common to all who disclose residential

school abuse.

4.4.4.3   *Destruction of Family-oriented Childcare Culture*

When government officials took children from their parents and family ties, placed them in

institutional settings for up to a decade and more, the children were literally robbed of

opportunities to grow in a loving and nurturing environment. The destruction of traditional

childrearing practices destroyed parenting skills, knowledge of child development needs and

practical family management skills (Floyd, 1995). Methods of corporal punishment often replaced

traditional childrearing practices, thus creating intergenerational cycles of abuse (Deiter, 1999). A

British Columbia literature review (2001) indicates backgrounds of abuse and family dysfunction

as common to individuals seeking shelter services.

4.4.4.4   *"Institutional Mentality"*

The objective of the residential school system was to strip Aboriginal children of their Native

identity, their nomadic ways, their culture, values and beliefs. The residential school system was

implemented to resocialize Aboriginal children to fit into a life of manufacturing and agriculture

upon leaving the residential school environment. "Marching out from the schools, the children,

effectively resocialized, imbued with the values of European culture, would be the vanguard of a

magnificent metamorphosis: the 'savage' was to be made 'civilized', made fit to take up the

privileges and responsibilities of citizenship" (RCAP, 1996a, p. 2).

Residential schools resemble what Goffman (1961) called 'total institutions', designed to "teach a person new roles, skills, or values", strip away individuality, and "concerned with changing people long after discharge" (cited in Thatcher, 2002, p. 71). A long-term impact of the 'total institution' is the loss of an individual's sense of self and self-efficacy, or the creation of what Goffman calls an "institutional mentality." Children end up able to do little for themselves. In adulthood, this affects an individual's ability to seek and maintain employment, housing or other support services. A dependency on society is created.

4.4.4.5 Impact of Childhood Sexual Abuse

Claims of physical, sexual and spiritual abuses endured in Canada's residential schools now total more than 12,000. In the Sioux Lookout District, the Aboriginal Healing Foundation funded numerous projects to address the legacy of abuses endured in local residential schools, located in Sioux Lookout, Fort Frances, Vermilion Bay, Thunder Bay and Kenora. The site of the old Sioux Lookout Indian Residential School, open between 1926 and 1978, became the site of three healing gatherings in the last decade, indicative of abuses and legacy of the residential school system.

Finkelhor and Browne (1985) cite long-term impacts of childhood sexual abuse as a prolonged sense of mistrust, anger, grief, depression, sexual confusion, stigmatization, low sense of self-esteem and powerlessness. Survivors learn to dissociate feelings, thoughts and memories, (Briere, 1992), enhancing potential for unhealthy and imbalanced relationships later in life because of an inability to achieve true intimacy and fully trust others. Often alcohol and

substances are used to numb the pain and dull the senses; more immediate forms of self-destructive behaviour are self-mutilation and suicide (Gelinas, 1983). A British Columbia literature review (2001) reveals that incidences of "early childhood adversity" such as physical and sexual abuse are consistent among the homeless.

4.4.4.6   Spiritual Abuse

Early missionaries sought to convert Aboriginal persons to conform to Christian practices. The residential school system further alienated individuals and communities from traditional spiritual beliefs and practices. Aboriginal children in residential schools were taught to believe that the traditional teachings and practices of their parents and Elders were sinful and evil. Aboriginal teachings were undermined and cultural and spiritual ties to the community were severed (Grant, 1996). Whole communities were wounded (Duran and Duran, 1995). Individuals lost their sense of identity and self worth. Survivors turned to self-destructive behaviour and alcohol and substance abuse to numb feelings of shame and a wounded soul, placing the survivor at risk of homelessness.

4.4.4.7   Alienation from Formal Education

"A study of First Nations literacy, commissioned by the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, concluded that Aboriginal people place little value on education because of the unpleasant memories associated with previous schooling in the residential school system" (cited in Thatcher, 2002, p. 89). This has had a profound effect on the loss of language, with generation after generation

caring little to learn to read or write (Thatcher, 2002) and places individuals with low literacy

levels and limited potential for employment at risk of homelessness.

4.4.4.8   Lack of Bi-Cultural Adaptation

What may be most misunderstood about the nature of the residential school system is the

objective of the educational policy, and other assimilation policies for that matter, to

unequivocally destroy traditional norms and patterns of behaviour and replace them with those of

white society. The objective was not met. Language was destroyed and individuals and

communities stripped of identities, but, as a whole, traditional norms and practices were not

replaced with social structures serving to assist Aboriginal peoples with adapting to dominant

society. Rather, reserve settlement served as incubators for destruction of a traditional way of life.

Thatcher (2002, p. 97) notes that those minority groups who have managed to

"successfully" survive assimilationist pressures do so because they "consciously 'sift and sort'":

> These successful minorities consciously 'sift and sort' out those aspects of the
> larger society that are required to not only survive but to prosper in economic
> terms, while at the same time sustaining their social network linkages and cultural
> ties to their own ethnic communities. Groups like the members of the Jewish
> Diaspora, East Indians in Africa and the Caribbean, Latin American émigrés to the
> United States, the Hutterites in Western Canada, the Old Colony Mennonites, the
> Amish, and Asian and Latin American Mestizo immigrants to the Americas have
> generally succeeded, as groups in successfully taking full advantage of the
> bounties of modernism and affluence. To accomplish this they have had to
> overcome great adversity and they did so by retaining strong family and
> community ties, retaining their own languages, by placing formal learning at the
> apex of the community value hierarchy and by aggressively exploiting the
> technologies and economic opportunities made available in the larger society.…

Overt destruction of languages and community ties, combined with students' inability to

make sense of their social world after leaving the institutional setting left Aboriginal peoples

without the potential to 'sift and sort' as have "successful" minority groups. Thatcher (2002, p.

97) notes:

> Unfortunately, unlike the many minorities which have established themselves in
> Canada, the residential schools, educational policy generally and other aspects of
> assimilation policy, have served to undermine traditional Aboriginal social
> organization, language and culture, and, perhaps, in large part, to eliminate the
> option of bi-cultural accommodation for Aboriginal peoples.

The impact of the residential school system on survivors and future generations is

enormous. Suppressed anger, lack of identity, the creation of dependent thinking, alienation from

formal education, lack of bi-cultural adaptation, prolonged and intense pain characterize the

legacy of the residential school system. At this point, there is no reason to believe that residential

schools are *solely* at the root of Aboriginal homelessness, not in the context of a larger social

engineering strategy to assimilate Aboriginals into white society. Practices within the residential

school system devastated its students and successive generations; but the residential school

system did not exist in a vacuum. The residential school system was part of a larger social

engineering strategy to assimilate Aboriginals into Euro-Canadian social, political and economic

structures.

4.4.5   Conclusion

It would be a huge injustice to perceive the violence, physical and sexual abuse, mental health

issues, addictions, domestic violence, childhood sexual abuses and hopelessness and despair

experienced by people on the streets as "personal" issues. Structural forces are, and have been for

many years, invasive and imposing forces contributing to social problems experienced by

Aboriginal people. The topic of homelessness is no different. One must consider the larger

historical and political picture to fully comprehend the gross disparities and subsequently address

the underlying issues.

4.5   Some Local History

There is little reference to the first peoples of the land in local museum archives or town

development resources. Yet, the Anishinabe people have lived in northwestern Ontario for

thousands of years. Five detailed resources provide an excellent historical account of the Sioux

Lookout District as indigenous to Aboriginal people. Each resource is a must read for anyone

interested not only in local history but for those wanting to know the role Aboriginal people

played in the fur trade in general. Rae Kiebuzinski (1973) - from Ear Falls, a town situated just

west of Lac Seul and approximately one-hundred kilometers northwest of Sioux Lookout -

researched Hudson Bay archives, numerous public archives, and spoke with many Elders in the

late 1960s, a time when the Elders of the area could provide both oral histories and first hand

accounts of the fur trade and treaty signing agreements. Charles Bishop (1974) examines the same

historical period, focusing on socio-economic impacts of the fur trade on the lives of people

indigenous to the local area. Victor Lytwyn (1986) reviews historical documents relevant to the

area in *The Fur Trade of the Little North*. A local archaeologist presents the local area as a

hinterland for trade, clearly outlining waterways connecting the area as far north as Fort Albany,

south to Rainy River, east to Lakes Nipigon and Superior, and west to Winnipeg (Hyslop, 1985).

And, there is the 1784 personal account of voyages traveled from Nipigon to Winnipeg by Edward Umfreville, who was hired by North West Company to chart an alternate route that would be wholly in British territory. The researcher refers to these sources to present here what is known to the Aboriginal persons whose ancestry is rooted in the Sioux Lookout District.

So often history is spoken of as beginning at the time of white settlement, which in the Sioux Lookout area would not have occurred until the late 1800s. Indigenous peoples, however, occupied the Sioux Lookout District as hunters and gatherers, as far back as seven thousand years ago (Hamilton, 1991), a century and a half following deglaciation. Finds of a local archaeologist place people in the direct geographic vicinity of Lac Seul - Sioux Lookout two thousand years ago (personal discussion, 2003). Over time, "a highly flexible social organization and economy developed which successfully coped with the comparatively sparse resources of the region" and the extended family served as "the primary social and economic unit" (Hamilton, 1991, p. 8). "These families were quite mobile, frequently moving to hunt and collect the plants and animals of the region as they became seasonally available" (Hamilton, 1991, p. 8).

First contact with early traders was as early as the late 1600s. Bishop (1974, p. 108) and Kiebuzinski (1973) place French traders in what is now known as the Sioux Lookout District after the English set up post in 1679 at the mouth of the Albany River, attracting the Anishinabe who saw trade with the English as more lucrative. The Anishinabe had already been trading with the French at Nipigon prior to the development of Fort Albany. So when French traders began losing trade to the English they pushed further inland to bring trade directly to the people of the immediate area. "It is believed that the first unknown 'coureur du bois' [or woodrunner from the

colony of New France] penetrating inland from Lake Superior must have come to Obe-She-Ko-Ka [the Anishinabe name for Lac Seul] in the first half of the eighteenth century" (Kiebuzinski, 1973, p. 43). Lytwyn (1986, p. iv) claims that the time of French intrusion of what he calls the 'Little North' "cannot be documented precisely since a large number of coureurs de bois engaged in illicit fur trading outside the realm of official French policy," therefore there would be no earlier trade records.

Though there is some inconsistency in the literature regarding a precise date of European contact, Lytwyn (1986) and Kiebuzinski (1973) agree that the English River - Lac Seul waterways was a busy trade route from approximately 1680 until 1880 because of its link to the north, south, east and west (North to Fort Albany, South to Rainy River, East to Nipigon and Lake Superior, West to Winnipeg). The area was central to accessing all four directions, travelled by birch bark canoe. By the early 1800s, says Kiebuzinski (1973), "it seemed the whole world was traveling through Lac Seul."

In short, the Sioux Lookout District was occupied for centuries prior to the development of the railway and "white settlement." Detailed Hudson Bay archives support this assertion. One must surely acknowledge that the mere existence of these documents illuminates the fact that the local area was occupied long before the development of the Canadian National Rail, earlier known as the Grand Trunk Rail, constructed in the early years of the twentieth century.

4.6 Land Displacement

Local Elders tell us that displacement from traditional land was among the first of government

policies and practices aimed to assimilate the Anishinabe people, destroy traditional social

structures and take control of lands and resources. Land treaties all across the country were just

one means to this end.

By the mid to late 1800s Euro-Canadians were outnumbering the Anishinabe and plans for

nation building and east west railway expansion to facilitate agricultural development were well

underway. By no coincidence, the signing of land treaties transpired at the same time as plans for

nation building. It was 1872 when railway surveyors had moved ahead from Thunder Bay,

followed by French Canadian woodcutters clearing trees for the Canadian Pacific Rail,

approximately eighty kilometers south of the Lac Seul post (Kiebuzinski, 1973, p. 121). In 1873,

Treaty 3 was presented to Aboriginals of the area on behalf of Her Majesty the Queen "to open up

[the land] for settlement, immigrations and other such purposes" (Treaty 3, p.3). By signing the

treaty, Aboriginals were to "cede, release, surrender and yield up to the Government of the

Dominion of Canada" (Ibid., p.4) all their rights, titles and privileges whatsoever. This was an era

when reserve settlements, a major component of treaty agreements, were formed across the

country to push indigenous peoples to marginal areas and open the land for white settlement,

placing the Anishinabe people in locations the Federal government saw as incubators of

resocialization (Tobias, 1987). The Sioux Lookout area was no exception. Just one year after

railways surveyors began moving westward from Thunder Bay, Treaty 3 was signed in the Lac

Seul area.

By 1882, just one year after the completion of the Canadian Pacific Rail at Wabigoon

(and, just eighty kilometers south of the Lac Seul post), the Canadian Pacific Rail was being used

to transport goods to Winnipeg. The English River - Lac Seul waterways was never again to be used for that purpose. That same year a government surveyor selected lands for settlement of Lac Seul family bands, dispossessing the Anishinabe of land that had been traveled by their peoples for thousands of years.

By the early 1900s, the more immediate area was being surveyed for the development of the Grand Trunk Railway, making its way through the Lac Seul vicinity. Within that first decade of the twentieth century, white settlement grew around the railway, to become the small town now known as Sioux Lookout, just a few kilometers east of Lac Seul.

In other areas of the Sioux Lookout District, in the Treaty 9 area for example, the nomadic ways of the Anishinabe were "interfering" with government assimilation policies. In fact, "Treaty 9 (and additions to it) and a major amendment to Treaty 5 resulted from several different development pressures in the early twentieth century. The most important of these were expanded mineral explorations and mining; the growth of the pulp and paper industry, the development of hydro-electric-power generating systems; and the building of the second transcontinental railway with branch lines to James Bay and western Hudson Bay" (Ray, 1996, p. 211).

Bishop (1974, p. 84) writes: "Some Indians in this area as early as 1899 complained that miners, prospectors, and surveyors were becoming so numerous that they were disturbing the game and interfering with the means of livelihood of the Indians." Apparently, the signing of the treaty would address this issue. In the Mishkeegogamang area, when blind Chief Missabay signed treaty 9 in 1905, he believed his people were promised a large stretch of land to continue with their traditional ways (Bishop, 1974). To Federal policy-makers, treaty signing was a means to

displace Aboriginals of their land, move them to marginal areas, break them of their "nomadic habits" and retain lands and resources for government use. These objectives are clearly written into the treaties and other government documents.

The Anishinabe people were not only displaced from traditional land but dispossessed of any natural resources that would later serve to sustain a community. In 1876, the Federal government implemented the Indian Act, giving the Minister sweeping powers to exercise control over the political and economic lives of Aboriginal peoples. It is the Minister, who, under the Indian Act, has the power to grant licenses to dispose of timber, sand, gravel, clay or other non-metallic substances, controlling natural resources on reserve land. Further, anyone removing natural resources from reserve land may be charged and convicted with a criminal offence. The Indian Act does, however, provide that there must be consent of the band to remove resources from the land, yet the Minister may nonetheless grant a temporary permit without consent, leaving the Anishinabe people without the resources or land to sustain a local economy.

