

# THE LITTLE VOICES OF NUNAVUT

A STUDY OF WOMEN'S HOMELESSNESS NORTH OF 60

## *TERRITORIAL REPORT*



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Nunavutmi Angnat Katimaylit  
Nunavut Status of Women Council  
Le Conseil du statut de la femme du Nunavut

**Qullit Nunavut Status of Women Council**  
**January 2007**

*They have a shelter here for men but nothing for women.  
It's because it was talked about, put in the news,  
put out there and they did it right away.  
Women have needed stuff for so long,  
but our voices are so little they can't hear them.*

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## ***Disclaimer***

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# Executive Summary

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## ***Introduction***

In the fall of 2005, a pan-territorial steering committee of service providers and women's advocacy organizations<sup>1</sup> was set up and received funding from the National Secretariat on Homelessness to carry out research on homelessness in Northern women. *A Study of Women's Homelessness North of 60*, as the study was to be called, was divided into three territorial research projects with work being carried out in the three territorial capitals: Whitehorse, Yukon; Yellowknife, NWT; and Iqaluit, Nunavut. Funding was provided by the National Secretariat on Homelessness, the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada – Indians Relations Secretariat, and the Nunavut Department of Education – Nunavut Homelessness Program. The goal of the project was:

***To conduct a comprehensive research study related to women's homelessness in the North with the potential to address several of the barriers that currently prevent more effective action.***

The study drew on the personal experiences of homeless women to examine the ways in which gender, violence, poverty and access to housing and community services play a major role in creating women's homelessness. It also examined the structures, policies and economic and social practices that contribute to homelessness for women in Canada's North.

The part of the study that was conducted in Nunavut by Qullit Nunavut Status of Women Council was completed in June 2006. This Executive Summary is based on the territorial research report *The Little Voices of Nunavut: A Study on Homelessness in Northern Women*. The results of the study, including the research findings and recommendations for action, are summarized in this report. To ensure that the reality of homelessness among Northern women and their children was reflected accurately in the report, the voices and views of women with lived experience of homelessness remained at the centre of this project, and are included here in italics.

## ***Primary Objectives***

- To inform and improve the services provided by the partners of this Study related to the incidence and impact of homelessness among Northern women;
- To influence the quality of service provided by other organizations and agencies across the North serving homeless women and those at risk of becoming homeless;

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<sup>1</sup> Kaushee's Place, Whitehorse, Yukon; Yukon Status of Women Council, Whitehorse, Yukon; Qullit Nunavut Status of Women Council, Iqaluit, Nunavut; Qimaavik Women's Shelter, Iqaluit, Nunavut; Yellowknife Women's Society, Yellowknife, NWT; YWCA of Yellowknife, Yellowknife, NWT.

- To inform public policy and Territorial and regional program initiatives such that they are more effective at reducing homelessness and the negative impacts of homeless among Northern women; and
- To stimulate community action aimed at reducing homelessness and the negative impacts of homelessness among Northern women.

By adopting a grounded feminist theory methodology that privileges the voices of Northern homeless women, the research process remained iterative, participatory and action-oriented, with the focus of the research on mapping the current situation with the aim of uncovering new possibilities for creative action.

### ***Data Collection and Analysis***

The study gathered data from the three primary target groups listed below:

1. Women who were homeless or at risk of becoming so;
2. Service providers (at the local, regional and territorial levels) working to reduce the incidence of homelessness among women and/or to reduce its harmful impact; and
3. Policy makers and program managers at the local, regional and territorial levels.

Data was collected through focus group sessions, individual interviews and survey questionnaires, literature reviews and the gathering and analysis of existing data. The transcripts of the interviews and focus groups were coded for themes under five large categories:

- a. Determinants of homelessness for Northern women;
- b. The impact of homelessness on Northern women;
- c. The policy and bureaucratic practice environment related to homelessness in the North;
- d. The service environment in the Territories designed to reduce homelessness and to mitigate its harmful effects; and
- e. Recommendations for action.

Themes linked to each category were formed and are discussed below. In total, 73 women participated in the interviews or focus groups. Women interviewed represented 14 communities from all three regions of Nunavut, with 40% residing in its capital, Iqaluit. As well, input was gathered from service providers. The findings and recommendations reflect their input and analysis.

### ***Definitions of Homelessness for this Study***

- **Visible or absolute homelessness** – includes women who stay in emergency hostels and shelters and those who sleep rough in places considered unfit for human habitation, such as doorways, vehicles, and abandoned buildings



- **Relative homelessness** – applies to those living in spaces that do not meet basic health and safety standards, including protection from elements, security of tenure, personal safety and affordability
- **Hidden homelessness** – includes women who are temporarily staying with friends or family or are staying with a man only in order to obtain shelter, and those living in households where they are subject to family conflict or violence
- **At risk of becoming homeless** – can include those who are one step away from eviction, bankruptcy, or family separation

## ***Highlights of Findings***

### ***Determinants of homelessness for Northern women***

- **Theme # 1 – Every Woman is Potentially At Risk**

Specific characteristics of living in the North such as a harsh climate, a high cost of living and limited employment and housing opportunities, and high rates of social issues such as addictions, domestic violence and intergenerational dependency on income support interplay in creating a complex constellation of factors that contribute to or sustain the different forms of homelessness in the North. The threat of homelessness exists for a broad range of women, from the unemployed, to members of the workforce who have no subsidized housing or don't earn enough to pay market rents, to GN employees who are in precarious possession of staff housing.

- **Theme #2 – Partner's Behavior And Circumstances**

The vast majority of the women interviewed have been victims of violence, or exposed to high levels of violence when moving from place to place. Several of the women became homeless when they made the decision to flee an abusive family member, most often their intimate partners. When asked what they believe is causing women's homelessness, the interviewees have been very forthcoming in noting violence as a serious problem requiring immediate intervention in the North.

- **Theme #3- Forced Eviction & Relocating to Another Community**

The predominant themes that have emerged illustrate the complications involved when the man in a relationship lists a unit under his name, exclusive of his partner. If the relationship ends, becomes abusive, or if the woman becomes widowed, she is expected to evacuate her home. The vast majority of women who have shared stories of eviction have been forced out of their homes because of their partners' actions.

- **Theme #4- Lack of an Adequate Support System**

Inuit women who are homeless in Nunavut survive because of the values that are placed on maintaining family ties and sharing. Fifty-four percent of Inuit currently live in overcrowded

conditions, and 38.7% of them are considered in core need. This statistic is so high because the desperate lack of housing options forces these women to turn to friends and family.

- **Theme #5- Personal Wellness And Capacity**

Homeless women often find themselves suffering from physical and emotional exhaustion, including feelings of disempowerment, which trap them in a cycle from which they can find no respite. Being incapable of sheltering/protecting themselves and their children, results in feelings of worthlessness, eventually taxing every other area of their lives.

- **Theme #6 - Community Institutions And Structures**

Major issues include a lack of services and resources and the ineffectiveness of many existing services, reflected, for example, in the housing situation in Nunavut – with virtually all housing public and not privately owned and the lack of housing, the lack of jobs and struggles with Income Support and the lack of homeless shelters for women.

- **Theme #7 – High Cost Of Living and Business Sector Practices**

The costs of living in Nunavut are very high. Apart from rent, the cost of heating, electricity and water is so high that many residents cannot afford to maintain accommodations without subsidy. In the case of homeless women, even if they were given a home, they could easily become bankrupt within a short time because fuel, water and regular maintenance are not indexed to income. Potential service providers face the same challenge.

- **Theme #8 - Societal Indifference/Punitiveness Toward the Homeless**

A theme that emerged here is the failure of the Nunavut Government to offer proper resources for transition in the North, for example addiction services, and the lack of cultural appropriateness within community institutions.

- **Theme #9 – Climate/weather**

Homelessness tends to be invisible in Nunavut – people are not living on the street as you often see in southern cities, because the harsh weather prevents them from doing so.

### ***The Impact of Homelessness on Women in Nunavut***

- **Theme #1 – Physical and Mental Health**

Homelessness has an impact on the woman's physical and mental health, such as malnutrition, which in turn results in countless physical ailments. Without proper resources (e.g. homeless shelters), personal hygiene is also a compromise women are forced to make. Respiratory and communicable diseases are also pervasive for women taking up residence in overcrowded conditions.

- **Theme #2 - Family Separation and Impact on Children**

Homelessness also has a devastating effect on children's physical and emotional wellbeing. Children suffer through constant stress, experience break up of families, and suffer academically.

Children living in overcrowded conditions have an inability to concentrate in the classroom, no sense of security, poor nutrition, confused behavior based on the absence of routine, and constant worry about where they will be sleeping that night or how many people will share their room.

- **Theme #3 - Survival Sex And Criminalization**

Homeless women are often forced to engage in sexual relationships in exchange for access to basic needs such as food or accommodation. Being without adequate shelter will cause people to make decisions they would not have made if they had the basic means of living.

**Theme #4 – Losing all your Resources through the Vicious Cycle of Homelessness**

A lack of basic amenities, such as food and adequate shelter, deprives women of the ability to develop self-esteem and capacity, jeopardizes their health and safety, and infringes upon any hope of becoming stable members of the workforce.

***Policy and Bureaucratic Practice Environment***

- **Theme # 1 - Income Support**

Many women said they struggled with the amount of income support they received. There seems to be a lack of consideration of the cultural norm of sharing resources, which for women implies she often has more dependants than just her children. Also, certain aspects of the income support policy are flawed as for example women are obliged to engage in “productive choices” after two months of receiving IS, which seems to disregard the reasons and situations of why a woman became homeless in the first place.

- **Theme # 2 – Inuit Organizations**

All women interviewed had knowledge of the existence of the main Inuit organizations<sup>2</sup> that might be of aid to them. However, women reported an increasing frustration as they felt the organizations that were established to represent them were not communicating with the public, and information gathered was not easily accessible.

- **Theme # 3 – Government and Lack of Housing**

There is no continuum of housing in Nunavut in terms of transitional housing, affordable housing, and/or homeless shelter. Several of the interviewees have cycled from an abusive situation in a public housing unit, into a safe shelter, and when their term has expired, back into the same public housing unit.

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<sup>2</sup> Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated (NTI), Qikiqtani Inuit Association (QIA), Kitikmeot Inuit Association (KIA), Kivalliq Inuit Association, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK)

## ***Service Environment in Nunavut Designed to Reduce Homelessness***

- **Theme # 1 – Lack of Specialized Services/Effectiveness of Existing Resources**

The biggest gap in services is the absence of a homeless shelter, with six safe women's shelters across the territory accepting clients on the premise of abuse only. Other existing gaps are inadequate staff training, limited program capacity, lack of confidentiality of existing services and a flawed student housing program where housing at the Arctic College is only available eight months during the year or is dependent on certain programs.

- **Theme # 2 – Food Provision**

Inconsistent and inadequate funding and lack of space make the operation of food provision services such as soup kitchens and food banks in Nunavut a grueling challenge. Continuation of services has also been a stumbling block, as the operation of programs is often reliant upon a single individual.

## ***Recommendations for “The Little Voices of Nunavut”:***

1. **Immediate intervention to Address the Public Housing Crisis**

The federal government must provide funding mechanisms to encourage and support the development of low-income housing in Nunavut.

2. **Ensure an Adequate Supply of a Variety of Low-income Housing Stock is Available for Women and Children in Environments That Can be Kept Safe and Secure**

Nunavut must implement priority housing policies that ensure that women living in violence or exhibiting other high needs are prioritized on access lists held by subsidized housing providers.

3. **Establishment of Emergency Shelters for Homeless Women that also Accommodate Children**

More emergency shelters for homeless women are needed to alleviate current issues of overcrowding and inadequate resources. Improving the quality of the existing shelters in terms of services is needed, as well as gender and culturally sensitive models.

4. **Creation of Low-income Second-stage Transitional Housing Options**

The creation of sufficient second-stage housing is needed for women leaving shelters to ensure opportunities for healthy choices.

**5. Housing Authority Policies that Remove Barriers for Women Living in Violence and Those Who are Homeless or are at Risk of Becoming Homeless**

- a. A cultural and gender analysis needs to be applied to housing authority policies;
- b. Housing policies which address historic debt fairly need to be established;
- c. Ceilings on rental rates need to be established;
- d. Service providers need to be encouraged to identify and develop potential supportive housing options as new initiative proposals.

**6. A National Housing Policy Inclusive of Women**

- a. A National Housing Policy instituted by the Federal Government needs to be created that is inclusive of women and lives up to human rights obligations under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights guaranteeing a right to an adequate standard of living and adequate housing;
- b. A National Housing Policy needs to ensure that women's housing needs are met across their lifespan ;
- c. Inuit organizations and coalitions need to be included as active partners in the development of the National Housing Policy.

**7. Poverty Reduction Strategies**

- a. Existing social security programs need to be improved;
- b. New programs and policies that are designed to prevent and reduce poverty need to be introduced.

**8. Overcoming Barriers to Access to Services for Homeless Women**

Homeless women can experience barriers in accessing services that are important in empowering them to overcome their homelessness.

**9. The Provision of Services that Address the Full Range of Determinants of Women's Homelessness**

- a. Implement a continuum of care model;
- b. Enhance capacity of service providers to work effectively with homeless women;
- c. Increase access to educational programs;
- d. Increase access to affordable daycare.

**10. Appropriate Funding for an Array of Front-line Services**

- a. Ensure front-line services are adequately and appropriately funded to build capacity to function effectively;
- b. Recognize the value and contributions of service delivery through the voluntary sector.

**11. Community Wellness Strategies, especially related to Domestic Violence and Substance Abuse Treatment and Prevention**

Urgent attention needs to be given to the implementation of effective domestic violence and substance abuse treatment and prevention strategies.

**12. Collect Information and Develop Inter-agency Protocols and Tools for Tracking Women’s Homelessness**

- a. Design and implement interagency protocols and tools for collecting, managing and sharing accurate and relevant information as well as for designing and tracking clear outcomes indicators;
- b. Provide adequate funding to service agencies to allow them to keep appropriate records and to access and share information;
- c. Conduct further research.

**13. Mechanisms for Collaborative and Creative Solution Building**

- a. Nurture the creation of collaboratives that are dedicated to addressing the full range of determinants of women’s homelessness and build their capacity to function effectively;
- b. Ensure that all relevant stakeholders are “at the table” when public policy related to women’s homelessness is being developed and when government program decisions are being made.

**14. Public Awareness & Attitude Change**

Create public awareness that will help change negative attitudes and make informed decisions that address and prevent the challenges of homeless women.

***Conclusion***

Inuit women have long been silenced, their needs ignored, and their potential as active members in the development of a prosperous North disparaged. Overcrowding is a national disgrace and offers no promise of a flourishing future for Nunavummiut. Government bodies tend to require hard statistics, figures, numbers - to understand the magnitude of northern homelessness - but this data is virtually impossible to achieve. While we cannot offer a single

dramatic statistic to depict our desperation, we hope the candor in the words of the women who live in these horrific conditions will prove to be of greater value.

Because Nunavut's housing shortage is extreme coupled with elevated levels of family violence compared to southern Canada, the situation here has become more desperate. Nunavut currently has **no services** available for homeless women and the women's shelters that do exist are constantly forced to turn away women who are homeless. There is a fine line in place here, when we consider why a woman is homeless in the first place. This suggests an immediate call for action. Women across Nunavut have come together and spoken in a single voice – they are taking a stand for their basic rights as citizens of Canada - and it is time we listen. We can only hope this report will capture the desperation in their stories, and hold the torch high enough to provoke change.

The future of Nunavut depends on it.

## Introduction - About “A Study of Women’s Homelessness North of 60”

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In the fall of 2004, the Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation (CERA) held a consultation in Whitehorse with territorial women’s groups related to women and housing in Canada’s North. At this meeting, key participants in the three northern territories—Yukon Territory, Northwest Territories and Nunavut—decided to form a steering committee to develop a submission in response to a call, released by the Homelessness Initiative of the Federal Government, for research proposals on homelessness in the North. These steering committee partners were:

- **Kaushee’s Place, Whitehorse, Yukon** – Kaushee’s offers shelter to women and their children who are fleeing abuse. In addition to a no-cost, thirty-day crisis-level stay, Kaushee’s offers independent second-stage housing in a secure environment based on Yukon Housing rates. Outreach, support, advocacy and childcare are available to women, as well as a twenty-four hour crisis line and a drop-in outreach service.
- **Yukon Status of Women Council, Whitehorse, Yukon**—YSWC is a non-profit feminist organization that has been providing a voice for Yukon women since 1972. It advocates for legislative change to end discrimination against women and fosters public knowledge about women’s rights and issues in the Yukon. The organization publishes a monthly page, “All About Us” in the Yukon News newspaper. YSWC has conducted research on rural women’s issues and published the report “Strong Women’s Voices – Rural Choices”. YSWC is currently involved in work related to women and poverty and women and housing in the Yukon and the nationally. YSWC is a member of the Feminist Alliance for International Action and the National Working Group on Women and Housing sponsored by the Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation.
- **Qullit Nunavut Status of Women Council, Iqaluit, Nunavut** — The Council was established under the *Status of Women Council Act* of Nunavut on April 1, 1999 and commenced operations April 1, 2001. The purpose of the Council is to advance the goal of equal participation of women in society and promote changes in social, legal and economic structures to that end. The objects of the Council are: 1) to develop public awareness of issues affecting the status of women; 2) to promote a change in attitudes within the community in order that women may enjoy equality of opportunity; 3) to encourage discussion and expression of opinion by residents of Nunavut on issues affecting the status of women; 4) to advise the Minister on issues that the Minister may refer to the Council for consideration; 5) to review policies and legislation affecting women and to report its findings to the relevant government departments or agencies; 6) to provide assistance to the Minister in promoting changes to ensure the attainment of equality of women; and 7) to provide the appropriate assistance to organizations and groups whose objectives promote the equality of women.



- **Qimaavik Women’s Shelter, Iqaluit, Nunavut**— The Qimaavik Transition House provides emergency shelter for women and children who have been abused. Qimaavik operates a twenty-four hour crisis/suicide line. Individual counseling and a regular healing circle are offered. Advocacy services and public education related to abuse against women are delivered by staff. Victim services include support in the justice system and support to find employment, educational opportunities and housing. Other services include a literacy program and a program for children.
- **Yellowknife Women’s Society, Yellowknife, NWT**— The Society was incorporated as a non-profit agency in January 1990 after an 18-month consultation process with local women. Its mandate is to support and assist women in empowering themselves so they can develop their goals, achieve wellness, enjoy equality and be recognized for the contribution they make to the community. The Society operates the Centre for Northern Families, which is deeply involved in addressing social justice issues and in developing and implementing programs that support the health, social, cultural and economic autonomy of Northern women. The involvement of women who access services at the Centre in decision-making roles, the influence of Aboriginal cultural values and traditions and a prioritization around training and mentoring young women are reflected in programs that are gender-specific, family-focused and inclusive of men and children. Services are innovative, unique, flexible, culturally relevant, person rather than program directed and developed along a continuum of care.
- **YWCA of Yellowknife, Yellowknife, NWT**— The YWCA of Yellowknife exists to increase the well-being and independence of people, particularly women. It is a non-profit charity with a long history of service and program delivery in the North. Established as a community-based association in 1966, the YWCA came to Yellowknife at the invitation of the Commissioner for the purpose of providing housing. The YWCA is motivated by the motivated by the above mission statement and supported by a local volunteer board of directors, as well as a national and international YWCA network. The YWCA of Yellowknife offers a wide range of programs and services, which include: emergency and transitional housing and support services, in-home support and outreach programs for adults with development disabilities and for adults with mental health issues, licensed after-school care for children and youth, a 12-bed shelter in Yellowknife and a 6-bed shelter in Fort Smith for women and children fleeing violence, groups for children who have witnessed violence, and workshops for teens related to dating violence.

The YWCA of Yellowknife offered to serve as the lead partner and financial agent for this consortium.

The steering committee asked Judie Bopp, Ph.D. of the Four Worlds Centre for Development Learning to act as the study’s principal researcher. Four Worlds has a strong track record for the conduct of national research studies, especially related to social issues in Aboriginal communities (see, for example, Bopp, Bopp and Lane, 2003; Bopp, Bopp, Lane and Norris, 2002; Lane, Bopp, and Bopp, 1998; and Bopp and Bopp, 1997).

*A Study of Women’s Homelessness North of 60* drew on the personal experiences of homeless women to examine the ways in which gender, violence, poverty and access to housing and community services play a major role in creating women’s homelessness. It also examined the structures, policies and economic and social practices that contribute to homelessness for women in Canada’s North.

The partners undertook *A Study of Women’s Homelessness North of 60* with a view to making a difference. They were not interested in “just another study”, but wanted to inform and improve the services of their own organizations and the work of their colleagues across the territories. They also felt that it is possible to design better public policy and territorial and regional program initiatives in order to reduce homelessness and the negative impacts of homelessness among Northern women. They were convinced that communities can be mobilized to work on those determinants of homelessness that cannot be delivered through services from outside the community.

### ***Why Research on Women’s Homelessness in the North is so Important***

According to a National Anti-Poverty Association (NAPO) report (Neal, 2004), women are among the fastest growing groups in the homeless and at-risk population. This study of homeless women in three cities (Ottawa, Halifax and Vancouver) found that most of the women were without adequate access to an income that could provide housing when it was needed and were victims of violence at one time in their lives. Most of the women in the NAPO study also had a personal history of child physical and/or sexual abuse and/or adult abuse from intimate partners. Fleeing their homes was often a self-protection strategy to escape from various kinds of harm.

These findings are reinforced by Wiebe and Keirstead’s 2004 study entitled *Surviving on Hope is not Enough: Women’s Health, Poverty, Justice and Income Support in Manitoba*. Twenty-six of the twenty-eight respondents in this study reported that income support payments in that province do not provide enough resources to rent a safe or healthy place to live.<sup>3</sup> As a result they endure infestations of pests such as mice, lice and cockroaches; continual sewage backup and leaky pipes; and poor air quality from mildew and other factors. They live in buildings in which many types of violence, including homicide, occur. They have to take money from their health care, food and clothing allowances to make their rent payments. The seriousness of these issues is compounded by the fact that most of these women have children in their care.

The picture of women’s homelessness presented by Canadian studies such as these, as well as other recent reports about the situation across the country (Hightower and Hightower 2004, Seychuk 2004, Mearns 2004, Petit et al. 2005, Finton and Kramer 2005, CERA 2002,

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<sup>3</sup> One of the other two women lived in a shelter and therefore did not make rent payments. The other lived in a home owned by her parents, and her rent was, therefore, subsidized by them.

Carter and Polevychok 2004, Jackson 2004, Bennetts and Green 2004, to cite a sample), offers a strong counterpoint to the stereotype of the homeless as people (predominantly men) with severe addictions and mental health challenges living rough on the streets. As we hear from the stories shared by the women who participated in *A Study of Women’s Homelessness North of 60*, homelessness can just as well be the lot of a newly separated or divorced working woman living hand-to-mouth in a Whitehorse hotel room, or an elderly woman living in the shelter in Yellowknife who has left her home in a small community to escape fifty years of abuse at the hands of her partner, or a single woman and her young son sleeping in the closet of a relative’s one-bedroom apartment in Iqaluit that already houses eight other people and is the site of frequent all-night parties.

The poignant fact that emerged from *A Study of Women’s Homelessness North of 60* is that all women in Canada’s North are at risk of homelessness. A small change in their circumstances can jeopardize the fragile structure of their lives that allows them to meet their basic needs. Thousands of women and their children in the Yukon, Northwest Territories and Nunavut are already experiencing either absolute homelessness (that is, living on the street or in an emergency shelter) or hidden homelessness (living in a situation that is unsafe, unhealthy and/or insecure).

Although everyone living in the North recognizes that housing is a “big problem”, few realize the full extent of the problem as it impacts women and children. Few understand the complex constellation of factors, many of which go well beyond the shortage of housing stock, that conspire to maintain this state of affairs. Those who do not live in the North have even less awareness about the despair and day-to-day suffering of these fellow Canadians.

It is clear that no one would want this situation to continue. Efforts to make a change, however, have generally been piecemeal and inadequate. A couple of emergency shelters, life skills classes, craft projects, small adjustments to employment support or housing policy, sensitivity training for police and justice personnel, while all valuable in themselves, have proven insufficient to address an issue that continues to worsen. Those most closely associated with women’s homelessness in the North agree that what is needed are concerted and sustained efforts by a broad range of social actors.

A comprehensive research study related to women’s homelessness in the North has the potential to address several of the barriers that currently prevent more effective action. First, accurate and comprehensive information is an indispensable tool for change. Mearns argues that “more and better information about Aboriginal homelessness, family violence, and the gendered nature of both is needed, and urgently so” (2004:1). A clear map of the determinants of women’s homelessness in the North (that takes into account factors in the personal and family life of women; the social, political, cultural and economic life of their communities; and the policy and practice environment of government and voluntary sector services) is critical for the development of an effective theory of change and the resulting action. As long as critical information is isolated in bits and pieces within the information systems of dozens of agencies and as long as it is isolated from the essential knowledge that homeless women have about this issue, it cannot really inform effective change.

Second, the story of women and homelessness in the North must be told in such a way that it will inspire political and social will for action. Information is never enough to produce change. Hearts need to be touched. People need to be given the opportunity to encounter the reality of homelessness among Northern women and their children so that they can reflect on whether we can tolerate such suffering in a society that prides itself on compassion and that values justice. Research is one way to give voice to women whose experience has so far remained on the “margins” of society.

*A Study of Women’s Homelessness North of 60* is dedicated to achieving these aims.

# Part I - The Research Purpose and Process

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## ***Objectives and Research Questions***

With this background information about the importance of research related to women and homelessness in Canada's North in mind, the steering committee for *A Study of Women's Homelessness North of 60* defined the primary objectives and research questions of this Study as follows.

1. *To inform and improve the services provided by the partners of this Study related to the incidence and impact of homelessness among Northern women by:*
  - a. Mapping the “determinants” of homelessness among Northern women, including the relationship between homelessness and other determinants of wellbeing as those identified in the population health literature:
    - i. What are the conditions in a woman's life that may cause her to become homeless?
    - ii. What are the social, economic, political and cultural factors in communities that contribute to women losing their homes?
    - iii. Are there specific determinants of homelessness among Aboriginal populations in the North?
  - b. Mapping the impacts of homelessness among Northern women
    - i. How does homelessness impact the personal wellbeing of women?
    - ii. How does homelessness among women affect their families?
    - iii. What is the impact of homelessness among women on the communities from which these women come and to which they travel?
    - iv. What is the impact of homelessness among women on society at large and on societal institutions?
    - v. Does the experience of Aboriginal women differ in any way from that of others?
  - c. Mapping the policy and bureaucratic practice environment related to homelessness in particular, to the determinants of homelessness, and to the impact of homelessness on the lives of women, their families and their communities
    - i. on the local community level,
    - ii. on the regional level,
    - iii. on the territorial level, and
    - iv. as they impact Aboriginal women, their families and their communities.
  - d. Mapping the service environment designed to reduce homelessness and to mitigate its harmful impact for women and their families in the Territories:
    - i. Which services currently exist to assist homeless women or those at risk of becoming homeless?

