

Conceptualizing Optimum Homeless Shelter Service Delivery: The Interconnection between Programming, Community, and the Built Environment

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Abstract

Extensive research draws attention to the causes and consequences of homelessness. Missing from this literature is a holistic assessment of the conditions and characteristics of optimum shelter service delivery. This exploratory study reports results from a qualitative study conducted mid 2006 through early 2008 consisting of 1:1 key informant interviews with 50 expert practitioners in North America and the United Kingdom who are employed in, and/or experts on, homelessness services or urban planning and design. Findings show that success in service delivery is largely defined by an overlap of several characteristics associated with three major themes. The first theme, systemic characteristics of a shelter, includes such characteristics as shelter programs, shelter management, and shelter attention to client dignity and safety. The second theme, community relationships, includes perceptions of the homeless and of public safety, the challenges of NIMBYism, and positive community involvement. The third theme, the built environment, includes shelter congruency, shelter size, shelter location and accessibility, and a shelter's community impact. The analysis of findings provides evidence of particularly important precedents that could lead to potential improvements in service delivery, and to inform future research agendas.

Keywords: Homelessness, social services, shelters, urban planning, community inclusion

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Résumé

La littérature sur les sans-abri porte principalement sur les causes et les conséquences de cette situation. L'une des lacunes de la recherche se rapporte à une évaluation holistique concernant les conditions et les caractéristiques optimales sur le plan de l'accès aux services d'abri. Cette recherche résulte d'une étude qualitative conduite au cours de l'année 2006 jusqu'au début de 2008. L'étude consiste d'entrevues avec 50 experts en Amérique du Nord et le Royaume-Uni. Ces derniers sont soit employé et ou des experts concernant les services pour les sans-abris et la planification urbaine. Les résultats illustrent que le succès de la livraison de services au sans-abri est en grande partie défini par un chevauchement de plusieurs caractéristiques associées à trois thèmes principaux. Le premier thème, les caractéristiques systémiques d'un abri, inclut les caractéristiques suivantes : programmes d'abri et la gestion d'abri liée à la dignité et sécurité des clients. Le deuxième thème, les rapports avec la communauté, inclut les perceptions des sans-abri et de la sécurité publique, les défis de NIMBYism et la participation positive de la communauté. Le troisième thème, l'environnement en soi, inclut la congruence d'abri, la taille d'abri, l'emplacement d'abri et l'accessibilité et l'impact d'un abri sur la communauté. Les résultats de l'analyse sont particulièrement importants afin d'améliorer la livraison de service d'abri et de développer ce terrain de recherche.

Mots clés: sans abri, services sociaux, abris, planification urbaine, inclusion communautaire

Introduction

Canada, like other OECD countries, has a crisis in homelessness. As in other welfare states, Canada has experienced reduced government funding for housing initiatives (Hulchanski 2002) and decreasing scope and comprehensiveness of income security and allied programs that prevent homelessness (Graham 2008). Where a federal department devoted to the question of housing used to exist, Canada's approach to the homeless has suffered from both reduced institutional and social support. In the absence of a single mandating body at either the provincial or federal levels, a common strategy representing best practice does not exist. Different approaches to homelessness have therefore been possible at the levels of local jurisdictions, and individual social service organizations within jurisdictions. Over time, this variance may have enabled a great potential for creativity and innovation. But what do these various approaches look like? What are the insights that social housing professionals might provide? The following qualitative exploratory research examines these questions. Key informant interviews provide insight into current approaches to homelessness practice, particularly into poten-

tial precedents from which practitioners and scholars could learn, and from which further innovations could be developed.

The questions we raise are anchored to three primary theoretical assumptions. First, homeless shelters (and similar institutions) are the primary means of service delivery for homeless people in many countries. Any improvement in the way that this type of service is offered will have a considerable positive impact on homeless people and the communities in which they reside. Second, the spatial form and urban context of homeless shelters and the type and quality of their service models are inextricably linked. A shelter's management, programming, clients, and service delivery model are decidedly implicated in the physical space that makes up both their immediate site and city at large. Third, the spatial and contextual reality of shelters has both explicit and implicit consequences. While these facilities make basic needs like shelter, food, and support services accessible to homeless populations, they can also inadvertently segregate a proportion of those experiencing homelessness due to perceived issues of safety or stigmatization tied to their physical structures (Bridgman 2006; O'Reilly-Fleming 1993).