In reference to reserve land occupied by the Anishinabe, the Indian Act declares that reserve land may not be sold or leased unless first surrendered to the Queen, at which time it becomes the Ministers responsibility to manage or sell the land. The Indian Act makes clear that Aboriginals will not benefit from the sale or lease of reserve land.

Without land and resources, opportunities for capital accumulation are limited, perhaps even non-existent. Aboriginal people, in other words, were forced to move to reserve settlements, but deprived of any right to subsistence as known to the Euro-Canadian population, i.e. land and resource ownership.

Section 5 – Information Gathering

5.1 Introduction

Fieldwork began the fall of 2002. Fieldwork is described by Hedican (1995, p. 223) as a first hand

information gathering process that translates local concerns so that comparisons and discussion

can illuminate broad trends, policies and relationships. Fieldwork for this project involved

participant observation, unstructured conversations, structured interviews and oral histories.

5.2 Participant Observation

Participant observation served to be the most important means of building rapport and

establishing trust. Lack of trust is based on past experiences. Aboriginals, and rightfully so, feel

betrayed when they take whites into their communities, offer hospitality and first-hand knowledge

of social issues but benefit little from the experience. Documents often end up in the academic

realm of discussion and debate and little is done to improve existing situations (Richer, 1988).

Further, a white researcher of Aboriginal issues is viewed as one who somehow views him or her

self as expert advisor, subsequently demeaning lived experiences.3 Trust and rapport had to be

established to gain culturally relevant information about Aboriginal homelessness. From the

writer's perspective, listening was key to not only build trust, but to learn. Limited interaction

may have made some participants uncomfortable at first but over time the researcher gained a

reputation of one who would listen, a confidant.

The researcher spent Saturday mornings the first winter (October 2002 through April

2003) at Sioux Lookout's "Out of the Cold" Shelter to get acquainted with shelter users and

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3 For a discussion of anthropologist as advocate see Hedican, 1995, p. 67-68.

permit time to build rapport and a trusting relationship between the researcher and participants.

No specific questions were asked over that first winter. The researcher merely sat and talked with

people, poured coffee, assisted with house chores and informed everyone that Sioux Lookout

Homelessness Committee (a group formed to implement long term solutions to homelessness)

would open a Transition Program in October 2003, meaning a drop-in facility would be open on a

twenty-four hour basis. The researcher respectfully and unobtrusively shared in the activities and

conversation of the participants, observing and learning about participants as much as participants

were willing to share without being questioned. The time period allowed people at the shelter to

become familiar with a person they would come to know as supportive and non-judgmental.

By the end of the "Out of the Cold" season, regular shelter users became familiar with the

researcher, sharing their thoughts about the opening of the new building and why they end up on

the streets. By May 2003, the Sioux Lookout "Out of the Cold" shelter closed for the spring and

summer months. People who would otherwise access the shelter were now congregating at

Centennial Park on the town's main street, at the Nishnawbe-Gamik Friendship Centre for

morning coffee and at the occasional lunch served at the Friendship Centre by the Sioux Lookout

Homelessness Committee 2003 Project Coordinator and the writer/researcher. It was at these

locations where the researcher built on the relationships and rapport established at Sioux Lookout

"Out of the Cold" Shelter.

5.3   Unstructured Conversations, Building Rapport

By May 2003, the researcher began explaining the larger project, which was to gain an

understanding of the life experiences of people who end up on the streets. The Basic Information

Sheet (BIS), attached as Appendix A, served as level one of the interview process and as a tool to

initiate discussion about homelessness with participants. The BIS was introduced to people who

congregated at the park or gathered at the Nishnawbe-Gamik Friendship Centre for soup and

coffee. The researcher always explained that her role in the larger project was to gather real life

experiences of people who either live on or frequent the streets of Sioux Lookout. It was

explained that real stories are needed to inform public opinion and develop and implement

effective culturally appropriate polices and programs.

The researcher spent the spring and summer months building trust and rapport with

participants. Approximately 300 people participated in the study in some way, offering input or

providing bits of information. Not every participant was asked to complete a BIS. The researcher

did not want to appear as an intruder or disrespectful of personal space. Between May and

September 2003, forty-three people were asked to complete the BIS – to provide their name,

home community, how long they had been in town, why they were on the streets and request

consent to a later interview. Each and every person who completed a BIS consented to a later

interview, indicative of the overall support for the research project and support for the subsequent

development of a model to address the issues.

BISs were completed in exchange for small gifts such as a cigarette, sandwich, coffee,

lunch or a ride to the airport. This was considered level one of the interviewing stage, where

unstructured conversation took place with participants.

The Sioux Lookout Homelessness Committee 2003 Project Coordinator, a respected local

Nishinabe woman, was present at this stage of the research, whether at the park, on the street or at

lunch at Nishnawbe-Gamik Friendship Centre. The Project Coordinator became just as acquainted

with participants as had the researcher. Over the summer months, prior to the October 2003

opening of Nishnawbe-Gamik Friendship Centre's new Transition Support Program, the

researcher and the Project Coordinator became known for assisting individuals in need with the

provision of dry clothes, hygiene products or a telephone call. As well, people on the streets

frequently approached either the researcher or the Project Coordinator when in need of support

services, such as assistance completing a housing application or an application for Ontario Works,

or simply when they wanted someone to talk with. The role of the Project Coordinator became

vital to the research project. Participants were informed that should they have any concerns about

either the research or the researcher then the Project Coordinator would hear and follow up on

complaints. No complaints, however, were brought forward.

Most people encountered at the park or at the Friendship Centre openly disclosed stories

that contribute to the overall knowledge gained about why people end up on the streets. Of the

people who completed a BIS, their stories were documented with the BIS, while field notes were

utilized to record stories of the people who did not complete a BIS. The latter information helped

the researcher gain solid understanding of the issues, yet under no circumstances where an

individual did not grant written consent are the stories repeated.

5.3.1   Confidentiality

Maintaining confidentiality was always an issue for the researcher, as it is for every researcher,

yet conducting a study in a small town means that extra care must be taken. For example, the park, where people on the streets congregate, is centrally located in the town. It provides an excellent location to meet and chat with people on the streets. Yet, there are many passersby and most people utilizing the park grounds and benches are Aboriginal. The researcher's identity may be clear to passersby, particularly once "word" got around town that a research study was being conducted. The researcher could not easily blend into the setting. This places the informant at risk of being identified and interferes with measures to maintain confidentiality. Therefore, extra measures were taken to either connect with people in a most secluded section of the park or to visit the park at the quietest times of day or days of the week. Also, no interviews took place at the town park, only unstructured casual conversation and the completion of the Basic Information Sheets. People were interviewed at inconspicuous settings, including a room at the Friendship Centre, at the town beach or in a coffee shop.

Further, once the researcher began conducting interviews it became increasingly clear that confidentiality could not be maintained simply by using pseudonyms in the final written report. People who end up on Sioux Lookout's main streets come from all over the District. One may think that with the geographic space separating each of the northern reserve communities from each other and from Sioux Lookout that knowledge of another person's life would not exist, but in general, people in the District are very familiar with one another. If that seems an exaggeration, it may be. But the potential to unwillingly reveal identity could not be underestimated. Berg (1998, p. 48) asserts that guaranteeing confidentiality is an active attempt to remove from the research records any elements that may reveal the informants' identity. For the purpose of this

study, this was done by presenting narratives and stories in a content analysis.

5.4   *Unstructured Conversation, Level Two Interviews*

Nineteen participants were asked to complete level two interviews (see Appendix B) the stage of

the research process following completion of a Basic Information Sheet (BIS) and casual

conversation about issues underlying Aboriginal homelessness. The researcher chose participants

for level two interviews based on a participant's comfort level with the researcher. One's comfort

level was determined by whether one made him or her self available to sit and talk at the park or

help out at the soup kitchen for example, or if he or she sought out the services of the researcher.

Some interviewees were chosen based on his or her reason for being on the street, indicated on

the BIS. Berg claims that researchers may conduct "purposive sampling" to select informants

representative of a population and investigate social issues (1998, p. 229). Purposive sampling for

this research study meant that informants, or interviewees, were chosen based not only on a

comfort level or level of rapport but as representative of either the "chronic," "situational" or

"episodic" homeless. Six of the nineteen informants are among the "chronic" homeless. Three are

among the "situational" homeless and ten are among the "episodic" homeless.

Nineteen people in total took the time to sit and talk with the researcher, in exchange for

some form of services and/or some form of monetary expression of appreciation, ranging from

$30.00 to the cost of air transportation for someone desperately wanting to return home to family.

The researcher explained to each informant that is only reasonable to pay the informant for his or

her time, given that the researcher is paid for her time. The exchange was also a gesture to

indicate the researcher's willingness to conduct a study both culturally appropriate and relevant to Anishinabe values, beliefs and practices. Exchanging goods for services or vice versa is a practice traditional to the Anishinabe people.

Prior to the interview, confidentiality was guaranteed and informants were advised they may choose not to answer any question, they may withdraw from participation at any time and/or they may refuse to participate altogether. Only then, with written consent, did the researcher proceed with the interview.

Interviewing remained unstructured at the early stages of the level two interviews. To build further trust and rapport, and to break any barriers of cross-cultural communication that may exist, the researcher chose to do more listening than asking questions. Level two interviews began with an expression indicating interest in learning about the participant's life experiences: "Help me to understand. Me. A visibly white woman, who has never spent a night on the streets... Help me to understand why it is that you end up on the street?" This type of interviewing involves actively listening as opposed to asking specific questions. Interview responses are viewed as "narrative accounts or stories" assuming that "telling stories is one of the significant ways individuals construct and express meaning" (Mishler, 1986, p. 67). The process helped build further trust and rapport and educated the researcher, meaning that more informed questions could be asked either later in the level two interview and/or at the next interview – the level three, or structured interview.

5.5   Structured Interviews

Once the researcher gained a sense that the informant felt heard, indicative by the extent and the detail of what was being disclosed, the researcher then began to ask more specific questions to explore family background, community history, everyday life as a person on the street and the legacy of the political impact of Federal policies on the individual's life. Appendix B lists level three questions. Care was taken to abandon any line of questioning where the individually non-verbally indicated unease or reluctance to talk about a certain issue.

A sound rapport was established with nine of the nineteen informants at the level two interviews (i.e. during the unstructured conversation stage). The interview then became more structured, with the researcher asking more specific questions to reveal more details about structural impacts on their everyday lives. Additional time was required to build further rapport with the other ten participants. In other words, following unstructured conversation at the level two interviews, further time was spent with participants at lunch at the Friendship Centre or simply taking time to chat when we met on the street. Often services were offered, such as a ride to a doctor's appointment, a phone call on behalf of an informant to locate family, paying a visit to an informant in the hospital, offering soup or a sandwich to someone in need or offering a few dollars to wash clothes at the laundromat or purchase hygiene products. Additional time spent with the informant at lunch at the Friendship Centre continued to prove to be an excellent means to build further trust and rapport. By October 2003, nineteen level three interviews were completed.

5.6 Data Management

At the time Basic Information Sheets (BIS) were introduced to participants, the researcher began

keeping detailed field notes, written as soon as possible after a visit to the park or to the

Friendship Centre and immediately following each interview. A master list made of names of

individuals and matched to pseudonyms is kept in a private place accessible only to the

researcher. Pseudonyms were then used in all field notes to ensure confidentiality. Field data was

entered on a computer and common themes identified. This type of data management allowed for

easier manipulation of the final report (Fielding and Lee, 1992, p. 3).

Section 6 – Basic Data

6.1 Introduction

Forty-three individuals from fifteen different communities (including Sioux Lookout and the surrounding First Nation communities) completed Basic Information Sheets (BIS), providing the researcher with the following information: 1) date of contact; 2) location of contact; 3) name; 4) preferred pseudonym; 5) age; 6) community of origin; 7) date of the first time on the street; 8) how long on the street; 9) reason for being on the street; 10) where he or she is staying; and 11) written consent to an in-depth interview with the researcher.[4] To protect confidentiality, name and community of origin are omitted from the list below.

6.2 Basic data

All forty-three individuals agreed to an interview.

1. There were twenty-eight male participants and fifteen female participants.

2. The researcher approached individuals to complete a BIS at sites common to people who stay on the streets. Eighteen people were contacted at the park along the town's main street. Two people were seated on a bench at the town beach when the researcher contacted them. Four people were stopped on the sidewalk along the town's main street. Another nineteen people were asked to complete a BIS while they were at a lunch held at Sioux Lookout's Nishnawbe-Gamik Friendship Centre.

3. Ages range from 24 to 72 years of age. Five people are between 24 and 30 years. Nineteen people are between 31 and 45 years of age. Fifteen people are between the ages of 46 and

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[4] See Appendix A for a copy of the Basic Information Sheet

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60 years. Four people are over 60 years.

4. Reasons for being on the street and length of time on the street include the following:

Reason for Being on the Street	Length of Time on the Street
"lived on street since 16 years old"	21 years
"come to town to drink"	once a month
"don't live on street - just passing through"	couple hours
"on street for three years, don't have a house back home"	three years
"drinking"	Twenty-one days
"between jobs. "going to .... for season work"	four days
"homeless"	I don't know
"homeless"	I don't know
"drinking"	2 weeks
"passing through, have a job back home"	two days
"pregnant"	28 days
"family reasons"	2 days
"stuck in town"	1 week
"no reason to go home"	2 days
"no money to get back"	since yesterday
"came for medical reasons"	2 weeks
"homeless"	4 years
"no answer"	two months
"no place to stay"	years
"don't want to return just yet"	3 days
"came to take wife home when she got out of jail"	2 weeks
"not enough support in ...."	4 months
"something to do"	once a month... first time this year
"to party"	18 days
"party and drink"	1 ½ months
"never been without shelter. have my own place"	n/a
"never been without shelter. have my own place"	n/a
"missed [transportation] home, end up on streets"	8 days
"Lived in.... came here for medical reasons"	month and a half
"violence in the community... means of escape"	month
"violence in the community... means of escape"	month
"treaty money"	just today
"something to do. go back and forth"	since this morning
"off and on"	6 years
"day trip to Eye Van. trying to go home"	one week

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"escort... going home tomorrow morning"	not on street
"medovac'd. discharged. escort is drinking"	not on street. at hostel
"released from jail... mom was supposed to meet me"	woke up on streets
"came with friend who was beat up by her boyfriend"	one week
"to go to court. witnessed a theft"	2 days
"to drink"	no answer
"it's always been this way... never different"	44 years
"just here"	no answer

5. Respondents indicate utilizing the following spaces for shelter: "on the street,"
   "anywhere," "tent," "in a truck," "outside," "at in-laws," "nowhere," "police station,"
   "bush," "in a van," "at home," "with a friend," "with brother" and "at the hostel."