- ii. Which services exist to assist communities to work on the determinants of homelessness such that fewer women are becoming homeless?
    - iii. Which services specifically target Aboriginal peoples?
    - iv. What is the difference in service level from remote communities to the larger settlements?
    - v. What is working about these services?
    - vi. What is needed to make them better?
  - e. Compiling lessons from best practice in the Territories, in the rest of Canada and internationally.
    - i. related to effective public policy and bureaucratic practice,
    - ii. related to effective front-line service delivery, and
    - iii. related to effective community mobilization.
2. *To influence the quality of service provided by other organizations and agencies across the North serving homeless women and those at risk of becoming homeless by:*
  - a. including them as active participants in the study, and
  - b. sharing the results with them.
3. *To inform public policy and territorial and regional program initiatives such that they are more effective at reducing homelessness and the negative impacts of homelessness among Northern women by:*
  - a. including policy makers and program leaders as active participants in the study, and
  - b. sharing the results with them.
4. *To stimulate community action aimed at reducing homelessness and the negative impacts of homelessness among Northern women by:*
  - a. broadly sharing the results of the *Study on Homelessness* throughout the North, and
  - b. including the community determinants and impacts of homelessness among women as a focus of the Study.

## **Methodology**

A naturalistic research method (Lincoln and Guba, 1985), which draws on feminist and grounded theory, was chosen as the most appropriate approach for this study. Naturalistic research relies primarily on qualitative data, which provides a rich description of the central problem under investigation, and fits well with this research's purpose of mapping the factors that contribute to homelessness among women in Canada's North and the impacts of this phenomenon, as well as the policy and bureaucratic practice environment within which it exists.

Grounded theory begins with the data itself, rather than with a hypothesis or theory (Glaser 1965, 1978, 1992). The data is examined using constant comparison strategies. In this

approach, the data is mined for themes that speak to the research questions. These themes are constantly refined as more data is processed. In other words, theme categories are collapsed, are arranged in a hierarchy of themes and sub-themes, or are broadened from the specific to the more abstract. In this way a “theory” related to the research question gradually emerges and is elaborated.

As Leipert and Reutter point out, “feminist research seeks information that has been undervalued, overlooked, or ignored; privileges women’s knowledge; acknowledges the importance of agency, structure, and context in women’s lives; and provides rich descriptions and explanations of processes that support health” (2005:50). In this way, this Study is giving voice to homeless Northern women.

Although much of the data gathered in this Study was qualitative (generated through interviews and focus group sessions), some quantitative data was also compiled about the number of women seeking asylum in a variety of shelters and other emergency housing options, and their demographic characteristics. The Study will also seek to synthesize such data as may have been gathered in other studies and reports.

## ***Other Characteristics of the Research Process***

By adopting a grounded theory methodology that privileges the voices of Northern homeless women, the research process remained iterative, participatory and action-oriented.

- 1. Iterative** - The research process and partners remained flexible. The partners in *A Study of Women’s Homelessness North of 60* already have a great deal of experience working directly with homeless women, with collaborating with other service providers and with working with government policy makers and program managers. They believed that this Study would uncover new knowledge and highlight important linkages between homeless women and those at risk of becoming homeless, public policy, service delivery, and community action. The research tools (such as focus group and interview guiding questions as outlined below) were designed to be flexible and to be able to further explore emergent outcomes without losing their validity. The process also incorporated new focus groups and interview targets when it became clear that these groups had an important perspective to contribute to the findings.
- 2. Participatory** - The partners of *A Study of Women’s Homelessness North of 60* were not merely formal signatories of this proposal. They were fully involved in every aspect of the data gathering and analysis process. They ensured that the Study took into account the different circumstances, opportunities and needs of all three Territories and that the results of the study would be relevant for each of them. Furthermore, all stakeholders in the results of the study were consulted about the final design of the research tools, and the findings and observations have been produced in such a way that they are accessible to everyone, from community people to service providers to policy makers. The focus group and interview process were designed to stimulate reflection, generate new ideas and mobilize action. In this

way, the Study was not merely a prelude to change, but actually catalyzed change, since those who participated in the study felt a sense of ownership and felt truly heard.

- 3. Action-oriented** - As stated above, the partners in *A Study of Women's Homelessness North of 60* are already active change agents in their communities. They took on this Study because they believed that something can and must be done to improve the situation for homeless women (and especially Aboriginal women) in the Territories and to reduce the likelihood that others could be forced to live without their basic need for shelter being met in a dignified way. For this reason, the focus of the research was on mapping the current situation with the aim of uncovering new possibilities for creative action. As well, it was hoped that the participatory nature of the research process would, in itself, stimulate new action on the part of policy makers, service providers and community-based agencies and individuals. Finally, this research process, described in a later section, was carried out in two phases. The first of "mapped the territory", so to speak, and the second engaged policy makers, service providers and communities in a consultative process aimed at discovering new pathways for action.

### ***Data Gathering Target Groups and Techniques***

This Study gathered data from the three primary target groups listed below:

1. women who are homeless or at risk of becoming so;
2. service providers (at the local, regional and territorial levels) who are trying to reduce the incidence of homelessness among women and/or to reduce its harmful impact; and
3. policy makers and program managers at the local, regional and territorial levels.

The following data gathering techniques were used:

- focus group sessions and interviews with policy makers and program managers at the local, regional and territorial levels;
- focus group sessions with service providers working with homeless women and their families as well as those at risk of becoming homeless;
- focus group sessions with women living in shelters as well as in other types of emergency and transition housing;
- focus group sessions with women who are "couch surfing" and on the street or are identified as at-risk of becoming homeless (self-identified, identified by friends or relatives, identified by service providers);
- individual interviews with those women in the above categories who are more comfortable with this data-gathering process than focus group sessions;
- survey questionnaire returns from service providers (e.g. staff of shelters, health workers);
- synthesis of existing reports and studies related to homelessness among women in the Territories, and especially among Aboriginal women;



- review of the literature on homelessness, on the social determinants of health (as they are related to homelessness), on the impact of homelessness (especially on women, and on Northern and Aboriginal women in particular); and
- territorial consultative meeting to explore the implications for action arising from the focus groups, interviews and survey data.

### ***“Products” of the Research Process***

The information generated through these data gathering techniques produced the following tools that can be used to inform and stimulate change efforts:

- case study stories of homelessness among Northern women that illustrate the personal, family and societal determinants of homelessness;
- a “state-of-the-Territories” descriptive analysis of the determinants of homelessness and their interrelationship;
- a demographic analysis of Northern women currently using services related to homelessness;
- best practice case studies related to public policy, service delivery and community mobilization; and
- findings and recommendations related to policy and community action related to positive action on the determinants of homelessness among Northern women, with specific attention to Aboriginal women.

### ***Phases of the Research Process***

The research was carried out in two main stages:

1. **Mapping the Terrain** - The purpose of the first phase was to generate a clearer picture of the determinants and impacts of homelessness among women in the North (with particular attention to Aboriginal women), of the services that are currently being offered to assist these women or those who are at risk of becoming homeless, of the public policy environment that impacts levels of homelessness among Northern women, and of best practice related to preventing homelessness among women and to supporting those who find themselves in that unfortunate circumstance. As already outlined above, this phase used focus group sessions and interviews with homeless women and those at risk of becoming homeless; service providers working with homeless women and those at risk of becoming homeless; and policy makers and territorial and regional program managers and/or funders. A literature and document review synthesized what is already known about homelessness among women in the North and about best practice related to public policy, service delivery and community mobilization in the North, in Canada and internationally. This information was used as a point of comparison and to provide context for the findings of the present Study.

2. **Territorial Consultative Meetings** - Once the findings of Phase I were analyzed and synthesized, a consultative meeting brought together a dozen or so individuals in each of the three Territories to reflect on the implications for action. These individuals represented the key stakeholder groups (i.e. homeless women, community-level services and leaders, regional and territorial service providers, public policy makers, funders, etc.) and were chosen for their commitment to and knowledge about the determinants of homelessness and what can be done to make a difference. Their task was to make recommendations related to the findings of the Study and to consult about how they could catalyze action for change. This process validated the findings from Phase I, added new insights and helped ensure that the Study would not stay “on the shelf”. The goal was to use the Study as a valuable tool for government and civil society alike to find ways to integrate the findings and recommendations into viable solutions.

### ***Maintaining Research Trustworthiness***

This Study maintained trustworthiness through establishing credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. A little background on each of these is provided here.

1. **Credibility** – This criterion was met through “triangulating” data from a variety of sources (e.g. at least sixty women in each of the three territories and from service providers at different levels) and by verifying our information against whatever quantitative data is available and against the literature on homelessness, including any other relevant studies we can find.
2. **Transferability** – This criterion was addressed by getting input from as many communities as possible and by preparing rich theme composite statements so as to give the readers of our research findings enough background information that they will be able to judge for themselves whether their own circumstances are similar enough that they can transfer our findings to their context.
3. **Dependability** –Using more than one data source (triangulation) helped establish dependability, just as it did credibility. Participatory methodologies ensured that those women who best know the experience of homelessness and those who are struggling to impact the policy and structural barriers that contribute to homelessness provided a valuable check on every step of the research process.
4. **Confirmability** – The requirement of confirmability was met by being very clear in about the Study’s objectives and methodology, and by including samples of the raw data and the data reduction and analysis products so that anyone who wants to do an “audit” can easily see what was done and why.

## ***Maintaining Ethical Standards***

There are three areas of ethical responsibility that are especially important for this study: openness and honesty, doing no harm, and giving something back.

1. **Openness and honesty** –Everyone who shared their stories and insights was informed about the objectives of the research, who else would be involved, how the information would be used, and how they could learn about the final findings. Another aspect of openness was letting informants know exactly which moral and legal obligations the researcher had with respect to knowledge she might gain related to instances of abuse.
2. **Doing no harm** –Several considerations were important here.
  - a. *Ensuring confidentiality for all participants*
  - b. *Cultural sensitivity*, especially in view of the fact that many homeless women in the North are Aboriginal and come from small communities
  - c. *Sensitivity related to individuals who have suffered trauma* by using interview and focus group processes that do not re-traumatize people
3. **Giving something back** - in recognition of the substantial contribution that informants are making to this Study, they were offered helpful information about resources, a small cash honorarium, and a small gift package (e.g. coupons from local merchants and personal care items).

## ***The Research Process as it Unfolded***

In all three Territories, at least sixty women who are experiencing or have experienced homelessness were contacted to enlist their participation in the Study through interviews or focus group sessions.<sup>4</sup> They were contacted through shelters, transitional housing units, referrals from community service providers and word of mouth. In some instances, posters were also put up in places that homelessness women might frequent.

A consent form and orientation sheet was distributed to each woman who participated in an interview or focus group. This sheet also collected basic demographic information. In those instances where an interview was conducted on the phone, the form was read to the informant and verbal consent was obtained. (The consent form/ orientation sheet that was used in Nunavut is attached in Appendix A.)

The guiding questions that were used for the interviews and focus groups mirror those listed in the section on *Objectives and Research Questions* above. The sessions with homeless women focused on mapping the determinants (personal, social, economic, political, cultural, service and policy environment) and impacts of their homelessness on themselves, their families, and their communities). Interviewers also asked about the insights the women had into what is

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<sup>4</sup>73 women who are currently homeless or who have experienced homelessness served as informants in Nunavut, 65 in the Yukon, and 64 in the Northwest Territories.

needed to change those determinants and mitigate the impacts. The guiding questions for the service providers focused on their insights about the same questions.

Especially with the homeless women, the research questions were used as a guide during an exchange that was kept as much like a natural conversation as possible. This enabled the women to share in a way that felt comfortable to them, and allowed the needed information to emerge in that context with the aid of supportive questions. One of the community researchers vividly described her experience as follows.

*Virtually every woman I have talked with is in a state of overwhelming stress. They are not only homeless, or periodically homeless, they are trying to cope with a wide range of additional problems. Almost all have long-term unsatisfactory, and often conflictual, relationships with income support, child welfare, legal aid, housing authorities, landlords, etc. Many have children in temporary or permanent care... All the women I have talked with have symptoms of chronic traumatization. These include, but are not limited to, ... anxiety, panic attacks, chronic depression, grief reactions...and a pervasive sense of hopelessness...*

*When interviewees are extremely traumatized, as many will likely be, they need to tell their story in many different ways and from many different perspectives. It may sound like repetition but it isn't from their perspectives. Those things they talk about over and over again are the experiences that have the greatest emotional impact on them and about which they feel the most helpless, guilty, grief stricken, alone and angry. I don't stop people when they do this or try to 'focus' them on my agenda... I listen... When I later gather together everything they have said I find that the questions we are asking are answered. In short, the interviews I'm doing aren't driven by the questions I have in mind, they are driven by the needs of the women to be heard, understood and validated.*

The response of the women who participated in the research was unexpected. This was not research, but rather their lives, and they were grateful for the opportunity to be heard, but also for the chance to make a difference. This generous, and often intimate response made a deep impression on the interviewers. One of the community researchers described her experience as follows.

*One focus group in particular will stay with me for a lifetime. In the midst of so much pain, one woman expressed how looking into the eyes of her tiny son was what she needed to believe in herself again. This set her on a self-healing journey that allowed her to [conquer] her addictions and eventually acquire a home. This inspiring woman opened up her doors to the other 4 ladies in our focus group and encouraged them all to follow her example. It was heartening to see the women talk and embrace one another.*

*During other focus groups, [name of research assistant] and I have had women approach us at the end to say thank you, quoting how much better they felt having talked about their experience for the first time, and to know they are not alone...*

*The value of this research is stronger than words, and has above and beyond exceeded our initial conceptions. We can only hope our results will capture the desperation in the stories of these women and hold the torch high enough to provoke change.*

The content of these guided dialogues with the homeless women and with the service providers was either recorded on audiotape or by means of notes taken by the interviewer. The goal was to capture the women's contributions as close to verbatim as possible. Since the chosen research methodology was grounded research, it was very important not to inadvertently begin analyzing the data during the collection process by taking summary rather than verbatim notes. (A sample interview transcript is attached as Appendix B.)

Once all the data was collected, the demographic characteristics of the homeless (or previously homeless) women was collated by ethnic background, age, educational level, number of children in their own or someone else's care, and major health issues. The results of these tabulations are presented in *Part IV – The Demographics and Incidence of Homelessness for Northern Women*. This section also contains the data collected through an initial mapping exercise involving a cross-section of service providers in each Territory about their pooled knowledge of the demographics and incidence of homelessness in the North.

The transcripts (or notes, as the case may be) of the interviews and focus groups were coded for themes under five large categories: a) the determinants of homelessness for Northern women, b) the impact of homelessness on women in Canada's North, c) the policy and bureaucratic practice environment related to homelessness among women in Canada's North, d) the service environment in the Territories designed to reduce homelessness and to mitigate its harmful effects, and e) recommendations for action.

As the material was processed, themes emerged related to each category. For example, the first category, "the determinants of homelessness for Northern women", generated the following nine themes from the Nunavut data:

1. Every woman is potentially at-risk
2. Partner's behaviour and circumstances
3. Forced eviction from home & relocation to another community
4. Lack of a support system
5. Personal wellness and capacity
6. Community institutions and structures
7. Cost of living and business sector practices (including sexism)
8. Societal indifference/punitiveness toward the homeless (including racism)
9. Climate/weather

Each idea of each interview received a code related to the category and theme. For example, if a women was speaking about how physical abuse that she experienced at the hands of her intimate partner forced her to leave her home, that comment would be coded “A” for the category “the determinants of homelessness for Northern women” and “2” for the theme “partner’s behaviour and circumstances”. A section might receive several codes. To use another example, if a women described how her partner damaged their home during a drinking party and this caused them to be evicted from their home, this section of the interview would be coded “A2” and A3”. The section might also be coded “A6” if the community institutions (such as the local housing board) held her accountable for the damage and denied her access to other housing, even though she was not responsible for the damage.

Research data related to the other categories listed above was similarly coded by theme. A list of the themes that emerged under each category is included in the relevant section of this report.

Once all the data was coded, all the material related to each theme was compiled. In other words, every comment that was coded as “A2” was gathered in one place This material was then studied to determine the “story” that it told. An anthology was prepared of this material, which wove together the contributions from all the informants in a way that would present a coherent picture, while protecting the confidentiality of the participating women. These anthologies provide the major content for the *Findings* sections of this report (Parts V to VIII).

While this data gathering and analysis work was being done, a literature review was also being conducted. The relevant information from this review was organized according to the same categories as this research study. A summary of this information is included at the beginning of Parts II to X of this report. The literature provides a useful point of comparison for this Study’s findings and also adds perspectives to enrich its contribution to the field.

## Part II - Defining Homelessness

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There is broad consensus in the literature that homelessness in general, and among women in particular, represents a continuum of circumstances. These include living on the street, seeking refuge in shelters, sleeping in the homes of friends or relatives, accepting shelter in return for sexual favors, remaining in households in which they and/or their children are subjected to various types of abuse, staying in accommodation that is unsafe and/or overcrowded, and paying for accommodation at the expense of other livelihood needs (such as food, clothing and health care).

The terms used to describe different aspects of this continuum vary, but most encompass, in some way, the circumstances listed above. All the studies we reviewed distinguished between “visible” (or “absolute”) and “relative” (or “hidden”) homelessness (see, for example, Seychuk, 2004; Kappel Ramji Consulting Group, 2002, Petit et al., 2004; Mearns, 2004). Some demarcated between “relative” and “hidden” homelessness (Petit et al., 2004, for example). Seychuk (2004) noted that many women are “at risk of homelessness” for a period of time before they become either “absolutely” or “relatively” homeless. Representative definitions for each of these terms are presented below.

**Visible or absolute homelessness** – “...includes women who stay in emergency hostels and shelters and those who sleep rough in places considered unfit for human habitation, such as parks and ravines, doorways, vehicles, and abandoned buildings” (Seychuk, 2004:1).

**Relative homelessness** – “applies to those living in spaces that do not meet basic health and safety standards, including protection from the elements, security of tenure, personal safety and affordability” (Petit et al., 2004:no page number).

**Hidden homelessness** – “includes women who are temporarily staying with friends or family or are staying with a man only in order to obtain shelter, and those living in households where they are subject to family conflict or violence” (Kappel Ramji Consulting Group, 2002:1).

**At risk of becoming homeless** – “can include those who are one step away from eviction, bankruptcy, or family separation” (Seychuk, 2004:1).

Reference is also made in the literature (e.g. CMHA, 2004) to “core housing need”, which is generally defined as follows:

**Core housing need** – a household whose accommodation does not meet one of the following standards: affordable (housing costs, including utilities, do not exceed 30% of before-tax household income); adequate (in condition and does not require major repair); or suitable (sufficiently large, with enough bedrooms, to appropriately accommodate the household) (Ibid:8).

CERA (Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation), in their March 2002 report entitled “Women and Housing in Canada: Barriers to Equality”, underscores the importance of including the full continuum described above in any discussion of women’s homelessness, but also cautions that traditional definitions of homelessness are inadequate to represent the complex and inter-related factors that contribute to women’s homelessness.<sup>5</sup>

Although the number of women living on the street is increasing in many parts of Canada,<sup>6</sup> street homelessness is not representative of most women’s experiences. Definitions that focus on “absolute” or “visible” homelessness therefore leave most homeless women, especially those with children, out of homelessness counts and media portrayals of the issue. For these women,

*...living on the street is an impossible option that is almost certain to mean losing their children. For single women, increased vulnerability to violence and sexual assault make street life something to be avoided at all costs. Existing shelter surveys indicate dramatic increases in the use of shelters by both single women and women with children, particularly Aboriginal women and Black women. But living in a shelter is also considered a last resort... (CERA, 2002:1)*

At the same time, CERA notes, definitions that focus on “affordability” and “adequacy” criteria (critical elements in definitions of “relative” or “hidden” homelessness or for identifying women “at risk of homelessness”)<sup>7</sup> tend to simplify the ways in which government and private sector policy and practices are discriminatory toward women. Women are more likely than men to be single parents, to work in low paying and non-permanent employment, to take on care-giving roles when family members become incapacitated, to suffer a dramatic decrease (averaging 33%) in household income in the case of separation or divorce. As well, domestic violence creates a need for housing that cannot be anticipated months in advance. In other words, women are dramatically impacted by “short-term changes and transitions which are often not captured by general affordability or adequacy measures” and are therefore “often overlooked in programmatic responses to homelessness” (Ibid: 6-7).<sup>8</sup>

The literature also notes that many women can often cycle through the various stages of homelessness described above.<sup>9</sup> For example, 2.2 million adult women in Canada could be

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<sup>5</sup> The “unique challenges in women’s lives in relation to income stability, daycare, transportation, dependents with disabilities, personal security and the needs of children define the complex interdependencies behind women’s homelessness” Ibid:7).

<sup>6</sup> For example, CERA reports, “recent data suggests that in cities like Toronto, as many as one in four people living on the street may be women” (2002:1).

<sup>7</sup> A standard indicator of “affordability” is generally a household that spends less than 50% of its income on housing.

<sup>8</sup> For example, linking child tax credits, employment insurance supplementary benefits or rent subsidies to a previous year’s annual income do not assist women in meeting transitional needs.

<sup>9</sup> Finton and Kramer for example, describe homelessness as “the result of a developmental path. Often this process is not a straight line, but is circular, with episodes of returning to the family home, sharing housing with friends, and living without shelter.” (2005:6)



defined as at risk of homelessness because of poverty.<sup>10</sup> All it takes is a small change in their circumstances (e.g. losing their employment, becoming ill) to throw them into hidden homelessness (i.e. staying with friends or family or anyone who will provide shelter). If this situation becomes untenable (e.g. they are no longer welcome, they are experiencing abuse), they can end up in a shelter if one is available or on the streets (absolute homelessness). If they return to an abusive situation, simply in order to have shelter for themselves and their children, they are then back in a hidden homelessness situation. Or, if they are able to access appropriate and sufficient resources, they may be able to find accommodation again, but will remain at risk of homelessness. The stories that the homeless women interviewed in *A Study of Women's Homelessness North of 60*, and other studies such as Neal (2004) provide many different examples of how women move in and out of the various stages of homelessness.

Other researchers (e.g. Neal, 2004, Hightower and Hightower, 2004) point out that none of the standard definitions capture the essence of homelessness. For the homeless women who participated in The National Anti-Poverty Organization's study on homelessness, *Voices: Women, Poverty and Homelessness in Canada*, "...a home is more than a roof over one's head. It is also a place where they, as women, can be safe and secure and have a little privacy and control over their living spaces." (Neal, 2004: 3) Hightower and Hightower echo this sentiment when they write, "Everyone, even the homeless, knows the meaning of 'home'. Home is where you are always welcome, where you are safe, and where you live alone or with the people closest to you, people you love and who love you." (2004: 1)

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<sup>10</sup> Neal (2004:24) reports that, according to Statistics Canada's "low-income cutoff" measures, the percentage of poor women in Canada has steadily increased to almost 19 percent of all adult women.

## **Part III - Characteristics of Canada's North, and Nunavut in Particular, that Contribute to Women's Homelessness**

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Canada's North has special characteristics that contribute to high rates of homelessness in general, as well as among women in particular. Although each territory has its own unique expression of these characteristics, they all share:

- remote geography,
- a harsh climate,
- a small population base,
- the lack of accessible and affordable transportation systems,
- underdeveloped infrastructure,
- a high cost of living and limited employment opportunities,
- inadequate access to appropriate social services,
- the high cost of labor and materials needed to increase housing stock, and
- high rates of social issues such as addictions, domestic violence and intergenerational dependency on income support.

Comprehensive reports that span all these factors are difficult to find. One of the aims of the research process undertaken through *A Study of Women's Homelessness North of 60* was to generate a detailed look at how women in the North experience these conditions, and the impact they have on them. These rich descriptions are included in the *Findings* sections of this report.

Some excellent information is available about the shortage of housing in Nunavut, a primary determinant of women's homelessness. Much of the information used to develop the summary presented here was compiled by the Nunavut Housing Corporation for its submission to the Federal Government in an effort to address this longstanding and critical issue. It is important to note at the outset that almost all housing in Nunavut is public housing. Because of the prohibitive cost of labour and materials in Nunavut, there is almost no private housing market.

### ***The Housing Shortage in Nunavut***

There is an acute shortage of affordable and adequate housing all across the North, which is a critical factor in the incidence of homelessness. As Petit, Tester and Kellypalik remind us, "Housing, with its ripple effects, is at the heart of the homelessness issue" (2005: 9). How this situation has developed in Nunavut has historical and political roots. In 1993, the Federal Government of Canada signed the largest Aboriginal land claims agreement in Canadian history. At the same time, legislation was passed leading to the creation of the new territory of Nunavut (Inuktitut for "our land") on April 1, 1999. Today Nunavut is a growing society struggling to maintain its rich Inuit tradition in the face of its growing diversity. With the youngest population in Canada, and also the fastest growing, Nunavut has called for innovative approaches to the delivery of virtually every aspect of government programs and services.

Nunavut is composed of twenty-five fly-in communities, ranging from populations of a few hundred to just under seven thousand. Inuit compose 85 percent of the total population of Nunavut, which currently is home to approximately 29,000 people. Encompassing one fifth of Canada's total landmass, the population density is the lowest in Canada at 0.01 persons per square kilometer, compared to the Canadian average of 2.9 persons per square kilometer. The young territory of Nunavut employs a public government, electing MLAs on an individual as opposed to party basis, sharing this structure with the Northwest Territories, which also has a significant Aboriginal base.

Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit (IQ), one of the pillars of the Government of Nunavut, calls for the incorporation of Inuit values and beliefs into the day-to-day workings of the Government. With this in mind, the Government of Nunavut devised the Bathurst Mandate, which is "a statement of values and priorities that guides and conducts the government and identifies the common objectives of members" (GN, 2006).<sup>11</sup> These four guiding principles are: 1) healthy communities, 2) simplicity and unity, 3) continuing learning, and 4) self reliance.