This research is a result of a fusion between the disciplines of environmental design and social work in a research project that sought to identify the characteristics for successful redevelopment of a shelter in Calgary, Alberta. Theories of spatial structure (see for example Jacobs 1960; Lynch 1961; Punter 1990) were utilized to provide a conceptualization of social space/place for the intentions of this research (see for example: Fainstein and Campbell 2002; Gosling 2003). This was important because it provided a frame to move social work research beyond focusing primarily on the social environment but also to attend to the physical environment. Recent literature on the theoretical paradigms informing social work practice has identified this as a "People-and-Place-based strategy" (see for example: Schriver 2004). The importance of such a theoretical frame has been explored in recent literature around homelessness allowing social work research to concentrate on how spatial dimensions of homeless shelters compound levels of social exclusion faced by homeless populations in any given community (Cresswell 1997; Law and Wolch 1991; Sibley 1995), and analysis of the subsequent degree of social polarization that exists amongst communities with homeless individuals (Hartnett and Harding 2005). Limited research, though, regarding the spatial context in which homeless shelters exist limits our understanding of the quality, type, and purpose of service delivery to homeless people (Lobao and Murray 2005). Research needs to move beyond large system analyses of shelters and focus on their local neighborhood context (Krivo and Peterson 1996; Lobao and Murray 2005; Wilson 1987).

Literature Review

The study of homelessness on a conceptual basis is relatively expansive (see Schutt and Garrett 1992). For example, a large body of research identifies the extent of homelessness in Canada and throughout the world relating both to structural issues (see for example Blau 1992; Ji 2006) and personal factors that contribute to people becoming homeless (see for example: McChesney 1995; Ralston 1996). By structural issues, we mean such factors, beyond the scope of individuals' capacities to change, which might increase the probability of homelessness. These include a community's unemployment levels, its rates of labour market integration/reintegration, or its costs and availability of housing stock. By personal factors we mean such triggers or personal crises that under the worst circumstances may lead to homelessness. Trigger points include such crises as leaving the parental home after an argument, marital or relationship breakdown, family violence, widowhood, leaving prison, leaving some form of social or health sector care, sharp deterioration in mental health, increase in alcohol or drug abuse, financial crisis of mounting debts, or eviction from a rented or owned home (Anderson and Christian 2003; Fitzpatrick, Kemp and Klinker 2000).

Other research has sought to investigate the relationship between homelessness and communities. Any group of people can develop norms and values that represent a subculture, and ethnographic research has shown this to be true of people who are experiencing homelessness (Snow and Anderson 1993; Wagner 1993; Winchester and Costello 1995). People experiencing homelessness form relationships with each other and with specific community members segregated from other elements of the wider local community. A sense of camaraderie and community may result. Also, some research has explored this relationship between community and homelessness in terms of why people experiencing homelessness are in particular communities. Homeless people may be forced into particular areas for various reasons, including socio-spatial control (Mitchell 1997; Smith 1996). They may move into specific communities for various reasons such as to gain access to employment or housing opportunities (Wolch and Dear 1993), or for reasons of personal choice that relate to individual survival and meeting ones basic needs (Cloke, Widdowfield, and Milbourne 2000).

Research has also delved into the nuances between homeless shelter location, homeless people, and communities (see for example: Davis 2004; Wynne-Edwards 2003). Homeless shelters respond to interactions within the community as well as to the needs of homeless citizens. The location of these shelters, the services that are offered, and the interactions that homeless people have with their communities are all influenced by perceptions held by members of the commu-

ity. Furthermore, shelters are typically built in urban neighborhoods that already house many individuals of a lower socio-economic status (Dear and Wolch 1987; Rowe and Wolch 1990). Homeless people often experience a reduction in mobility, so shelters are located in places that are within walking or transit range of other social or health services. As a result, interaction with other communities can be significantly reduced (Marcuse 1988; Rowe and Wolch 1990).