6.3   General Profiles of the Homeless in Sioux Lookout

Clearly, basic data provides very general profiles of the homeless in Sioux Lookout. Using the
definitions of homelessness introduced earlier in this paper, people's situations place them in one
of three categories of homelessness. Forty-three of the 300 completed Basic Information Sheets
(BIS). Of the forty-three who completed BIS:

- Twelve (or 28%) may be described as *"chronic"* homeless, who have no place to live
  other than some form of make-shift shelter;

- Nineteen (or 44%) of the participants are *"episodic"* homeless. In the "episodic" group
  are people who, based on information they provide on the BIS, either arrived in town for
  medical or other services and extend their stay to drink or the sole purpose of their trip to
  Sioux Lookout is to drink;

- Eight (or 19%) people are what is here referred to as the *"situational"* homeless, noting

reasons such as "family reasons," "released from jail," or family "violence" as factors

contributing to their situations;

- Four (or 9%) people are not homeless. They simply completed a BIS because they were at

  the park when the researcher asked people to participate. This is an important point to note

  if the perception is, as it may be in Sioux Lookout, that all people who gather at the park

  are "street people."

As mentioned earlier, the BIS served more to introduce participants to the larger research

project than to gather pertinent information. Unstructured, or level interviews, followed by

structured interviews provide more in-depth information about real life experiences. What are the

stories behind the faces?

Section 7 – Factors Contributing to Homelessness in Sioux Lookout

7.1   Introduction

This research project began a year and a half ago when the researcher set out to learn why people end up on the streets of Sioux Lookout. It is because of the individuals who shared their stories, their anguish and their pain, that the researcher is able to present to the reader the stories below. It is hoped that these stories may enlighten public opinion, foster positive social relations between Aboriginals and whites and that Sioux Lookout and surrounding First Nation communities may move forward as a caring and just society, with the development of effective strategies, policies and programs to address root causes of Aboriginal homelessness.

Some of what is written here is of a very sensitive nature. It is not the writer's intention to place blame or create further tension, but to draw attention to some very painful issues that require actions on the part of program developers, policy-makers and the leaders of Sioux Lookout and the surrounding communities to address the real issues underlying "homelessness" in Sioux Lookout. Factors contributing to the homelessness of each individual are varied and complex. Each informant experienced and/or experiences more than one risk factor.

As a means to protect confidentiality, names, ages and communities of origin are not revealed in the text of this paper. Rather, a "latent content" analysis (Berg, 1998, p. 225-26) is presented. Underlying messages of narrative responses are arranged by themes common to the narratives. Following are themes common to narrative responses during the interviews.

7.2   A Background of Violence and Abuse

Nine of the nineteen informants of this study (or 47%) disclose backgrounds of violence and abuse. Three people state that violence and abuse is precisely why they are on the streets today.

One woman, seven months pregnant by this time, fled an abusive relationship to end up on the streets of Sioux Lookout. She left the home she shared with her common-law husband with no money and no income. At the time we met, she was permanently on the streets, with no place to go. She had spent six weeks at First Step Women's Shelter (FSWS) in Sioux Lookout then ended up on the streets when she was asked to leave because she threatened to physically harm a staff person. For her, returning to her home community was not an option. She feels that others blame her for the abuse she had endured.

Another woman, a young woman compared to many on the streets, speaks openly of the domestic violence in her home as she was growing up.

> I lived a total of five years in [my home community]. I mostly remember my parents apart. Her memories of childhood are very vivid ones, images of her trying to protect both her mom and her sister. "I made sure she never got hit," she said of her sister.... One time I remember my dad throwing a washing machine. I told my sister to go get my uncle.... The last time he hit me I was fifteen. I told him I would kill him if he hit me again.

"There is no way" she will return to her home community. There is no one she can trust. No one she can "count on." No support.

The third woman who stated that she is on the streets specifically because of a background of violence and abuse speaks of numerous incidents within her home community that led to her decision to migrate to Sioux Lookout. To protect her identity, the specifics of the incidences are not revealed here. She had many siblings, "now there's three," she tells me. "It's a dangerous place," she says. She would rather live on the streets of Sioux Lookout than return home for fear of violence and abuse.

One woman has a history of domestic violence. She has no place to live because she was evicted from her apartment. She was raising her two children on her own after leaving a violent

relationship. Her children were taken a year later by Child and Family Services when she left

them alone and went out drinking. She was evicted the same month when she returned home with

her friends after the bar closed and "everyone was making too much noise." She spoke of the

eviction as an indication of the landlord's lack of sensitivity to Aboriginal culture.

The remaining five informants who disclose stories of violence and abuse are not on the

streets of Sioux Lookout on any permanent basis. They travel in and out of town, between their

home communities and Sioux Lookout. They travel to Sioux Lookout "to drink." Four individuals

speak of the abuses their mothers suffered at the hands of their fathers. "My cousins and me

would run out of the house," said one woman. "I'd hide," discloses one man, "hide under the

table, watch my mother get pounded in the face. I didn't do anything." He repeats the latter, as

though carrying guilt about not intervening. He cries. "I didn't do anything."

Another man speaks briefly about "getting hit" at residential school. "I guess for not

speaking English," he says. "I don't know why I'd get hit," he says. He says little about his

experiences in residential school.

7.3 Childhood Sexual Abuse

Three of the nineteen informants, two women and one man, disclose childhood sexual abuse. Two

of the informants cite childhood sexual abuse as *the* factor contributing to drinking binges and

subsequent stays on the streets of Sioux Lookout.

One woman has been frequenting Sioux Lookout she says "since [she] was old enough to

get here... to drink." She speaks about drinking as means "to numb the pain." The abuse occurred

up until she was nine years old, when she was taken into custody of Child and Family Services

when she was found alone in an abandoned car after fleeing from a family member who brought her to Sioux Lookout. The pain is deep. She holds back the tears, but says, "there's many more like me." She thanks the researcher for listening and for working on the development of new programs in Sioux Lookout. "People need to talk.... need counselling services... and AA."

Another woman blames "lots of uncles" for the pain she carries today. She claims her grandmother is her "rock." "I knew I was safe when I was sleeping next to her," indicating that perhaps her grandfather too was abusive. "I wouldn't even go to his funeral," she said. She suspects the abuse began when she was approximately four years old. "I can't turn to anybody," she says, "I won't go back. There's nothing for me there.... no support.... You can't tell anybody." She is discouraged by the lack of confidentiality among support workers in her home community.

"I was just a kid," says a man who had been visiting his family up north and missed his ride home from Sioux Lookout.5 "I gotta get back," he told me repeatedly the first time we met. "I got drinking," he said, ".... I didn't stop 'til I ended up in a coma.... I'll tell you. I've been through lots. I end up drinking. Most of the time I keep going." He took a deep breath. "You heard of that Rowe guy?" he asked. "I have," I said. In 1994, former Anglican minister Ralph Rowe was sentenced to six years in prison for sexually abusing sixteen boys over a seven-year period in one northern community. This young man is from a community other than the community where the charges originated. He remains silent to avoid revictimization. It is believed that many victims are doing the same, remaining silent. "Just a kid," he said, tears beginning to well in his eyes. "Every summer he would fly in," he sobbed. "How could anybody do that to a kid?" He spoke about hard work and keeping busy, as his refuge, yet it is "always" on his mind.

"Sometimes, I just can't take it... I think about it all the time... For seven years it happened." He

spoke of the time he tried to kill himself to ease the pain. "Most of the time I keep busy....

Sometimes, I just drink." He blamed this most recent drinking binge and subsequent stay on the

streets of Sioux Lookout on missing his flight home, drawing him into the street scene. He speaks

of the anger, grief, powerlessness and hurt he experiences as a result of childhood sexual abuse…

"Every minute of every day," he said, "I can't stop thinking about it."

The three individuals who disclosed childhood sexual abuse claim "there's more [people

on the streets who suffer from the pain of childhood sexual abuse]... they just don't wanna talk

about it."

7.4 Mental Health Issues

Eleven (or 58%) of the nineteen informants of this study live with some form of mental illness, or

are in need of counseling or healing services. The percentage of individuals requiring healing or

mental health supports is likely to be significantly higher, with full disclosure. People who end up

on the streets are having difficulty coping with traumatic life circumstances, seriously impacting

an individual's mental health.

Seven informants disclose having received counselling in the past but "it didn't work,"

according to each informant. Three of the seven disclose having attempted suicide. One of the

seven (male) has lost eight close friends to suicide within the last two to three years. The suicides,

he says, are because of childhood sexual abuse. Each and every informant indicates that his or her

life has been touched by suicide. They have lost loved ones, or several loved ones, to suicide.

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5 This informant flew from one of the northern First Nation communities, where he was visiting family, to Sioux

A Sociological Analysis of Root Causes of Aboriginal Homelessness in Sioux Lookout, Ontario

Individuals who end up on the streets have given up hope, given up any faith that life will get better. Three men in this study are grieving the loss of a spouse, two within the last year and another within the past five years. None of the men was able to speak without crying about his wife's death. Each of the men, in his own way, says, "Nothing matters anymore." He drinks to stop the pain. Another man's parents died "about ten years ago now.... that's why I drink," he said. He too grieves." I come to drink... to escape... I drink to make me happy," he said. When speaking with these individuals one must ask herself: why it is that there are individuals who go through very similar life experiences and some 'give up' while others cling to hope, or faith?

One woman has lost twelve family members to suicide, natural death and violence. She ended up on the streets for the second time in her life when her housemate died of a stroke. His death left her alone and on the streets. She has little comprehension of how to manage a budget or pay the rent. She says, "I would like to have an apartment some day."

7.5   Addictions

All nineteen (100%) of the informants of this study use alcohol and/or solvents.

Nine (or 47%) of the informants openly refer to him or her self as an alcoholic or "drunk," who regularly and consistently use alcohol and/or solvents (on a daily basis). Eight of those nine informants have been known to use solvents. "It's fast," said one woman of the quick intoxicating effect of drinking hair spray. The nine informants who claim to be alcoholics or "drunks" are on the streets for various reasons. Two of the nine are "situational" homeless (one was recently released from jail, while the other informant fled an abusive relationship). Four of the nine are among the "chronic" homeless. They would not have permanent shelter if not for the provision of

emergency shelter. Three of the nine informants are among the "episodic" homeless that travel to

Sioux Lookout specifically "to drink." What may be more important to note is that eight of the

nine informants who self proclaim to be an alcoholic or "a drunk" says he or she drinks "to

forget," or "to escape" or "that's the only way to deal with things." Alcohol and substances are a

means to numb the senses, forget about past abuses and heal the pain. The other informant says

simply "I'm a drunk... always been a drunk.... that's what I do."

Another nine (or 47%) of the nineteen claim to be binge drinkers while the remaining

individual, of the nineteen, doesn't speak of issues with alcohol, though he is among the chronic

homeless (a regular on the streets) and known to be intoxicated on a daily basis. Another four

binge drinkers are among the situational homeless, and five individuals are among the episodic

homeless. The episodic homeless travel to Sioux Lookout for various reasons (medical, court

services, counselling, recreation, family visits – or simply "to drink") and choose stay for a short

time, rather than immediately return home. They shift between being with shelter (while in their

home communities) and without shelter (while in Sioux Lookout). At times, they may board with

friends or family while in town. Most are on the streets a few days, while others are there for up

to a month at a time before returning to a home community. Each informant uses alcohol or

solvents to deal with painful experiences.

One man, who sought out the researcher attempting to make clear why he and others binge

drink, says:

> I drink.... you wanna know why?.... I forget. I don't wanna think about it all. You
> know how old I was when I started drinking? I was eight. Eight years old. My
> cousins and me would go out in the bush. My parents drank... we drank. I used to
> watch my dad... that *&! He'd beat the hell outta my mother... see him push her
> around, kick her. We'd hide. My brothers and me would hide... every woman I've
> been with... I do the same... I can't be with a woman... my brother killed himself

last year... I told him go ahead... I told him that... I drink… I don't wanna think about it all.

He speaks in anger, frustration and hurt, his body language revealing each of the deep and painful emotions he carries. He speaks of how the guilt from his brother's death haunts him each minute of each and every day. "Lots like me," he said, referring to others on the streets. "Drinking makes it stop." "It does?" I asked. "Eventually," he said, referring to what another man called "a slow death... gradual suicide," drinking to the point of unconsciousness, hoping for death.

7.6   Housing Shortages

Nine of the nineteen informants have no place to call home, though not all nine informants are among the chronic homeless – four are considered situational homeless (2 persons fled from abuse, another was evicted and another released from jail).

One woman, four months pregnant and adamant she would not return to her home community, applied for social assistance and geared-to-income housing shortly after we met. As a "homeless" person she was put on a priority waiting list with both Sioux Lookout Non-Profit Housing and Kenora District Housing. Five months later, still awaiting the vacancy of a rental unit in Sioux Lookout, she and her newborn baby moved into her sister's home on reserve, a two bedroom unit already housing her sister's family of four. Another woman also returned to overcrowded housing units on reserve when she was evicted from her apartment in Sioux Lookout (after spending two months bouncing between the streets and the sofas of friends and relatives).

Three informants have no income, nor have they sought rental housing. They say they are

reluctant to apply for social assistance because of drinking issues, yet the manager of Nitawin

Community Development Corporation, providing federally funded off reserve housing units,

states that housing units are technically available to unemployed persons at a minimal rate. The

Corporation however has no policy for priority status. These three individuals then, even if they

were to apply for off reserve housing, would be subject to a two-year waiting list.

One informant is an Ontario Works recipient. Another is a recipient of Ontario Disability

Support Program (ODSP). The former receives $195.00 a month for basic needs and is eligible

for $325.00 per month shelter allowance. The ODSP recipient receives $516.00 basic needs

allowance per month and is eligible for a $414.00 shelter allowance per month.

Another woman, in Sioux Lookout because she says she did not "have supports in [her

home] community" never sought housing, nor does she have an income. Her plan was to move to

one of the larger urban centres to "get help," the healing and support services she felt she needed.

She relocated after three months to move forward with her plan. Few housing options would have

been available to her had she remained in Sioux Lookout and applied for social assistance while

accessing social service and support programs in town.

One informant works odd jobs and finds seasonal employment on a regular basis. When

asked if he had a place to live, he responded, "Yes, I live in a tent in the bush." He conveyed that

his needs are minimal, very basic. He is comfortable with his life and does not necessarily need or

want a "place to live."

7.7 Release from Jail

One of the nineteen informants ended up on the streets of Sioux Lookout after she was released

from Kenora district jail. She is a young woman who was sitting on the steps outside of Sioux Lookout's Nishnawbe-Gamik Friendship Centre, curled up, her arms wrapped around her legs, soaking wet and crying when we met one August afternoon. It had rained all night. She awakened on the lawn of the town park, scared, wanting to go home. "My mom was supposed to meet me," she said. "She said she'd be here when I got out of jail." The young woman later spoke of her mother's past – a history of domestic abuse. Her mother too frequents the streets of Sioux Lookout, fleeing domestic violence.

According to a report by Native Women's Association of Canada (1995): "A very high proportion of Aboriginal women within the Canadian prison system have histories of domestic and sexual abuse" (cited in Beavis et al., 1997, p. 12). The young woman in this study did not indicate that her mother had been in jail, but the young woman's experiences on the streets and in jail are a negative impact of her mother's life experiences.