The first of the four principles, "healthy communities" is directly related to the incidence of homelessness in Nunavut. Under this principle, the survival and success of Canada's newest territory "depends on the health of each of its physical, social, economic and cultural communities, and the ability of those communities to serve Nunavummiut<sup>12</sup> in the spirit of Inuuqatigiittiarniq; the healthy inter-connection of mind, body, spirit and environment" (Awa, 1999:9). Pursuant to the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement, while upholding the principles of IQ, the Federal Government and the Government of Nunavut have responsibilities to ensure the basic needs of Nunavummiut are consistently met and their rights as citizens of Canada upheld.

One of the most fundamental entitlements of all Canadians is the provision of adequate shelter. In a 2005 submission to the Government of Canada, the Nunavut Housing Corporation and Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. describe the housing situation in Nunavut as a stark reality,

*... where adequate shelter has become a scare resource rather than a basic right. National statistics tell the story: half of Inuit live in overcrowded conditions and 38.7% of them are considered in Core Need meaning they do not live in and cannot access acceptable housing. The Inuit of Nunavut are locked in a housing crisis that is worsening daily as the population booms and existing housing stock ages [...] Over 99% of public housing residents in Nunavut are Inuit and, with the shortage of housing such as it is, the only housing choice for many Nunavummiut is to add their names to the lengthy public housing waiting lists. For many people, this means years of waiting while multiple families live together and sleep in shifts within homes that average less than 1000 square feet. (2005:1)*

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<sup>11</sup> Government of Nunavut: Consensus Government. Internal manuscript retrieved from [www.gov.na.ca/Nunavut/English/about/cg.pdf](http://www.gov.na.ca/Nunavut/English/about/cg.pdf).

<sup>12</sup> Any person – Inuit and non-Inuit, residing in the territory of Nunavut.

According to the concise summary included in the above-named document, this situation has been developing for the past half century. Federal Government social housing programs in the Eastern Arctic began in the 1960s and continued until 1993, after the signing of the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement, when the Government of Canada assigned the new construction and acquisition of social housing to territorial governments. Although on-reserve housing programs for Aboriginal Canadians were maintained, no special provisions were made for the Inuit, who are clearly recognized as Aboriginal people.

*Within a few months of signing the NLCA, the Federal Government announced that new construction and acquisition of social housing was to be phased out and responsibly assigned to the provincial and territorial governments. No special provisions were made for the North or for the Inuit of Nunavut. Given the historical dependence on public housing, this decision had obvious and profound implications for Inuit. Public housing programs ceased in Nunavut, even while on-reserve housing programs for other Aboriginal Canadians were maintained... Since 1993, over \$3.8 billion has been invested in housing for First Nations, while Inuit—clearly recognized as Aboriginal people—were specifically excluded. (Nunavut Housing Corporation, 2004:3)*

The Government of the Northwest Territories did step in and assist with the construction of 1,400 new housing units, an intervention without which the housing crisis would be even worse. The creation of Nunavut saw the construction of an additional 500 staff housing units, through matching efforts between the Territorial and Federal Governments, to accommodate the required growth in the civil service. As well, the Federal Government created or acquired 300 staff housing units for its civil servants. 99% of the latter are, however, located in Iqaluit, and virtually all these units are occupied by Qallunaat (i.e., southern Canadians).

In April 2000, the Nunavut Housing Corporation was created and given the responsibility to manage the existing stock of approximately 3,900 social housing units in the Territory. By 2004, 329 additional units had been added to the social housing portfolio. Since 2002, the Federal Government initiated the Affordable Housing Program, but failed to modify the criteria for the construction of units to reflect the high costs in the North.<sup>13</sup> The Federal Government's Strategic Infrastructure Fund, initiated in 2003, provided additional funds, sufficient to allow the construction of about 160 social housing units in Nunavut communities. Early in 2004, the Federal Government promised that a strategy for off-reserve housing was being actively considered. With the change in government in late 2005, it is not clear at the time of this writing exactly what steps will be undertaken to address this chronic and serious situation that contributes significantly to women's homelessness in the Nunavut.

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<sup>13</sup> The 2002 Federal contribution was capped at \$25,000 per unit regardless of location. The second phase of the Affordable Housing Program, announced in 2004, allocated money on a per capita basis, which meant that Nunavut would be allocated one-half of one percent of the total, or enough to build one house, given the high costs of construction in the Arctic.

Homelessness and the lack of available housing options have come to be a source of desperation in Nunavut. Although Northern homelessness is primarily characterized by relative<sup>14</sup> and hidden<sup>15</sup> homelessness, absolute<sup>16</sup> homelessness does exist. Women who participated in this research project shared stories of being forced to sleep in empty containers lining the beach, in unlocked cars, or embracing decomposing garbage to retain some warmth in the harshest nights of winter.

Based on the unique circumstances of life in the North, the creation of new housing supply is almost entirely dependant upon government initiatives. The absence of trees means there is no accessible lumber for housing construction, requiring all materials to be shipped or flown in at escalating costs. Because there is no real private market in Nunavut, and because the cost of living is so high, government-supplied housing serves as the primary source of shelter. The Nunavut Ten-Year Inuit Housing Action Plan reports that “3,000 public housing units are needed immediately just to bring overcrowding on par with the rest of Canada” (2004:i).

*Bottom line: build housing, then let's see how things unfold from there. I'll tell you right now, a lot of the social issues, their intensity, will decrease immeasurably if you just give everyone housing. Then we can start dealing with the fall out from everything. You cannot help people move forward if you do not have a house. (Shelter worker).*

The lack of housing is creating social havoc and forcing people to make unhealthy choices they would not ordinarily make. Abused and abuser are forced to remain in the same dwelling for lack of other accommodation, and there is no continuum of care for those who need it. People with mental health issues and those struggling to recover from addictions may find shelter for the night but not the treatment they need to return to society (Jackson, 2006). In *Mapping the Healing Journey*, Lane Jr., Bopp, Bopp, and Norris (2002) discuss how the effects of trauma on Aboriginal communities, such as the undermining of tradition, destruction of traditional economies and governance, and the breakdown of healthy community life (including the introduction of drugs and alcohol and the prevalence of family violence), are being recycled through generations. They suggest historical turning points translate into patterns of dysfunction such that it is felt up to five generations removed.

While many similar strategies can be recommended for non-Inuit and Inuit homelessness, and for both men and women, Inuit women who are homeless have special needs. The dire housing shortage and desperate homeless situation has unique impacts on Inuit women. With

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<sup>14</sup>As defined in the previous section relative homelessness “applies to those living in spaces that do not meet basic health and safety standards, including protection from the elements, security of tenure, personal safety and affordability” (Petit et al., 2004: no page number).

<sup>15</sup>Hidden homelessness “includes women who are temporarily staying with friends or family or are staying with a man only in order to obtain shelter, and those living in households where they are subject to family conflict or violence” (Kappel Ramji Consulting Group, 2002:1).

<sup>16</sup>Absolute homelessness “...includes women who stay in emergency hostels and shelters and those who sleep rough in places considered unfit for human habitation, such as parks and ravines, doorways, vehicles, and abandoned buildings” (Seychuk, 2004:1).

increasing rates of domestic abuse and sexual violence, homeless women are at risk in very different ways than their male counterparts. Also, with extremely high birth rates in Nunavut, women are most often accompanied by children, so it is of concern for the future generation of Nunavummiut that we have examined homelessness from the female perspective.

*It is abundantly clear that aboriginal nations cannot progress as long as the pattern of recycling trauma and dysfunction generation after generation is allowed to continue. Something is needed to interrupt the cycle and to introduce new patterns of living that lead to sustainable human well-being and prosperity.*  
(Lane Jr. et al, 2002:10)

## **Part IV – Findings: The Demographics and Incidence of Homelessness Among Women in the North**

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The literature consistently identifies certain segments of the Canadian population at higher risk of homelessness than others: Aboriginal people, immigrants and refugees, sole support mothers, single women, people with serious mental illnesses, people with disabilities, youth,<sup>17</sup> the poor, and those escaping an abusive relationship (CMHA, 2004; Finton and Kramer, 2005; Hightower and Hightower, 2004; McCormick, 2004; Mearns, 2004; Melcombe, 2004; Seychuk, 2004; Wiebe and Keirstead, 2004). Women are the sole representatives of some of these groups (i.e. single women and sole-support mothers) and are over-represented in several others (such as the poor and those escaping an abusive relationship). When several of these categories are combined (such as an Aboriginal woman with disabilities or an immigrant woman escaping an abusive relationship), the woman is at even greater risk of homelessness.

Neal argues for the importance of a gendered approach to research and social action related to homelessness. Both men and women who are homeless are caught in gender stereotypes, she says. “Men who are homeless are ‘failed men’ because they can not support themselves...” Women who are homeless fit the “gender stereotype” as dependent and needy, while they become reduced “to a marginal place where they learn to work their way through the shelter system by using these services with deference and gratitude”. (2004:28)

### ***Who are the Homeless Women in the North?***

The following list was compiled by women representing key stakeholders (homeless women and government and non-government service providers) in the three Territories when they considered the question, “Who are the homeless women in the North?”. It is important to note that this list does not represent an analysis of the circumstances of a representative sample of homeless women, but rather the knowledge and experience of those who intimately understand the issue, either because they live it or because they working with it on a daily basis. It is also important to note that the categories listed below are overlapping; that is, a woman may fit under more than one heading.

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<sup>17</sup> According to McCormick, 2004, two-thirds of the young people who run away from home in British Columbia are girls.

<b>Categories of Homeless Women in the North</b>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The hard to house</li> <li>2. 16-18 year old girls/women</li> <li>3. Women fleeing abuse</li> <li>4. Women who go to the capital to go to school</li> <li>5. The working poor</li> <li>6. Women with disabilities &amp; women with disabled children</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>7. Aboriginal women</li> <li>8. Immigrants</li> <li>9. Mid-aged or older women</li> <li>10. Women with children</li> <li>11. Women with large families</li> <li>12. Women in trouble with the law</li> <li>13. Lone women</li> </ol>

The following table provides additional information about the circumstances that put these women at risk of homelessness.

<p><b>The “Hard To House”</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Because of addictions, mental illness, mental health problems, neurological damage (such as fetal alcohol syndrome disorder)</li> <li>• Because of physical disabilities</li> <li>• Because they have large families</li> <li>• Because they have been traumatized (e.g. childhood sexual abuse) and are therefore acclimatized to chaos</li> <li>• Because of a lack of tenancy skills</li> <li>• Because they have spent time in correctional facilities</li> <li>• These people can often experience homelessness on a cyclical basis</li> <li>• Because of the lack of supported living arrangements</li> </ul> <p><b>Women Fleeing Abuse</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women who leave relationships or are divorced are caught in limbo, with little income, assets frozen, not eligible for SA</li> <li>• In rural communities, the small housing stock limits choices</li> <li>• Women in this situation do not receive</li> </ul>	<p><b>16–18 Year Old Girls/Women</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They are too young for income support</li> <li>• There are few services and existing services often have barriers for this age group</li> <li>• Many of these girls end up in the sex trade in order to get shelter and food</li> <li>• Addictions (e.g. crystal meth) is a prevalent characteristic</li> <li>• They may couch surf with friends or acquaintances or they end up with older men who expect sexual favours in return for shelter</li> <li>• They have little or no family support and low levels of education</li> <li>• They may or may not have a consistent partner</li> <li>• If the girl is pregnant, she may be able to get some help from Health and Social Services and from Child Protection</li> <li>• Once they turn 19, they can get income support</li> <li>• If they have male partners who are able to work but are not supporting them, then they are not eligible for income support</li> </ul>
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<p>priority on housing wait lists</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Politics between the man and woman’s families can limit choice/options for housing</li> </ul> <p><b>The Working Poor</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The threshold for meeting basic needs is at least \$50,000 for a single person in Nunavut. It takes two incomes for most families to be able to make ends meet. Costs for many basics (e.g. fuel) are escalating.</li> <li>• Any exceptional circumstance (losing work, health problems, a relative/partner incurs debt for which they are responsible) can create a crisis.</li> </ul> <p><b>Aboriginal</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A question to ask is why are the majority of homeless women Aboriginal?</li> <li>• Aboriginal women fit into most of these categories but also have some special considerations and barriers</li> <li>• They are caught between jurisdictions (Federal versus Territorial)</li> <li>• Income support requirements (“productive” choice, relatives living together) conflict with cultural values and priorities</li> <li>• The dominant society worldview and the Aboriginal worldview also clash in other ways that impact the wellbeing of women</li> <li>• Conditions in their home communities punish women (nepotism, sexual assault, old boys network, families protecting their own)</li> <li>• Housing and other resources in home communities are in the hands of a few people</li> <li>• Federal government policies not the same as territorial policies (not as liberal).</li> </ul>	<p><b>Women in the Capital to go to School</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May have trouble maintaining shelter in the period over the summer when they are not receiving a training allowance and are not eligible for income support during that time</li> </ul> <p><b>Women With Disabilities &amp; Women With Disabled Children</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of accessible, safe housing</li> <li>• People with disabilities are often hidden in the community because of their difficulty in getting out</li> <li>• Those with invisible disabilities often get little or no support</li> <li>• Eligibility for disability supplement (SA) is determined by a physician. Some physicians are reluctant to sign.</li> </ul> <p><b>Immigrants</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They often start out at the bottom. Many are under pressure to send money home</li> <li>• Cultural factors may make it difficult for women to access services, have adequate employment or establish an independent household</li> <li>• Lack of social support networks, language skills, knowledge about resources and rights, and living skills applicable to this context</li> <li>• They are invisible. They don’t speak out about what is going on in their lives and the community doesn’t want to get involved</li> <li>• Can’t access income support. If the spouse is the sponsor, then she is trapped when the relationship is violent or otherwise abusive. If someone else is the sponsor, they can’t access income support because the sponsor is responsible.</li> <li>• Some women are vulnerable because of the type of employment they have (e.g. nannies)</li> </ul>
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<p><b>Mid-Aged Or Older Women</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May have older children, grandchildren or no children living with them</li> <li>• Health problems are one cause of homelessness. If they lose their jobs or if they are hospitalized, (IS will not pay while someone is in the hospital) therefore they can get in arrears and not be able to catch up</li> <li>• Financial hardship can cause a breakup in the family since there are different services for men than for women. If the woman does not have dependent children, she is treated as “single” (there are few if any services for homeless couples without children).</li> <li>• This age group can have a hard time finding employment (ageism, not having appropriate work clothes, etc.)</li> <li>• They may stay in abusive situations because they do not have an independent source of income, their income is needed to help cover the costs of the household they are in (e.g. when they live with adult children); no housing is available.</li> <li>• May suffer from addictions, mental health problems or other barriers to leading a stable life.</li> <li>• May be abused by their older children and/or other relatives</li> <li>• If a senior citizen, they may be eligible for seniors’ housing, but there are long waiting list for such facilities</li> <li>• If grandchildren living with them, may not receive assistance</li> <li>• No supported independent living for seniors</li> </ul> <p><b>Women With Large Families</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If women in small communities leave their abusive partners they are often refused</li> </ul>	<p><b>Women With Children</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They are in a catch-22. If the children have been apprehended, a women can’t get them back unless she has a stable home; but she can’t get a stable home unless she has children (because income support levels are too low for a “single” women)</li> <li>• As a “single woman” on IS they can only rent a room, and this makes them very vulnerable (to sexual exploitation, to being evicted without much notice, to living in a hostile environment)</li> <li>• Because income support payments are frequently late, landlords are hesitant to rent to women on income support. Racism is also a factor for why landlords don’t have any vacancy when these women try to rent.</li> <li>• Weather is a factor, since adequate clothing is expensive. Child Protection may get involved when children are not adequately clothed.</li> <li>• Women live in a hostile community climate—prevalent beliefs are that women on income support are cheating, that they don’t deserve the benefits they get, and that they should constantly prove their need and right</li> <li>• Clawback of child tax benefits for women on social assistance keeps them short of money for food and rent</li> <li>• No emergency shelter for women with children</li> </ul> <p><b>Women In Trouble With The Law</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Criminal record is a barrier to productive choices and to tenancy</li> <li>• Women who have recently been released often have no place to go (and their home community may ostracize them)</li> </ul>
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<p>housing and other types of support (nepotism/corruption/punishment by those families having power in the community). They are therefore “forced” to leave town in order to gain shelter and to be able to care for their children.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When they leave the community for a larger center, they lose help with parenting, access to traditional foods, and often end up homesick.</li> <li>• They run into many problems: they are not eligible for IS for several months, they may be denied access to subsidized housing because of past arrears/ damage to their homes (often incurred by their partners, but without knowledge of their rights, they end up being held responsible); their children get into trouble; they have trouble adjusting to the many “rules” around life in an urban centre; available housing is too small (most units are 2 bedrooms with a maximum 6-person occupancy; and visiting relatives may result in an eviction (if they stay too long, cause damage, party)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some of these women are violent, and therefore hard to house</li> <li>• Loss of children</li> <li>• There are generally no separate facilities or programming for female inmates.</li> </ul> <p><b>Lone Women</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They are only eligible for the lowest social assistance rates</li> <li>• They are the most vulnerable to predators (sexual exploitation and violence)</li> <li>• They are the most at risk of committing crimes (stealing, vagrancy, drug dealing, prostitution)</li> <li>• There are very few services that target this group and therefore it is very difficult for them to exit homelessness</li> <li>• They are the most overlooked and least understood sub group of homeless women</li> </ul>
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### ***Incidence of Homelessness in Nunavut***

As already mentioned in this report, women are among the fastest growing groups in the homeless and at-risk population (Neal, 2004). The fact that only a small portion of homeless women live on the street or in shelters, but are rather “couch surfing” in the homes of relatives or friends, or are living in unhealthy and unsafe conditions, or having to sacrifice other necessities of life (such as food, clothing and medical care) in order to keep a roof over their heads (and often that of their children), makes it very difficult to get any kind of accurate picture of the number of homeless women.

This study did not attempt to carry out a homelessness count in Northern communities. This type of data collection was well beyond the scope and means of the project. It had been hoped that some indicative statistics would be available from service providers. What was learned was that data specifically geared to tracking women’s homelessness is not currently collected.

*People aren't gathering that information. If people had been gathering it for the last decade, something my have been done about this by now. (Shelter worker)*

Some sense of the scope of the problem may be gained from the following information, however. The Katauyak Shelter Rankin Inlet reported that, "In November alone, we had 28 different women at the shelter. With 158 different women since April, that's 3 times the amount from last year". A staff member of the Qimaavik Shelter in Iqaluit gave the following information. "

*I'd say there are one hundred to one hundred fifty homeless women out and about the streets in Iqaluit. Haven't really kept track of the amount of women who are coming into the shelter who are in a homeless situation or who have been chronically homeless. We haven't been looking at that, so I don't know if I could offer up any valuable stats in that respect, which is part of the problem. [With respect to the] men's homeless shelter and soup kitchen,] women come in there, but it's about 80% men now, 5% children, the rest women. Averaging now about 60 people a day, 7 days a week.*

The Nunavut Housing Committee provided information about the number of people who do not have adequate housing. They report that:

*There are a little over 1,000 families on the waiting list, and we've shown from our research and our numbers that for every 1 person on the waiting list there are 2 more out there who don't qualify for a number of reasons. You can wait 6,7,8 years sometimes for housing.*

The problem, as one front-line worker put it, is that "People aren't gathering that information. If people had been gathering it for the last decade, something my have been done about this by now."

## ***Demographic Information about the Homeless Women who Participated in this Study***

**Number of participants** - 73 women participated in interviews or focus groups

**Ethnic background** - 100 % declared ethnicity as Inuit

**Community of origin** - Women interviewed represent 14 communities from all three regions of Nunavut, with 40% residing in Iqaluit, the Capital of Nunavut. Other communities of origin include Cape Dorset, Clyde River, Hall Beach, Igloolik, Pangnirtung, Pond Inlet and Qikiqtarjuaq in the Baffin Region; Baker Lake, Rankin Inlet and Repulse Bay in Kivalliq Region; and

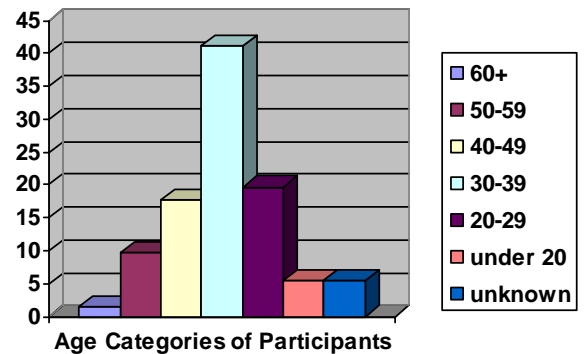
Cambridge Bay and Taloyoak in Kitikmeot Region.

**Children** - 85% of women interviewed have children, 8.2% without children and 6.8% did not specify.

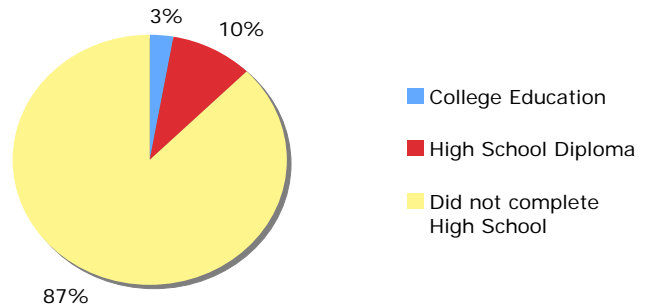
**Income source** - 90% of women interviewed were on income support. The 10% not on income support stated that they work full-time or part-time, produce and sell crafts, are supported by families, are not eligible for IS for some reason, or did not specify their source of income.

**Health impacts** - Only 16% of the women interviewed responded to this question on the demographic form. They reported a variety of health complications that either are a result of homelessness or are exacerbated by their situation, such as malnutrition, respiratory and communicable diseases. During the interviews, a great many of the women discussed emotional and mental health issues that were the result of their living situations, such as anxiety, stress, depression, despair, hopelessness, suicidal thoughts, and existing challenges that were exacerbated by homelessness such as addictions and bi-polar disorder.

**Age** - Ranged from 18-68, with 43.5% falling within the 30-39 age bracket. The median age of Inuit in Nunavut is 19.1 years, which is significantly younger than the median age of 37.7 for the non-Aboriginal population of Canada. The ages of the participants in this study represent an array of age categories, suggesting homelessness is being recycled through generations. The statistics did show an increase in percentage in the middle age categories, suggesting a generational worsening of homelessness



**Educational level** - 3% of women had a college education, 10% had a high school diploma, and 87% had not completed high school. The majority of women interviewed could read/write very little, and many had at most, a grade 8 education. Because 87% of the women had not completed primary schooling, they did not have functional literacy skills.



## Part V – Findings: The Determinants of Homelessness for Women in the North

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### *What the Literature Says*

The literature reviewed for this study identified the following factors as determining a woman's risk of becoming homeless.

1. **Poverty** - at least in part due to employer discrimination against women who are Aboriginal, young, old, disabled, immigrants, mothers; women are relegated to low-end, minimum-wage part-time jobs without benefits; lack of eligibility for employment insurance because of these types of jobs; low pensions for senior women for the same reason; lack of accessible and affordable childcare; government policies that claw-back child benefit supplements from income support payments; income support and disability payments that are not adequate to meet basic needs; lack of support for women to develop the means for obtaining adequate income (Neal, 2004; National Working Group on Women and Housing, 2006; CMHC, 1997; Craig, 2005; Kappel Ramji Consulting Group, 2002; Kerr et al., 2004; Hightower and Hightower, 2004; Townson, 2000; The Community Social Planning Council of Toronto, 2006; Wiebe and Keirstead, 2004; Melcombe, 2004; Seychuk, 2004)
2. **Domestic/family violence** – not only do women become homeless because they are facing violence/abuse (sexual, physical, mental, emotional, financial, etc.) against themselves and/or their children, homeless women are at significant risk of further victimization (Neal, 2004; CMHC, 1997; Kappel Ramji Consulting Group, 2002; Hightower and Hightower, 2004; The Community Social Planning Council of Toronto, 2006; Melcombe, 2004; McCormick, 2004; Seychuk, 2004)
3. **Traumatic change in life circumstances** - e.g. divorce or separation, illness, job loss, eviction, accident, death of a partner or caregiver, discharge from a mental hospital or prison, being kicked out by a partner or caregiver sharply reduce the income and other resources available to women (Neal, 2004)
4. **Lack of safe, quality, affordable housing** - inadequate stock of subsidized housing resulting in waiting lists that are too long; rents are too high in the private market; landlords offer substandard housing at exorbitant rates or even ask for sexual favours in exchange for housing (National Working Group on Women and Housing, 2006; Kappel Ramji Consulting Group, 2002; Kerr et al., 2004; Hightower and Hightower, 2004; The Community Social Planning Council of Toronto, 2006)
5. **Addictions** - is both a contributing factor to other determinants such as poverty criminalization, and family violence, as well as an outcome or impact of those same factors; addictions also make it difficult to maintain housing or to qualify for subsidized housing (CMHC, 2003; The Community Social Planning Council of Toronto, 2006; Seychuk, 2004)

6. **Criminalization of women for “crimes of survival”** (e.g. prostitution, welfare “fraud”, writing bad cheques, self-defense, theft, drug use) - is a cause of women losing their homes and also makes it difficult for them to regain housing once released from prison (National Working Group on Women and Housing, 2006)
7. **Serious mental illness** – has been found to be a critical factor, especially for women living on the street or in shelters who experience chronic homelessness (CMHC, 1997; Connors, 2005; The Community Social Planning Council of Toronto, 2006; Wiebe and Keirstead, 2004; Seychuk, 2004)

### ***The Findings of “The Little Voices of Nunavut”***

The homeless women who participated in focus groups sessions and interviews for *The Little Voices of Nunavut* study spoke about all these determinants in vivid and evocative ways. Their experience and analysis underscore the complex web of relationships that exists between these determinants and conspires to trap women in circumstances that are so heartbreakingly similar across the North.

As discussed in the *Methodology* section of this report, the transcripts of the Nunavut focus groups and interviews were coded according to themes. As the coding process proceeded, these themes were elaborated or collapsed to fit emerging understandings of what was being shared, resulting in the following nine themes.

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 1. Every woman is potentially at-risk                          | 6. Community institutions and structures                                     |
| 2. Partner’s behaviour and circumstances                       | 7. Cost of living and business sector practices (including sexism)           |
| 3. Forced eviction from home & relocation to another community | 8. Societal indifference/punitiveness toward the homeless (including racism) |
| 4. Lack of a support system                                    | 9. Climate/weather   |
| 5. Personal wellness and capacity                              |  |

Once the coding was complete and the data was organized according to these categories, theme anthologies (i.e. composite statements that drew on all the data related to each particular theme) were then prepared. The result is a series of rich descriptions of the experience and insights related to the circumstances that result in such dramatic numbers of women being homeless in Nunavut. The chart below compares the theme categories as they evolved in this Northern study with the themes that emerged from our literature review.