DeVereuil (2006) and Veness (1994) argue that the development of large shelters in already less empowered neighbourhoods masks a “warehousing” strategy and the spatial control of homeless people. As a result the geographic location of homeless shelters becomes considerably restrictive for the homeless population (Takahashi 1998). Furthermore the spatial location of homeless shelters acts to maintain the exclusionary processes that exist for this population (Sibley 1995). Isolating homeless people from the larger communities within which they reside is directly connected to the socially held perspective that homeless people are deviant and feared members of society (Kennedy and Fitzpatrick 2001; Kennett 1994; Pleave 1998). As a result, homeless people are forced to meet their basic needs of survival under the guise of scrutiny (Hartnett and Harding 2005) and “homelessness” becomes the defining attribute of their existence (Anderson 1998). Missing from much research, however, is the question of what social housing practitioners understand emerging, promising practices in their field.

Methods

Lead investigators, along with collaborators from the City of Calgary, identified a number of individuals to contact as potential key informants. Once a list of potential key informants was identified, snowball sampling was used to identify additional informants. A total of 50 key informants were interviewed for this research project. The participants came from a wide range of professional fields, including professors of geography and social work, architects, nurses, policy makers, city planners, and directors and CEO’s from a variety of social service organizations in North America. Each participant was involved in some capacity with either homelessness or urban planning and design. The majority of participants were from North America, while some interviews were also conducted with individuals from the United Kingdom. The research used an over-sampling of key informants from the Calgary region to highlight local needs, issues and potential solutions.

Data collection utilized standard qualitative research methods (Holstein and Gubrium 1995), employing a dialogical interview process (Stewart 1998). Interviews were conducted in person or over the telephone in which a researcher and/or research assistant took notes throughout the interview process. Using a semi-structured open-ended interview guide respondents were asked about the char-

acteristics (physical and social) of homeless shelters or social service agencies that might act as useful precedents that other cities or sites might follow. Respondents were also asked about precedents that planners might want to avoid, and the characteristics of these negative precedents.

Data was analyzed using qualitative methods. Analytic induction and constant comparison strategies (see Goetz and Lecompte 1984; Glasser and Strauss 1967) were utilized to detect patterns within the researcher field notes within and between participant responses related to characteristics of successful shelter precedents and unsuccessful shelter precedents. Specifically, the researchers read through all the field notes with the objective of identifying common themes, after which the themes were then coded and data were searched for instances of the same/similar or different phenomenon. Finally, following this process data was then translated into working hypotheses that were refined until all instances of contradictions, similarities, and differences were explained (thus increasing the dependability and consistency of the findings). All members of the research team collaboratively worked on this stage of research to maintain the credibility criteria of the study. Furthermore, confirmability was monitored throughout this peer review process and respondents were given the opportunity to reflect on the findings presented in the draft technical report and able to correct any inconsistencies with the presentation of findings and their initial participant contributions. Summaries of the findings were also presented to interested key local stakeholders on two occasions to obtain feedback and increase confirmability.

The data revealed three main categories: (1) Systemic Characteristics of a Shelter, (2) Community Relationships, and (3) the Built Environment. Within each of these categories several themes developed that help to determine which characteristics have led to a particular shelter being considered a successful precedent by key informants.

Findings

Systemic Characteristics of a Shelter

Respondents provided insight into the characteristics of the present method of service delivery that aid in shelters being successful. They identified characteristics of shelter programs, shelter management, and shelter attention to client dignity and safety as necessary characteristics in determining a successful shelter precedent.

Shelter Programs

Respondents identified that successful shelters often provide education and employment training. They associated the fact that computer skills are increasingly becoming a required competency for many employers, so shelters should encourage training that familiarize clients with training and experience with computers.

Woodworking and nutrition education, and everyday living skills were also identified as useful on-site programs. Respondents described the success of shelters that try to coordinate day programs so that their clients have a place to go and activities to do during the day. Community centers were suggested as an effective option because they offer a variety of services and an atmosphere of safety. Some shelters likewise can arrange sleeping for shift workers or those who are sick.