This young woman's situation also reveals a serious flaw in the court system, where individuals released from jail are transferred back to the place of arrest, regardless of whether the individual has a residence to which he or she may return. For this young woman (originating from one of the northern First Nation communities), arrangements had been made by staff at Kenora District Jail for the young woman to bus from Kenora to Dryden, Ontario, then take a taxi to Sioux Lookout. Because she was arrested and sentenced in Sioux Lookout, jail staff did not arrange transportation beyond Sioux Lookout. When she arrived in Sioux Lookout, expecting to meet her mother to take her home, and her mother was nowhere to be found, the young woman ended up on the streets and started drinking within a few days. Within two months she'd been arrested for public intoxication and was sent back to jail. This young woman's situation may have

been prevented with policies and practices in place for individuals released from jail. Policies and

practices may include the release to a support program, with a transition plan in place for the

individual's successful return to community life.

7.8   Hopelessness and Despair: Wounded Spirits

Common to most informants (84%) was a sense of hopelessness and despair, deep heartaches that

they feel can only be lessened with alcohol and/or substance consumption. Of the nineteen

informants, sixteen (84%) speak specifically of alcohol and substances as a means to bury the

pain they carry from past abuses and losses. The sense of hopelessness they feel is readily

detected in their spirit and language.

Two women in particular cry before speaking. Just the thought of why they are on the

streets stirs deep emotions. "I just can't go home," says a woman who lost her children to Child

and Family Services. "They took my baby," she continues, "I don't have anyone... Thinking about

not having my baby, none of my kids... That's what I think about.... 'cept when I'm drinking."

Regardless of the questions asked by the researcher the informant always returned conversation to

the topic of her children. Eventually, after several weeks and gaining a high comfort level with

the researcher, the woman asked, "can you help me get my kids back? I don't know what to do."

Another woman is very willing to disclose, almost as though a confidant may be a renewed hope

for change. She lost several siblings to violent and self-destructive deaths, and ended up on the

streets when her father died. Without her father in her life she felt safer on the streets than in her

home community.

One young man says he "keeps going most of the time" yet he carries burdens of past

abuses "each and every minute of the day... sometimes I just wanna drink... to not feel anymore."

He'd been repeatedly sexually abused as a young boy, and attempted suicide once. The heartache

is constant, he says. "It doesn't go away."

"There's no one to turn to," says a young woman. "The community is small. There is no

help.... I don't know where to go." As a young girl several uncles raped her. She ended up in

Sioux Lookout when released from jail and did not want to return to her home community. She

speaks of the experience that led to her arrest. "I almost killed her," she said, "I just wanted

someone to hurt like I was hurting." "I can't go back.... There's no one to talk to... I'm just so

tired of it all," she says one afternoon after confiding she'd been raped on the streets the night

before. To her, life on the streets is better than the place she referred to as "home."

"It's such a mess," reveals another woman. "I just don't know what to do... I don't know

why I end up with men like that." She ended up on the streets when she left an abusive

relationship, not the first time she had been in a violent relationship. The first time, it took thirty-

six stitches to repair her face, after her husband repeatedly kicked her with his steel-toed boot.

Her ex-husband now raises their nine-year-old son. She was, at the time she and the researcher

met, living on the streets and pregnant with the child of her past partner.

Another middle-aged woman speaks openly of the pain she carries from being sexually

abused by uncles as a very young child. She recognizes she needs counselling and support but she

says she has tried, and "it doesn't work." Instead, she drinks. She makes regular trips to Sioux

Lookout, to be with the crowd on the streets, those who "understand" her and to drink until

memories fade and pain numbs.

A young woman was full of hope, recently released from jail, thinking she had come to

Sioux Lookout to meet her mother, who would take her home. Her mother didn't show up. The young woman spent a few days looking before she learned that her mother met a man and was now on the streets, drinking. The young woman too turned to alcohol and substances to cope. She says her mother has had "a hard life." The young woman herself has been in and out of jail because of alcohol related offences and on the streets off-and-on over the past four years.

One man who had lost his children to Child and Family Services expresses a lack of will to continue. "I just don't care anymore," he says. "I've been drinking off and on... on the streets... since that time last year... work is there [in my home community]... but I don't care. It doesn't matter to me... Not since I lost my kids." His thirty-year-old wife passed away due to a diabetes related illness the year prior.

Another man just finished contract work in the bush, cutting pulp. He says he has nothing to live for. His wife was in her late thirties when she died. She learned of a serious illness just a few days before she gave birth to their first child. She was medovac'd to one of the city centres. By the time the informant drove to meet her at the hospital she and the baby were both gone. He's held seasonal jobs over the years. It's been seven years since his wife's death. "I have nothing to live for anymore," he says. "I drink all over.... Red Lake, Kenora, Winnipeg." "I just don't care..." He drinks to numb his pain, something he's been doing since he was twelve, implying the abuses began when he was in residential school.

Another man fights the tears as he speaks of the losses he has experienced over the years. His first wife, a young woman, died of kidney failure - far too common to Natives of the Sioux Lookout District - directly linked to diabetes related complications. He spent more than a decade raising their two children, working when he could. His children are grown now. "When I just

can't take anymore," he says, "... I come to drink." It's been four years since his second wife's

tragic death. He is a quiet man. He says he wants for nothing. He is employed on a seasonal basis.

He does odd jobs, either hauling building supplies into the northern communities or doing

construction work when it is available in the north. He merely works to help pay for liquor and

bare necessities. He lives outdoors when emergency shelter is unavailable.

Another man spoke of his parents' death as the time when he "gave up." He looks away,

indicating he did not want to disclose details. "About ten years now," he says, "that's why I

drink." He seemingly gave up his will to continue.

"Everything!" says another man, as he vents his anger. "She was my everything!" His

wife suffered a tragic death, the details of which are left out of this report to protect his identity.

"I'll drink 'til I die... I don't wanna be here... a slow death... a gradual suicide... that's what it is."

This is how he refers to binge drinking, a means to ease his pain, a death wish, praying for an end

to all the pain.

The loss of a significant other was common to five male informants. Each of them claims

the loss, as one man put it, as "the last straw," their reason to "give up." They say they have no

will to live, to continue in a world full of despair and heartache. One man in particular seems

numb to the pain. The others drink to numb the pain, as he does. Yet he does not seem angry. He

is the epitome of a lost soul, hopelessness and despair embodied, as he continues to merely exist.

It has been four years since his wife died of a diabetes related illness. His spirit is broken.

One man speaks of the years of abuse he witnessed in his home. The terror and violence

his mother suffered at the hands of his father. His tears would turn to anger. "I'm just so *?#

mad!!... It just doesn't stop.... I want it to end... I want the hurt to end.... I want it all to end." And

back to tears again. He lives with guilt from his brother's suicide. He blames himself for not

stopping him. He is angry at himself and at the world. He is angry with his father for not being a

better role model. "I end up doing the same thing... I treat women like he treated my mother... I

don't deserve to be with a woman," he said. "I don't wanna be like him... but I am... It just makes

me so *?#!! mad... I drink to make it go away." He wants help. "Men like me," he says, "we just

don't know how to treat women... there should be some place for us to go... get help."

"It just doesn't matter," says another man. "That's what you do.... you drink... that's how

you do it... get through a day." He says little of past abuses, and the researcher never asks him to

elaborate. His face glosses over when he is asked about residential school experiences and abuses.

"It happened," is all he says. It could be that the pain he experiences, turning to alcohol, hair

spray and other substances to "get through a day" has to do with experiences as a young child in

residential school or any other trauma he may have experienced as an adult. It is the loss of his

children to Child and Family Services, however, which he acknowledges as the defining event for

him – when he turned to the streets. He is a quiet man who has been on the streets off-and-on for

several years. He chooses to disclose little.

A man well known on the streets of Sioux Lookout may be the most visible among

wounded spirits. He was born on the banks of a river a few miles northwest of Sioux Lookout, his

family's traditional homeland. His dad fished for one of the local commercial fishers, situated in

Hudson, on Lost Lake, the hub of transportation for hundreds of years, going as far back as the

fur trade and the Red Lake gold rush.[6] The streets of Sioux Lookout are "home," says the man. At

sixteen years of age, shortly after finishing residential school and around the same time his father

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[6] See Parrott, D.F. (1970) for an excellent reading of *The Red Lake Gold Rush*.

died, he turned to the streets to live. That was in 1959. Forty-five years later he says he has "lived

through everything... [and] not much matters anymore."

Each of the sixteen informants gives very specific reasons why he or she is on the streets –

domestic violence, mental health issues, backgrounds of violence and abuse, childhood sexual

abuse, the loss of children to Child and Family Services, housing shortages, a release from jail

and addictions. All are among the circumstances people on the streets cite as contributing to

where they are today, on the streets of Sioux Lookout. Each and every person has lived through

more than one traumatic life experience, any of which may contribute to the hopelessness and

despair they feel today. They are "lost souls," or wounded spirits, who turn to alcohol and

substances to "numb the pain."

Eleven of the sixteen individuals who spoke of alcohol as a means to "numb the pain" (or

58% of all nineteen informants) also spoke of early childhood adversities, including residential

school abuses, family violence and childhood sexual abuse.

7.9 *Homelessness in Sioux Lookout as a legacy of residential school system?*

Nine of the nineteen informants attended residential school. Another seven informants have

parents who went to residential school. Two informants have siblings who attended, but the

informants attended day school in their home communities. One informant did not attend school,

nor did his parents. Is homelessness in Sioux Lookout a legacy of the residential school system? It

is this researcher's opinion that it indeed is a contributing factor.

Eighty-four percent of this study's respondents clearly drink to "bury pain." Fifty-eight

percent disclose that they drink as a means to forget past abuses. What is clear when speaking

with each of the respondents is an inability to cope. These individuals have lost loved ones to

natural deaths, violence, and suicide. They have lost children to government officials. And, for

most, they have known little else other than pain and abuse. They've witnessed it. They've lived

it. It is what they know. Indeed, their pain is deep. However, this researcher repeatedly asked

herself: why is it that some people "cope" and others choose to bury their pain?

Throughout the research process, it became increasingly clear that the absence of positive role

models in a young person's life is a major factor in one's ability to "cope" later in life. It was the

residential school system that robbed children of opportunities to have caring community and

family members who otherwise are the most significant and positive impacts as role models and

teachers of life skills. Further, not only did children grow up with the absence of positive role

models, but the emotional, physical, spiritual, and sexual abuse experienced within residential

schools added additional trauma to individual lives. As a result of trauma, individuals learned not

to feel, they experienced a sense of powerlessness, loss of control over their own lives, and now

often resort to alcohol and substance abuse to numb their pain, possibly self mutilation and

suicide as well (Gelinas, 1983; Kinzl and Biebl, 1992). These factors, compounded with stripped

identity and disruption to Aboriginal culture, traditions, and economic systems – all intentions of

the residential school system – contribute to the sense of hopelessness and despair experienced by

respondents. The intergenerational impact of these injustices is profound. Cycles of excessive

drinking as a means to bury pain are repeated generation after generation.

Section 8 – Interviews with Local Elders: Government Policies Contribute to a Sense of Hopelessness and Despair for People Living on the Streets

8.1   Introduction

Just two to three short generations ago, the Anishinabe people traveled the land. They fished,

hunted, trapped and "set up camp" – living off the land as their ancestors had done before them.

Elders remind us that governments' assimilationist policies have had a devastating impact on

Aboriginals. "We see this in the way our children are educated… in our health… the loss of our

culture… the loss of our way of life… everything had a purpose. Every plant you see… A plant

not used for food, was used for medicine... everything." Another Elder recalls the "drummer" who

traveled the land to visit, from family to family. "It was 1936 or 1937 when we heard the drums,"

he said, speaking of a time when he and another boy "headed toward the drum… You would give

him tobacco… he would pound on his drum… The man would pound on his drum then walk

around the wigwam. It would shake. He went around it again. It would shake some more. Each

time he went around it, it shook more. Not touching anything. The wigwam shook… I saw it. I

tell what I saw." The drummer, said the Elder, "helped people who were sick." The Elder tells

this story to remind the researcher that it was just two short generations ago that "way of life" for

Aboriginals was different. He tells the story to emphasize the abrupt disruption of Aboriginal life.

It is this disruption to traditional life - the decline of traditional skills – and the absence of

any real substantive means to adapt to western or mainstream society, say local Elders, that has

resulted in the sense of hopelessness and despair experienced by those who turn to the streets, a

scene of addictions and binge drinking.

Each factor listed below contributes to a sense of malaise and normlessness on reserve – a

disruption of identity and traditional social and economic structures, not necessarily replaced by

adequate employment, schools, housing, or health care. Each factor is a result of government

policies that have done nothing but destroy traditional ways in order to assimilate and regulate the lives of the original peoples. According to local Elders, there is a strong correlation between each factor and what is witnessed today on the streets of Sioux Lookout, Ontario.

8.2 *Wage Labour Plays a Role in Loss of Traditional Skills – Wage Labour Disappears*

"Native people didn't go hungry," says a local Elder. "It was about survival... Every person had a job to do. Hunters. Gatherers. People went as food was needed, with the seasons, based on where the animals were going." "Each person in the family had a job," she added, "... when the family used what they needed from the land they moved somewhere else." This was a way of life for people up until just two short generations ago. Today, say the Elders, young people "don't have the skills." The skills to survive off the land have been lost. (There are, however, several hunters and trappers still in the area.)

Several Elders speak of changes to the traditional economy as having occurred with the introduction of new forms of labour. One man speaks of the changes he saw as beginning when his grandfather took he and his family to the reserve – during the late 1930s - drawn to the area because of its proximity to commercial fishing. His family was "given machinery by Bowman Fisheries," which at the time shipped out four or five boxcars of fish every two weeks. Another man speaks of the many jobs he held after leaving residential school in the mid 1930s. He says he spent thirty-nine years clearing trees in the area, making room for development of houses and roads; a way of life new to Anishinabe people. The Elder has had many "jobs" over the years, clearing bush for highway development from Dinorwic to Sioux Lookout, and from Sioux

Lookout to Hudson. He has worked at the gold mines in Red Lake, and the mills in Sioux Lookout. He was employed in transportation, freighting goods from Hudson, Ontario (on the southern point of the Lac Seul water system), to Red Lake, when the gold mines were booming. He held the latter job at a time when water transportation from Hudson to Red Lake via the Lac Seul waterways was key to entering the Red Lake area, prior to construction of the road from the Trans-Canada highway to Red Lake. The Elder who speaks of his life as a labourer has worked hard over the years, actively employed in what today is considered the "unskilled" jobs. Wage labour introduced a new way of life, he says, a way of life which also became a way of the past. "Those jobs aren't there anymore… commercial fishing… mining… road development… The jobs that are there… Indians don't have what it takes… you need a grade 12 nowadays." "When I went to do those jobs… my dad was still living off the land…," he added. "We don't do that anymore."

Wage labour, according to Elders, created a generation removed from acquiring the skills required to know how to live off the land. Not only do the young people not have the skills to compete in the "western" world, say the Elders, they also no longer have the skills to survive off the land. "Most kids don't know," says an Elder from a northern community, "... they don't know how to trap, survive off the land... there's no jobs here. They're lost... the old ways are disappearing... There's no jobs..."

"There's no hope," is how several Elders express the sense of normlessness experienced by younger generations. The disruption to identity and traditional social and economic structures has not been replaced by any substantial means to adjust biculturally. There are few jobs. Housing is crowded and inadequate. What is learned in the schools seems almost irrelevant to life on

reserve. There is little sense of identity. There is little direction, the Elders say. "Life becomes all about drinking. People go to Sioux Lookout to escape how they feel when they are here," said an Elder from a northern community.