<b>Theme Headings for the Determinants of Women’s Homelessness</b>	
<b><i>Literature Review</i></b>	<b><i>Nunavut Study</i></b>
Poverty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Every woman is potentially at-risk</li> <li>• Forced eviction and relocation to another community</li> <li>• Cost of living and business sector practices (including sexism)</li> </ul>

Domestic/family violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partner’s behaviour and circumstances</li> <li>• Forced eviction and relocation to another community</li> <li>• Lack of a support system</li> <li>• Personal wellness and capacity</li> <li>• Community institutions and structures</li> </ul>
Traumatic change in life circumstances	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Every woman is potentially at-risk</li> <li>• Partner’s behaviour and circumstances</li> <li>• Cost of living and business sector practices (including sexism)</li> </ul>
Lack of safe, quality, affordable housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Forced eviction and relocation to another community</li> <li>• Cost of living and business sector practices (including sexism)</li> <li>• Climate/weather</li> </ul>
Addictions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of a support system</li> <li>• Personal wellness and capacity</li> <li>• Community institutions and structures</li> </ul>
Criminalization of women for “crimes of survival”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community institutions and structures</li> <li>• Societal indifference/punitiveness (including racism)</li> </ul>
Serious mental illness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personal wellness and capacity</li> <li>• Community institutions and structures</li> <li>• Societal indifference/punitiveness (including racism)</li> </ul>

The rest of this section presents representative theme anthologies (composite statements) for each of the categories listed above.

### **Theme Anthology # 1 - Every Woman is Potentially At-risk**

*“There is not much distance from where you are to finding yourself on the other side of the fence.”*

This quote from one of the interviewees captures accurately how much of a reality homelessness has become for countless Northern women. Homelessness in Nunavut has a very different reality than the circumstances generally found in Southern Canada. The structure of small communities in this sparsely populated territory creates a sense of desperation when it comes to finding affordable housing, while other Nunavummiut are constantly at risk of losing their homes. The threat of homelessness exists for a broad range of women, from the unemployed, to members of the workforce who have no subsidized housing or don’t earn enough to pay market rents, to Government of Nunavut employees who are in precarious possession of staff housing.

The severe housing shortage currently facing Nunavummiut has made it next to impossible for women to find refuge. Since single women without children are of lowest priority for public housing, young women transitioning from basic education to adulthood have little choice. They frequently have no option but to remain in their parents' home, which is but one



reason why three or four generations of families living under one roof is such a characteristic of Northern life.

*I just can't afford the high cost of living and rent here. The housing situation is really desperate. That stress is what drives families apart and then other relatives are taking sides. Family is pitted against family all the time.*

The interviewees also expressed frustration with having a house leased under their partner's name. When a relationship ends, even if her partner has been physically abusive, it is the woman who loses her home. One participant claimed, "He was so abusive, and I was the one given just a garbage bag of clothes." This story rings painfully true to many women.

*I owned a home together with my partner, but it was under his name. So when we broke up, I'm the one that lost the house. My daughter went to live with relatives. It will be a long time before either of us gets a house, especially her because she is single with no kids. The single people have less chance of getting a house soon.*

Staff housing is a perk offered by various Northern employers to encourage a permanent employee base. This arrangement can never be stable and keeps women at a constant risk of becoming homeless. If a woman's job is terminated for any number of reasons, under staff housing policies she and her family can be asked to vacate the home within a week. Several of the women interviewed had experienced this situation, and had found themselves in the cold with nowhere to turn. This situation can hit women of any economic status.

*I was a nanny back home in Arctic Bay and when I moved in with her I gave up the house. I thought it would be a good move, give me some stable income. After awhile the job didn't work out anymore and I was left with nowhere to go.*

Women also become homeless for a number of reasons that are out of their control. Some have suffered from a mental illness, are transitioning from correctional facilities, are newcomers to the North or relocating between northern communities, or are battered women fleeing their dwellings to escape abuse. In short, every woman residing in Nunavut continually lives with the threat of one day having to survive without shelter.

*I've been down south to clinics and I've seen psychiatrists and stuff and I'm still not well – I'll never be well and I'm now on the outside looking in. I used to be one of those people on the inside looking out. I was doing good, I was making 58 thousand dollars a year and I had a place to rest and I was living good, but then I got unwell and now I'm on the outside looking in.*

## Theme Anthology #2 - Partners Behavior And Circumstances

*“I put up with sexual abuse from my common law because leaving him leaves my children with no father. I didn’t want them to suffer for mistakes they didn’t even make.”*

A woman’s intimate partner often plays a large role in the occurrence of homelessness in all areas of the country. The situation for Northern women is unique however. This section will describe the circumstances related to a woman’s intimate relationship that cause her to become homeless and how challenging it is to overcome these when you reside in scarcely populated, isolated communities.

Nunavut has more victims of crime per capita than any other province or territory in Canada. “Measured by the number of persons charged, the rate of crime is over six times higher than the Canadian national average. The rate of reported assaults is 10 times higher and the rate of reported sexual assaults is 25 times greater than the national average”. (Kitikmeot Law Centre, 2006:1; see also *Measuring Violence Against Women: Statistical Trends 2006*) The vast majority of the women interviewed have been victims of violence, or exposed to high levels of violence when moving from place to place. Several of the women became homeless when they made the decision to flee an abusive family member, most often their intimate partners. When asked what they believe is causing women’s homelessness, the interviewees have been very forthcoming in noting violence as a serious problem requiring immediate intervention in the North.

*Safety is a big issue when you’re homeless, and you’re more vulnerable to violence. There are a lot of men that rape babies to grannies. That’s one of the worst things in this town is rape. The men think we are only here for them.*

*You go with this man even though you don’t want to. You don’t love him, you don’t like him, but he has a bed to sleep on. You have no choice but to follow him because you need a place to sleep. It makes you sick inside, makes you lose your mind.*

*So many women get in fast relationships just to get out of their situation. I’ve gone back to abuse just to have a home and I’m sure lots of women are in that same situation. You wait forever for a house in Iqaluit, years even, and lots of bad things can happen to a woman in a year.*

*I put up with sexual abuse from my common law because leaving him leaves my children with no father. I didn’t want them to suffer for mistakes they didn’t even make.*

*The RCMP helped me the last time my husband almost killed me. But I don’t think you can put a face or culture on homelessness. However, there is a high level of violence in the Inuit culture. If we don’t come from a healthy*

*environment and we meet someone who initially shows us a little kindness, we will run to them. Things get progressively worse from there. It's a generational thing. We need an immediate solution.*

*We were homeless for a few months, my husband and my kids because he burnt down my house.*

During an interview in the Edmonton Journal with a family from Kugaaruk living in a three-bedroom house with sixteen people (four families), one family member stated, “The government should be making more houses. When it's too crowded, it's pretty hard to not argue with each other. It gets harder and harder all the time” (*Nunavut in Thick of Housing Crisis*, Edmonton Journal, November 24, 2005). This immediately brings to light the link between overcrowded conditions (lack of available housing) and violence. There is a direct link between the high prevalence of violence in Nunavut and a lack of accommodation. Women become trapped in abusive situations because they have nowhere else to go. Many existing shelters across Nunavut will accept women on a nightly basis, leaving them no option but to return to the abusive situation in the morning.

*Fast relationships just to get out. I've gone back to abuse just to have a home and I'm sure lots of women are in the same situation.*

*I've been in and out of the women's shelter for 3 years and I'm very emotionally drained. I feel like I won't get my kids back, and I was the one that was raised here. I have everything in my home, but I was just given a garbage bag full of clothes. Why can't we have a shelter like the one in Yellowknife? They keep you there until you can get back on your feet. The one here? Here you're only there for a night. You have to leave the next day--just until your abusive partner sobers up. There has to be a place where you can go until you get on your feet. We have no services to help us! Kids are hungry all the time. We need more food banks. More and more kids are going into foster homes and group homes because of homelessness. That is causing depression, family violence, separation, more drinking, drugs, people tend to turn to something to calm them, ease their pain. Eviction is usually because those turn to alcohol a lot, and drugs.*

One of the service providers that was interviewed pointed out the strong relationship between homelessness and addictions in this way.

*A lot of northern homelessness has to do with addictions and abusive relationships. If a woman has just gotten herself out of an abusive relationship, she will usually turn to alcohol and drugs, which can get her into deeper issues, such as involuntary crimes (in order to feed her children) and losing her kids to Social Services.*

Hence, a lack of resources that causes one societal problem will also create another.

*Men got no kids to take care of either. The kids are with the woman. Women get used to being controlled, and sometimes they lose their children too, if they have no place of their own. My husband won't even help with milk or pampers.*

*Yes, we'd rather just give up the house and go instead of putting up with the abuse. Kids are always with the mother and then they have to witness violence. It's not fair to them. I left to keep my kids together. I had to escape an abusive situation and I didn't wanna lose them so I took a chance. There are just so many Nunavut women being homeless because there aren't enough houses and too much abuse.*

*I was in a relationship for 10 years where he has the attitude that "well she's Inuk. I can get anything now. I can live with her and this is my house." Our own Inuit organizations are the ones protecting the non-Inuit. I know my children aren't happy with their alcoholic father. He's just laughing at Nunavut justice because he slipped through the cracks.*

One further complication endured by women regarding their intimate partners is the customary practice of having the male partner's name on the lease for social housing units. When a woman's relationship ends, or if she becomes widowed, she immediately loses her home. Thus, the current procedures support the abuser, not the abused.

*Sometimes it's totally out of our control that we are homeless. I left my home community for a relationship and it ended. My spouse and I broke up and left me having to get out of the house and I found myself in a community that wasn't my own with nowhere to go. The ladies are left out in the cold with no income when they separate from their partners. They have no income, no home, no hope of getting another house. I see so many situations like that and that's how everyone's house is so over-crowded.*

*I'm in the middle of a court separation with my former common-law. We owned our own home together under both of our names. I don't think it was right to put his name under the home because it was a program for me, and now that we are separated, and I have no job I was given a garbage bag full of clothes.*

*I am widowed. I couldn't bear living alone after my husband passing. I relied on my husband to take care of bills. I never learned how to do that stuff. His name was also on the lease so when he passed away, I had to leave.*

*One time when my husband was being violent, I kept going back to my brothers and he kept saying "you can't keep staying here I have a family." I didn't know where to turn. I didn't wanna go to my mother's either because he would go there and scare everyone, and it was very hard for me to go to my other siblings. I miss my sister so much but I can't go visit her anymore. It's really hard on me*

*and my kids cuz I can't go there because he keeps calling. The RCMP finally helped me get his name off the lease so now I have a place under my own name.*

*Men seem to get it so well. We have to get out of the house and us having no place to go, the only option seems to be is go back with an abusive boyfriend. He's just waiting for me to give up hope so I will go back. I can't go to RCMP cuz my partner will haunt me forever. Men seem to get the house under their name and women seem to be kicked out all the time by their boyfriends.*

### **Theme Anthology #3- Forced Eviction & Relocating to Another Community**

***“I fled from my violent husband from my home community. I couldn't stand the violence. Women are always running from their communities.”***

Forced eviction from social housing units was a reality for many of the women interviewed. This section touches upon several reasons women find themselves forced out of their homes. A primary reason for eviction is that the male lists a unit under his name, exclusive of his female counterpart. If the relationship ends, becomes abusive, or if the woman becomes widowed, she is expected to evacuate her home. The vast majority of women who have shared stories of eviction have been forced out of their homes because of their partners' actions. Tenant damage is also another reason women become evicted from public housing.

*I was relocated to another [public] house but I had unpaid bills so I was evicted. Arrears take on a life of their own. I can't catch up now. But I guess us Inuit, we are lucky for our relatives because if you get kicked out of somewhere or have no place to go they will always take us in – but now its happening to so many people and everyone is going to the same house. Because it's so overcrowded, there is drinking and drugs and then people get kicked out of their family's homes too. I know it's not just Cambridge Bay that goes through this, it's all over Nunavut.*

*My ex-boyfriend was vandalizing and his name was on the lease so we got kicked out. Eviction happens to a lot of Inuit I think, because people turn to alcohol a lot and drugs to ease their pain.*

*I got evicted on more than one occasion – three times actually. The first time it was because my first husband passed away and his name was on the lease. They made me leave. Another time my ex-boyfriend was vandalizing and his name was on the lease so we got kicked out. My family members are homeless too and have been for many years. I had a brother who was homeless. Bills ran up and he ended up moving to Yellowknife. He didn't want to come back because there is no housing over here. He would have waited for many years and he did not want that. His body was found in a cardboard box. My sister down in Ontario, she can't come back because she is ill, and the housing will be too long too and she*

*don't want to come back because over here there is lots of drugs and alcohol. I also have another brother who is homeless in Calgary. I don't want Inuit to go through this. It's hard. It affects too many families of all cases.*

Because Nunavut communities are so influenced by family structures, a woman is often also forced to leave her community. Even if she leaves her home community for medical reasons, her dwelling might be removed from her possession in her absence.

*I had a house in Cape Dorset, but I came to Iqaluit for the hospital. While I was away, the house got taken away from me. There's such a shortage of houses, they thought I had left for good so it was given to someone else.*

#### **Theme Anthology #4- Lack of an Adequate Support System**

***“I haven't eaten a meal in over a week. I just feel so uncomfortable to do that at my brother's. If you are uncomfortable where you are staying, you feel like you're in the way of them. They want to help you but they are still pushing you away, making you feel uncomfortable.”***

Inuit women who are homeless in Nunavut survive because of the values that are placed on maintaining family ties and sharing. Fifty-four percent of Inuit currently live in overcrowded conditions, and 38.7% of them are considered in core need. This statistic is so high because the desperate lack of housing options forces these women to turn to friends and family. Women are often coming with more than just their own mouth to feed, and families can only provide so much. Three or four generations of families often huddle under one roof, which becomes a breeding ground for frustration. Women are forced to sleep in shifts, and if they are lucky enough to have a room, it is shared with several others. They have no privacy, and their tenure is based on the circumstances of others. If the home becomes violent and unbearable, the absence of alternative housing leaves the women feeling trapped. They often feel as though they are a burden to their families and end up moving from home to home, stripping them of stability. This also creates difficulty for women to maintain employment or access existing government programs if they do not have the security of a roof over their heads.

*It's hard to get a job because you have no address or phone number. They just think you're a drug addict.*

*I am going through that right now. My son and I are living with my brother and his family and it's a one-bedroom. It's really crowded, so then we start arguing and fighting. Everybody goes all over the place, so when it gets tense I have to find somewhere else to stay for the night. I won't go home for days. I just go from home to home, couch to couch, friends to friends. I'm so tired of that.*

*I live with my parents. We are five in a one-bedroom house. It's very hard trying to support my whole family.*

*Been living in overcrowded conditions. We are seven in a one-bedroom house, plus friends come by to sleep over when their family is drunk. It's hard trying to get a bed to sleep on at night! It's hard to live with your family because they expect so much of you. That stress is what drives families apart and then other relatives are taking sides. This housing thing is really desperate here. Family is pitted against family all the time. I can't stand the fighting anymore.*

*You can't do what you want or people complain about you and your child all the time, when you can't really help it because you have no where else to go. I don't have my own privacy and space. Everyone goes to my parents and when I buy groceries it goes fast.*

*The hardest time is when my family gets mad at me and wants to kick me out and I have no place to go. Being locked out of where you're staying is hard. Some people won't let you in, so it's kinda hard, always having to do what other people want you to do. It puts a strain on the family.*

*I am living with mom. It will be a long time before I get a house because I am single with no kids. The single people have less chance of getting a house soon.*

*Right now I'm not getting along with anybody. The weekend is the hardest time because my sibling likes to drink and then I get stuck babysitting while she gets loaded. And if I say no, she gets mad at me for weeks at a time. It's tiring.*

*I'm sorry I am having such hard time thinking about anything else other than where I'm going to sleep tonight. I just keep thinking "fuck, he's coming home today". He will bring alcohol back with him too so I can't even stay there on the floor. I can't go the shelter cuz I'm not being beaten up. It's the only thing on my mind.*

*My siblings like their booze, and every time they drink that's when I know I have to find somewhere to sleep. I can't go to my sister's because she's got a family of her own too. I can't bother her with that. This whole town turns into alcohol city on the weekends. It's hard for us to go out visiting and stuff. I know I will be babysitting my grandson and babysitting until Sunday, because they will be partying all weekend.*

*You are vulnerable to any kind of abuse in another person's house. I couldn't live with my brother. He was sexually abusive. But then, you have to wait forever for your own house in Iqaluit. Years even. Lots of bad things happen in a year.*

*I guess we are lucky for our relatives, because if you get kicked out of somewhere or have no place to go, they will always take us in. But now it's happening to so*

*many people and everyone is going to the same house. My older kids got jobs to help out with food.*

*When I first came back from living in Yellowknife, my son and I went and lived in my brother's closet because there was nowhere else to go. We lived in that closet for almost a year. He ended up having six kids and that was one of those single one-bedroom units. You get situations like that all over.*

*Asking for help is so hard. So much shame. I can't trust anyone. No place to go, nowhere to sleep, having to go to the police station to sleep. Asking friends and family is the hardest because I ask too often. I have a family here, but they have family too to take care of. When you don't have no one to go to, you have to stay where you are not wanted. Very hard.*

*Right now I'm considering letting my daughter stay with friends. I know she'll be OK. I don't want to drag her around with me. Her friends parents said they would take her until I could get back on my feet, but it's so hard to separate us. Really, really hard. And even my daughter says she can maybe stay with her uncles but I don't want to put that on anyone else. My two brothers, one just had back surgery and the other one has epileptic seizures all the time, and they both already have overcrowded homes, so I can't let my daughter go there either. It's full.*

## **Theme Anthology #5- Personal Wellness And Capacity**

***"I've thought about hiring someone to beat me up just so I can stay at the women's shelter. I know it sounds crazy, but that's what desperation does to your mind when you have no place to go."***

Another determinant of homelessness in Nunavut women involves wellness and capacity. A woman's potential for improving her position in life is often inhibited by her health and/or her perception of her own personal abilities.

*I don't think that it's because we're Inuk, but that most of us don't have the education to get good paying jobs, to afford the high cost of rent up here. I know Inuit people don't have all these diplomas that people want, but we do have the skills to do it. We just need the opportunity, the chance.*

Women often find themselves suffering from physical and emotional exhaustion, including feelings of disempowerment, which trap them in a cycle from which they can find no respite. Being incapable of sheltering/protecting themselves and their children, results in feelings of worthlessness, eventually taxing every other area of their lives. They are stripped of all esteem, and poor health negatively infringes upon their capacity to better their situations. Many of the



women interviewed stated that they have experienced a complete loss of identity, with no remaining sense of a culture which brought such a great sense of pride to their forbearers.

*It is so hard always having to do what other people want you to do. No security. You feel so low, you cry, you're spent. No one respects you. No self-esteem. You feel trapped. You lose your identity, your culture, who you are. It separates you from your family too.*

*A women needs free time, time to be alone. You can't have that when you're homeless, when you sleep in shifts with five people to a room. It's emotionally draining. I just don't know where to turn to for help. My daughter is homeless too. It breaks my heart to see this happening to her. There is so much tension of bills, trying to find her own space and the list goes on.*

*I'm sorry I am having such hard time thinking about anything else other than where I'm going to sleep tonight. I just keep thinking "fuck, he's coming home today". He will bring alcohol back with him too so I can't even stay there on the floor. I can't go the shelter 'cuz I'm not being beaten up. It's the only thing on my mind.*

Several women have cited mental illness as inhibiting their capacity to escape the cycle of homelessness. Many slip into a deep depression and are completely unaware of where to find help. The general consensus among Nunavummiut is that there is a serious lack of services/resources for those struggling with mental illness. The few services currently in place often lack the proper staff training to function effectively. Another obstacle is a lack of awareness about the services that are available. When women find themselves in these trying situations, the vast majority have no idea where help exists. The mental strain endured by these women also comes with labeling by their peers. This negative stigma cripples women in their efforts to seek help. As a result of being ostracized, they feel too shameful and embarrassed to seek out any existing counseling.

*There are a lot of health problems associated with our condition. Not just physical stuff but mental health as well. Just look at the depression and suicide rates. I've thought about hiring someone to beat me up just so I can stay at the women's shelter. I know it sounds crazy, but that's what desperation does to your mind when you have no place to go.*

*You are more likely to be taken advantage out there. People pushing you around, "you're that kind of person because you are homeless, calling you names, a person you're not even." Even the RCMP – to a point they will help and to a point they don't. Because you live out on the street they are gonna treat you like crap. We are all people and we shouldn't be categorized for our physical and mental being.*

*How am I ever going to get a good night's sleep when I'm constantly moving from place to place? I can't think when I'm at work, I'm tired, I'm stressed out, I'm depressed. When you use all your energy going around all day looking for a place to rest, how can you have a good night's sleep and go to school and function all day? With no food, no breakfast, you just can't! From being so stressed out I'm bleeding inside. I've had my period for three months now and I'm waiting to see the doctor again today. When I talk to him I tell him I'm tired because I couldn't find a place to sleep last night and I'm just depressed all the time.*

*There is no feeling worse than to be homeless, to be unloved and to think that nobody in the community wants you, won't give you a unit or a house or a place to stay, or just a decent living condition. It's really hard. It's really depressing. You find a lot of depression in these small communities and suicide, suicide is very high.*

*I'm bipolar. I have health conditions but people don't see that because of the negative stigma that's attached to homeless people. They just think I'm weird. But everyone lives under some sort of stigma. They always judge you from the way you were, not the way you are.*

*I've been down south to clinics and I've seen psychiatrists and stuff and I'm still not well – I'll never be well and now I'm on the outside looking in. I used to be one of those on the inside looking out. I was doing good, I was making 58 thousand dollars a year and I had a place to rest and I was living good, but then I got unwell, and now I'm on the outside looking in. No one will even consider me now because I'm sick. And I'm a smart woman, I can do any job. Teach me for half an hour and I can do it for the rest of my life. They look at me now as an unwell person, but they don't know that I've been getting help. I've gone to Winnipeg and Calgary and all these different places.*

Drugs and alcohol are often used as an escape, further trapping the women in a vicious cycle. Many of the homeless women interviewed had used drugs and/or alcohol “socially” but did not use heavily until they found themselves homeless. The women cited this change as an attempt to “numb the pain”. It was also suggested that drug use was more “effective” in the winter, as it helped anesthetize the pain suffered at the hands of a harsh winter climate. The high rate of substance abuse is exacerbated by a lack of treatment services, and a lack of education and awareness of the negative impacts of drug/alcohol use. This cycle also drains the women financially, leaving them struggling to pay bills. Arrears then take on a life of their own, and all these burdens become more than women can handle. Community correction officers also recognize that women often develop heavy addictions to drugs such as cocaine and heroine, often as a result of being trapped in abusive relationships, and these drug habits will then lead to crimes, in most cases, simply to feed their children.

*I've turned to drugs to ease the pain, and now I'm just all over the place, trying to find work and so on. It's so hard to put my life back together when I don't even have a place to call home. I don't ask for help from anyone. So much shame. I have no self esteem. I feel trapped. I've lost my identity, my culture, who I am. Being homeless separates you from your family too.*

*I had an alcohol and drug problem and I was kicked out of the house for that reason.*

*Always running away from the pain – an escape. Yeah, I admit I use drugs and alcohol. I know I am those things. I tell people that I need help. Help me!*

*Yes I'm an alcoholic and I'll always be one. Yes I'm a drug addict and I'll always be one. But that's not all I am. That's what they see me as no matter where I go and I just need help. I need an opportunity. When you're homeless too, you have to prove to everybody that you can do this. You always have to prove yourself because people think you are a certain way.*

*Having addictions causes you to lose everything. It's hard to get a job because you have no address or phone number. They just think you're a drug addict. Yeah I smoke pot because it helps me. It helps me eat. It's the only thing that helps me because I've been so depressed. My daughter, she can't stand alcohol. Sometimes I have to take her and leave, even at 2:30 in the morning.*

## **Theme Anthology #6- Community Institutions And Structures**

***“Students get housing right way, people coming in, government employees coming in. And they keep those houses open, even if they don't have staff to put in them. It's always the people that are from here that are homeless.”***

The structure of communities in Nunavut is what makes this homeless epidemic so unique. On the surface, many people fail to understand how things operate because it is so vastly dissimilar from southern Canadian communities. Iqaluit is currently the largest community in Nunavut, with a population of under 7,000, while the other twenty-four communities have significantly fewer people. The dynamics involved with the operation of our current institutions are often overlooked when examining our homeless situation.

Major issues include a lack of services and resources and the ineffectiveness of many existing services (partly because privacy and confidentiality are not respected). A harsh climate, the structure of family and intimate relationships in isolated conditions, issues of racism, and a vast Northern terrain complicate communication and connectedness between Nunavut communities. Also critical is the high cost of living. Quite a large gap exists between the employed and unemployed, and if you are not benefiting from a Government of Nunavut salary, it is virtually impossible to get ahead. As of 2004, almost fifty percent of Nunavummiut were

income support clients (data supplied by the Department of Health and Social Services), which clearly illustrates the problematic economy currently in place.

*There is a lack of housing for parents. Single parents are usually frowned upon.*

*There are some young people, teenagers who want to leave their parent's home because of the alcoholic problems and stuff, but they can't. They can gamble three or four nights in a row, rest for a night and then go at it again.*

*Turning to illegal options. If I was doing it, prostituting myself or selling drugs, I would have money. I admit I've thought about it.*

The housing structure is also very different in Nunavut. Private ownership is rare, because the cost of building your own home far exceeds affordability for most Nunavummiut. In a territory where jobs are scarce and home-building costs run three times the national average, more than half of the people live in government-supplied housing (*Nunavut in Thick of Housing Crisis*, Edmonton Journal, November 24, 2005). In terms of people living in poverty, women are constantly on the verge of being homeless. Parents have no way of passing on the legacy of a “family home” to their offspring. If there is a death in the family, and that name is on the lease, all other members are required to leave the premises. Public housing can never be a family home. It is merely a house associated only with those whose names are on the tenancy agreement.

Overcrowding is the most significant result of the housing shortage. The community housing authorities have strict policies that prevent tenants from housing additional dwellers within a social housing unit, which results in enormous under-reporting of homelessness. It is all too common to see mattresses lining the floors, five or more people sharing a small bedroom where they are forced to sleep in shifts. Health becomes a major issue, and food is scarce. A lack of housing options has also forced women into unhealthy and often abusive relationships just to put a roof over their heads.