Furthermore, several respondents identified that shelters create a more effective service when they specialize in one particular area (such as providing services for the mentally ill, men, or women) rather than attempting to provide services to a broad range of the homeless population. These respondents suggested that this narrow focus helps to create an effective network of service delivery in a region for that particular population. Several respondents also indicated that successful shelters offer more than immediate services (such as food and lodging) but also focus on services that facilitate the successful re-integration of clients into the community.

Many respondents also identified that successful shelter designs utilize transitional housing as a key component of service delivery. As one respondent described, a fitting precedent for transitional housing can be observed in Edmonton, Alberta. The Hope Mission has three primary components: a below grade area for inebriated individuals fit with mobile shower units; main level transitional housing with single rooms; and long term, mini apartment units. At this facility, guests can potentially transition through each stage if needed. Several other potential precedents bear emphasis. Another respondent described how Toronto, Ontario has also developed new methods for providing shelter. The Fort York, which is a men's shelter run by the city, has an emergency unit, as well as programs that help guests gain access to employment. Once men are employed they are appointed a private room and share a common meal area. Another respondent described the Christie Ossington Center in Toronto. It has a 'step-up' program with a sixteen-bed hostel and twenty single rooms. Guests are encouraged and supported to try and address some of the instabilities they face. Once guests have successfully completed the programs, they are eligible to rent a single room, which provides more stability towards the aim of independent living. Likewise, another respondent described the success of the Fred Victor Mission in Toronto, which has moved from being a shelter to permanent housing.

Shelter Management

Respondents pointed out that shelters in the United States and Canada manage guests quite differently. In the United States, shelters are funded by state insurance and end up housing 'beneficiaries'. Canada, on the other hand, tends to treat its clients like guests, which may foster stronger, more positive ties between service providers and users. Beyond the immediate implications of the manner in which

guests are perceived by shelter staff, respondents also identified the role of the shelter concerning issues of social justice. For example, one respondent described the role of a shelter with neighborhood development pressures. The real estate market in social service areas tends to be dynamic, and has often led to services being forced out to less desirable land. This clash of land use and development pressure is pushing homeless people into areas further away from services. In order to avoid this problem, shelters require strong management to ensure that people recognize their imperative and legitimate presence as stakeholders in the city.

Shelter Attention to Client Dignity and Safety

Multiple respondents reported that service models that involve lining-up and sleeping on the floor can significantly compromise client dignity, especially as some guests perceive it to be a form of punishment for being homeless. When these line-ups are highly visible, they can also damage relationships between shelter clients and other community members. The guests feel as though their presence generates attitudes of hostility and stigmatization, and community members can feel threatened from this lingering presence on the street. Related to the issues described about line-ups other respondents commented on how the simple act of taking up residence in a shelter can serve to compromise client dignity, regardless of the agency's programming or service model. One strategy to ameliorate this problem can be found in the location and discretion of shelter entrances. Service models that require guests to make their entry and participation in shelter services public through their visual presence on the street can significantly threaten client dignity, and should be avoided. Instead, more discrete entrances provide the opportunity for clients to retain their privacy and dignity while maintaining a greater perception of safety among community members.

Respondents also identified that it is imperative that shelters provide spaces that feel safe to their clients. Shelter users are a vulnerable population who are threatened by, among other things, drug trafficking and violence. As an example, one respondent described that the Calgary Urban Projects Society (CUPS), a health facility that serves socially excluded populations in downtown Calgary, has frequently had issues with the public space immediately outside their entrance. People who loiter near the facility, often intoxicated, become an intimidating barrier for those who seek services. These individuals also threaten community perceptions of the agency, as they are mistaken for clients. It is important for shelters to provide a spatial separation between clients who are under the influence of drugs or alcohol and those who are not. Such measures allow for safer spaces for both of these groups, each with their own vulnerabilities.

Health safety is a further consideration, as some respondents reported. Facilities should always encourage consistent and effective sanitary practices. For example, wooden bed frames should be changed to those constructed out of metal because it

is a more sanitary material (particularly for cleaning and controlling bed bugs, for example). Also, an adequate number of hand sanitizers should be dispersed throughout the building to help reduce the number of illnesses contracted in the facility.

Community Relationships

Respondents here identified characteristics related to perceptions of the homeless and of safety, the challenges of NIMBYism (Not In My Back Yard), and positive community involvement as helping to improve community relationships.