8.3 Loss of Traditional Skills: The Impact of the Residential School System

Elders also speak of the residential school system as playing a major role in the fact that many of the younger generations lack the skills to trap and live off the land. The residential school system, supposedly implemented to provide Aboriginal children with the skills and education to assimilate into Euro-Canadian society, actually denied them of both a western education and opportunities to learn traditions and ways of subsistence traditional to their families and communities. Anishinabe children who were taken from their families to attend residential schools, for the most part, did not receive an education. They ploughed the fields, milked the cows, cut wood, mended clothing, baked bread, did laundry and so on. As a result, many children left the residential school system alienated from the education system itself. Many residential school survivors left school as soon as they were able and took on the "unskilled" jobs of the market economy. Their parents and grandparents remained on the reserve, surviving between what the land provided and what they earned as commercial fishers and fur traders. Younger generations, because they were attending residential schools, missed opportunities to acquire the traditional skills that provided subsistence for the many generations before them. The traditional skills were lost between generations.

"The people on the streets," says one Elder, "... they are lost between two worlds...

Residential schools did that… Our parents thought that sending us to school would help… help us have a better way of life…. But we didn't learn… hardly even spent more than a few days in the classroom…"

8.4   Traditional Skills Not Replaced with Means to Adapt

"They [federal government officials] told our parents they had to send us to school…" "Traditional ceremonies were prohibited," adds another Elder. "Our people signed treaties… to protect our children… we were promised education, health care… promises...."

"How do these factors relate to what we see on the streets?" the researcher asked. "On the one hand a way of life is destroyed," the Elder says. "On the other hand, there is no hope… no replacement… Our children must leave the community to get an education… they travel hundreds of miles to go to high school… it's hard for them. They are away from home… They are young… and they are taught in a system that doesn't make sense to them… It is a different way of life in the cities." "And… we see sicknesses that we never used to see…. And, we have no jobs here for our young people…our traditional way of life is disappearing…. Yet, there is nothing else… little hope."

"People drink… that's how they cope," says one of the Elders. "They see no other way… many give up." The Elder repeats what several other Elders emphasize: "They've given up hope… we live in a system that isn't working… our people are dying."

8.5   Poverty and Asset Impoverishment

Further to government policies that have contributed to the decline of traditional economy and

skills are policies that have kept people on reserve in a chronic state of poverty. Two local Elders

speak of the Indian Act as a means to control Aboriginals by prohibiting them to acquire assets.

The Indian Act made it a criminal act for an Indian person to own, buy or sell resources.

As a result, the practice of giving Anishinabe people credit rather than cash during the fur trade

era was continued well into the twentieth century. A local Elder gives a 1960s example of how

the credit system prevented the Anishinabe people from "getting ahead." The Elder worked for "a

Kenora man" who paid cash for fur. The trader "wanted to set up a post in Big Trout Lake." The

Elder was sent by the trader to the reserve to learn more about the potential of such a

development. "I was surprised to learn they were still using the credit system," said the Elder. "I

came back and told him 'you'd be doing them more harm than good'," said the Elder, expressing

his concern that the Hudson Bay Company may "cut off" credit of "any trader who sold to a free

trade." By this time, residents were dependent on Hudson Bay Company for trade items such as

flour, lard, clothing, fishing and trapping equipment, etc. If the trader sold his furs to an

independent – for cash – the risk of being "cut off" by Hudson Bay Company could be life

threatening.

Another Elder recalls joining her father when he took his fish to the local post. She

attended her father because she could speak English. "They'd say how much the fish weigh," said

the Elder, "then they'd say 'this is what I'll pay you.' They'd never pay him enough for him to be

able to repay them for whatever supplies he'd purchased over a season. He was never given cash.

He never got out of his credit.... My father did this for fifteen to twenty years."

Impoverished conditions, say the Elders, are a direct impact of the Indian Act. One Elder,

a man with a history of self employment, claims it was his decision to "give up" his "rights as an

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Indian" that enabled him to become financially successful. "There was no way I was going to do that," he said, when he spoke of choosing to live off reserve. "I saw how my brothers got treated… the rules they had to live by… I said 'no way' I was gonna' live like that… government telling me where to live… and telling me I couldn't own anything… I've always paid for all my own equipment… owned my own stuff… owned it outright."

8.6   Welfare Dependency

"Our young people think welfare is the answer." Each and every Elder stressed his or her disappointment that social assistance has created a dependency thinking among younger generations. "A lot of them don't know how to trap… and they don't want to," expressed one concerned Elder. "Welfare is not the answer… our young people have given up." Three Elders expresses concern not only because young people are "waiting for someone to take care of them," as one Elder puts it, but because this way of life is traditionally foreign to Aboriginals. "Native people always worked hard," one Elder says with pride. "Whether we were out trapping, fishing, chopping wood… or working to make ends meet… We did what we had to do… That thinking is disappearing… Young people today don't know hard work… the government did that to us."

Another three of the eight Elders raise concerns about government cutbacks that have further imposed impoverished conditions on Aboriginal people. Adding to the state of poverty were 1995 revisions and restrictions to Ontario Works regulations. In northern reserve communities, where a family pays up to $10.00 for a four litre bag of milk, $3.05 for a can of corn or $3.79 for a box of Kraft dinner, cuts to social assistance rates were devastating. To add further trauma, revisions to Ontario Works criteria meant that only one person per household

could collect social assistance. In communities where multiple families live in one house, it is simply not possible to feed an entire household on one social assistance cheque. Where a family has lost its traditional skills, the impact is even more devastating.

New criteria placed on eligibility for Employment Insurance (EI) is also a factor contributing to poverty in First Nations. Often where there is work, employment is posted as either seasonal or contract positions. Persons filling the positions do not meet the number of hours worked criteria to be eligible for EI once the season or contract ends. This means that the individual is then placed in a position to consider Ontario Works, which, as noted above, is not necessarily an option.

8.7   Government Controls Trapping

Other Elders speak of provincial fur quotas, trapline registration and fees for land use, which were implemented in the late 1940s, as negatively impacting upon the lives of the Anishinabe people and their livelihood. Aboriginals were given no option but to adhere to government policy. This was just one more means for the government to control resources of the land, and ultimately the livelihood of the Anishinabe people.

8.8   A Connection Between Reserve Systems and Homelessness

When the government land surveyor initially arrived in what is now known as Sioux Lookout he promised the original peoples to "draw the reserve around" the area Aboriginals were known to occupy. Later, boundaries of the Lac Seul reserve settlement were drawn where "most of the Indians lived," opening the land for settlement. Four families, however, lived - and still live - in

the area now known as Sioux Lookout. Another Anishinabe family lived further south of the area.

This history is important to a discussion about "homelessness" in Sioux Lookout because

descendants of one of the original families live on the streets today, on the very land where their

ancestors fished, hunted, trapped and "set up camp". Today, they are referred to as "homeless,"

when just two generations ago the land was their home. It provided sustenance. No one was

"homeless."

Section 9 – Analyses

9.1 Introduction

Four percent of the Canadian population is Aboriginal, yet ten percent of the homeless population is Aboriginal. In Sioux Lookout, Ontario, 99% of the homeless are Aboriginal. Those who end up on the streets of Sioux Lookout travel to the small town from surrounding First Nations communities. They either fly in as escorts with medical patients or arrive for their own medical or mental health appointments, they arrive to attend court or because they are released to the town from Kenora District jail. Some arrive specifically looking for employment or other support services. Others travel to the town for recreation, family visits, or "to drink." Every person who ends up on the streets, according to this study, has alcohol and substance abuse issues. Eighty-four percent are traumatized from grief, past abuses, suicide, divorce, family violence and/or the loss of children to Child and Family Services. Their heartache is deep. They have experienced life that is unknown to most of the mainstream population. They are, in the words of Aboriginal Elders, "lost souls." They drink to forget about depressed social conditions on reserve and they drink to numb the pains from past abuses.

The homeless of Sioux Lookout, Ontario, seek refuge from depressed conditions that are direct consequences of assimilationist policies and the tendency of the homeless to give up on life is the result of years of abuse, a government created dependency and an "institutional mentality" created by the residential school system.

People on the streets of Sioux Lookout arrive in the small town looking for an escape, an escape from depressed social conditions and an escape from feelings of anger, sadness and pain. Five percent of Sioux Lookout's homeless population arrives after a release from Kenora District jail because of a system that releases an offender to the origin where the charge was laid – not to

the home community. Another 5% of the homeless population lives on the streets of Sioux

Lookout, where their ancestors lived before them, as they had generation after generation. The

remaining 90% seek refuge from impoverished conditions, housing shortages, abuse and family

violence. They turn to alcohol to cope with heartache and depression.

9.2   Seeking Refuge from Depressed Conditions

Just two to three short generations ago, the Anishinabe traveled the land. They fished,

hunted, trapped and "set up camp" – living off the land as their ancestors had done before them.

Today, what is witnessed on the streets of Sioux Lookout - addictions, binge drinking, people

drinking hairspray and other substances to escape feelings of hopelessness and despair – is a

result of political and economic policies and practices that devastated and impoverished

individuals and communities.

Thatcher (2002, p. 35) suggests that the 'hypermobile,' or one-third of the persons on

reserve, live up to 40% of the year in a nearby city. Aboriginal homelessness is the "result of the

migration to cities of people from severely depressed conditions on reserves and other rural

communities." They travel to the city "in search of jobs and education" (Beavis et al., 1997, p. 9).

Aboriginal persons who frequent Sioux Lookout also seek to escape depressed conditions, but

most seek short-term refuge. Most turn to the street scene from one or two days to a month or

two.

Earlier developments meant employment in the mining, forestry and railway industries,

but the unskilled jobs have disappeared, leaving Aboriginals prone to high rates of unemployment

and welfare dependency. First Nation communities north of Sioux Lookout report unemployment

rates that range from 27.6% in Kasabonika (Ottawa, 2001) to 90% in Fort Severn (Fort Severn, 2003). The number of persons across the District in receipt of either employment insurance or social assistance is 30.8%, with percentages reading as high as 44.8% in Pikangikum and 61% in the winter months (Angeconeb, 1998, p. 46, 52 and 56). Further devastating reserve communities are revisions to Employment Insurance and Ontario Works eligibility criteria. For persons in seasonal employment, revisions to Employment Insurance make them ineligible for federal income benefits, while 1995 revisions to Ontario Works legislation means that only person per household is eligible for Ontario Works benefits. Where multiple families live in single-family homes, as is the case across reserve communities north of Sioux Lookout, the impact is devastating. Even welfare is not an option for many, and, where traditional hunting and trapping skills have eroded, individuals and families live in extreme poverty.

Traditional hunting and trapping skills, for many, were lost as an impact of the residential school system. With children in residential schools and/or entering the labour market for employment, parents and kin missed opportunities to pass skills to successive generations. "Most kids don't know," says one Elder from a northern community, "… they don't know how to trap, survive off the land… and there's no jobs here… our young people are lost." People who end up on the streets are lost between two worlds. They have limited opportunities for income and employment. And, most no longer have the skills to live off the land. On a land where people "never went hungry," poverty is now widespread. For people on the streets, it seems hopeless.

The introduction of wage labour also plays a significant role in the loss of traditional skills. Young people, often after leaving the residential school system, took up employment with nearby mines, commercial fishers and transportation. Lacking higher education, they occupied the

unskilled jobs that are disappearing with the 'new economy.' This meant entire days, or even weeks or months spent away from home, where they may have acquired the traditional skills than sustained Aboriginal families for thousands of years. Instead, young Aboriginals spent decades employed in the unskilled sector, a sector that has been on the decline with the rise of a technological and service based economy. Wage labour, according to Elders, created a generation or two removed from acquiring the skills required to live off the land. Where the skills are lost and entire families live off one pay cheque, or one Ontario Works cheque, severe poverty plagues communities.

Aboriginal persons who end up on the streets of Sioux Lookout experience social conditions that are largely unfamiliar to the rest of the population. Each and every person on the streets of Sioux Lookout is in some way impacted by suicide and most, if not all, have experienced early childhood abuse and family violence.

Across the country, suicide among Aboriginals is three times the national average (RCAP, 1995, p. 11). Suicide rates across the Sioux Lookout District are two to five times the national average (Sioux Lookout District Hospital Negotiating Committee, 1995, p. 7). The loss of a loved one to suicide is common to all persons on the streets of Sioux Lookout. Brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, sons, daughters, cousins and often more than one family member have been lost to suicide. Each and every person, whether they express grief, anger or no feelings at all, knows the trauma of losing a loved one to suicide and most have witnessed and/or experienced family violence and abuse.

Fifty-eight percent of the informants in this study disclose early childhood adversities. They speak of hiding under tables, fleeing from their homes and turning to alcohol as early as

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eight years of age to escape violence and abuse within the home. This researcher suspects that

violence is common to all informants, yet they choose not to disclose. Eighty-four percent of the

homeless in Sioux Lookout speak candidly about using alcohol and substances as a means to heal

pain from past experiences. Fifty-eight percent speak about early childhood adversities. The other

twenty-six percent use alcohol and substances to forget about the loss of a significant other. It is

just one more life experience that contributes to a 'why bother' thinking.

9.3   Sense of Powerlessness: An Impact of Violence and Abuse

Beavis et al. (1997, p. 13) note "high incidence of family violence, sexual assault and incest in

many Native communities." Thirty-nine percent of Aboriginal adults report family violence as a

problem in their community and twenty-five percent report incidences of sexual abuse (Ottawa,

1993). There is no known report of incidences of childhood sexual abuse in the Sioux Lookout

District. Fifty-eight percent of the informants in this study claim to use alcohol to "numb the

pain" from early childhood adversities. The impact on an individual's sense of self-efficacy and

powerless is clear from interviews with informants in this study.

Many people who end up on the streets of Sioux Lookout witnessed violence and abuse as

children. These individuals carry feelings of guilt, hopelessness and powerless, compounded with

feelings that they have no right to feel otherwise.7 Those who were abused as children also

express feelings of hopelessness and powerless, grief, anger and hurt. This sense of

powerlessness, according to Finkelhor and Browne (1985), are long-term impacts of childhood

sexual abuse.

Not only are persons on the streets of Sioux Lookout looking for an escape from depressed social conditions, but also the sense of powerlessness they experience impedes their ability to move beyond the pain to a sense of self-efficacy. The adult survivor experiences further confusion, as noted by Native Women's Association (1995, p. 9 and18), when confronted by the impact of living in a small community, where it often seems everyone in the community knows of the abuse but does little or nothing about it.

9.4   Government-Created Dependency

Moving people to reserve communities where there is limited job potential, robbing them of opportunities to own and control land and resources, implementing an education system to strip identity and wipe away traditional skills to live off the land and consistently implementing further government policies that are foreign to needs on reserve has created generations of people dependent on government income. The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples wrote, "Substandard living conditions and limited life changes are associated with depression and feelings of helplessness and hopelessness. Conversely, depression and other mental and cognitive disorders prevent people from acting to change their life circumstances" (1996, p. 24). This phenomenon is a major factor contributing to a sense of hopelessness and despair experienced by Aboriginals who turn to the streets.