*We owned our own home together it was under both of our names and I don't think it was right to put his name under the home because it was a program for me and now that we are separated because I have no job. But I'm very educated. I'm fighting so hard for my home. I was born and raised here. My ex just laughs at everybody, the whole community, he's got no respect for elders. I'm just all over, trying to find work and so on. It's so hard to put my life back together when I don't even have a place to call home.*

*Students get housing right way, people coming in, Government employees coming in. And they keep those houses open, even if they don't have staff to put in them. It's always the people that are from here that are homeless.*

## Theme Anthology #7 - Cost Of Living and Business Sector Practices

*“The government is great at putting programs on. I can take all sorts of programs but where’s the jobs?”*

Cost of living is another unique circumstance of Northern life. “It just doesn’t make sense that the minimum wage is \$8 an hour (or about \$1,280 a month) when a one-bedroom apartment in Iqaluit can cost anywhere between \$900-\$1600 per month” (*Most Nunavut Homeless*, Nunatsiaq News, October 5 2001). The cost of heating, electricity and water is so high that many residents cannot afford to maintain accommodations without subsidy. According to Jackson, for example, (2006:15), the cost of supplying a gallon of water to a household is about the same as a gallon of gasoline.

*Regarding affordability, Nunavut stands out statistically. Each and every private dwelling unit in the territory receives some type of housing subsidy. For some at the highest income levels, it may be a small subsidy for power and fuel. For middle-income earners, subsidies may also include staff housing rent/household subsidies and homeownership down payment and/or home repair assistance. For low-income earners, rent and mortgage geared to income options are the norm, along with virtually all utilities paid on their behalf. If these subsidies were removed or factored out, all but the most affluent of Nunavummiut would have affordability problems. (Nunavut Housing Corporation and Nunavut Tunngavik Inc., 2004:10)*

In some communities, private developers are beginning to put up apartment buildings, but this brings no refuge to low-income women or women on income support. A community rentals officer stated that Nunavut homelessness is “...in a crisis and it’s going to get worse unless something is done about it. It can potentially hit people of any economic wealth. If you lose your job, you have seven days to move out of your house. I see quite a number of people who are instantly homeless and aren’t prepared for it. That’s on the working level.” Even if these women were given a home, they could easily become bankrupt within a short time because fuel, water and regular maintenance are not indexed to income.

Potential service providers face the same challenge. A community shelter director who was interviewed for this study said, “It seems like our hands are tied wherever we go. There are a few places we can put a shelter here, but when we contact the person who owns the property, they want to sell it for an extremely high price and there is no way we can fundraise enough money to cover that cost.” The women interviewed for this Study describe their experience as follows.

*It’s more expensive and colder here and we don’t have the help they do down south!! The government is great at putting programs on. I can take all sorts of programs but where’s the jobs?*

*Can't afford to live here. The rent is too high and there's just not enough public housing. Affordable housing would solve a lot of problems here. I have been a house mother for the last 5 years and unemployed for 5 years, and I'm a surviving child of parents that went to residential school, and I have been healing on my own with the help of our wellness center and the programs they offer.*

*I got laid off from my job and had to leave my apartment because I couldn't afford rent. Income support services can only help a little with food. It's not enough. We could use income support in different levels like they have in the south. What we get is not even close to enough.*

*Can't keep up with rent, can't keep up with job. Sometimes we have our own way. People are forced to turn to social services. On top of that we have high fuel cost, so we can't buy our own house. Especially if you are a single mom, you can't afford it. It's too expensive. If you have kids, welfare is never enough each month. Lots of people are becoming unemployed, lots of single parents and teenage moms all over Nunavut.*

*I lost my job, so I lost housing. I try to get casual employment now where I can just to make ends meet – to eat and stuff. I make crafts too, but I make the most of my money bumming at the store.*

## **Theme Anthology #8 - Societal Indifference/Punitiveness Toward the Homeless (including Racism)**

*“There is no feeling worse than to be homeless, to be unloved and to think that nobody in the community wants you...”*

Regardless of where you live in Canada, the homeless tend to be negatively stigmatized by other members of society. Homeless persons are often judged and mistreated based on the stereotypes of what a homeless person “is”. The situation in Nunavut is no exception.

*A generation of Nunavummiut are growing up in desperate situations, where people value life less than they did in the past. Previously, Inuit had stable homes where traditions could be passed on. Riddell said now, the poor of Nunavut can't afford a permanent family home to provide stability. I see it as the absolute destruction of a culture. (Homeless Shelter on the Rocks, Nunatsiaq News, March 11 2005)*

This sentiment is shared by many, as the Inuit way of life has become confused and eroded since they were forced into southern models of life. The problem is not necessarily the evolution of time, but rather the failure of the government to offer proper resources for a North in transition. For example, addiction services are seriously lacking in Nunavut. Currently, Inuit

women with severe drug and alcohol addictions are sent to other Canadian jurisdictions. Several women who have experienced this suggest an inability to heal under circumstances where no Inuit context exists. Cultural appropriateness needs greater attention within community institutions.

*They judge up from the way you were, not the way you are. Emotionally, it really hurts your mind trying to understand why this happened to you. Facing reality. Feeling suicidal. Worthlessness feeling. I don't ask for help from anyone.*

*I think we have to live like the old days. It would be a lot better. It was more community oriented in the past. We need to help everybody out like our ancestors did. It's easier to live in the South than in Nunavut. I am not proud to say that, but it's reality now.*

*All we want to do is voice our concerns without being judged upon. People on the boards do tend to look down on you. They judge you as a person and not as a member of our community that has real concerns. The same people are on every board and they are the ones that go to NTI meetings and they are drinking and you hear about them all over Nunavut and it's so embarrassing and these are the men that are making our decisions for us!!!*

The vast majority of women believe it would be more beneficial to go back to their traditional way of living. It was expressed in numerous interviews that, “Qallunaat are taking over our land.” While most women maintain that they feel no prejudice toward White people, they feel the “White way of life” does not fit their traditional lifestyle and has further complicated their living situation. Women have also stated that “Qallunaat get houses faster,” and “If I were a Qallunaaq, I'd probably have a house.” Several of the women suggested by simply looking at the homes owned by Inuit versus that of Qallunaat, that the message is clear as to who is valued the most. This gap continues to increase, suggesting a systematic failure. The Government ought to implement strategies to help Northern constituents help themselves, rather than displacing them in non-traditional “Southern” models that have proven unsuccessful.

*Qallunaats are running the show here. They get houses immediately. Nunavut used to be more community-oriented. Everyone helped each other out. We need to help everybody out like our ancestors did. Go back to Inuit culture. We need to go back to the traditional way of life.*

*If I was a Qallunaat I think I'd be able to get a place right away. The rest of Canada thinks Inuit is second-class citizens, and what we do and what we say and what we think doesn't matter. I think the government wants all Qalunaat in Iqaluit – they get houses immediately. There is so much favoritism for White. They are taking over our land, running the show. Where are all the houses the Government promised the Inuit?*

*We need to possibly get our own housing association with Inuit officers. Plus Inuit don't really understand the policies and rules and regulations and stuff. Today, I find that educated Inuit versus an uneducated Inuit like our elders are competing with nicer homes with a shack. Elders need to be looked after better. We can't even buy our own land to own our own homes because we are on Crown land. We can only lease. There are government houses over here that are not being used. It's too expensive to try and live in it, or their jobs are only fitted for a southerner.*

*So many people have come here, made their money and gone. And do they stick around and spend their money here? No! They go, and their homes are left empty for the next southerner to come and make their money and go and we are still left with nothing. They will send up these people, make sure they are comfortable, everything paid for, while their own people are wandering the street.*

*It belittles us that we are in hard situations sometimes. It's like we are making rules for the wrong people. Yeah we have to respect the Canadian law and humanity, but realistically, how many people are coming in from outside that are living here long term? I know we have to please the new comers coming in, but I think it's time to start listening to local people on how we want things.*

*People in higher positions take advantage of us where we are at in our lives. People that come North for work and get all our houses, why can't they at least get some kind of cultural orientation so they can understand us better? Those people that are making our decisions don't know anything about us.*

*All these non-natives are getting all kinds of benefits and I've called NTI and told them they should be straightening up their policies to better serve their people and why are so many non-Inuit getting this and that. They told me they would look into it but that was over 10 years ago! But I remember!*

*Students get housing right way, people coming in, Government employees coming in, and they keep those houses open even if they don't have staff to put in them. It's always the people that are from here that are homeless. People that move here, oh they got house right away. How did they get house right away? You get mad and then you take it out on your leader and your leader says, "Oh, our people are alcoholics, they're drug addicts, they are this and that!" Why should we listen to that? When we are their people! We grew up here! We choose to live here! We choose not to move and other people do and they get priority!*



## Theme Anthology #9 – Climate/weather

*“In the wintertime, it’s cold right to the bone.”*

Although homelessness is a global issue, Inuit women face unique challenges that call for different solutions in the North. Homelessness tends to be invisible in Nunavut – people are not living on the street as you often see in southern cities, because the harsh weather prevents them from doing so. On the most frigid days of the year, the climate can reach 60 below zero, forcing penniless women to pile into local establishments, hoping to make a cup of coffee span the day, or gathering at a friend or family member’s already overcrowded home. The northern climate, combined with lack of available housing, is why homelessness in the Nunavut shows itself in the average number of people per dwelling. With no homeless shelters for women anywhere in the territory, women are left relying on family to house them from the cold.

*My parents, when I was nine years old and I was staying at my aunt’s, and they were drinking a lot, and one night I tried to go back there and they wouldn’t answer. Maybe they weren’t there, I don’t know, but I had to sleep under the house in December. I’m pretty sure that was not just one incident for me. In the wintertime, it’s cold right to the bone.*

*Winter is so much harder. Existing buildings that aren’t in use can be used to give women shelter from the cold at least. So many ladies are left out in the cold with no income when they separate from their partners. They have no income, no home, no hope of getting another house. I see so many situations like that and that’s why everyone’s house is so overcrowded.*

*I can sleep outside in the summer, but not in winter. I almost froze my feet off last winter.*

*I can walk around all summer until everyone wakes up. Nowhere to go in the winter and you can’t walk around because you’ll freeze. There’s so much more pressure to find somewhere to sleep in winter.*

*It’s hard in the summer but winter is worse. Living in the car is no problem in the summer, but in the winter I have to send my common-law to the men’s shelter, and I stay at a friend’s house.*

*During the summer, people go out camping most of the time so it becomes easier, but in the wintertime when everyone stays in it gets crowded. You can put a tent up in the summer, go fishing, berry picking, things to keep you busy to keep your mind off of your life. But you don’t get anything for free either, so you’re lucky if you have a tent.*

## Part VI – Findings: The Impacts of Homelessness on Women in the North

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### *What the Literature Says*

The picture of the impact of homelessness on the lives of women and those around them that emerges from the literature is as complex and interdependent as the factors that contribute to its occurrence. It is, indeed, difficult to separate the impacts of homelessness from its determinants, as these two sets of factors are often cyclical.

For example, most homeless women are in that condition, at least in large part, because of poverty. In turn, homelessness contributes to poverty. Women who have experienced a change in income-level gradually lose all their resources in a bid to retain shelter. Once they have given up their savings, car, their damage deposit that could be applied to other accommodation, etc., they have an increasingly difficult time creating the conditions that will allow them to generate sufficient income to meet their basic needs. If they become homeless, they are also likely to lose their children, and become classified as “single” with respect to income support from the government. They are then unable to afford appropriate accommodation, and the cycle continues.

If a woman chooses to engage in illegal behaviour (e.g. prostitution, drug trafficking, theft) in order to halt a downward spiral into complete poverty, the consequence can be criminalization, which then can result in homelessness. Women emerge from prison with few if any resources and a loss of a supportive social network. They face discrimination when they try to re-enter the housing or job market. There are few options for homeless people to generate legal income, and so the result can be further criminalization and a consequent deepening alienation from society. In this way, criminalization is both a contributor to homeless and an impact of living without shelter.

The above scenario is only one well-documented example of how poverty, homelessness and criminality become a mutually reinforcing cycle of causes and effects. Similar scenarios could be developed to illustrate the cause-and-effect relationships between addictions, mental health issues, family violence and the lack of safe, quality and affordable house. The review of the literature that was part of *A Study of Women’s Homelessness North of 60* uncovered the following list of impacts of homelessness on women and their families.

1. **Criminalization** – As described above, homelessness can place women in a situation where criminal behaviour (e.g. prostitution, shoplifting, drug trafficking) seems the only reasonable option for “managing her conditions of endangerment” (Balfour and Comack, 2006). (Petit et al., 2005; McCormick, 2004; Neal, 2004)

2. **Stigmatization; loss of dignity, self-respect, self-esteem** – Homeless people describe what it feels like to be the subject of other people’s ignorance and prejudice; they also describe the impact of trying to get help from government programs and services as well as some voluntary sector services; they equate having a home with being a “normal” member of society and the psychological effect of living without this basic “right” can be devastating. (Petit et al., 2005; McCormick, 2004; Bennetts and Green, 2004; Neal, 2004)
3. **Loss of a community support system, opportunities to gain skills and access to information** – By living “on the margins”, so to speak, homeless people cannot easily access information through channels such as the post, telephones or the internet; they do not have the type of social interaction with people that allows them to build social capital; and they are often far from family or other possible informal support systems (Petit et al., 2005; Wiebe and Keirstead, 2004; Bennetts and Green, 2004; Craig, 2005; Canadian Mental Health Association, 2004; Neal, 2004).
4. **Increase in risks related to health and safety** – Examples of such risks include exposure to violence, exposure to addictions, exposure to health risks such as increased risk of HIV-AIDS, hepatitis C, tuberculosis, exposure to extreme cold, increased stress (CMHC, 1997; McCormick, 2004).
5. **Loss of resources needed to meet basic needs** – Resources that can be lost include food, clothing, hygiene products, transportation, and shelter. Maintaining ownership of any resources that are acquired can also be a problem. (Seychuk, 2004; Craig, 2005; Canadian Mental Health Association, 2004; Neal, 2004)
6. **Impact on children** - e.g. Homelessness for children means being unable to participate in basic and important social interaction and physical recreation activities (because of associated costs, because they cannot invite peers to their home, and because they are constantly on the move); their schooling can suffer from constant moves; there is an increased danger of these children growing up to become homeless youth and adults (Wiebe and Keirstead, 2004; Canada Mortgage and Housing, 1997; Neal, 2004).

### ***The Findings of “The Little Voices of Nunavut”***

The same process as was described in the previous section on the determinants of homelessness was used to generate theme categories related to the impacts of homelessness. The four themes that emerged from the Nunavut data are as follows:

- |   |                                     |
|---|-------------------------------------|
| 1. Physical and mental health               | 3. Survival sex and criminalization |
| 2. Family separation and impact on children | 4. Losing all your resources        |

Although the wording used to categorize the impacts of homeless differ somewhat from that used in the literature, the correlation between these two lists is striking. The chart below

compares the four theme headings as they evolved in this Northern study with the themes that emerged from our literature review.

<b>Theme Headings for the Impacts of Women’s Homelessness</b>	
<b><i>Literature Review</i></b>	<b><i>Nunavut Study</i></b>
Criminalization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Survival sex and criminalization</li> </ul>
Stigmatization; loss of dignity, self-respect, self-esteem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Physical and mental health</li> </ul>
Loss of a community support system, opportunities to gain skills and access to information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Losing all your resources through the vicious cycle of homelessness</li> <li>• Family separation and impact on children</li> </ul>
Increase in risks related to health and safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Survival sex and criminalization</li> <li>• Losing all your resources through the vicious cycle of homelessness</li> <li>• Physical and mental health</li> </ul>
Loss of resources needed to meet basic needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Losing all your resources through the vicious cycle of homelessness</li> </ul>
Impact on children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family separation and impact on children</li> </ul>

The material below includes representative theme anthologies (composite statements) for each of the categories discussed by homeless women in the North in the context of their participation in this Study.

### **Theme Anthology #1 – Physical and Mental Health**

*“We are in crisis. We are in an emergency situation now. Where there’s homeless people, people are committing suicides, getting health problems, lots of overcrowding, lots of sickness!”*

One of the most detrimental consequences of homelessness is the impact it has on a woman’s physical and mental health. An obvious result of poverty is malnutrition. Women are often forced to go days without sustenance for their already weary bodies. Poor nutrition results in countless physical ailments, which further complicate the capacity of these women to better their position. Without proper resources (e.g. homeless shelters), personal hygiene is also a compromise women are forced to make.

*Living in car in the summer is no problem, but in the winter I have to send my common law to the men’s shelter, and I stay at a friends house. Living in car is still hard though, especially not having a bathroom to wash up.*

*From being so stressed out I'm bleeding inside. I've had my period for 3 months now and I'm waiting to see the doctor again today. When I talk to him, I tell him I'm tired because I couldn't find a place to sleep last night, and I'm just depressed all time.*

*It's hard when there is no food. I come from the old days when you were shy and embarrassed to ask for help or for money or food, so I can't even ask my son. I have one child and he's 28 and I'm embarrassed to ask him for food sometimes. I sometimes sneak in a hint and say, "Oh, I haven't had anything to eat." Sometimes you can go to relatives and have a little bit of bannock and some tea and that's great but, how long can you live like that? There are some days you just can't get through. I haven't eaten a meal in over a week. I just feel so uncomfortable to do that at my relative's.*

*I finally got my appointment date for surgery. I physically got myself sick worrying over my homelessness. It's hard too, when you can't even eat for a couple of days.*

Illness is also pervasive for women taking up residence in overcrowded conditions. Nunavut's dire overcrowding issue, combined with building design flaws, contributes to a variety of respiratory and communicable diseases (*Most Nunavut Homeless Suffer in Silence*, October 5, 2001). Overcrowded homes are breeding grounds for illnesses, as basic individual needs for wellness cannot be met. Anecdotal observations from the Nunavut Housing Corporation indicate that the homes with the highest numbers of occupants also tend to have the smallest square footage (Nunavut Housing Corporation and Nunavut Tunngavik Inc., 2004). According to the Edmonton Journal, medevacing people, especially babies, to hospitals in Iqaluit and the South due to respiratory problems is common. Most patients come from overcrowded homes, where showers are usually limited, and food, especially nutritious food, is scarce. (*Nunavut in Thick of Housing Crisis*, Edmonton Journal, November 24, 2005)

*I have tried to get help from housing. My family lives with another family. It's really overcrowded and that's bad enough, but now we have mould growing everywhere. I called Housing so many times to get it checked because it's making us all sick. Especially my kids.*

Overcrowding also has demonstrated a link to alcohol and drug use. Many women site this as a method of temporary escape from anxiety and frustration that breeds in overcrowded dwellings.

*Yes, I'm an alcoholic and I'll always be one. Yes, I'm a drug addict and I'll always be one. But that's not all I am. That's what they see me as no matter where I go and I just need help. I need an opportunity. All the crime and*

*drinking and drugs comes from the overcrowding. You just get frustrated. You go crazy.*

Continued feelings of worthlessness also affect a woman's mental health. Many women cite depression as a common emotional response to their unfavorable situations. Several also admitted to feeling suicidal. Women with children were particularly hard on themselves. Feeling as though they had failed at motherhood was the most painfully emotion they endured and often led them into severe depression.

*You're not an unfit parent. You just happen to be in a bad situation. The fastest thing they do is take your child away. That's the fastest solution. They have money to do this and that, take your kids and then you are really left with nothing. They'll take the only thing good in your life. Oh well, your child should be going to school but if they don't have a place to sleep, if you use all your energy going around all day looking for a place to rest, how can you have a good nights sleep and go to school and function all day! With no food, probably no breakfast, and you just can't!*

*Just because I'm homeless it made me feel worthless, like I'm not a good provider I'm not a good mother. I'm not doing my kids any good by keeping them. It stresses them out.*

*I feel like I wish I never had kids because we just stand outside in the cold. I feel they wish for a better mom.*

*Emotionally – it really hurts your mind trying to understand why this happened to you. You have no place to go. Not being able to trust anyone. It's emotionally draining. How am I ever going to get a good night's sleep? I can't think when I'm at work, I'm tired. I'm stressed out. Depressed.*

*We are in crisis. We are in an emergency situation now. Where there's homeless people, people are committing suicides, getting health problems, lots of overcrowding, lots of sickness! There are a lot of health problems associated with our conditions. Not just physical stuff but mental health as well. With the depression and suicide rates.*

## **Theme Anthology #2 - Family Separation and Impact on Children**

***“Their personalities have changed. They aren't the same anymore. They are angry. The stress is affecting them. Kids shouldn't feel stressed. They should have fun.”***

Extremely high birth rates are also characteristic of Northern communities. Canada Census information indicates that Nunavut's population increased by 8 percent between 1996 and 2001, with increases in some communities as high as 22 percent (Statistics Canada 2001, cited in

Nunavut Housing Corporation and Nunavut Tunngavik Inc, 2004:10). Census information also indicates that, "...the birth rate in Nunavut is consistently 25% or higher compared to a birth rate between 10.5% and 11.2% for the rest of the country" (ibid). Considering these statistics, it is no surprise that 90 percent of the women interviewed for the purpose of this study have children. The impact of a woman's homelessness on her children and the family as an entity is grave, and without immediate intervention, the future of Canada's newest territory is in jeopardy.

There is widespread agreement among child health experts that the first six years of life are a crucial stage in one's personal development. The physical health of children is undoubtedly impacted by a woman's homelessness or having to reside in overcrowded dwellings. "First Nations and Inuit children are considerably less healthy than their non-Aboriginal counterparts. For example, both populations are characterized by elevated levels of FAS/FAE, relatively poor nutrition and low birth-weights." (Stout & Kipling, 1999: no page no.) Also, according to this study,

*Ear infections and tooth decay are two other key problems affecting Inuit children's health. Inuit dental caries rates are extremely high, even among children as young as two, and they result from such factors as poor oral hygiene, inappropriate infant feeding habits and a lack of access to professional care. Even though tooth decay among Inuit children is not a life-threatening condition in and of itself, it is expensive to treat, and may affect children's ability to eat and speak. (ibid)*

Without access to adequate shelter, children of homeless women suffer academically. School counselors report children living in overcrowded conditions have an inability to concentrate in the classroom, no sense of security, poor nutrition, confused behavior based on the absence of routine, and constant worry about where they will be sleeping that night or how many people will share their room.

*I know for a fact the significance of this problem because I talk to a lot of young people who aren't sure where they are going to live or who is going to be there. Even if they themselves are not homeless, they often have people staying overnight at their house who are homeless. They are often going into a situation where they are forced to deal with people they don't know, with the threat of sexual or physical harm. The impact that has on their family life is huge. (High school guidance counselor)*

Many women reported negative personality changes in their children. They also lose interest in school, most often due to shame. Lack of sleep and hunger also dampen their desire to interact with other children.

*Their personalities have changed. They aren't the same anymore. They are angry. The stress is affecting them. Kids shouldn't feel stressed. They should have fun. I*

*have to argue with them all the time where their siblings are involved. They fight with each other, I think out of frustration.*

*School is hard for them when we are homeless. They don't get enough sleep. They are tired all the time. My daughter, she doesn't want to go to school, and there's no food to eat. They don't want to go hungry.*

*It's hard for them to get homework done with no privacy. They feel unwanted, embarrassed at school, worrying a lot. They have no interest in activities.*

*It's so hard when kids are involved. Some sleep on the floor and the next day there may not be any food for them to eat. It's an everyday thing of constant worry of children.*

*It puts a strain on the family. [My children] have no sense of security. They have lost trust in people. They aren't honest or respectful anymore. I mean, these are things you need when you're growing up*

*If they don't have a place to sleep – if you use all your energy going around all day looking for a place to rest, how can you have a good night's sleep and go to school and function all day? With no food, probably no breakfast, you just can't!*

*My kids turned out to be criminals. They never felt safe where they were staying. It hardened them.*

The lack of services for women with children raises questions about the priorities of government bodies. Over recent years, monies have been spent bettering educational facilities that provide respite for children for six hours a day and the opportunity to learn in a safe atmosphere. The reality, however, is that better infrastructure provides little benefit when children are forced to endure eighteen hours of overcrowded conditions that provide no adequate place to rest – two or three mattresses lining the floor per room—and no quiet place to complete homework. With Statistics Canada reporting that there are nearly 10,400 children under the age of 14 years in Nunavut, making up over 35% of the total population (Statistics Canada, 2001), it's clear that attention should be focused on the situation of children in a homeless situation. The future of the children of Nunavut will be difficult without access to their basic right for adequate shelter.

While years of catch-up are required to adequately increase public housing, access to a homeless shelter that women can turn to with their children could provide immediate relief for some families. The lack of such a resource often leads to family separation. Without the ability to provide shelter, several women were forced to leave their children with family members, adopt them into foster homes, or surrender them to social services.

*When you're homeless and you have children and they aren't with you, they don't understand that you are leaving them behind to protect them. They cry and*



*say, “I want to go with mommy!” I had no other option but to give them up. I know they are safe in a foster home.*

*The hardest part of being homeless for me was having to adopt out my children because I know I can’t care for them myself. It hurts me to see that they seem to like their foster parents better.*

*Right now I’m considering letting my daughter stay with friends. I know she’ll be ok. I don’t want to drag her around with me. Her friend’s parents said they would take her until I could get back on my feet, but it’s so hard to separate us. Really, really hard. For me, the hardest part was losing my kids. I didn’t have a home, so they were taken from me. The family services down south—that’s what we don’t have up here. Because you are homeless you can’t have your kid. It should not be like that. Society should be saying, “Let’s give her a small place of her own with her kid, let them bond together! They can get through this trying hard time as long as they are together.” But no, they are saying, “No, she can’t do it. Hey kids! Your mother can’t do this. You have to come with us.” It shouldn’t be like that.*

*I know my children. They aren’t happy with their alcoholic father. He’s just laughing at Nunavut justice because he fell through the cracks. I’ve been in and out of the women’s shelter for three years and I’m very emotionally drained because I feel like I won’t get my kids back. I was the one just given a garbage bag full of clothes.*

*My kids are affected a lot because their father has custody of them, and I don’t have contact with them at all. They are with him because I have no place of my own.*

*Being away from my children is so hard. I can’t take them with me because it’s not good for them. I have to do what’s best for them and sometimes they don’t understand that. They just want to be with me. Sometimes they think the parent doesn’t love them because they leave them, but it’s not that. It’s just the situation of homelessness. Oh, the things that happen to us when we are kids!*

*My son worries about things a child should never have to worry about. “Where we gonna sleep tonight, mom?”*

*It was really hard on my kids because you don’t really have to voice it. Like for instance, you’re living under somebody else’s roof, and if that person’s kids are being bad to my children, you really can’t say anything cuz if you do, you’re gonna be turned around and told to go out or it’s going to be a real conflict. So it’s really hard on the children, and it was hard on me too. My kids were being slapped around and carried around. They were just like little dolls. It was hard.*

*I have to run run, run, run and it has a horrible effect on them. They can't ever feel settled. They have no routine. That's important for kids, to have a routine.*

### **Theme Anthology #3 - Survival Sex And Criminalization**

*“You can always turn to men. They will always give a place to sleep for sex.”*

Measured by the number of persons charged, the rate of crime in Nunavut is over 6 times higher than the Canadian national average. The rate of reported assaults is 10 times greater and the rate of reported sexual assaults is 25 times greater than the national average. (Kitikmeot Law Centre, 2006). Kugluktuk, for example, has an adult population of about 750, yet in 2005, the Kugluktuk RCMP laid approximately 550 charges (Kitikmeot Law Centre, 2006). In Taloyoak, during the last Nunavut Court of Justice circuit, approximately 10% of the whole community was facing court charges (Kitikmeot Law Centre, 2006).