Perceptions of the Homeless and of Safety

For any strategy to be successful, respondents suggested that there is a significant need to change public perceptions regarding poverty and homelessness. Such a campaign might first focus on the location where the shelter is situated, confronting public fear and ignorance about the region's homelessness with messages that reveal the reality of homelessness and the tenuousness of seemingly stable housing situations. Furthermore, respondents identified that stereotypical and misguided perceptions of the homeless population in popular culture have resulted in a serious misunderstanding of homelessness. This needs to be rectified. Respondents also identified successful precedents in which local business groups and non-profit organizations work together to create and sustain a more constructive perception of homelessness to have a positive impact on the entire community.

Respondents also commented on the perception of safety. Within the community, for example, respondents suggested that typically there is a general perception that shelters detract from the neighbourhood's sense of public safety. Respondents described how the presence of a nearby shelter is often an issue for many business owners, and some citizens may feel threatened in the vicinity of homeless shelters. For this reason, respondents described that it is essential for shelters to collaborate closely with local police departments to ensure that both the general public and their clients feel safe in the area around the shelter.

In discussions regarding perceptions of public safety, homeless populations are often precluded from the 'public'. Whereas in reality, members of the homeless population are one of the most vulnerable groups in society. Economically marginalized, socially disempowered, and often equipped with poor coping tools and support structures, homeless individuals are commonly victims of theft, physical and sexual assault, and drug-dealers. Respondents from a multitude of areas, including Canada's northern regions, identified the importance of understanding that homeless individuals are also at risk of safety related to environmental conditions such as weather. For these reasons, respondents identified the need to establish that homeless citizens have needs in terms of safety and are also victims of crime.

The Challenges of NIMBY(ism)

NIMBY, or “not in my back yard,” is a phenomenon describing the sometimes aggressive response articulated by communities when members perceive a local development as a threat to their land values, way of life, or health and safety. While Nimbyism can be a very positive manifestation of community solidarity and empowerment, it also tends to reveal significant economic and power disparities between community members, as those with more resources are better equipped to deter ‘negative’ development.

Whether Nimbyism is viewed as a positive or negative force in terms of its community impact, respondents identified that negatively perceived land-uses such as shelters are often discriminated against by this sociological phenomenon. Respondents identified that any attempt at community integration will undoubtedly come up against some NIMBY resistance. One respondent described how Seaton House, located in Toronto, has come up against significant NIMBY pressure to change its focus or relocate its services. Conversely, another respondent noted that The Calgary Drop-In Center was able to secure approximately fifty apartments in an inner city community with little community resistance. Furthermore, another respondent described The Exit shelter on 16th Avenue in Calgary as being a good example of avoiding Nimbyism. By immediately integrating into the community, the agency reduced its perceived threat before any negative feelings could emerge. Respondents pointed out the need to further explore the factors with which NIMBY resistance is minimal for some shelters.

Positive Community Involvement

Finally, respondents also identified that shelters achieve the highest level of integration when they have both community support and input from the onset. Respondents described that when a community feels that they are involved in developing or improving the shelter, a sense of ownership can develop that strengthens this connection further. Institutions can also play an important role in the integration process. Respondents suggested that the need was to work towards the social and financial inclusion of all citizens in the community, including those using shelters. Essentially providing benefit to both the shelter’s clients and also the community as a whole.

Some respondents suggested that some shelters are successful because they can better integrate into the community by ensuring the area in and around the shelter is cleared of debris and litter. Having green space around the shelter is one simple way of contributing to an aesthetically successful environment. Some respondents suggested that design and use of outdoor space is critical because clients inescapably tend to congregate close to the shelter. Further integration strategies identified by respondents involve the physical upkeep of the neighbourhood by the

shelter staff. Physical maintenance of the shelter results in a number of positive consequences. Not only will it enhance the physical appearance of the shelter and surrounding area, it can also help provide a positive image to the community.

Furthermore, respondents suggested that successful shelters play a role in their community's economy, commonly through some sort of service-oriented business initiative. By contributing to the service industry of a region, shelters achieve a further level of integration and provide opportunities for positive interactions between their clients and the public.