9.5   An Intergenerational Impact of the Residential School System

Clearly, Aboriginals on the streets of Sioux Lookout have experienced life unknown to the rest of

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7 Crosson-Tower (2002, p. 383) associate feelings of guilt, hopelessness and powerless with the feelings carried by

the population. Common to the people on the streets is a feeling that there is "no use." They have

"given up on life." Another major factor contributing to this sense of powerless is an

"institutional mentality," an intergenerational impact of the residential school system.

An "institutional mentality," according to Goffman (1961), results from living in an

institutional setting whereby the main objective is to strip identity, teach new roles, values and

skills. In this case, the new identity was to fit with a Euro-Canadian agricultural society. The

long-term impact is the loss of individuality and a depleted sense of self-efficacy. The survivor

ends up being able to do little for him or her self, a dependency has been created. What is

observed on the streets of Sioux Lookout is the impact felt among successive generations.

It must be emphasized that dependency thinking is not necessarily common among

Anishinabe people, nor is it necessarily common to residential school survivors. Aboriginal

people are clearly resilient people who have survived repeated and deliberate attempts to

obliterate their population. But, common to people on the streets is a depleted sense of self-

efficacy, hopelessness and powerless resulted from depressed socio-economic conditions and

government created dependency thinking resulting from ethnocentric policies and a residential

school system that stripped individuals of identity, individuality and sense of control over one's

personal outcomes.

9.6 *Homeless Persons in Sioux Lookout Face Income, Employment and Housing Barriers*

Several writers (Brody 1971; Falconer, 1990; Morrow, 1990 and Reeves and Frideres, 1981)

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child witnesses of domestic violence.

argue that reserve-urban migration patterns are social consequences to depressed conditions, lack

of jobs, poor housing conditions and lack of housing on reserve. This is indeed the case in Sioux

Lookout. When Sioux Lookout Homelessness Committee opened its doors to persons on the

streets in November 2003, it encountered an increased number of the "situational" homeless,

those seeking refuge from family violence, abuse and divorce situations. These individuals,

however, face major barriers to income, employment and housing.

Fifty percent of the Aboriginal population over fifteen years of age has not attained a high

school diploma (Beavis et al., 1997, p. 2). Eighty-four percent of Aboriginal persons across the

Sioux Lookout District have less than a grade nine education.8 Thatcher (2002, p. 44) suggests

Aboriginal migrants have difficulty finding jobs because of the "new economy." The shift to a

technologically, computer and information based, specialized economy, has decreased the need

for unskilled workers. Individuals with little or no education, therefore, have difficulty finding

jobs. Persons on the streets of Sioux Lookout face this barrier.

Addictions issues further compound difficulties obtaining an income. Generally,

unemployed persons may turn to general welfare for financial support. For most persons who end

up on the streets of Sioux Lookout, this is not an option. Because one must actively seek

employment and/or training to be eligible for social assistance, persons on the streets, because of

addictions issues, do not apply for general welfare. Most people on the streets of Sioux Lookout

have no income at all.

Those who do find employment or meet eligibility criteria for social assistance face

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8 See www.knet/communities. The average percentage reflects the average of the First Nation communities listed as
showing relevant 1996 census information. The First Nation communities include: Deer Lake, Fort Hope, Fort

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affordable housing shortages and may have to wait up to two years for geared-to-income housing.

Sioux Lookout Non-Profit Housing (SLNPH), municipally administered, operates one hundred

fifty-four housing units and has a 100% occupancy rate (Sioux Lookout Anti-Racism Committee,

2000, p. 21-22). Single persons face even longer wait lists because there are only eight non-profit

single units in the entire town. Nitawin Housing Corporation, a federally funded housing service,

has no single units at all.

Addictions place persons at high risk of eviction because, due to cultural values to share

and support one another, tenants permit family and friends into their homes to stay, quite often,

indefinitely. When persons turn up late at night at the tenant's doorstep, the tenant then faces a

risk of eviction because of noise complaints from neighbours. Aboriginal people, because of their

practice of sharing, are at higher risk of eviction than are non-Aboriginal people.

Severn, Kasabonika, Kingfisher 1, Lac Seul, Pikangikum, Poplar Hill, Sachigo 1, Sandy Lake, Summer Beaver, Weagamow, Webequie, and Wunnumin 1.

Section 10 – Research Limitations

This project began when it was recognized there was a clear need to comprehend why Aboriginal people are disproportionately represented on the streets of Sioux Lookout. Prior to the early stages of the research, there was little understanding among those attempting to address the issues. The Municipality commissioned the 'Front Street Committee' to conduct round table discussions to propose recommendations to address what they saw as 'vagrancy,' 'loitering' and 'public drunkenness,' There was a clear need to understand the stories behind the faces, eliminate stereotypes and establish effective long term solutions to address root causes. Policy-makers have revealed no understanding of root causes. This project was an attempt to understand the issues so that as a community, and a larger District, program developers and policy-makers may move forward to implement effective strategies.

For a visibly white researcher, the research process had limitations right from the onset. Aboriginal people "don't want to be researched anymore," as more than one informant put it. Reasons for this were respected, so the researcher moved forward at a comfort level appropriate to the individual. This created time constraints for the overall project, but there was an overall commitment from Sioux Lookout Homelessness Committee members and Project Coordinators, as well as the researcher, to move beyond racial tensions and toward a vision of a humanitarian and just society.

Section 11 – Recommendations

11.1 Introduction

It is because of the stories shared by individuals on the streets, the expressed experiences of

Elders, Chiefs, Councillors and service providers working with people on the streets, that Sioux

Lookout Homelessness Committee (SLHC) is able to present a model to address homelessness in

Sioux Lookout.

In Thatcher's (2002) review of the literature, he suggests three levels of solution responses for

best practices, each guided by a paradigm alternative to assimilation, parallelism or the "new

paradigm," which recognizes that Aboriginal peoples can have a foot in the past, present and

future. According to the *new* paradigm, responses to homelessness will be multi-tiered,

addressing socio-economic inequities, developing community-based strategies and delivering

programs specific to Aboriginal tradition and culture – yet accepting of cultural, social, economic

and technological changes. It is this *new* paradigm (Thatcher, 2002, p. 142-143) that is adopted to

present a model for homelessness in Sioux Lookout. Three levels of solutions include 1) micro

strategies, focused on the individual, 2) mezzo-level, or community-based strategies, and 3)

macro-level strategies, directed at policy or structural change (Thatcher, 2002, p. 147). Micro and

mezzo level strategies are presented as a model for Sioux Lookout, Ontario, followed by policy

implications – macro level strategies. In short, recommendations:

- are specific to Aboriginal culture and tradition;

- are accepting of culture as susceptible to change, and recognizing the importance of skills

  development to keep pace with technological change;

- recognize all levels of structural forces that contribute to Aboriginal homelessness, and

  therefore address root causes; and

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- innovative, with emphasis on sustainability, considering the volatility of government

    grants and programs.

Also important to note is that program development ideas must always come from the

people most affected by the issues. In this case, it is the people on the streets who must continue

to be involved at all levels of discussion and program modification. The proposed model is the

result of community consultations, consultations with Elders, Chiefs, Councillors, local and

regional service providers and, most importantly, people on the streets. This researcher strongly

suggests that the model be implemented only following further discussions with people on the

streets and be revisited and revised accordingly. The model presented below is not based on the

personal opinions of the researcher, nor was it developed based on personal opinions of Sioux

Lookout Homelessness Committee members. The model presented below represents what was

heard during hundreds of hours of community and individual consultations.

11.2   Toward A Sustainable Model for Sioux Lookout

First, let us return to the different categories of homelessness in Sioux Lookout. There are

approximately fifteen chronically homeless people on the streets of Sioux Lookout. Without the

provision of emergency shelter, they live in makeshift shelters, tents, dumpsters, abandoned cars

or abandoned buildings. According to data collected at Sioux Lookout Homelessness

Committee's Transition Support Program,9 there are approximately another 600-800 individuals

per year who travel to Sioux Lookout for medical, social service or recreation purposes, or to visit

family or specifically visit the community "to drink." They end up on the streets of Sioux

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9 Data dated from November 1, 2003 – May 1, 2004.

Lookout for periods of one day to a month or two. They are the "episodic" homeless, the

transients. Most have addictions issues, and most have personal histories that contribute to

feelings of despair. Then there are the "situational" homeless. They end up on the streets due to

family violence, eviction, divorce or release from jail, for example. These individuals have no

place to go, but they are not among the chronic - or long term - homeless. These individuals

generally access supports and either settles in Sioux Lookout, return to their home communities

or take up residence in another community. Each group of individuals, and each individual, has

varying needs. The model described below incorporates the needs of each group.

Throughout the course of research for this project, Sioux Lookout Homelessness

Committee presented draft models to various groups (First Nations Elders, Chiefs, Councillors,

residential school survivors, local service providers, emergency shelter coordinators across the

region, and people on the streets).10 The model presented here has been revised based on input

of each of the aforementioned groups. Their input is vital to effective program development. The

steps taken by SLHC may prove beneficial to communities facing similar issues and needs.

Due to fears of implementing programs that may not be funded in the future by

government resources, one of the objectives of Sioux Lookout Homelessness Committee (SLHC)

is to develop sustainable programs that will not depend upon government resources to maintain

operations. Prior to publication of this paper, Sioux Lookout Homelessness Committee purchased

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10 SLHC conducted focus groups consisting of Elders, Chiefs, Councilors, and community members in several surrounding First Nation communities: Muskrat Dam First Nation, Lac Seul First Nation, Ojibway Nation, Keewaytinook Okimakanek, Cat Lake First Nation, Kingfisher First Nation, Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inniwug, Wapekeka First Nation, North Caribou First Nation, Wunnumin First Nation, and Sachigo First Nation. A *Leaderships' Dialogue on Homelessness* was held May 28, 2002 at Sunset Women's Aboriginal Circle's *Third Pelican Healing Gathering* in Sioux Lookout, Ontario. January 2003, eighteen service providers participated in a focus group at Nishnawbe-Gamik Friendship Centre in Sioux Lookout. And consultations were held with emergency shelter providers in Red Lake, Ontario, and Kenora, Ontario.

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a building that will provide revenue to help sustain program operations. Rental revenue from five

transition rooms on the upper floor of the building help offset operational expenses and the cost of

the full-time Transition Support Coordinator for the Transition Support Program (TSP) on the

main floor. Revenue from the rental of office space on the lower level also contributes to the

Coordinator's salary dollars.

11.3   General Policies

Also, prior to outlining a model for Sioux Lookout, it is important to revisit key points heard

throughout consultations with key individuals and groups. Each point is important to program

development and program delivery and will be formulated as policies to be utilized by Sioux

Lookout Homelessness Committee for the purpose of implementing and delivering its

Transitional Support Program. Key points integral to policy development at the micro and mezzo

levels are as follows:

1.   Cultural relevance: It is vital that all counselling, assessment and referral programs are

delivered from a culturally relevant perspective, supporting the values, beliefs and

practices traditional to Aboriginal people. Because each of us holds values and beliefs

grounded in our own experiences and culture, this will often mean ensuring that

Aboriginal people are in positions responsible for program delivery.

2.   Personal responsibility: Thatcher (2002, p. 148-49) proposes a Transtheoretical Model

(TTM) of program delivery:

> TTM assumes that people are responsible for their own change at their own
> pace and that the role of the helper is to assume that all clients have the
> potential for change and that they can benefit from encouragement, support

and guidance, offered in a style and measure appropriate to their readiness for change. In other words, the service client's intentions are respected but even if she/he is unwilling to change, she/he is not dismissed as someone who is not ready for service.

SLHC utilizes this model in the delivery of its Transitional Support Program. The potential for change is recognized and accepted in all clients.

3.   Empowerment: Elders repeatedly stress the importance of individuals taking personal responsibility for change. For example, client users will take responsibility for the design and delivery of programs such as a food bank, soup kitchen, street patrol, etc. This will serve as a means to self-empowerment and personal growth, eliminate feelings of dependency and low self-esteem and create a sense of self-efficacy. In the delivery of services at Sioux Lookout's new Transitional Support Program, for example, the Program Coordinator provides guidance and direction, assisting people with forms, phone numbers and linking them to services, but it is the individual who takes responsibility for personal outcomes.

4.   Avoid enabling: Government policies and practices created a general dependency among Aboriginal people. These issues must be considered when delivering programs for Aboriginal persons. For example, some Elders of the Sioux Lookout District express dire concern that the provision of an emergency shelter may enable people to drink, i.e. people may frequent Sioux Lookout to drink, knowing there is a safe place to rest at the end of the night. The argument that the provision of an emergency shelter may enable drinking may seem absurd among mainstream theorists, program developers and policy-makers. But, one must recall that there tends to exist a dependency thinking, created by the destruction of traditional economies and

structures and a reliance on general welfare, not to mention a defeatist thinking

generated by the residential school system, as well as a cultural norm to share

resources and provide for one another, that contributes to a way of thinking that differs

from the mainstream population. In other words, where non-Aboriginals may think

that a person will not access emergency shelter unless he or she is in absolute need,

this may not necessarily be the case for Aboriginal persons, particularly if an

individual has addictions or problem drinking issues he or she is dealing with and the

priority is to "numb the pain," or experience whatever it is that binge drinking has to

offer. With this in mind, local Elders asked SLHC to implement strict policies and

procedures for admission and use of its emergency shelter and programs, to "not

encourage people to travel to Sioux Lookout to drink." Strict intake procedures

include verification of name, address (if there is an address), next of kin, medical

issues, income, employment and reason for being without shelter. This will not deter

all individuals from binge drinking in Sioux Lookout. It may however encourage those

who do not wish to disclose information to rethink a trip solely for the purpose of

binge drinking.

One must also remember that many shelters require users to complete an intake

process. This is common practice across shelters and should be exercised in Sioux

Lookout, as it has not been done in the past.

5.   Confidentiality: Persons in need of support services have a right to privacy and a right

to expect confidentiality when confiding in a professional and trained support worker.

This study determined that there are people who refuse to access services because they

fear that what they say in a counselling session will not be kept confidential. This is

not to say that this is an issue in all communities, or across all agencies, but caution

and care must be exercised to protect confidentiality. Professional training may be

necessary to educate workers about responsibility and codes of ethic.

11.4   Proposed Model – Mezzo Level Strategies

With the aforementioned policies guiding program design and delivery, a proposed model for

Sioux Lookout to address immediate needs and root causes of homelessness is as follows:

1. Emergency services*:* The newly purchased building will house an emergency shelter, a

   drop-in centre (where individuals have access to a phone, showers, a warm place and

   supports), food bank, soup kitchen, clothing depot and a Transitional Support Program.

   The Drop-in centre is open to all homeless persons and those at risk of homelessness.