Poverty-stricken people are often forced to prostitute themselves in a variety of ways to meet the basic needs for survival. Women are abused in different ways than men, as women are often forced to engage in sexual relationships in exchange for accommodation. A community pastor expressed his concern by saying, “One girl told me she’s been prostituting herself since she was a teenager. There are young girls coming up learning this same thing and will eventually take her place. I’m really heartbroken for them. I see what they are forced to do to provide for themselves.”

Being without adequate shelter will cause people to make decisions they would not have made if they had the basic means of living. Desperate situations often cause women to choose desperate measures, whether it is engaging in unhealthy sexual relationships, or committing criminal offenses to assure the survival of their families. Women also turn to illegal substances to have a sense of reprieve from the anguish of daily life. There is a close correlation between substance abuse and unsafe sex. Rates of STD infection are extremely high and suggest that the entire sexually active population is at high risk (Stout and Kipling, 1999). Making choices that are not positive will therefore affect all members within the small, isolated communities in which Northerners reside.

*Safety is a big issue when you're homeless, and you're more vulnerable to violence. There are a lot of men that rape babies to grannies. That's one of the worst things in this town is rape. The men think we are only here for them.*

*Long as I'm safe and my kids are OK. But it's hard to be safe when you're on the street. Finding a safe place to sleep. It's scary being a woman. You can be violated so easy.*

*Turning to illegal options. If I was doing it, prostituting myself or selling drugs, I would have money. I admit I've thought about it.*

*You go with this man even though you don't want to. You don't love him you don't like him but he has a bed to sleep on. You have no choice but to follow him because you need a place.*

*Vulnerable to any kind of abuse in another person's house. Vulnerable to any man out there on the street.*

*Fast relationships just to get out. I've gone back to abuse just to have a home, and I'm sure lots of women are in the same situation. You can always turn to men. They will always give a place to sleep for sex.*

*Having to sleep in an alcoholic's house and getting kicked out when the bars close. If you're not willing to have sex – you have to go.*

### **Theme Anthology #4 – Losing all your Resources through the Vicious Cycle of Homelessness**

***“I know women and children who have had to sleep in dumpsters, curling up next to garbage to acquire heat from its decomposition.”***

A lack of basic amenities, such as food and adequate shelter, deprives women of the ability to develop self-esteem and capacity, jeopardizes their health and safety, and robs them of any hope of becoming stable members of the workforce. It is virtually impossible to function productively when your basic needs are not being met, when you have no place to rest or complete other simple daily tasks we often take for granted. You can provide skills training and healing circles, but if women are not able to meet their basic needs they cannot engage fully in any other activity—even if they are there in body—because in their minds they are worrying about where they are going to sleep tonight, how they are going to buy the next pack of diapers or get milk for their little ones.

*There are six people living in a three-bedroom house so we all have to share rooms. It's hard to get my own space and private time. I don't have any children but I still need space to myself. The in-laws control my life, my food and my space.*

*It's so hard going from place to place and having to ask family to stay with them. I am going through that right now. My son and I are living with my brother and his family and it's a one bedroom. It's really crowded, so then we start arguing and fighting. Everyone goes all over the place, so when it gets tense I have to find somewhere else to stay for the night. I won't go home for days. I just go from home to home, couch to couch, friends to friends. I'm so tired of that.*

*When I first came back from living in Yellowknife, my son and I went and lived in my brother's closet because there was nowhere else to go. We lived in that closet*

*for almost a year. He ended up having 6 kids and that was one of those single, one-bedroom units. You get situations like that all over.*

*My family house is crowded and I argue with my family at times. I can't get my own privacy and space. Everyone goes to my parents and when I buy groceries, it goes fast. It's frustrating not having any space of your own. A woman needs free time, time to be alone. You can't have that when you're homeless.*

*Some people say it's easier being homeless here in the summer, because parents go out on the land sometimes, or you can always put up a tent yourself, but you don't get anything for free. You're lucky if you have a tent.*

*Keeping track of your things is hard. No storage space for furniture, clothing and so on. I need privacy, like keeping woman stuff. I sleep on the floor with my son. How am I ever going to get a good night's sleep? I can't think when I'm at work. I'm tired. I'm stressed out. Depressed.*

*The hard part of not having a house is not to have my child play so much, not being able to do laundry all the time.*

*The hardest part of homelessness - not having washroom while on my monthly menstruation. Being sexually vulnerable to any man out there. When you just need basic stuff huh, you can't think of anything else.*

*Always a struggle finding a place to sleep every night. Hard having no bed, so you go with this man even though you don't want to, you don't love him you don't like him but he has a bed to sleep on. You have no choice but to follow him because you need a place.*

*No place to go. Not being able to trust anyone. I just want to find a place that's safe so I don't have to be afraid. Long as I'm safe and my kids are ok. But it's hard to be safe when you're on the street – you are vulnerable to any kind of abuse.*

*Sharing a room with your child when you are constantly moving from place to place. My child can't play and we can't have visitors. I have to send them to bed at a certain time because we have to sleep in shifts. They can't have fun – they have to be quiet most of the time, and it's hard for them to get homework done with no privacy.*

*Right now I'm not getting along with anybody. The weekend is the hardest time because my sibling likes to drink and then I get stuck babysitting while she gets loaded. And if I say no she gets made at me for weeks at a time. It's tiring.*

## Part VII – Findings: The Policy and Bureaucratic Practice Environment Related to Homelessness among Women in the North

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### *What the Literature Says*

The literature that was reviewed for this study was consistently critical of the role that the policy and bureaucratic practice environment at the municipal, provincial/ territorial and federal levels plays in creating the conditions that make it difficult for so many women to maintain adequate, safe and affordable housing. The key themes that emerged from this review can be summarized under the following nine categories.

1. **Income Support Policy and Practice** – Income support rates are not sufficient to cover the cost of increasing market rental rates (e.g. Kothari, 2006; Craig, 2005; Bennetts and Green, 2004; Kerr, Frost and Bignell, 2004; Townson, 2000; The Social Planning Council of Toronto, 2006). The policy of clawing back Child Tax Benefits from women on social assistance keeps them in poverty (e.g. Craig, 2005). Benefit rates as low as 28% of the poverty line<sup>18</sup> result in overcrowding, women having to forgo food and utilities to maintain housing, and children being excluded from school field trips, recreation, etc. Policy direction is aimed at removing recipients from welfare list (e.g. Savarese and Morton, 2005). Damage deposits are limited to one per lifetime (e.g. Craig, 2005). Employment insurance is often unavailable for women who have only been able to find temporary and/or part-time work or, if they do receive benefits, levels are inadequate to meet basic needs.
2. **Municipal government policies** – Urban renewal projects often displace people without ensuring that adequate replacement housing alternatives exist (e.g. Kothari, 2006). Federal housing policy leaves municipal government without the resources to respond to social housing needs (e.g. Connors, 2005).
3. **Child Protection Services** – Using uninhabitable or unsafe housing (e.g. in situations of domestic violence) as a justification to remove children from the custody of their mothers is essentially punitive and discriminatory (e.g. Kothari, 2006).
4. **Landlord/tenant regulations and their enforcement** – The lack of protection for tenants makes it easy for landlords to discriminate against women on the basis of their gender, family status, race and income and for landlords to evict tenants. Social assistance recipients are often forced to accept housing that is unsafe and unhealthy. (e.g. Kothari, 2006; Craig, 2005)

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<sup>18</sup> Rate for a single employable individual in Manitoba.

5. **Public housing policy** – Canada has one of the smallest social housing sectors of any Western nation (e.g. Hulchanski, 2002) with a small portfolio and the lack of integrated policy that binds federal and provincial jurisdictions to a continuum of program actions (e.g. Carter and Polevychok, 2004; Craig, 2005; Connors, 2005; CMHA, 2004; Kerr, Frost and Bignell, 2004; The Social Planning Council of Toronto, 2006). This policy direction is producing wait lists as long as ten years (e.g. Kothari, 2006). The 25% rule (i.e. public housing tenants must pay 25% of their income on rent) makes it hard to get out of the poverty trap (e.g. Bennetts and Green, 2004). Wage exemptions for low income workers who are also receiving social assistance can end up being a disincentive for working, and the red tape involved in getting the social assistance cheques wears people down (e.g. Kerr, Frost and Bignell, 2004).
6. **Policies around support for people with disabilities** – Income assistance for women with disabilities is out of step with daily living needs and their capacity to function and government service providers are misinformed about these realities (e.g. Wiebe and Kierstead, 2004).
7. **Policies related to the provision of addictions and personal development services** – There is a consistent lack of support for vocational and education opportunities that could lead to independence and self-improvement. The lack of childcare, transportation and training funds that would allow women access to existing programs creates additional barriers (e.g. Wiebe and Kierstead, 2004; Bennetts and Green, 2004; Kerr, Frost and Bignell, 2004). Services for addictions, health and mental health issues are inadequate (e.g. CMHA, 2004).
8. **Bureaucratic climate** – Homeless women complain about a lack of access to information about how to access programs and how to appeal unfair rulings, about the inaccessibility of workers, and about a lack of understanding and respect and a climate of suspicion within government programs (e.g. Wiebe and Kierstead, 2004; Bennetts and Green, 2004; Kerr, Frost and Bignell, 2004). Workers need to be allowed to develop services creatively (e.g. Craig, 2005; Bennetts and Green, 2004).
9. **Minimum wage rates** – Even a \$10/hour job is not sufficient to meet basic needs (e.g. Jackson, 2004; Craig, 2005).

### ***The Findings of “The Little Voices of Nunavut”***

When the interview and focus group data from this Nunavut study was coded and compiled, three primary actors were discussed:

1. Income support programs
2. Inuit organizations
3. Subsidized housing programs

A comparison between these themes and the findings of the literature review is presented in the following table.

<b>Theme Headings for the Policy and Bureaucratic Practice Environment related to Homelessness Among Women in Canada’s North</b>	
<b><i>Literature Review</i></b>	<b><i>Nunavut Study</i></b>
Income support policy and practice	Income support program
Municipal government policies	Inuit organizations
Child protection services	Income support programs
Landlord/tenant regulations and their enforcement	Subsidized housing programs
Public housing policy	Subsidized housing programs
Policies around support for people with disabilities	Income support programs
Policies related to the provision of addictions and personal development services	Inuit organizations
Bureaucratic climate	Income support programs Inuit organizations Subsidized housing programs
Minimum wage rates	Income support programs

The material that follows summarizes the observations of the homeless women and the service providers who work with them related to the bureaucratic policy and practice environment in Nunavut linked to the incidence and shape of homelessness.

### **Theme Anthology #1 - Income Support Programs**

*“People in high positions, like people in income support, are very quick to jump on your back. There is hardly anybody to lift you up.”*

Income support workers are seeing an alarming increase in clients across the Territory. According to information from the Nunavut Bureau of Statistics, data from 2004 suggests almost 50 percent of the entire population of Nunavut receives income support benefits. Ninety percent of women interviewed were on income support. The remaining 10 percent stated that they work full-time or part-time, produce and sell crafts, are supported by families, are not eligible for IS for some reason, or did not specify their source of income. In the communities that had available food banks and/or soup kitchens, the women utilized these resources as well to stretch their inadequate wages.

One of the biggest challenges with the income support program in Nunavut is the rate of staff turnover. There is a lot of burn-out in these positions. Within small communities income support workers may have to serve their own relatives. In no other jurisdiction in Canada would workers be expected to assess their mothers, fathers, brothers or sisters and subsequently turn them down for benefits. Services are therefore inconsistent, and staff training is not yet adequate.

After two months of receiving income support, a woman must engage in what is coined a “productive choice” or she is exited from the program. As one income support worker explained, “Income support is a program of last resort in all jurisdictions across the country, so there is an expectation that you are out there trying to improve yourself”. This is obviously a necessary element to the program, yet tragically flawed. These policies cannot possibly deal with the deep trauma these women have experienced as a result of homelessness.

The expectation that resources are shared is a cultural norm of Northern Inuit since they are heavily reliant upon family structures. Clients therefore have dependants, not just the immediate family, who are often not taken into account. When applying for the income support program, a woman who has children has to make them visible/present to be considered for additional benefits. Therefore, if a woman has children staying with family members because she is homeless, she is considered single and eligible for single benefits only. With a “single” classification, the monies issued cannot provide the stability the woman needs to get her children back. This suggests no real support exists to keep families together.

Income Support policy in Nunavut stipulates that almost all benefits be released through the local Northern stores. Women are issued only \$20 cash per head within her family. This is hardly enough to allow her to purchase clothing or other personal necessities outside of the Northern stores. This does not promote personal empowerment, and it also limits choice in terms of where to shop. The Northern Store headquarters is located in Winnipeg, so government allocated funds to income support recipients flow out of the community.

The income support program frequently finds itself overspent because of the desperate lack of public housing. Women with no income who should be able to apply for and obtain a public housing unit are being turned away because availability is low. Sometimes these women are put up in higher income housing. The women’s shelter in Iqaluit, for example, has been very proactive in finding adequate shelter for women in the private sector. This means, though, that the number of people living in privately owned apartment complexes is climbing, forcing the government to pay approximately \$3,000 per month for people who should be in \$60 public housing units.

In the following paragraphs, the women talk about their experiences with income support services.

*Income support does not help at all. When you have kids the money is just too small, and if you don’t go by their rules, they cut you off. No good. Oh yeah,*



*and they deduct everything! Even if you get money from your relatives, they deduct that too. Bingo earnings even!*

*Income support can only help a little with food, but it wasn't enough. I can't live on \$200 a month. What we need is income support on different levels like they have in the South. What we get is not even close to enough. They don't help like they should.*

*When you live in [the women's shelter] you aren't allowed to have social assistance. That's not much help. I'm a victim of abuse and now there's no way for me to get ahead. Housing and social services—just no good. No help at all.*

*We have it so technical now that they say, "Oh, it's not on my job description so we can't do it". It's so hard to get help. I mean, I have nothing. I am looking for work. I went to training even though I know I won't receive any assistance. I live off hand-offs from my parents and it's really depressing. I can't go on income support because I'm in a home where they can provide for me because they say my basic needs are being met. I feel like a little kid that I'm living with my parents at age 34. I can't go to the system because I'm under their guidelines.*

*People in high positions, like people in income support, are very quick to jump on your back. There is hardly anybody to lift you up. There are more people trying to push you down. People in those positions take advantage of us, where we are at in our lives. People that come up North for work and get all our houses, why can't they at least get some kind of cultural orientation so they can understand us better? The people making our decisions don't know anything about us.*

*Social services kicked me out when they found out I was living with someone and he refused to pay half the rent. Shouldn't they at least provide some housing while we are figuring things out? Where did they expect me to go?*

*I approached social services for help and they said I had to give up my kids. When I went to them for help, that was their idea of help, to take my kids. I might be homeless but we are still a family. It was very hard to get help, of any kind.*

## **Theme Anthology #2 - Inuit Organizations**

***"I've called NTI and told them they should be straightening up their policies to better serve their people, and why are so many non-Inuit getting this and that. They told me they would look into it but that was over 10 years ago. But I remember."***

*In 1993, the Inuit, the government of Canada and the government of the Northwest Territories signed the largest Aboriginal land claim agreement in Canadian history. At the same time, legislation was passed leading to the creation of a new territory of Nunavut on April 1, 1999. The new territory was to have a public government serving both Inuit and non-Inuit. (NTI website, 2005).*

Various private corporations were founded to guarantee that the lands claims agreement was upheld, and the rights of all Inuit persons preserved. The major corporations serving the Inuit people of Nunavut are the following. The Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated (NTI) represents the 21,000 Inuit of Nunavut (NTI website, 2005). Nunavut is subdivided into three regions, each having a standing Inuit organization under the NTI umbrella: The Qikiqtani Inuit Association (QIA), representing the interests of the Inuit of the Baffin Region, the High Arctic, and the Belcher Islands; Kitikmeot Inuit Association (KIA); and Kivalliq Inuit Association representing those respective regions respectively. The Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK), a Canadian-wide body, represents the four Inuit regions of Canada and has at heart the interests of the Inuit at the national level. All organizations have as their objective to work to improve living conditions, both socially and economically, for all Canadian Inuit.

All women interviewed had knowledge of the existence of the abovementioned organizations. While there seemed to be no problem with awareness, cynicism was an issue for the majority. Several women felt the organizations that were established to represent them were not communicating with the public, and information gathered was not easily accessible. The women expressed an increasing frustration with Inuit associations and felt racism was taking place against their own people. Their thoughts are depicted below.

*All these non-natives are getting all kinds of benefits. I've called NTI and told them they should be straightening up their policies to better serve their people, and why are so many non-Inuit getting this and that. They told me they would look into it but that was over 10 years ago. But I remember.*

*Students get housing right away, people coming in, government employees coming in. They keep those houses open, even if they don't have staff to put in them. It's always the people that are from here that are homeless. People that move here, oh they got a house right away. How did they get house right away? You get mad and then you take it out on your leader and your leader says, "Oh, our people are alcoholics. They're drug addicts. They are this and that." Why should we listen to that? We are their people! We grew up here and we choose to live here. We choose not to move and other people do, and they get priority.*

*All we want to do is voice our concerns without being judged upon. People on the boards do tend to look down on you. They judge you as a person and not as a member of our community that has real concerns. The same people are on every board and they are the ones that go to NTI meetings and they are drinking and*

*you hear about them all over Nunavut and it's so embarrassing and these are the men that are making our decisions for us!*

*I was in a relationship for 10 years where he had the attitude that, "Well, she's Inuk. I can get anything now. I can live with her and this is my house." Our own Inuit organizations are the ones protecting the non-Inuit.*

*Homelessness has been a problem ever since we've been here. It's been a problem for 50 years and it's gonna be a problem. Why don't they have a group working on this? Brainstorming is the best and we could find solutions! A place where everyone can go and look after the number one concern of everyone: homelessness!*

*I find it frustrating too that we are members of this community and when we write letters and voice our concerns, we know not to expect a response for at the very least two months, and we're lucky to get one at all.*

### **Theme Anthology #3 – Subsidized Housing Programs**

***"You wait forever for a house in Iqaluit. Years even. Lots of bad things happen in a year."***

The consensus Government of Nunavut was created on April 1, 1999, with Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit (IQ) as one of the primary principles. "IQ is the incorporation of Inuit values and beliefs into the day-to-day workings of the government" (Awa, 1999:8). The Bathurst Mandate, "a statement of values and priorities that guides and conducts the government and identifies the common objective of members," (GN website, 2006) was completed for Nunavut in August of 1999 with the principles of IQ in mind. The first of four components of this mandate is "healthy communities". The survival and success of Canada's newest territory "depends on the health of each of its physical, social, economic and cultural communities, and the ability of those communities to serve Nunavummiut in the spirit of Inuuqatigiittiarniq; the healthy inter-connection of mind, body, spirit and environment" (ibid).

A fundamental building block of a healthy community is access to adequate, suitable and affordable housing. The Inuit spirit has become eroded as people continually observe the failure of all levels of government to provide this basic right. "Public housing waiting lists continually exceed 1,000 families or about 3,800 persons" (Nunavut Housing Corporation, 2004:7). Not only is this information dated in respect to the vast population growth of Nunavut per year, but the Nunavut Housing Corporation has also demonstrated in its research that for every one person on the waiting list for housing, there are at least two more that do not qualify for a number of reasons, whether this is to do with a history of tenant damage, or simply with loss of hope which stops people from applying. Perhaps they are single, since single women and men fall to last priority and can wait anywhere from six to eight years for housing.

In the early 1990s, the Federal Government withdrew from the provision of social housing. At that point, Nunavut, which was still under the jurisdiction of the Northwest Territories, was barely keeping up with the growing demands for public housing. Over a two-year period, all funding for new social housing was dropped, which compounded the dire situation Nunavummiut face today. “3000 public housing units are needed immediately just to bring overcrowding on par with the rest of Canada” (Nunavut Housing Corporation, 2004:9). Again, for the reasons stated in the above paragraph, these figures likely under representative the current situation. The economy of this very young territory also contributes to homelessness and overcrowding. There is no strong wage economy. Yet a healthy housing industry could help create that and open up other areas of choice. This problem can only be addressed by intervention through Federal programming with an influx of money for shelters, transitional housing, and affordable housing.

In terms of poverty, women are constantly on the verge of being homeless. If they live with their parents, as many of the interviewees do, their parents have no way of passing on a legacy to their offspring when they pass away. The children are required to leave the premises. Therefore, the comforts of a “family home” can never exist in public housing. The home is only associated with those whose names are on the tenancy agreement, offering no permanence or security.

Nunavut is unique in that there is no continuum of housing. There are six safe shelters for abused women across the territory, and then the jump is right to public housing. There is no transitional housing, no affordable housing, no homeless shelter, no rooming options available whatsoever. Several of the interviewees have cycled from an abusive situation in a public housing unit into a safe shelter, and when their term has expired, back into the same public housing unit. When asked about available resources, the women expressed a deep-seated frustration concerning vacant buildings and empty government staff housing units. The army barracks in various communities were mentioned continuously, as they remain empty for the majority of the year. These women are not asking for much, simply a roof over their heads and protection from the cold winter climate. They feel that the option of better utilizing available resources is not being adequately explored.

The desperate housing situation, which results in women who have lost their housing or for whatever reason simply cannot obtain any lining the floors in homes that are not their own, becomes a strain on the family, places pressure on the homeowner, and puts Nunavut women at a higher risk for alcohol and drug abuse as they are looking for sources of escape

What follows are the sentiments of the women toward a government that pledged the provision of better opportunities for Inuit, and their failure to make good on that promise.

*Homelessness has been a problem ever since we've been here. It's been a problem for 50 years and it's going to be a problem. Why don't they have a group working on this? Brainstorming is the best and we could find solutions! A*

*place where everyone can go and look after the number one concern of everyone: homelessness!*

*There's so much favoritism for white. Qallunaat are taking over our land. They get houses immediately. The rest of Canada thinks Inuit are second class citizens and what we say and what we think doesn't matter. The government didn't keep their promises to the Inuit. Where are the houses they promised us? If they think the housing situation is different now, they are wrong. It's still there. It's getting worse.*

*Why not make a homeless shelter out of the condemned buildings? Something is better than nothing! All the housing units we have here are for college students or government employees, and there are empty buildings here that people could use to sleep in, and it's sad! Just look at how many government units are empty!*

*In the bigger centers, why don't they have some kind of building where women can go? Not just if they are being abused, but if they are homeless or with their children. Anything! I know it's money but it has to start somewhere.*

*Why can't we have a shelter like the one in Yellowknife? They keep you there until you can get back on your feet. The one here? You go there and you're only there for a night. You have to leave the next day. Just until your abusive partner sobers up. There has to be a place where you can go until you get on your feet.*

*There are existing buildings that aren't in use that can be used to give women shelter from the cold at least. Even if we utilized the women's safe shelter better, like maybe as a lodge?*

*They have shelters here for men, but nothing for women. I wish I could go to the shelter, but they won't let me sleep there because I'm not being beaten up. Just give us a roof to sleep under! We don't need much, just shelter from the cold.*

*I couldn't get my name on the housing list. The waiting lists are so long because there isn't enough housing. You wait forever for a house in Iqaluit. Years even. Lots of bad things happen in a year.*

*I was on the waiting list for housing for two and a half years and I was living at the women's shelter at the time.*

*I live with my parents. I still haven't got a house. There's just a lack of housing options for parents. Single parents are usually frowned upon. We are at the bottom of the waiting list for housing.*

*I have never had my own home. I can't afford to live here. The rent is too high. There's not enough public housing. There are few houses in the communities.*

*We need more houses being built. It's totally out of our control that we are homeless. We have no chance to get ahead, to pick up the pieces of our lives.*

*There are no houses available here in Taloyoak. There are only a few houses built here each year. There are so many Nunavut women being homeless because there aren't enough houses.*

*The ladies are left out in the cold with no income when they separate from their partners. They have no income, no home, no hope of getting another house. I see so many situations like that and that's how everyone's house is so over-crowded.*

*Like, if you get kicked out down South you have so many options, but up North, there are only so many houses, so many buildings you can go to. There is nothing else. You can't go anywhere, there is nothing!!*

*The family services down South, that's what we don't have up here. Because you are homeless you can't have your kid. It should not be like that. Society should be saying "Let's get her a small place of her own with her kid and let them bond together. They can get through this trying hard time as long as they're together. But no, they are saying, "No, she can't do it. Hey kids, your mother can't do this you have to come with us." It shouldn't be like that.*

*There's probably not a lot that will be done. We will never get a house and you can't change it unless they look at how housing is done in Nunavut.*

## **Part VIII – Findings: The Service Environment in the Territories designed to reduce Homelessness and to Mitigate its Harmful Impacts**

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### ***What the Literature Says***

It is not always easy to draw a line between the policy and bureaucratic environment and the services that are their visible expression. There is, therefore, some overlap between this section and the previous one. For example, the central role that the inadequate level of income support payments play in creating homelessness and its many harmful impacts is largely dealt with in the previous section on policy and bureaucratic practice, although the attitude of some income support workers is brought forward in this section.

Some clear trends were evident in the literature related to the effectiveness of the services that have the aim of reducing homelessness among women, preventing women at risk of homelessness from losing their homes, and reducing the harm experienced by homeless women. The findings of the sources reviewed for this study can be organized into the following categories.