The Built Environment

Respondents identified characteristics of successful precedents that respond to aspects of the shelter associated with the built environment. Respondents identified shelter congruency with other buildings in the area, shelter size, shelter location and accessibility, and a shelter's community impact to be important constructs determining the success of the shelter and its integration within the community.

Shelter Congruency

Respondents identified that service providers need to consider what features might help to better integrate shelters into the urban environment, particularly in situations of rapid urban change. One respondent provided an example of the United Kingdom community of New Castle's West End that having undergone massive redevelopment the region still maintained its socioeconomic demographic and architectural character. Shelter appearance and land use also needs to be congruent. Some respondents suggested that successful shelters are built similar to the surrounding architecture to avoid being easily identifiable to the public. Furthermore, some respondents identified that shelters with a low visual intrusion are also more likely to be accepted socially in the community.

Shelter Size

Respondents suggested that service providers should avoid large monolithic structures, which stand apart from their surroundings. Larger buildings tend to hold a dominating presence over both the street and pedestrians. Over sized facilities are more difficult to blend in with the surrounding architecture, can become ghettoized, and are often avoided by the public. Large shelters are also more difficult to manage. A number of small shelters, on the other hand, can be more effectively integrated into the community. Respondents also informed that volume can make a significant difference in terms of integration into the city. Increased volume in clients has led to greater physical impact on an area. Small-scale shelters that can accommodate between thirty and seventy guests seem to work most effectively. Shelters accommodating over one hundred guests are described as less effective. Modestly sized facilities often cater to a more narrowly defined population of the

homeless, which results in better service. Further, they have the ability to avoid line-ups, and they can provide the guests with a place to go and programming during the day.

Shelter Location and Accessibility

Respondents suggested that shelters should be located in areas that are accessible to guests such as a central location in proximity to other services. Common political expectations that homeless needs may be served in other regions of the city do not fully grasp the inescapable need for accessibility. One respondent provided a local example to highlight this point. In Calgary, there has been a great deal of controversy surrounding a proposal by the Calgary Drop-In Center to start a sobering center in the downtown. While stakeholder perceptions of possible negative community impacts are valid, such a facility is spatially implicated in the core, and would have greatly reduced effectiveness in an area spatially segregated from other services. Social service presence in populated areas also maintains public awareness of inequality regarding socially excluded and discriminated members of society.

A Shelter's Community Impact

Finally, respondents identified the importance of limited community impact with the presence of the shelter building and the service for guests. Some respondents pointed to the concentration of services. It has been suggested that accessibility is a factor determining successful shelter provision, but in a physical sense, the services offered do not have to be in immediate vicinity to one another. Furthermore, respondents also identified that good shelter design provides an inner gathering location for clients, rather than resulting in guests loitering and gathering in clearly visible public areas. An informant noted that Shelter House, in Thunder Bay, Ontario is relocating its services to a new building that has both an outside court and an interior court area. The building's U-shape provides spaces for clients to gather other than on the main street and thus increases the public perception of safety and reduces the vulnerability of the guests. It is important for shelters to provide a space that contributes to the neighborhood's walkability. Using the sidewalk and other public spaces for constant programming will decrease the walkability of a neighborhood. Respondents repeatedly articulated the importance for programming to occur in an inside space that is owned and controlled by the agency.

Discussion

Literature related to the service delivery system for people experiencing homelessness has predominantly focused on 'models' of service delivery, social policy, or economic factors. This research suggests that permanent housing is the most beneficial service model for providing service to individuals who are homeless or

are marginally housed. Although, to address the growing demand for shelter, government and social agency strategies have focused on providing large shelters with a wide variety of services. Alternative responses to the problem have highlighted the necessity of creating more social housing infrastructure and implementing programs that aid in the development of stronger social networks (Burt et al. 2004; Cairns and Gardiner 2003). While these seem to be adequate responses, homeless populations still face a multitude of barriers within the current social housing system (Canada and Mortgage Housing Corporation 2005) and have difficulty securing private rental housing (Novac et al. 2002).