2. Structured Intake: Emergency shelter workers will follow strict and structured intake

   guidelines: All persons in need of shelter will be advised of curfews and expectations (i.e.

   client responsibilities - participating in workshops offered by TSP, volunteering to work

   the soup kitchen, clean the building, assist with outreach, assist with interpretation where

   necessary and work shifts at the drop-in and emergency shelter programs, as well as other

   community programs implemented by the Transitional Support Coordinator). Other

   community programs will include assisting Elders with shoveling driveways, assisting at

   community events, etc. These latter projects will be created to create a sense of

   community and enhance self-esteem. Clients will be advised at intake that involvement is

   a personal choice - but all clients are expected to "help out," whether in the form of in-

kind or cash contribution. It is important to note, however, that expectations of clients are based on varying needs – again, the reader must return to the three different types of homelessness in Sioux Lookout. Each person, whether he or she is among the chronic, situational or episodic homeless, will have different needs, and therefore there will be different expectations.

Also, personal data will be collected and any pertinent information to assist SLHC to consolidate information on housing, employment, health and overall needs of clients. This will assist with future project development. All persons will be advised of the Transition Support Program and encouraged to visit the Coordinator to develop an individualized assistance plan.

Newsletters will be sent to First Nation communities throughout the Sioux Lookout District to create awareness of programs and intake procedures. This may help address concerns expressed about "enabling" individuals to drink. In other words, it must be made clear that transient individuals who desire nothing more than a warm place to rest their head must access other services. With that said, there must be appropriate programs in place to address the needs of this group of individuals – inexpensive hostel services and protocols with other organizations, for example.

3. Clients Help Establish Sustainable Project: Asking clients to "help out" with various services is a key component of program delivery. Client services are key to sustainability and to the development of self-esteem.

4. Establishment of an Accurate Data Base at the emergency shelter and Transitional Support Program: Accurate numbers of the people accessing support services and the need for

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additional supports must be documented to advocate for services to fill gaps and meet

individual and community needs. Sioux Lookout "Out of the Cold" shelter kept few

statistics on individuals in the past. This is due to difficulties obtaining information from

people who are intoxicated and seeking emergency shelter. It is also due to the reluctance

of volunteers (who have been community volunteers), who adhere to a belief that each

individual has a right to his or her privacy. We must move beyond this thinking. In

general, individuals accessing a service are expected to provide basic data. This is not an

invasion of privacy. Data collection helps identify needs, gaps in services and is useful in

terms of program development and advocacy.

For example, approximately one-third of the persons who participated in some way in

this study expressed a need for a "halfway" house for people returning to their

communities from either detox or addictions treatment programs. Participants claim that

the latter programs simply "don't work" because once they leave the programs they then

return to the same social issues and personal circumstances, which existed prior to

entering treatment. Persons coming out of treatment require services and programs to

assist them with the transition to sobriety. There is a need for what participants refer to as

a "halfway" house. Accurate data collected at the emergency shelter and the Transitional

Support Program will assist program developers to present the need to government

funders. In short, an accurate database will help to identify needs and develop appropriate

services and programs.

5. <u>Safety Measures</u>: Protocols will be established with relevant agencies to ensure that any

client ineligible for services (e.g. due to violence) or does not make curfew at the

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emergency shelter has a safe and warm place to sleep.

6. Sioux Lookout's New Transitional Support Program: The need for a continuum of services was identified at the early stages of project research. SLHC recently implemented a Transitional Support Program for persons on the streets. A Transitional Support Worker (TSW) is available to link persons to services (e.g. Nishnawbe-Gamik Friendship Centre's Native Court worker Program, Alcohol and Addictions Program and Community Health and Wellness Program, as well as other programs within the community – literacy, counseling, employment, training and skills development, mental health, churches, traditional teachings, outreach programs, income assistance, parenting support, grief support, faith supports and housing). Links to support programs will depend upon individual need and preference for mainstream or traditional services. The Transitional Support Program also offers in-house healing and sharing circles, and links to persons with the knowledge to deliver traditional supports such as smudges and the sweat lodge. The TSW also assists individuals with completing forms for everything from housing and income assistance to obtaining personal identification such as status cards and birth certificates.

7. In-House Workshops: The Transitional Support Coordinator will coordinate in-house workshops facilitated by local service providers to educate clients about various skills necessary to move toward independence (e.g. employment and life skills, addictions, money management, tenancy rights and responsibilities) and invite key service providers to facilitate healing and sharing circles.

8. Working with Surrounding First Nation Communities: The Transitional Support

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Coordinator will also be fully aware of services offered in each of the surrounding First

Nation communities. This will help the Coordinator link clients to services in their home

communities should they so desire.

9. A Call for a Tracking System: SLHC will work together with all relevant parties (northern

   Chiefs and Councils, Elders, community members, people on the streets) to establish a

   tracking system as a means of identifying people on the streets. It may be that Human

   Resources Development Canada's HIFIS (Homeless Individuals and Families Information

   System) could be implemented to meet this objective. Appropriate release of information

   forms will be in place.

10. A Call for a Land-Based Healing Program: SLHC will develop a proposal to appropriate

    funders to develop land-based program to facilitate healing and life skills development for

    persons on the streets requesting such services. The site will be located in a remote, or

    semi-remote, area where individuals may gain a sense of "connectedness" to the land.

    Programs offered at the site will include counselling and healing supports, sharing circles,

    Elders teachings, teaching and learning of trapping and hunting skills, sweat lodge and

    training in literacy, employment and life skills (e.g. self awareness, anger management,

    problem solving and conflict resolution and money management). Clients will address

    residential school issues, addictions issues, identity issues and issues of childhood

    maltreatment. Program objectives include building a sense of identity, self worth, self-

    respect and acquiring the skills necessary to adapt to a bi-cultural way of life. Land-based

    program clients will be vital component of the daily operations of the program – assisting

    with cooking, drying and smoking meats, cleaning, maintenance and teachings. In fact,

during the program's initial stages, the clients will assist with construction of cabins, a

main hall and a healing lodge.

11. <u>A Call for Detox and Treatment Services in Sioux Lookout</u>: According to data collected at

SLHC's new Transitional Support Program, hundreds of people travel to Sioux Lookout

each year for medical and other services then end up drinking on the streets of Sioux

Lookout. The structural and historical factors involved are presented within the context of

this paper and are not to be ignored. On the surface, addiction and problem drinking are

key factors contributing to homelessness in Sioux Lookout. Yet, Sioux Lookout has no

detox or treatment program to assist individuals who choose to make changes in their

lives. Elders tell us there is a need for more than detoxification. All persons seeking

treatment services must be prepared to work through the personal issues at the root of their

desire to "numb the pain." Individuals returning from detox and treatment programs and

ending up on the streets of Sioux Lookout tells us they require "half way" programs to

readjust to life without alcohol and/or drugs. Individuals require a safe place to make a

smooth transition to independence. These types of support programs may be made

available at transitional support type housing, outlined in number 14 below. Provincial

health dollars should be allocated to meet this need, and the provincial and federal

governments must be prepared to partner with local medical, mental health and other

community programs to assist with the development of effective detox, treatment and

transition programs.

12. <u>The Sioux Lookout District Must Work Together to Address the Issues</u>: When this project

began, there was discussion at the Municipal level regarding strategies to address "public

drunkenness," for the most part ignoring the structural and historical factors that

contribute to what is witnessed on the streets. Today, community groups continue to

engage in similar discussions. It is an objective of this research report that individuals and

community groups will gain an understanding and awareness of underlying issues, and

proceed with informed discussions to develop effective and culturally appropriate

strategies to address root causes. Discussions, however, must continue to include

representatives from all relevant parties, including people on the streets, Chiefs and

Councils, Elders, Municipal Council, service providers and non-profit organizations.

Ultimately, the development of a community plan will include all stakeholders.

In the future, the Municipality of Sioux Lookout may consider a role in the following

ways: Work with private developers and SLHC to develop hostel service; Work with

provincial and federal governments, First Nation Chiefs, Councillors and Elders, and with

Sioux Lookout Homelessness Committee and people on the streets to develop a "land-

based" healing and skills development program for people with addictions and childhood

maltreatment issues; Work with private developers, Sioux Lookout Homelessness

Committee and appropriate non-profit organizations to develop transitional and affordable

housing in Sioux Lookout. The Municipality's contribution toward any of these

developments may, at the very least, take the form of land transfers.

13. <u>Correcting Distortions of History- More Opportunities for the Municipality and Northern</u>

<u>First Nations to Work Together</u>: The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples identified

an essential first step in the process of healing Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal relations as

"jointly acknowledging the past so that both sides are freed to embrace a shared future

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with a measure of trust" and "correcting our understanding of our shared past" (1996, Volume 1., p. 30 & Part 1. 3. p. 2).

The real history of the Sioux Lookout District must be acknowledged to move forward with an honest relationship accepting of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultures. To begin, the Municipality may wish to fully support National Aboriginal Day, work with the surrounding First Nations to make known the fur trade and residential school histories (which could be presented either at the local museum or at a proposed Culture Centre) and work together to ensure that the Anishinabe people have access to lands and resources to sustain their communities and promote economic development, including the provision of urban (or special) reserves for the purpose of social and economic development. The provision of the latter would indeed convey an understanding and acceptance that the District is the traditional territory of the Anishinabe people.

14. Need for Affordable and Transitional Housing and Innovative Development in Sioux Lookout: There is up to a two-year waiting list for geared-to-income housing in Sioux Lookout, while Nitawin Community Development (a housing service for Aboriginal persons) has no single person units. Nitawin has 138 on its waiting list, East Kenora Housing 153 and 135 for Sioux Lookout Non-Profit housing. Jay Curtis, Manager at Nitawin Community Development, reports a need for at least 200 family units and 50 single units. Mr. Curtis adds, however, that regardless of the number of units built, the spaces will be occupied by individuals and families awaiting opportunity to migrate to Sioux Lookout to access medical and other support services as well as training and employment opportunities. This became increasingly apparent after Sioux Lookout

Homelessness Committee erected five transitional rooms, available to individuals

requiring short-term housing. Immediately, a family of three accessed one of the rooms.

The family would likely not have ended up on the streets. Instead, the family would have

bunked with family or friends. But the availability of a room permitted an opportunity to

migrate to Sioux Lookout. To date, individuals who otherwise may not be in Sioux

Lookout have occupied all five transitional rooms. They are individuals and families in

need of support. Other types of scenarios faced by SLHC are needs presented by

individuals in need of supportive type housing for individuals requiring assistance to make

a move from addictions to independence, or for individuals moving from family violence

situations and requiring life and employment skills training to make the transition to

independence. In its six short months of operation, SLHC's transition room program has

turned away more than thirty applicants in need of housing, indicating a need for

transitional housing in Sioux Lookout.

Municipal Council reports the presence of Crown land, or lack of available land, as a

barrier to housing development in the area (Reavie, 2003). Continued pressures on the

Provincial government may facilitate the release of Crown land. In the meantime,

innovative measures to access government grants, partner with private business enterprise,

and work with non-profit groups may be a solution to an otherwise hopeless scenario. For

example, when the Federal government in 2001 announced funding to address

homelessness, several communities across the country responded with partnership

initiatives to bring together multiple levels of government, the private sector and the non-

profit sector. In Port Moody, B.C., for example, at Inlet Centre, seniors and affordable

housing were combined with housing for single women over forty years of age,

wheelchair units, a hospice for the terminally ill and townhouses for families. In

Vancouver, at City Gate Housing Cooperative, space was included for childcare facilities

and retail services. In Toronto, townhouses were built on land donated by the City,

enabling the developers to keep the rent low. In other words, innovative measures were

taken to address community needs. Similar measures in Sioux Lookout are what are

needed to provide affordable and transitional housing to meet demands.

All levels of government, plus private and non-profit sectors, must work together to

address the issues. In Toronto, for example, "SCPI [Supporting Community Partnerships

Initiative] funding helped mobilize capacity in other sectors of government and

reorganized responsibilities across levels of government. The project is geared towards the

provision of longer-term and second-stage housing. The Municipality donated the land for

a dollar, SCPI funded the construction and the province oversaw the project and

conducted due diligence. The money saved in provincial housing subsidies has been

reinvested in support staff for the project" (Ruddick, 2003, p. 19).

15. <u>Discharge Planning at Correctional Services</u>: At present, several people a month end up on

the streets of Sioux Lookout after they are released from Kenora District Jail. Individuals

who were sentenced in their home communities north of Sioux Lookout and serve time in

Kenora are released from the jail with a bus ticket to Dryden, Ontario, with arrangements

for taxi service from Dryden to Sioux Lookout and air transportation to their home

communities. Not everyone chooses to return home. Some stay behind in Sioux Lookout,

or elsewhere. Others, who were not sentenced in their home communities, do not receive

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transportation arrangements home. They too may end up on the streets if not for the

support of family and friends. For individuals who are released on bail in Kenora, no

transportation arrangements are made. Service providers in Kenora suspect this

contributes to the large number of homeless people in that city. John Howard Society in

Toronto, Ontario, is investigating the possibility of offering employment and life skills

programs, case management, anger management, domestic violence programs and housing

search supports, for example, to individuals released from jail (Alderson-Gill &

Associates Consulting Inc., 2003). Similar types of service and discharge planning in

northwestern Ontario may assist people making the transition from jail to home.

16. A Call for Further Research – A Grass Roots – Participatory Action Project to Address

the Needs of Youth: This project did not attempt to address street youth issues, needs and

concerns. Yet, local service providers stress that many youth in the Sioux Lookout District

end up on the streets. A research project must be taken to address the needs of the youth.

To be effective, it must be a grass roots project, involving the youth on the streets, and

working with them to address underlying issues and implement effective projects and

programs.

17. A Need for Education: 84.7% of individuals fifteen years and over in First Nation

communities north of Sioux Lookout have less than a grade nine education (Sider, 2004,

p. 59). Although on-line and distance education assists individuals to obtain a grade

twelve diploma, most students are still leaving home to attend high school in Sioux

Lookout and Thunder Bay, Ontario. The provincial and federal governments must

continue to support education programs both on and off reserve. There is also a clear need

for training and educating Aboriginal teachers committed to educating students in

northern communities, another initiative requiring the support of the federal and

provincial governments. As well, funding support of Ministry of Education is required to

implement an alternative school program to address secondary school drop out rates in

Sioux Lookout (Sider, 2004).

18. <u>A Need for Skills Development and Training</u>: First Nation persons continue to be among

   those with limited skills and education. To be able to compete for the limited job

   opportunities, in mining and forestry for example, individuals must possess relevant skills

   and training experiences. There is a clear need for continued funding support of skills

   development and training programs in the Sioux Lookout District.

11.5   Macro Level Strategies to Address Aboriginal Homelessness

Interviews and consultations for the purpose of this research project help Sioux Lookout

Homelessness Committee and Sioux Lookout Anti-Racism Committee understand underlying

causes of Aboriginal homelessness. Many of the issues can be addressed at the micro and

community levels. Other issues involve structural change and policy revisions. It is suggested

here that any group working with Aboriginal homeless persons advocate for changes listed below.

As well, groups such as Sioux Lookout Anti-Racism Committee may choose to create awareness

of macro-level issues, thus helping to address issues of prejudice and racism that grow out of

ignorance and lack of understanding.

   The disproportionate number of Aboriginal persons on the streets is clearly an indicator of

structural inequities and historical injustices and failure to address any of these issues is a factor

contributing to Aboriginal homelessness.