1. **Inadequate stock of adequate and affordable housing** – The retreat of governments from active involvement in social housing and dramatically increasing private market rental rates are producing a critical and growing shortage of housing, especially for low-income individuals and families (e.g. CMHC, 2003; CMHA, 2004; Kappel Ramji Consulting Group, 2002; The Community Social Planning Council of Toronto, 2006; Kerr, Frost and Bignell, 2004; Bennetts and Green, 2004; Jackson, 2004; Kothari, 2006; Connors, 2005; Carter and Polevchuk, 2004; Craig, 2005; Neal, 2004).
2. **Inadequate or inappropriate services for homeless women and families as well as those at risk of becoming homeless** – Available services for legal aid, counselling, life skills training, parenting support, support for refugees and other recent immigrants, culture-specific services, mental health, physical health, fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, addictions, etc. are not adequate (e.g. CMHC, 2003; Kappel Ramji Consulting Group, 2002; CERA, 2002; The Community Social Planning Council of Toronto, 2006; Wiebe and Keirstead, 2004; Bennetts and Green, 2004; Craig, 2005). Services are more geared toward women living on the streets or in shelters than women experiencing “hidden” homelessness. Services may be difficult to access (because of location, hours, a lack of accommodation for individuals with disabilities, etc.). (e.g. Kappel Ramji Consulting Group, 2002) Girls and young women have few resources targeting their needs (e.g. Seychuk, 2004; McCormick, 2004; CERA, 2002; Kothari, 2006; Finton and Kramer, 2005 McDowell and Madsen, 2001).
3. **Inadequate funding for shelters and other types of services** – Just meeting the basic health and safety needs of clients can use the whole budget, leaving nothing for support

services, even though many clients have moderate to serious psychiatric, mental health and addictions issues (e.g. Kappel Ramji Consulting Group, 2002).

4. **Emergency and transitional housing are not adequate** – Shelters are generally geared exclusively to women fleeing abuse. Women who have been evicted or have lost their homes for other reasons have no place to go. Services in shelters and emergency hostels are not adequate to meet the varied and complex needs of homeless women. Women are often required to leave shelters and hostels after a prescribed period of time, even though no suitable housing may be available. Shelters and hostels may not be able to provide adequate nutrition, safety or hygiene. (e.g. Kappel Ramji Consulting Group, 2002; Kothari, 2006)
5. **Lack of coordinated service delivery** – Individualized, client-centered approaches are needed, but are rarely available. These approaches require well-trained staff, adequate funding, and interagency cooperation. There are often gaps for women being discharged from hospital or moving out of shelters. (e.g. Kappel Ramji Consulting Group, 2002; Finton and Kramer, 2005)
6. **Judgmental attitudes and discriminatory behaviour on the part of service providers** – Homeless women report that they sometimes do not feel respected or listened to, that rules related to access to services seems arbitrary and punitive, and that services do not always match needs (e.g. Kappel Ramji Consulting Group, 2002; Kerr, Frost and Bignell, 2004; Savarese and Morton, 2005).

### ***The Findings of “The Little Voices of Nunavut”***

When the interview and focus group transcripts for this study of homelessness among Northern women was completed, the following two overarching themes emerged.

1. Lack of specialized services and service effectiveness
2. Food security

These themes can be correlated to the categories derived from the literature review as depicted in the following table.

<b>Theme Headings for the Service Environment in the Territories Designed to Reduce Homelessness and to Mitigate its Harmful Impacts</b>	
<b><i>Literature Review</i></b>	<b><i>Nunavut Study</i></b>
Inadequate stock of adequate and affordable housing	• Lack of specialized services and service effectiveness
Inadequate or inappropriate services for homeless women and families as well as those at risk of becoming homeless	• Lack of specialized services and service effectiveness



Inadequate funding for shelters and other types of services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of specialized services and service effectiveness</li> <li>• Food security</li> </ul>
Emergency and transitional housing are not adequate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of specialized services and service effectiveness</li> <li>• Food security</li> </ul>
Lack of coordinated service delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of specialized services and service effectiveness</li> </ul>
Judgmental attitudes and discriminatory behaviour on the part of service providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of specialized services and service effectiveness</li> </ul>

The theme anthologies that emerged from the Study’s interviews and focus groups are presented below.

### **Theme Anthology #1- Lack Of Specialized Services and Service Effectiveness**

*“Our voices are so little they can’t hear them.”*

A community pastor described the visible face of homelessness in his community in these words. “I see about six of them, homeless women, day and night. 7:30 in the morning, walking the streets, sometimes together, sometimes alone. When I walk my dog at 10:30 at night, they are doing the same thing.”

The biggest gap in services is the absence of a homeless shelter. There are currently no shelters operating in the territory of Nunavut for homeless women with or without children. Six safe shelters operate across the territory but, according to their mandates, they can accept clients only if they are currently fleeing abuse.

*We have an intake criteria of violence. It’s a tough call sometimes because women often find themselves homeless because of their violent situation, but we only have so much funding. In accepting homeless women who did not fit the criteria, we have run out of funding before the end of the year. (Shelter worker).*

Women talk about their situation in the following words.

*Why can’t we have a shelter like the one in Yellowknife? They keep you there until you can get back on your feet. The one here? You get there and you’re only there for a night. You have to leave the next day. Just until your abusive partner sobers up. There has to be a place where you can go until you can get back on your feet.*

*I thought about hiring someone to beat me up, so then I can stay at (women's shelter). I know it sounds crazy but that's what desperation does to your mind when you have no place to go.*

*I'm sorry I am having such a hard time thinking about anything else other than where I'm going to sleep tonight. I can't go to the shelter' cuz I'm not being beaten up. It's the only thing on my mind.*

*I had a good experience at the [safe] shelter. The women's shelter really helped me. Every month they helped me fill out forms for housing, different applications to different places. Somehow they eventually got a house for me in my own name! Now I have other homeless women coming to live with me. I don't mind that' cuz I've been there. I know how hard it is.*

*They have a shelter here for men but nothing for women. It's because it was talked about, put in the news, put out there and they did it right away. But women have needed stuff for so long, but our voices are so little they can't hear them.*

*It's hard to find a place to sleep, especially when you have children. Women are always the ones with children. Why don't we have a family shelter? At least in the bigger centers, why don't they have some kind of building where women can go? Not just if they are being abused, but if they are homeless or with their children. Anything! I know it's money but it has to start somewhere!*

*Just give us a roof to sleep under. We don't need much, just shelter from the cold.*

The absence of transitional housing for women leaving safe shelters also plays a big role in women's homelessness. Entering a shelter can be a very traumatic event for women, and after their maximum stay expires, the lack of viable options finds them back in the same dwelling where the abuse happened in the first place. To the women it seems like a simple matter of government priorities. Nunavut has army barracks that remain closed for the majority of the year and cost three-quarters of a million dollars to maintain, while the rate of overcrowding (and thus, homelessness) is almost 40 percent higher than the national average. They call for available resources to be used more effectively to better serve Nunavummiut.

*I've been in and out of the women's shelter for three years and I'm very emotionally drained. It was easier being homeless in Ottawa. They have better shelters.*

*I wish I could go to shelter, but they won't let me sleep there because I'm not being beaten up. Can't we utilize the women's shelter better? Maybe as a lodge?*

*You know that women's shelter? It's good but you can only stay there one night then you have to go back. It eats you up inside knowing how it affects your children. All of this healing stuff I have going on, I feel like I'm the youth here because my children have to lift me up.*

*We have an intake criteria of violence. It's a tough call sometimes because women often find themselves homeless because of their violent situation. But we only have so much funding. In accepting homeless women who did not fit the criteria, we have run out of funding before the end of the year. We work diligently with homeless women to find a solution for them, but we cannot accept them. (Shelter Worker)*

Another existing gap is staff training. Often staff working in shelters, addiction/counseling services and so on are not trained to deal with problems of magnitude described in this Study. It was also mentioned throughout this research by the staff of the service agencies that various programs are often dependant on an individual person. There are no clear guidelines for these services from government, and capacity needs to be built in order to ensure continuation of the service if the operating manager relocates or changes occupations. There also exists a problem with confidentiality in existing services. Nunavut communities are sparsely populated and heavily influenced by family structures, making anonymity a challenge. If we are dealing with a small community, there seems to be a need for support systems to exist outside, as people within tend to be too intensely involved.

*I don't like it when people from my wellness center just want to sit and gossip. "Oh yeah, I took her kids away and she's not a good mother." That's why I don't want to come here. Yet this should be the most healthiest place without people judging me as soon as I walk in.*

The Arctic College student housing policies can also present challenges for female students. Students in the family housing who are continuing their program after the summer break can retain their housing. The residence for single students is closed from the end of June until the end of August, and is normally available only until the end of April when classes finish. During the summer months, these units remain empty. If women are not willing or able to go home over the summer, they can end up on the streets. For these women, improving themselves through education is a challenge that is tragically increased by their homelessness.

*I was evicted from student housing when I switched courses from nursing to mental health. Nursing provided student housing. The other course did not. The College evicted me and my young son before we could find another house. We still haven't.*

Services such as Tukisiniarvik in Iqaluit, informally known as the Friendship Center, provides essential services to the city's homeless population, such as resume preparation and employment information, a reference book on where to find services within the community, and

personal hygiene facilities such as laundry machines and showers. The success of services like this has been phenomenal. However, it has regular hours of operation and when the doors close at the end of the day, the women find themselves back on the street. “From 2002 to 2004, the city of Iqaluit spent \$1,302,780.00 on eight programs designed to help homeless people make changes in their lives to help them find jobs, homes and self esteem” (*Iqaluit Homeless Money Gets Mixed Results*, Nunatsiaq News, July 9 2004). Only three of the eight were successful. The reason initiatives failed seems obvious. It is difficult for people to access existing programs if they do not have the basic inherent right of secure housing. There simply are no services one could provide that could ever offset the shortage of housing.

*I can tell you what we need—a transitional home for women. That would be a place where women can go until they get their situation in order (Ed Picco, Minister of Homelessness)*

Services can only be as effective if funding is secure. Funding to the voluntary sector is often inconsistent and unstable. Several institutions in the voluntary sector are forced to apply for funding from many sources and to constantly have fundraisers just to function from week to week. The bottom line remains that the voluntary sector and existing services operate to the best of their ability. The existing safe shelters have been proactive in helping women transition into their own housing units by partnering with private developers/rentals agencies. Their capacity, along with that of all services operating within the service sector, remains vulnerable to shifting government priorities, however.

*There used to be a lady that ran a food bank here but she left town. She was really good community-wise. It makes me so mad those people that run for council that promise us all these things, especially for our kids, like a breakfast program, and as soon as they get elected it's like, where are those promises? They have a cushy job now and we still don't have a breakfast program. They forget about all the little people.*

*Every year we have to re-apply, and every year we're not sure if we're going to get any money. That's what happened to the last society that ran the shelter. They had it for years and then they got stuck. Government ended their contract. We can't even get five-year contracts. We've asked for that but we can't get it. The building we are renting from, we have a lease agreement that's five years, but what happens if our funding gets cut? That's the story for almost every service provider in Nunavut. (Community pastor).*

## **Theme Anthology #2 - Food Security**

***“It's hard when you can't even eat for a couple of days. I am scared all the time trying to get enough food, especially with a kid on the way.”***

Inconsistent and inadequate funding makes the operation of food security services in Nunavut a grueling challenge. Continuation of services has also been a stumbling block, as the operation of programs is often reliant upon a single individual. There is inadequate support for programs such as soup kitchens and food banks. The turnover rate in services offered creates a problem with awareness. Women often do not know which resources are available to them. If they get comfortable utilizing a particular program, and it is eventually withdrawn, they are less likely to make use of another.

Although program to assist women to become more self-reliant exist, they are often underutilized. An income support worker explained the situation as follows. “We have all kinds of training programs that are sponsored, not only by the Federal government but by the Department of Education and Income Support, but we’re not getting the numbers. Very few women are taking advantage of it.” The problem may well be that women have lost all hope in the system that was allegedly built to assist them. If the government is willing to offer various training programs, they must recognize that until a woman is appropriately housed and fed, she simply cannot avail herself of these opportunities.

The provision of food is one of the biggest challenges faced by the homeless. With little income, it is a constant daily struggle to find their next meal. The only obvious difference to these women between a healthy and unhealthy choice is the price, and food with no nutritional value provides a greater quantity at a lesser cost. A poor diet inevitably leads to various health complications, which further hinders a woman’s capacity. A woman often has many mouths to feed. She will go hungry herself to feed her children.

The feelings of disempowerment experienced by these women when they continually fail to feed their children and themselves are captured in their sentiments below.

*It’s hard when there is no food. I come from the old days when you were shy and embarrassed to ask for money or food so I can’t even ask my son, I have on child and he’s 28 and I’m embarrassed to ask him for food sometimes. I sometimes sneak in a hint and say, “Oh, I haven’t had anything to eat.” Sometimes you can go to relatives and have a little bit of bannock and some tea and that’s great but, how long can you live like that? There are some days you just can’t get through.*

*It’s hard when you can’t even eat for a couple of days. I am scared all the time trying to get enough food, especially with a kid on the way.*

*I haven’t eaten a meal in over a week. I just feel so uncomfortable doing that at my brothers.*

*I use social services and the soup kitchen to eat mostly. Going to your sisters or your brothers and collecting a little bit of food from them helps too.*

*Everyone goes to my parent’s house and when I buy groceries, it goes fast.*

*[My daughter] doesn't want to go to school when there's no food to eat.*

*[My children] don't want to go to school anymore because they don't get any sleep and they don't want to go hungry. Feeding our children is the biggest challenge.*

## Part IX – Findings: Relevant Best Practice

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### ***Best Practice Features Identified in the Literature***

Although there are no “best practice” case studies or literature references for Canada’s North, the features of best practice case studies from other parts of Canada are informative. The following sources were particularly helpful in compiling the summary that follows: CMHC, 1997; CMHC, 1999a; CMHC, 1999b; CMHC, 1999c; CMHC, 2002a; CMHC, 2002b, CMHC, 2003a; CMHC, 2003b; CMHC, 2004; Connors, 2005; Callaghan, 2005; CMHA, 2004.

This section categorizes the features of the best practice program initiatives reviewed for this study that are aimed at reducing homelessness, especially for women and their children. Please note that there is some repetition in the categories listed here, since a feature such as flexible housing, for example, is relevant to the category that discusses housing options as well as the one that addresses the needs of special populations.

The eleven broad categories of features of best practice program initiatives are listed below. More information about each of them is provided in the material that follows.

- Best practice offers appropriate housing options.
- Best practice offers adequate and appropriate emergency shelter.
- Best practice offers a variety of supported housing options.
- Best practice offers transitional housing as part of the continuum of housing options.
- Best practice reduces poverty.
- Best practice facilitates appropriate support for homeless women and their children.
- Best practice ensures access to the services to which the homeless are entitled.
- Best practice involves the homeless in the decisions that affect them.
- Best practice uses an integrated services model.
- Best practice addresses immediate needs while also working toward systemic change.
- Best practice engages the broader community in finding long-term solutions.

#### **1. Best practice offers appropriate housing options**

- a. Housing quality* - Like other people, the homeless value choice, privacy, safety, autonomy and control. Most prefer to live alone or with their immediate family in a house or multi-room apartment. Housing must be affordable, well-maintained, healthy, adequate in size, and safe.

- b. Access to community services* - Housing options should provide good access to the community in a safe area with a range of services and amenities such as public transportation and shopping.
- c. Part of the neighbourhood* - Housing should fit into the neighbourhood to avoid the stigma of “special” housing.
- d. Clear information* – People feel empowered and secure when there is clear communication about how they can act on their rights as tenants, when they understand the rules and regulations that affect them, and when they understand any changes in the arrangements that affect them.
- e. Flexibility* – Housing options need enough flexibility that they can accommodate changing needs, abilities and preferences. Options must also be able to accommodate people with disabilities and other special needs.

## **2. Best practice offers adequate and appropriate emergency shelter**

- a. Low-demand respite shelters* are needed for chronically homeless women (who often suffer from addictions, intergenerational trauma, domestic violence, and perhaps mental illness).
- b. Respond to all types of crises* - Emergency shelter needs to be available to all women in crisis, not just those fleeing current domestic violence.
- c. Gender and culture-sensitive* (especially for Aboriginal women) *models* are needed.
- d. More shelters* - Enough shelters are needed to alleviate current overcrowding.
- e. Adequate funding* - Shelters need to have enough funding to provide safe, healthy care and provide support adequate services (e.g. counselling, respite child care, referrals, life planning).

## **3. Best practice offers a variety of supported housing options**

- a. Best option for some sub-groups* - The needs of some groups are best met through supported housing options (e.g. those with serious mental illness or a range of disabilities, those experiencing catastrophic crisis, those suffering from extreme intergenerational trauma). Some individuals within these groups may never be able to live completely independently. Supported housing can maximize independence, reduce homelessness, hospitalization and reliance on other services.
- b. Not-for-profit housing* – This option can create a variety of housing options (from rooms to detached homes) through the establishment of housing corporations. Besides creating accommodations, these corporations can provide services such as group and home insurance and accounting, group purchasing, and social services.



#### 4. Best practice offers transitional housing as part of the continuum of housing options

- a. Sub-groups who benefit* most from transitional housing include many characteristics of the homeless women population:
- those recovering from trauma,
  - those with a background of multi-generational poverty and the lack of a supportive social network
  - young mothers and pregnant teenagers
  - those who are leaving institutions with little or no independent living experience
  - immigrants
  - those needing education and job skills
  - those who have on-going service needs because of mental or physical health problems, disabilities, addictions, or HIV-positive status
- b. Characteristics of effective transitional housing programs* – They should provide a safe, supportive environment where residents can overcome trauma, begin to address the issues that led to homelessness or kept them homeless, and begin to rebuild their supportive network. They are more long-term, service-intensive and private than emergency shelters, but still have a time of limit of somewhere between three months and one year.
- c. Service goals* include obtaining employment or upgrading educational skills, improvements in parenting and household management skills, psychological wellbeing, social skills, family relationships, reduced hospitalizations, and maintaining sobriety.
- d. Complement permanent housing options* – transitional housing programs can only be successful when there are permanent options to move into.
- e. Gender and culture-sensitive* (especially for Aboriginal women) *models* are needed – Sexual harassment can be a problem in mixed-sex buildings and many women prefer having other women for neighbours.
- f. Child friendly* – Children who have experienced homelessness need services and support. Housing options need to take into account the needs of children.

#### 5. Best practice reduces poverty

- a. Rental supplements* – This is a cost-effective way to assist low-income women to access and maintain shelter. It is demonstrated to be a less expensive and more satisfactory strategy than providing services to women through shelters. Rental supplements can provide quick support to those in greatest need and shorten public housing wait lists, since the supplements allow women to access private market accommodation.
- b. Adequate income support levels* – A great deal has already been said in this report about the contribution that inadequate levels of income support payments have on homelessness

- among women. Many women begin their journey toward homelessness by doing without food or other necessities in order to cover the rent, and then finally missing enough rent payments to be evicted. Other women are simply unable to find any accommodation that they can afford. Still others cannot scrape together the damage deposit and the first month's rent.
- c. Help when women face an unanticipated crisis* – Divorce, separation, losing a partner, loss of a job, serious illness in yourself or a family member—all these can lead to women losing their homes and entering the cycle of homelessness from which it gets increasingly difficult to escape.
  - d. Economic development initiatives* – Some programs link economic development with housing programs (e.g. gardens, convenience stores, catering, etc.).
  - e. Minimum wage levels* that can cover basic costs
  - f. Employment Insurance criteria* that take into account the part-time, contract work that many women are forced to accept
  - g. Guaranteed livable income* – A growing advocacy movement on women's affairs is calling for a guaranteed livable (or basic) income policy. This is an unconditional and universal income, administered by federal governments to ensure that no person's income falls below what is necessary for health, life and dignity.

## **6. Best practice facilitates appropriate support for homeless women and their children**

- a. Case management* – The individual needs of clients are addressed through trusting relationships with case managers and other professionals (income support workers, mental health professionals, medical professionals, legal aid workers, etc.). Support is flexible and targets specific needs rather than following rigid program criteria.
- b. Peer support* – People who share specific experiences and challenges can often help each other in ways that professionals cannot. Peer support can be informal and can also be organized through such activities as self-help initiatives, drop-in programs, or recreational, educational and volunteer programs.
- c. Support from family and friends* – Aboriginal women who move into urban areas often lose their extended family network. In some instances this support system has to be rebuilt as the circumstances that bring a woman to homelessness often include the fracturing of supportive and healthy family relationships and friendships (e.g. domestic abuse, addictions, mental illness).
- d. Community networks* – Bridging social capital (i.e., creating links between marginalized members of society and those with more resources) has proven to be a strong strategy for creating the opportunities that the poor need to change their circumstances (e.g. find

appropriate housing or secure employment). Best practice housing projects have high community involvement and buy-in.

## **8. Best practice ensures access to the services to which the homeless are entitled**

- a. Access to information* - Since homeless people often have very limited access to the information they need to access services or to demand their rights (e.g. they may not have telephones or email/internet access, they may have barriers to literacy, they may have conflictual relationships with service providers), they miss opportunities that could improve their situation or they get taken advantage of.
- b. Access and maintenance of benefits to which people are entitled* – The homeless and those at risk of homelessness face other barriers to accessing services besides lack of information (e.g. lack of transportation, lack of an address to which information and benefits can be sent, discriminatory or disrespectful attitudes on the part of service providers) that need to be addressed.
- c. Minimum barriers to services* – Many current government policies are unrealistic and trap women in homelessness (e.g. only covering a damage deposit once for any one client, not providing childcare and transportation allowances for up to six months after a client begins to receive social assistance, providing accommodation allowances that are lower than market rates, designating 18-year olds as independent). Programs need the flexibility to support women in their efforts to get and maintain adequate shelter. They also need tolerance for a range of behaviour, because some homeless people do not fit in very well in many contexts.

## **8. Best practice involves the homeless in the decisions that affect them**

- a. Housing program management and conflict resolution* - Opportunities to participate in the management of housing complexes and the resolution of problems and/or conflicts when they arise need to be offered to tenants.
- b. Respectful caring and client engagement* encourages people to grow and change and encourages hope in the face of feeling overwhelmed.
- c. Volunteer involvement* is a very successful model for building life and employment skills among homeless women. Serving on the board, on-going committees or ad hoc working groups are options. Supporting research and evaluation activities also provides useful avenues for upward social mobility, as they help develop a range of useful skills for community work.
- d. Regular input* – Town hall or house meetings offer an effective model for client involvement.
- e. Employment opportunities* – Work is a very motivating form of involvement, especially if it is matched with client interests and capacities. Work within the housing/service

agency is more likely to be successful than work in the wider community, since the agency has greater control over internal jobs. Some of these jobs can focus on building design, construction and renovation. Training and mentorship are important components of this approach.

- f. Creative activities* – These tend to work best when they are linked to concrete action in the community or to advocacy.
- g. Flexibility in the face of changing needs* - The needs of women change as they work toward life plans. Accommodating these changes requires constant dialogue and engagement.

## **9. Best practice uses an integrated services model**

- a. Continuum of care* – Effective support is essential to enable homeless persons to move along the service spectrum from high need to greater independence (from emergency support; to long-term, supportive and structured living; to independent living; to after-care services). This care needs to be holistic and individualized. The flexibility to create innovative services where gaps exist is an important aspect of this approach.
- b. Women with serious addictions* should be offered assistance in harm reduction or residential treatment facilities and receive follow-up care, including supportive housing options.
- c. Women being discharged from institutions* (such as hospitals and jails) need a choice of supportive housing to prevent them from ending up in emergency shelters.
- d. Range of services* – Examples of useful services include one-on-one support; referrals to community resources (e.g. housing, food, clothing, free furniture, counselling and advocacy); referrals to self-help and support groups; addictions support services on site; discussion groups focused on life skills issues; visits and presentations from relevant community agencies; medical services on site; daily meals; access to computers and training in how to use them.
- e. Flexibility to address emerging needs* – For example, if gang activity is targeting girls and young women, early intervention is important to keep these young people from ending up on the streets or with serious addictions or other mental health issues.

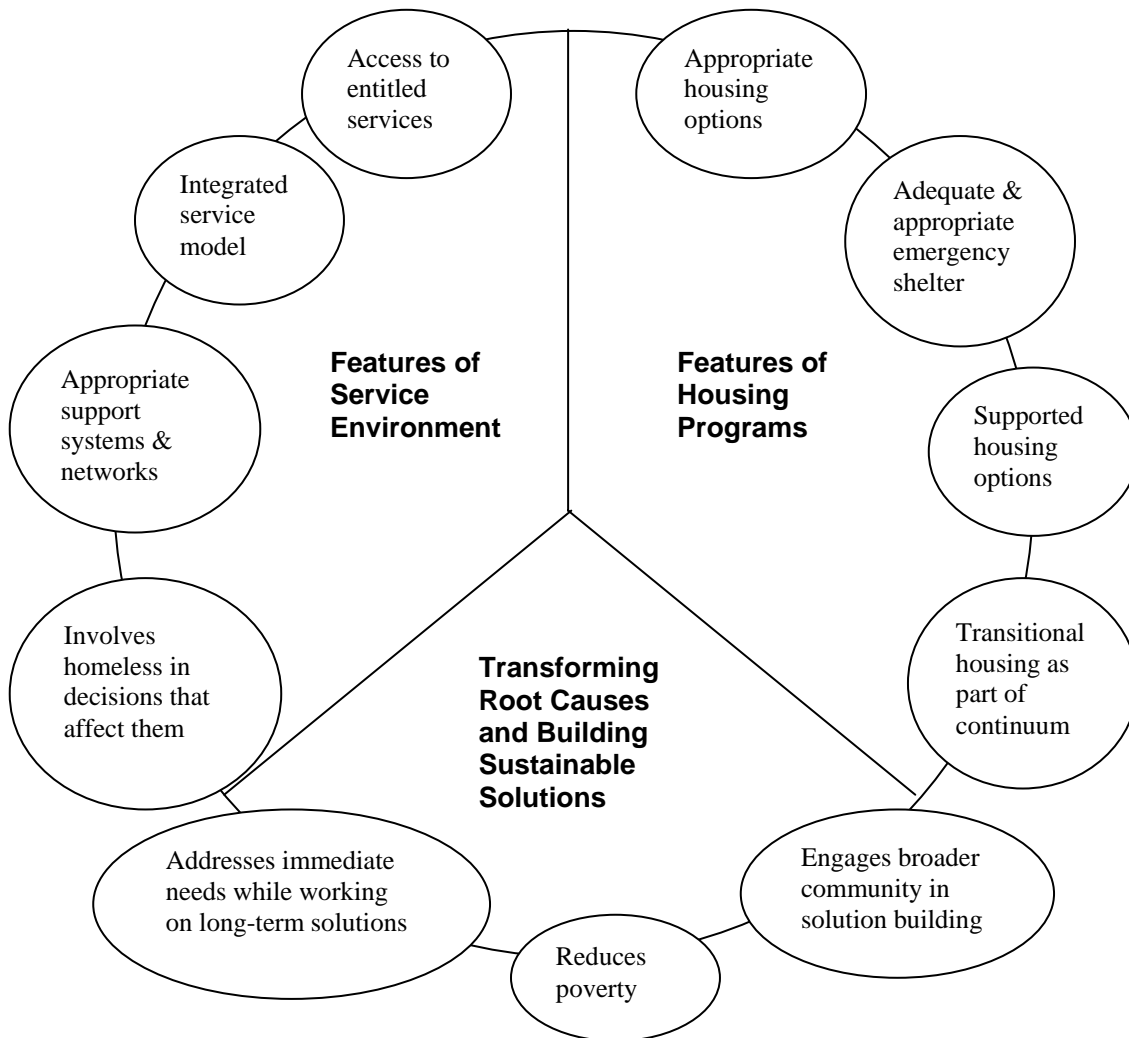
## **10. Best practice addresses immediate needs while also working toward systemic change**

- a. Addressing community, institutional and policy determinants* - Many of the determinants of homelessness among women are outside their direct control. They can only be addressed at the level of government policy, community institutions and norms and service delivery practices.