These barriers are resonant within responses from key informants in this study. People experiencing homelessness represent members of a community that are deprived of their basic needs and are restricted from participating fully in the wider community. Short (1989) argues that cities can be improved if all citizens are empowered and engaged. Good cities, he argues, engage their citizens in political discourse, which involves moving beyond simply understanding ideas and solutions in individualistic terms (Short 1989). When notions of empowerment and neighborliness are considered in relation to urban planning, the role of urban strategists comes into question (Landry 2001). What should their role be in defining communities within the cities of the 21st century? Can these strategists uphold urban planning models that meet needs and overcome traditional practices that marginalize segments of the population and enforce extensive limitations on their input? A consistent outcome resonates through investigations conducted in urban Canada: homeless people are not viewed and valued as full and included members of our cities.

A corrective identified by respondents in this particular study, and aligned with recent research (see for example Bridgman 2006), is to employ client-focused practices in homeless service delivery to improve the interconnection between homelessness and the wider community. This is a clear connection, as reported by respondents here, between the shelter service system and community relationships. Another includes the utilization of progressive programming within shelters that focus on skills training to help alleviate negative perceptions of people experiencing homelessness by community members. Also, shelter management has a unique role in improving relationships between the shelter, shelter guests, and the community at large—whether that involves addressing NIMBY challenges or increasing community involvement in the shelter system.

These factors identified by respondents are also deeply interconnected with the physical environment. Research has shown that when social service providers fail to address perceptions of the spatial condition in which they are located, they limit the ways in which people can positively engage with their environments (Landry 2001; Worpole 2000). The development of social housing projects in many Canadian cities provides a clear example of this oversight. Development

initiatives may pay little or no attention to the design and situation of their buildings (Gurney 1999). Research has highlighted that many social housing problems are directly linked to how these areas are perceived both by residents and other communities (Dean and Hastings 2000; Hastings 2000). Changing the spatial perception of homelessness is a key factor to creating a socially and spatially inclusive environment for homeless individuals (Rosenthal 2000).

Respondents here had great insight into how the spatial perception of homelessness has been successfully addressed in relation to developing community relationships, service delivery, and the built environment. One striking example of this interconnectedness was through discussions, by respondents, of shelter size. A successful shelter was identified as being smaller in size. Having less physical impact within a community, but also a smaller shelter has more potential to offer a client-focused environment within the shelter. These factors identified by respondents are important for providing a conceptualization of what needs to be considered in expanding a shelter or developing a shelter in a community. More research is needed to identify how these interconnections are manifested at a practice level.

Conclusion

The findings presented here define the complexity surrounding the issue of offering shelter service to people experiencing homelessness in a respectful, inclusive and community-orientated manner. The factors impacting successful shelters are multi-fold. For example, the use of design features such as interior courtyards may say something about a shelter's attention to client dignity and may have a direct impact on a shelter's relationship with its surrounding community. There, of course, are no easy answers to ending the prevalence of homelessness throughout the world. Service delivery organizations though can respond to some of these challenges through an understanding that the social and physical environments are equally impacting one another.

The initial intention of this research was to develop an awareness of the conditions that need to be examined when redeveloping a particular shelter in Calgary, Alberta. This initial research led to a geographic site analysis and an assessment of community perceptions of this specific shelter service in Calgary, Alberta. The findings presented here, though, have relevance to a wide range of urban contexts alike, and provide insight into what questions need to be asked and what factors need to be considered for development processes of shelter service within urban settings.

More specifically, this paper suggests the need to capture the nuances of the built environment, service delivery, community interactions, together in an analytical context and acts to provide necessary exploratory insight into what is required in developing an understanding of shelter service that provides dignified and

respectable service for guest of shelters. Through analysis of this data it is apparent that each of these factors (the systemic characteristics of a shelter, community relationships, and the built environment) are interconnected in a complex manner. Aspects of the built environment impact the system of shelter service which in turn may have negative implications for community relationships. This research, though, leads to several other questions. For example, how would a practitioner begin to analyze these factors? How do these factors impact on consumers of services levels of satisfaction? To provide clarification to these and other questions, current research being conducted by this research team seeks to analyse these conditions on a site by site basis to determine further the interconnection and relationship between each of these categories at a practice level.

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