
FOREWORD

At this year's Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness conference, I had the good fortune to hear Jesse Thistle's remarkable story about growing up in Brampton, Ontario, and his search to find meaning for himself and come to terms with the trauma of his family. Jesse is 40 years old and of Métis/Cree/Scots descent. His work as a historian and advocate around issues of Indigenous People's intergenerational trauma has earned him the highly prestigious Trudeau and Vanier awards. Receiving these awards and other recognition for his work, Jesse told the rapt audience of more than 800 attendees, would have been unimaginable a decade ago.

He went on to describe episodes from his youth—early memories of parental abandonment, the shattering of his nuclear family, and the love and care he received from his grandmother. In adolescence, Jesse was having problems in school, and he turned for relief to marijuana and alcohol, and later went on to many other drugs as his life as a young man unraveled. Desperate, living from one moment to the next, and committing crimes to support his addiction, Jesse spent years cycling in and out of homelessness, with temporary stays in and out of relatives' homes, jail, detox centres, and hospitals. While I listened to his story, it was difficult to reconcile the well-dressed, articulate, and thoughtful presenter at the conference with the images of the youth he described.

This comprehensive and timely volume seeks to answer questions related to Jesse's story: What was it that helped Jesse turn his life around? How did the youth who struggled with intergenerational trauma, neglect, addiction, poor health, and much more transform himself into the scholar recounting this narrative today? Who or what helped him along the way? And why or how was it effective? The chapters on assessment; cultural, social, and clinical sensitivity; and effective program models and interventions provide invaluable information and resources for anyone concerned about or working in the field of youth homelessness.

In my three decades of working with young people and adults experiencing homelessness and other complex problems, I've observed the positive impact on clients' lives of successful programs and interventions. I've also seen the negative impact when programs or interventions fail. Fortunately, today there are effective, evidence-based programs for ending homelessness, interventions that facilitate engagement with those who have lost

hope, as well as person-centred treatments to address trauma, addiction, and other complex needs. The insights presented in this volume can help to alleviate years of hardship and misspent resources by illustrating how to intervene early and effectively to address youth homelessness and prevent problems from becoming chronic and severe.

Jesse's story is inspiring because it teaches us that people can and do recover from tremendous problems and suffering. It also illustrates that a well-timed and healing intervention can have a life-changing impact. A major turning point in Jesse's life was when his grandmother summoned him to her deathbed. She asked him to promise that he would attend college one day. "Because I know you are smart," she confided. At that time, Jesse, in his early 30s and in the throes of addiction, could not act on his word. However, his grandmother's words and her faith in him registered in his psyche and provided hope through difficult times. As we listened to Jesse speak, we learned that he eventually kept that promise and was able to realize the potential within. This volume will prepare those working in this field to better help the young people they work with to also realize their potential within.

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