11.5.1   Rethinking Ontario Works

Welfare dependency is inevitable for the majority of persons living on reserve. Employment

opportunities are limited, and those that do arise are generally contract or seasonal positions that

do not last long enough to meet Employment Insurance criteria. Revisions to Ontario Works,

which included a provision that only one person in a household may collect a social assistance

cheque, had severe impacts in communities where housing is sparse and multiple families must

crowd into single family units. There is an obvious need for more on reserve housing as well as a

rethinking of Ontario Works eligibility criteria. Eligibility criteria must reflect experiences and

housing availability on reserve communities.

A rethinking of Ontario Works policies should also consider a need to teach Aboriginal

children living on reserve the hunting and trapping skills practiced by their Elders. These skills

are vital to healthy lifestyle on reserve, where there are few jobs and the cost of food and clothing

is generally two to three times costs off reserve.

Further, most persons on the streets of Sioux Lookout have no set income and addictions

inhibits eligibility for Ontario Works. Those with addictions are not actively seeking employment,

a criteria of those in receipt of social assistance. Policy-makers must rethink the program to

support an individual's right to basic needs.

11.5.2   Support for Bi-Cultural Adaptation

Thatcher (2002, p. 97) argues that Aboriginals need to take full advantage of the "bounties of

modernism and affluence" while maintaining social networks and cultural linkages in their

cultural community. To make this argument, Thatcher provides examples of the Hutterites in

Western Canada, the Amish and East Indians in Africa and the Caribbean who have retained

strong family and community ties, retained their own language, and placed "formal learning at the

apex of the community value hierarchy and by aggressively exploiting the technologies and

economic opportunities made available in the larger society" (Thatcher, 2002, p. 97). Government

policies must support traditional values, beliefs, languages and connections to cultural programs

and practices, while at the same time ensuring that Aboriginal persons have access to all the

supports that will provide the opportunities available to the mainstream population – land

ownership and control of natural resources, for example.

11.5.3   Land Ownership and Control of Natural Resources

Elders tell us that Aboriginal persons traditionally had no concept of "ownership," particularly of

land ownership. Without greater share of lands and resources, however, Aboriginal people are

deprived of a means of subsistence familiar to non-Aboriginals. Persons on reserve have limited

opportunities to acquire both personal assets and sustain communities. If communities are to

become self-sustaining, there is a clear need for the Federal government to release control of

lands and resources to First Nation communities.

11.5.4   Merge Traditional and Wage Economies

People living on reserve land must be able to rely on the resources of the land to avoid

dependency on government assistance. The education system should be permitting children to

accompany Elders on hunting and trapping excursions. A one or two week school and

employment "shut down" during hunting and trapping seasons will allow Elders to educate the

young. "Shut down" should not be accompanied by a loss of wages, or the risk that an Ontario

Works recipient will lose his or her social assistance because the child was not in school. The

traditional economy must merge with wage employment to provide a living wage on reserve, and

to revive traditional survival skills.

11.5.5   Overhaul of the Indian Act

The Indian Act "was administered in the interest of benign rule but its implementation created

isolation, control and enforced poverty. It has become the most vicious mechanism of enforced

control that exists in Canada today" (Frideres, 1983, p. 33). Further, "the Indian Act has led to the

mainstream assumption that Native people have vastly greater rights and freedoms than the

average Canadian citizen, when in fact the legislation is primarily restrictive and coercive rather

than emancipatory" (Hedican, 1995, p. 195).

The Indian Act defines where a person may live, restricts land ownership, regulates

governance on reserve, prohibits control of resources and defines rights of Aboriginal citizenship.

To overhaul the Indian Act to facilitate economic opportunities and self-governance of First

Nation communities, the Federal government must listen to the voices of the people indigenous to

the land.

11.5.6   On-Reserve Housing

Clearly, where there are multiple families crowded into single-family units on reserve, or

elsewhere, there is a need for accessible and adequate housing. Crowding multiple families into single-family units contributes to the spread of disease, illness, depression and even violence. The fact that any community has a twenty-year waiting list should be considered inhumane. The Federal government must address this issue; action must be taken.

11.5.7   A Need for Increased Health and Social Services On Reserve

Aboriginal leaders continue to advocate for increases to health and social services on reserve. Immediate access to good medical care, mental health services, counselling and social services are a necessity for the general health and wellness of any community. Many First Nation people live in conditions that would not, and should not, be tolerated elsewhere in the country, nor in the world. It is time for all levels of government to work together to make serious changes to address the poor health and social conditions on reserve.

11.5.8   A Call for Restorative Justice

The number of Aboriginal persons in the court system indicates a need for alternative measures. Restorative justice should be a next step for policy-makers, police officers, parole and probation officers, the court system and "offenders" working together to develop positive resolutions.

11.5.9   A Continued and Collaborative Effort of First Nations Leaderships to End Violence and Sexual Abuse

The Federal government must support this initiative – creating awareness of the impacts, and erecting emergency shelters on reserve. First Nation communities must continue to support the

initiative with strict adherence to criminal justice measures and/or restorative justice practices and/or healing strategies.

11.5.10 A Need for Healing Programs and Services

The Federal government must continue to support the operation of effective healing programs. Healing programs must be available to victims of violence, residential school abuses, sexual abuse and to individuals grieving the loss of loved ones.

11.5.11 Aggressive Drug and Alcohol Awareness Campaigns

The Federal government must continue to support drug and alcohol programs on reserve (NNADAP, for example) and add new monies for the development and implementation of aggressive education and awareness campaigns.

11.5.12 A Call for Education Reform

Children coming to Sioux Lookout for mainstream high school education are dropping out at extremely high rates. The system is simply not working for the students. This writer fully believes that Aboriginal history and identity must be built directly into the curriculum. Teaching Native History courses is not enough. Mainstream curriculum should be revised to reflect Aboriginal history, identity and the very different learning styles of Aboriginal people. Education reform would not only benefit Aboriginal students, but would help to enhance positive working relationships between Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals. Further, the Federal government must continue to support the work of Kwayaciiwin Education Resource Centre, a division of Northern

Nishnawbe Education Council. Kwayaciiwin assists with the development of community-driven

Aboriginal curriculum, which is crucial to identity enhancement and educating young people in

their own languages.

11.5.13   A Call for Additional Funds for Off-Reserve Housing

With a rising urban Aboriginal population, Federal government dollars must continue to assist

with the construction and maintenance of off-reserve housing. And, all levels of government

should actively and persistently promote housing as a fundamental right.

Section 12 – Successes of Sioux Lookout Homelessness Committee's (SLHC) New Transition Support Program

The Transition Support Program (TSP) opened its doors November 3, 2003. Its design was based

on Elders' suggestions and the belief that empowerment, personal responsibility and cultural

relevance are key to the program's effectiveness. Program design reflects the belief that support

networks are vital to an individual's self-efficacy. This is well documented in the literature: A

person who has experienced severe trauma or childhood abuses and adversity will not necessarily

become abusive and/or endure negative life outcomes. The presence of close friend, nurturing

role model, confidant or other forms of support enhances the individual's potential for positive

life outcomes (Egeland, Jacobitz, and Papatola, 1987). This thinking supports the need for links to

appropriate support services.

As part of the research process, to ensure that the researcher clearly understood the issues

so that she could appropriately present the issues within the context of this paper, this researcher

spent the first month working with SLHC and acting as Transition Support Coordinator (TSC) at

SLHC's new program. Thanks to input of many people, the Transition Support Program is clearly

an effective means of enhancing self-efficacy, self-esteem, individual empowerment and

promoting a sense of personal responsibility. The program, in its few short months of delivery,

proves to be highly effective and is recommended as a model for other communities.

Ten months after the TSP opened its doors, SLHC's new TSC, Mr. McLeod, suggests that

indicative of the successes of the program is the many activities clients are involved in to move

toward independence and help sustain the project. Clients assist with general housekeeping

(mopping floors, laundry, etc.), soup kitchen operations, general maintenance, cutting the lawn,

shoveling the driveway, weeding the garden and volunteering to "do shifts" at the Drop-In centre

and emergency shelter, i.e. accepting responsibility for overall supervision. In an era of minimal

government funds spent on social programming, client activities are vital to program

sustainability. Perhaps more importantly, client activities have proven to be an effective means to

enhance self-esteem and a sense of self-efficacy. Clients have also been involved in a number of

community projects. Clients were major contributors to the Municipality of Sioux Lookout's

spring clean up (2004), picking up over 5,000 pounds of litter and partnering with the

Municipality to pick up bags at designated areas. Clients assist Nitawin Community Development

Corporation with outdoor clean-up of its non-profit units. And, over the past winter, they

shoveled driveways for some of the elderly within the community. Of course, there may be

arguments from those who will refer to these activities as work projects. The argument that must

be made here is that clients helping out within the community not only enhances self-esteem, but

also promotes a sense of community, a gesture that expresses willingness to work together.

Community projects generate empathy, trust, understanding and help to eliminate prejudices and

stereotypes. People (Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals; the sheltered and the homeless) get to

know one another as individuals, as persons with real histories and real experiences. This, says

the TSC, has indeed been the case in Sioux Lookout, Ontario.

It should be mentioned that another component of the TSP is the availability of Transition

Rooms within the same building. Five rooms are available on the upper level of the building.

Rental of these rooms serves to generate revenue for the program, while availability also serves to

support individuals who chose to make a transition toward independence. Mr. McLeod explains

the transition room component of the program this way: "The move from emergency shelter to a

transition room is in itself a success." Persons accessing the transition rooms must be in a position

to pay rent. Individuals "in transition" assist with office duties, volunteer for shifts at the

emergency shelter and the drop-in centre and organize fundraising events. The TSC, where necessary, documents "hours worked" and reports to the Ontario Works Administrator. In the process, clients gain valuable work experience and a good work reference to help with their job search process. Transition Room tenants actively seek employment, housing, and other support services relevant to personal growth. In a period of six months, ten individuals/families have move from emergency shelter to the transition room program to independence. This is a major success - with a limited availability of five rooms. The number of individuals moving to independence may be higher with increased availability of transition rooms.

In support of the Transtheoretical Model (TTM) of program delivery that "assumes that people are responsible for their own change at their own pace and that the role of the helper is to assume that all clients have the potential for change and that they can benefit from encouragement, support and guidance" (Thatcher, 2002, p. 148-149), the TSC reports that individuals who have been on the streets for several years are making significant changes in their lives. The model outlined above may be useful to other communities with similar needs, facing similar issues.

Section 13 – Conclusions

This research project examines two hypotheses: 1) Aboriginal homelessness in Sioux Lookout as a legacy of the residential school system and 2) Aboriginal homelessness as an impact of Aboriginal person displaced from their homelands. In the words of local Elders, survivors are "lost souls" who turn to alcohol to heal pains from past abuses and end up on the streets. Findings indicate that the disproportionate number of Aboriginal persons on Sioux Lookout's main streets is a result of social inequities rooted in historical and structural injustices - displacement from the land, assimilationist policies, the erosion of traditional economies, lack of opportunities to own resources, poverty and asset impoverishment, a created dependency and correlating factors of violence, abuse, childhood maltreatment, addictions, housing shortages, depression and mental health issues. Is Aboriginal homelessness a legacy of the residential school system? This writer agrees with Thatcher (2002), who cautions against entirely blaming the residential school system for depressed socio-economic conditions, including Aboriginal homelessness. Indeed, there are many other historical, political and structural factors that contribute to Aboriginal homelessness. Historical, political, social and structural factors can no longer be ignored if policy-makers are serious about social change. Serious consideration should be given to each of the micro, mezzo and macro level recommendations for action outlined in the context of this paper if we truly wish to address underlying causes of Aboriginal homelessness.

One objective of this report is to place Aboriginal homelessness in Sioux Lookout in its proper social and historical perspective, to change discourse from current public opinion about race to discussions about the social and systemic causes of homelessness. The second objective is to present a model to address the issues. The writer encourages groups such as Sioux Lookout Anti-Racism Committee to use this document as a means to enlighten public opinions about the

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homeless and provide the discourse for informed discussion. As well, advocates of the homeless

are encouraged to examine the model presented here and utilized by Sioux Lookout

Homelessness Committee to address immediate needs and social issues underlying homelessness.

The model presented here was developed based on the experiences of people on the streets and

recommendations of Elders, Chiefs, Councillors and service providers. The model should of

course be evaluated and revisited for its effectiveness. At all stages of program development,

people on the streets must be included in discussions about programs that impact upon their lives.

The voices of the people most directly affected by any social issue must be heard and understood.

It is their recommendations, based on personal knowledge and experiences of the issues, which

will make a difference.

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Appendix A – Basic Information Sheet

Sioux Lookout Homelessness Committee is collecting information about people's experiences on the streets of Sioux Lookout.
Please take a few minutes to help us learn more about you.
This will help us to open the new shelter and other programs that may be of interest to you and others.

Date: _____   **Contact #:**

Where Contacted:

Name:

Another name to use for confidentiality:

Age: _____   **Legal status (non-status/status/Metis):**

Community of origin:

First time on street (date):

How long on street this time?

What reason?

Where are you staying?

We would like to talk with twenty-five people and, using a fake name, write your stories.

All information will be kept strictly confidential (no names will be used). Any information used for the purpose of writing a paper about people's life experiences will be written in general terms and another name will be used to keep your name confidential.
If you decide to permit me to return to interview you about your life experiences, you may at any time refuse to answer questions and you may at any time choose not to be interviewed any longer.
Are you willing to talk to me about your experiences on the street and willing to permit me to write about your experiences (using another name)?

                                                            Yes   No

Language preferred for interview(s):

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Appendix B – Levels Two and Three Interview Questions

Level Two:
- Have you always lived in Sioux Lookout?
- How long have you been here? (How long have you been on the street?)
- What brought you to Sioux Lookout?
- Where did you come from?
- Tell me about that community. What was life like there? (If you had to pick a single event or circumstance, what had the most bearing on you becoming homeless?)
- Have you ever thought about going back to your home community? (Do you have a place to live if you were to go back there?)
- How do you feel about being homeless?
- How many times have you been homeless?
- Where are you living now?
- What do you do on an ordinary day?
- What keeps you on the street?
- How do you manage? Where does food come from? Money? (How much?)
- What do you think about the police in Sioux Lookout? (Have you ever been arrested?)
- Where do you go when you need help or to be safe?
- Do you think there are certain times when there are more people living on the street? When? Why?
- What do you think would get you (and others) off the street? What would you and other homeless people need to keep you off the street? (Job? Support Network? etc.)
- What is the most important thing other Sioux Lookouters don't know about homeless people? What do you want them to know about yourself?
- Is there anything else you would like to add?

Level Three:
- Have you been homeless in any other city?
- What did you like/dislike about that place?
- Is it better for you in Sioux Lookout? Why/why not?
- Did your family come from this area?
- Did they visit or stay in Sioux Lookout?
- Do you remember any stories they told about being in Sioux Lookout?
- What was their life like in their community?
- What was your life like growing up in your community?
- Would you go back if you could? Why/why not?
- Do you or did a member of your family spend time at other reserves?
- Did you or a member of your family attend the residential school?
- How do you feel about that?

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- What effect did that have on you (on your family member)?
- In what other ways did government policies interfere with or change your life?
- How did that affect you?
- How do you feel about that?
- What would change your life?