## 11. Best practice engages the broader community in finding long-term solutions

- a. ***Builds partnerships between government, the private sector, the non-for-profit sector and ordinary citizens*** – These partnerships focus on immediate, practical steps (e.g. allocating underutilized buildings for use as housing), raising funds, and mobilizing the political will for policy change. They help leverage resources that any one stakeholder may not have, but that combine to make a difference.
- b. ***Educates the public about the realities of homelessness*** – This strategy can help tap into philanthropy (time, goods and money), can decrease the stigmatization and discrimination that homeless people face, and decrease “not-in-my-backyard” opposition to public housing developments and other service centers.

### Summary of Best Practice Features



## Part X - Recommendations

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The following fourteen recommendations have been developed to assist Nunavut to take the most urgent steps toward meeting the best practice benchmarks described in the previous section<sup>19</sup>.

### ***Recommendations for “The Little Voices of Nunavut: A Study of Women’s Homelessness North of 60”:***

1. Immediate intervention to address the public housing crisis
2. Ensure an adequate supply of a variety of low-income housing stock is available for women and children in environments that can be kept safe and secure
3. Establishment of emergency shelters for homeless women that also accommodate children
4. Creation of low-income second-stage transitional housing options
5. Housing authority policies that remove barriers for women living in violence and those who are homeless or are at risk of becoming homeless
6. A national housing policy inclusive of women
7. Poverty reduction strategies
8. Overcoming barriers to access to services for homeless women
9. The provision of services that address the full range of determinants of women’s homelessness
10. Appropriate funding for an array of front-line services
11. Community wellness strategies, specially related to domestic violence and substance abuse treatment and prevention
12. Collect information and develop inter-agency protocols and tools for tracking women’s homelessness
13. Mechanisms for collaborative and creative solution building
14. Public awareness & attitude change

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<sup>19</sup> The recommendations will be elaborated upon below. Please note that some of the recommendations overlap with the other territorial reports, while some are Nunavut-specific; for comparison, please review the Yukon Territorial Report and the NWT Territorial Report.

## ***Recommendation # 1 - Immediate intervention to Address the Public Housing Crisis***

***The federal government must provide funding mechanisms to encourage and support the development of low-income housing in Nunavut***

The 2001 Aboriginal Peoples Survey (APS) defines overcrowding as one or more persons per room. Over 50 percent of Nunavut homes currently have four or more people, and 32 percent have five or more (Nunavut Housing Corporation, 2004). The Nunavut Housing Corporation predicts the overcrowding rate among Inuit will increase to 70 percent by 2016 if housing intervention is not ratified and estimates it requires 3,300 more homes to adequately house the current population and 270 more every year to keep up with growth.

This means that a generation of Nunavummiut is growing up in desperate situations. Young Inuit are currently facing a dismal future, and many see the current housing crisis, and the social issues that stem from it, as destruction of a culture. Investment in housing is an important step in addressing the root cause of poor health and social issues such as homelessness among Inuit in Nunavut. Women living in Nunavut have been seriously disadvantaged by the decision to reduce federal social housing dollars to all jurisdictions. In Nunavut as in the other two Northern territories, there is a cumulative impact, as per capita funding mechanisms further limit the territories' ability to address critical housing needs. When these are mixed with increasing demand for housing due to growing populations and booming economies, the people paying the price are those who are most disadvantaged; these are the "little voices" no one hears.

The Federal Government has a responsibility to ensure that Inuit women, men and children have adequate shelter. As stated in *The Ten-Year Inuit Housing Action Plan* (Nunavut Housing Corporation, 2004: ii), the construction of the following units of public housing is called for:

1. **3,000 new units** constructed to reduce Nunavut overcrowding rate and core need;
2. **1,000 existing units** renovated to reduce overcrowding and improve long-term utility; and
3. **2,730 new units** constructed to keep abreast of Inuit population growth.

In following these recommendations for housing construction put forth by Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated and the Government of Nunavut, a systematic intervention in housing will not only dramatically decrease homelessness, but also provide the foundation for better health, education, social stability and economic development.

## ***Recommendation # 2 - Ensure an Adequate Supply of a Variety of Low-income Housing Stock is Available for Women and Children in Environments That Can be Kept Safe and Secure***

***Nunavut must implement priority housing policies that ensure that women living in violence or exhibiting other high needs are prioritized on access lists held by subsidized housing providers.***

Women, with or without dependent children or grandchildren in their care, need secure, safe and decent housing geared to those with modest or minimal incomes. This need for low-income housing specifically targeted for women and their children far outstrips the current supply of such housing, as discussed in Recommendation #1. Without increasing the supply of decent low-income housing, women cannot establish homes free from abuse, cannot adequately provide for their dependents, and cannot act to prevent their own homelessness. Women living in violent situations must also be in a position to retain access to their home and have their partner removed from the lease. As this report illustrates, with the low availability of affordable housing, women's choices are few—return to their abusive relationships or become homeless. This is not acceptable and is easily remedied by implementing a priority housing policy. **Victims of family violence must be consistently given priority access to public housing.**

On top of this, this recommendation will assist the working poor find and keep housing, which will in turn help Nunavut increase the supply of resident wage earners for jobs suited to their education and skill levels. As the service industry is struggling to compete for staff, helping women retain their ability to be and remain employed is simply good social policy. Women need security of person, a place to call their own and have their possessions, a place to make a life. Without this option, what is there to hope for or to work for?

The impact of homelessness can be reduced for specific at-risk target populations by increasing the amount and variety of supported low-income housing options. Individuals or groups who are at most risk of homelessness can be successfully accommodated in housing programs that are tailored to best meet their specific needs. Supportive housing can also range from short-term, temporary situations to long-term (possibly even life-long) options. Outreach support for persons with mental health needs is also an important consideration.



### ***Recommendation # 3 - Establishment of Emergency Shelters for Homeless Women that also Accommodate Children***

***More emergency shelters for homeless women are needed to alleviate current issues of overcrowding and inadequate resources. Improving the quality of the existing shelters in terms of services is needed, as well as gender and culturally sensitive models***

The Salvation Army in Iqaluit currently operates a 20-bed emergency shelter for men, and while this is hardly sufficient to meet the demands, there are currently no analogous services for women. As this study demonstrates, though, homeless women have specific needs and are exposed to specific risks which need to be addressed. Six Nunavut communities are equipped with safe shelters for women who are victims of violence, and although there is a fine line between homelessness and abuse, a safe shelter for victimized women cannot offset the need for services for the homeless.

Thus, more emergency shelters for homeless women are needed to alleviate current issues of overcrowding and inadequate resources. Improving the quality of the existing shelters in terms of services is needed, as well as gender and culturally sensitive models, as existing services are not adequate to meet the varied and complex needs of homeless women in the North. Shelters should also be able to respond to all types of crises – currently, many shelters across the Territories fill up their bed count with women fleeing from domestic abuse. This means some women who are homeless are turned away. **Emergency shelters need to be available to all women in crisis, not just those fleeing current domestic violence.** Apart from this, more low-demand respite shelters are needed for chronically homeless women suffering from an array of issues such as addictions, intergenerational trauma, domestic violence, and mental illness.

The participants of this study were asked what they believe is required to offer refuge from suffering as a result of homelessness. The general consensus was the creation of a shelter that has the capacity to accommodate children. 2001 Census information suggests the birth rate in Nunavut is 25 percent or higher in comparison to the birth rate of 10.5-11.2 percent for the rest of Canada. This suggests their request is reasonable. In developing strategies to provide an emergency shelter for Inuit women, modifications to accommodate children have to be considered.

The abovementioned services and resources can only be effective if funding is secure. Funding to the voluntary sector is often inconsistent and unstable. Shelters need to have enough funding to provide safe, healthy care and provide adequate support services (e.g. counseling, respite childcare, referrals, life planning). Ongoing staff training is required, to ensure quality of skills of the staff. Apart from this, capacity needs to be built in order to ensure continuation of the service if the operating staff relocate or change occupations.

## ***Recommendation # 4 - Creation of Low-income Second-stage Transitional Housing Options***

***The creation of sufficient second-stage housing is needed for women leaving shelters to ensure opportunities for healthy choices***

Victimized women utilizing Nunavut's existing safe shelters are very familiar with the revolving door that they represent. Fleeing an abusive partner or other family member is traumatizing for women. They struggle to break the bonds of control under which they have been living, sacrifice their home, abandon their traditional ideals of a functioning family unit, and leave behind personal belongings, all in the hope that the shelter will provide them the chance they need to seek better opportunities. Each shelter has its own guidelines with respect to how long a woman can stay, anywhere from a single night to six weeks. However, the number of women leaving shelters, only to find themselves back in the abusive household they fled in the first place, is painfully high as there are no transitional housing units, no rooming houses, no low-income options for women in Nunavut. In these scenarios, a woman's choice is, in many ways, already made for her, and she is further disempowered.

Based on this reality, it is clear that second-stage housing that provides women and children in transition low-income options and giving them enough time to explore future plans is urgently needed. Thanks to funding through Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC), many communities in southern Canada were able to acquire second-stage housing, as long as the groups who operated them could find funding to hire staff and cover expenses. Although CMHC identifies their *Shelter Enhancement Program* as a funding source for acquiring or building second-stage housing (as well as for repairing or improving existing shelters), the amount of funds allocated to the northern territories is not adequate for this purpose. **In the North, second-stage housing is a rare occurrence.** Yet women need time in addition to their limited stays in family violence shelters to make the transition to living on their own free of violence. In second-stage housing, women and their children can typically stay for between nine to eighteen months so they have an opportunity to plan for the future.

Women entering these programs usually have identified a need for on-going support and safety, and are committed to living in a violence-free environment and to ending violence in their lives. Programs within second-stage housing can help women better understand the impacts of violence on themselves and their children, develop long-term safety plans, build supportive social networks, assess their options for the future, and build the skills for living on their own.

## ***Recommendation # 5 – Housing Authority Policies that Remove Barriers for Women Living in Violence and Those Who are Homeless or are at Risk of Becoming Homeless***

### ***A cultural and gender analysis needs to be applied to housing authority policies***

Housing policies developed by Housing Corporations in all three territories are implemented through local housing authorities and associations. Applying a cultural and gender analysis to housing policies at both levels of government to ensure human rights obligations and the needs of homeless women are met in a way that is measurable and makes the agencies accountable is a significant step toward identifying and removing barriers that contribute to women’s homelessness in the North, particularly as they affect Aboriginal women. **Programs and services aimed at meeting the needs of women who are homeless, at risk of becoming homeless or living in violence need to be accountable with respect to measuring service impact and effectiveness.**

### ***Housing policies which address historic debt fairly need to be established***

Housing policies that address historic debt, especially if it was incurred as a result of damages perpetrated by violent partners need to be established so women are not thrust into permanent homelessness because of indebtedness to subsidized housing providers, who are often the only option in small, northern communities. **An amnesty, a waiver or a “forgiveness” of debt process** similar to that offered within a corporate context, particularly in instances where housing providers failed to actively pursue debt collection over a 5-year period, would offer an immediate, short-term solution for many homeless women in the North. For women re-qualifying for subsidized housing, a repayment plan for historic debt would involve low risk for the housing authority. Such a plan should involve partial forgiveness of the debt and be administered in a way that makes it possible for women to repay without undue financial hardship. As the anthologies in this report demonstrate, women would like to have the option of returning to subsidized housing and would be willing to repay historic debt at a fair rate over time.

### ***Ceilings on rental rates need to be established***

Policies that limit rent allocations in financial assistance programs to subsidized housing rates for women who have been evicted from subsidized housing units and are now required to pay market rent must end to prevent permanent homelessness. Likewise, policies that immediately cap rent at “single” rates for women in relationship transition must be changed so that their actual costs are covered to prevent them from becoming homeless. **A ceiling on rental rates must be applied**, even in circumstances where income rises for a few months, because many women obtain seasonal work and by the time the increased income is assessed, the earnings have already been spent.

*Service providers need to be encouraged to identify and develop potential supportive housing options as new initiative proposals*

Service providers have no mechanism through which to identify and develop proposals to address the needs of certain groups of at-risk or homeless women. By encouraging new initiative proposals, the creativity of the non-profit sector could be unleashed to address homelessness in ways that build on the strengths of each provider, or to develop joint proposals to better serve marginalized women.

For example, in Nunavut, **student housing units could be better utilized to serve the current demands for housing.** Approximately ninety percent of the women interviewed in this study did not have a high school education. Only 3 percent had secondary schooling. Promoting education, and thus furthering employment readiness skills for Inuit women, would be more effective if transitioning into college-level education was made easier. Currently, Arctic College offers student housing for students without children throughout the school annum only, while the units remain empty throughout the summer. This creates problems for women who have migrated to attend school and have no family members located within the community. Often they do not have the funds available to fly back to their hometown, so students find themselves homeless for up to a third of the year. Using student housing more effectively could encourage more women to enhance their skills to move into the careers of their choice. If student assistance were extended throughout the course of the year, it would provide full-time students with housing to meet their needs.

## ***Recommendation # 6 – A National Housing Policy Inclusive of Women***

***A National Housing Policy instituted by the Federal Government needs to be created that is inclusive of women and lives up to human rights obligations under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights guaranteeing a right to an adequate standard of living and adequate housing.***

A National Housing Policy, such as Canada had prior to 1995, would ensure that the federal government establishes and maintains a strong role in ensuring that international human rights obligations are met with respect to housing under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. As the lived experiences of women in this report demonstrate, housing cannot be left solely to the private sector. **A National Housing Policy would establish national standards for the design, implementation, monitoring and enforcement of laws, policies and strategies for housing support programs that meet the specific needs of women.** The National Housing Policy would need to allocate base funding to regions of Canada according to “needs” rather than on a per capita basis to respond to the overwhelming housing needs of women in the North. Formal methods of accountability within a National Housing Policy would ensure that Territories, Municipalities and First Nation governments meet established standards.

***A National Housing Policy needs to ensure that women’s housing needs are met across their lifespan***

Women’s housing needs change as their life circumstances shift and as they age. **A National Housing Policy would enable the spectrum of needs to be met by ensuring there is an adequate supply of affordable housing available for women according to principles of equality and non-discrimination.** A National Housing Policy would comply with principles of best practice and offer a continuum of housing services responsive to changing needs and circumstances, from emergency shelter, to supported housing, to housing for women and children and for seniors and elders. To incorporate another principle of best practice, homeless women would be included in the development of such a National Housing Policy.

***Inuit organizations and coalitions need to be included as active partners in the development of the National Housing Policy***

**The inclusion of Inuit women's organizations as active partners** in the creation of public policy is essential to ensure the Inuit woman’s voice is heard, in keeping with the principles of IQ. Also, existing homelessness coalitions in the territories could explore additional ways of providing low-income housing by participating in Canada-wide housing discussions.

## ***Recommendation # 7 – Poverty Reduction Strategies***

***Existing social security programs need to be improved.***

**Poverty reduction strategies could begin with improvements to existing programs.** As detailed in participants’ stories, existing social security programs are woefully inadequate. Rates do not correspond with the high cost of living in the North, are not indexed to inflation and have not been raised in many years. Policies need to be redrawn to prevent women from becoming hopelessly entrenched in the poverty cycle. Access to benefits must be equitable, non-discriminatory and preventative in nature. All women and their children need transportation, personal care items, household cleaning items, furniture and clean laundry. Claw-backs related to the Child Tax Benefit, bingo winnings and gifts must end. Social assistance rates need to be raised and indexed to inflation. A shelter allowance must be provided to women and indexed to inflation and changes in the private rental market. Food security must be guaranteed ending the dilemma women face of whether to pay the rent or eat.

***New programs and policies that are designed to prevent and reduce poverty need to be introduced***

The depth of women’s poverty is not decreasing despite the social safety nets created by government and civil society. Bold and creative approaches are needed to address this complex social issue. As women related, poorly paid seasonal and part-time work does not provide an adequate income, nor does social assistance. **It is time to look at other ideas.** A guaranteed livable income would provide dignity and economic security for women and families. It would replace the existing safety net that seems to be full of holes. A livable wage policy would assist women in being self-supporting and would be cost efficient in terms of reducing the need for social assistance. To reduce the poverty of the “working poor”, employers should be required to provide benefits for all employees. Funds for rent and food would not need to be diverted for other essentials such as dental work and prescription medicines.

Financial services for low-income people are needed across the North. Mainstream financial institutions do not work for people without addresses and those with little income. People living in poverty often enter into a cycle of debt that is difficult to end. Or worse, participate in criminal activities where they are further victimized. Financial services designed to meet the needs of the poor could offer a range of tailored options to women including check cashing and micro-credit programs. This would eliminate bad debt to housing authorities and the criminalization of women, as well as endless cycles of debt.

Rent supplements are a key component in successful housing strategies. With rental rates increasing in the North, low-income women are increasingly unable to afford private rental housing. However, as the stories illustrate, the amount of available social housing is inadequate. Portable rent supplements that are not tied to a particular location and do not require landlords to designate particular rent supplement units would help address the critical need for housing.

## **Recommendation # 8 – Overcoming Barriers to Access to Services for Homeless Women**

*Homeless women can experience barriers in accessing services that are important in empowering them to overcome their homelessness.*

Barriers homeless women can come across can exist in employment -, educational and social services. They can exist in information accessing, with critical information often isolated in bits and pieces within the information system of dozens of agencies and is isolated from the target group. Since homeless women often have very limited access to the information they need to access services or to demand their rights (e.g. they may not have telephones or email/internet access, they may have barriers to literacy, they may have conflictual relationships with service providers), they miss opportunities that could improve their situation.

Homeless women and those at risk of homelessness face other barriers to accessing services besides lack of information, such as lack of transportation, lack of an address to which information and benefits can be sent and discriminatory or disrespectful attitudes on the part of service providers. Also, conditions and circumstances in the lives of homeless women, such as alcohol dependence or mental illness, make it difficult for them to use existing services effectively. **Awareness and a mapping out of these barriers to homeless women are essential in order to improve access to services and resources needed by homeless women.** Efforts need to be made to ensure that women know where to obtain services needed; the services should be easily accessible and affordable or free. It is recommended that prolonged contact with outreach workers is available to facilitate access to services and help overcome related barriers, such as mental illness. Also, adequate funding for making these services available in shelters and related centers is needed.

*Public policy and government bureaucratic practice help shape available resources and services. Many current government policies contribute to barriers to these services by creating programs that are inflexible and have little tolerance, e.g. not providing childcare and transportation allowances for up to six months after a client begins to receive social assistance, providing accommodation allowances that are lower than market rates, or having no systematic approach to allocating affordable housing to homeless women. Programs should be more flexible in supporting women in their efforts to get and maintain adequate shelter and to access services that will improve their likelihood of overcoming their homelessness. In terms of access to and maintenance of benefits, rather than reinforcing the division between ‘being in receipt of social assistance’ and ‘working’, new benefit programs must be designed to address the complex inter-connections of various programs and benefits to ensure the availability for working women of a shelter allowance or housing subsidy adjusted to family size and housing costs.*

## ***Recommendation # 9 – The Provision of Services that Address the Full Range of Determinants of Women’s Homelessness***

### ***Implement a continuum of care model***

As pointed out in the Best Practice section of this report (see Part X), many types of support are needed to enable homeless women to move along the service spectrum from high need to greater independence, i.e. from emergency support to long-term, supportive and structured living, to independent living, and finally to after-care services. This support needs to be holistic and individualized. Service providers need the flexibility to create innovative new services where gaps exist. Besides the range of housing, learning and poverty reduction services described in other recommendations above, critically needed services include addictions treatment; mental health services; advocacy support for dealing with legal, financial and access to service issues; and specialized programs for the children of homeless women - including support for school success, issue-based therapy, support to enhance social inclusion, etc. The current state of such services in the North is woefully piecemeal and inadequate, especially in communities outside the capital cities of each Territory, and those services that do exist generally work in isolation from each other. **An integrated service model that provides a continuum of care is essential to breaking the vicious cycle of homelessness that far too many women find themselves trapped within.**

### ***Enhance the capacity of service providers to work effectively with homeless women***

Many of the homeless women who participated in *A Study of Women’s Homelessness North of 60* reported feeling misunderstood, judged, belittled and depersonalized by service providers, especially in the government sector. Special attention needs to be paid to building the capacity of service providers (especially in the North where staff turn over in many programs tends to be frequent) to work effectively with this population, whose needs are often overwhelming and complex.

Longer term, core funding must be provided for various service providers working in the area of homelessness. Inconsistent funding from different sources is difficult to manage, particularly for non-profit organizations that are already struggling to find enough volunteers. Nunavut’s only emergency center for men, for example, has no base funding. It is an endless road of applications, coupled with uncertainties, and ceaseless independent fundraising throughout the year to meet the demands of increasing numbers of distressed Nunavummiut.

Building the human capacity of service agencies is also essential. Staff turnover is high, and some programs rely on a single individual to survive. This creates a situation that is not sustainable. Nunavut’s agencies cannot be reliant upon a sole individual for effective operation. The seriousness of Northern homelessness requires dependability and reliability in programs offered. **Women need to know where they can find help**, and know it will still be there six months down the road. It is also noted that support measures that enhance food security are required, with priority attention focused on expectant mothers and families with young children.

### ***Increase access to educational programs***



Homeless women want to be self-determining and self-supporting. To do this, access to educational programs and support to follow through on employment is needed. Women need literacy programs, adult basic education, pre-employment skills and life skills training services. Workplace diversity programs need to be developed and where existing, reinforced and publicized. Options for training such as job shadowing need to be made available. In the Territories where skilled trades people are in great demand, trades training and training in non-traditional occupations would provide women with a sustainable occupation and fill a need in Northern communities.

### ***Increase access to affordable daycare***

Critical to any educational and training programs is the availability of affordable, subsidized daycare. Currently there are not enough daycare spaces available to fill the need. More spaces need to be funded so women with children can take advantage of training opportunities and end the cycle of poverty and homelessness. One of the services that should be made easily available to homeless women in shelters and in transitional or second-stage housing is childcare. Homeless women and their families have special needs and homeless mothers experience barriers preventing them from accessing services they need to overcome their homelessness. Since women with children are the fastest growing subpopulation in the homeless community in the North, adequate services for childcare need to be made available. **Shelters and services that support homeless women should provide free support services such as child care to ensure women have the opportunities they need to apply for services and programs.** Adequate funding is needed to ensure shelters and additional services are able to provide this free childcare.

Childcare in shelters and additional services is also beneficial for the children of homeless women themselves, as childcare can provide a safe and emotionally responsive environment for children of all ages. Childcare in shelters should include counseling for children; information about healthy or normal child development; and referrals and information about counseling for children available locally. Childcare services for homeless women should be able to provide safe, nurturing, responsive and appropriate care and activities for children while their mothers are preparing to take steps to overcome their homelessness.

## ***Recommendation # 10 – Appropriate Funding for an Array of Front-line Services***

### ***Ensure front-line services are adequately and appropriately funded to build capacity to function effectively***

Delivering services in an environment without recognition of normal cost increases for operation of facilities or insurance, without the means to evaluate and monitor performance, without the ability to give cost of living increases to staff, and without adequate infrastructure to support those services is a strong deterrent to excellence in outcomes. Other ‘cost containment’ deterrents to service excellence and positive outcomes for women include high ratios of clients to staff, no funds for staff training and development and little recognition of staff needs for support, coaching and debriefing in high stress environments. Front-line services are the key delivery mechanism for a wide variety of critical interventions for at-risk people. If interventions are to be effective, front-line services must be adequately and appropriately funded and supported. This holds true regardless of the mode of delivery - non-profit voluntary agency or government agency.

### ***Recognize the value and contributions of service delivery through the voluntary sector***

There is no long-term benefit of having all front-line services delivered by government agencies. Non-profit societies are positioned to recognize emerging and unmet needs and to respond quickly and appropriately to those needs to lessen the chance of women falling through the cracks in the delivery system. Government service delivery is a more expensive option, as government salaries are generally higher than non-profit salaries and benefits are more extensive. Non-profit societies also have the advantage of being able to access other sources of funding, such as foundations, United Way or other individual and corporate donors, and can bring these resources to the table in addressing key social issues. Non-profit societies engage the community in their work, through boards of directors and through various fundraising activities, and as volunteer workers. Thus, non-profits can add value to services in ways that the government cannot. Diversity of service deliverers is an indication of strength in a community, as a healthy voluntary sector adds vibrancy and creativity to meeting a community’s needs.

### ***Recommendation # 11 - Community Wellness Strategies, especially related to Domestic Violence and Substance Abuse Treatment and Prevention***

*The Government of Nunavut promised to develop and maintain wellness plans for each Nunavut community, identifying strengths, gaps and needs. Five years later, there is still no plan, and worse still, these goals have vanished from the GN's mandate (Kitikmeot Law Centre, 2006:3).*

Inadequate, unsuitable, overcrowded housing has long been linked to community and social wellbeing. Overcrowding and lack of viable housing options are also linked to family violence. Most women experience violence prior and/or during homelessness. Almost all of the women interviewed had been victims of violence or been exposed to high levels of violence when moving from place to place. Several of the women became homeless when they made the decision to flee an abusive family member, most often their intimate partners. When asked what they believe is causing women's homelessness, the interviewees have been very forthcoming in noting violence as a serious problem requiring immediate intervention in the North.

Violence is almost always associated with drug and alcohol abuse. Many of the homeless women interviewed used alcohol and/or other drugs "socially", but did not use heavily until they found themselves homeless. The women cited this as an attempt to "numb the pain". It was also suggested that drug use was more "effective" in the winter, as it helped anesthetize the pain suffered at the hands of Nunavut's harsh winter climate. Also, those who are in a situation of hidden homelessness are often being housed by alcoholics or drug addicts, and this increases a woman's risk of abusing these substances herself.

**Urgent attention needs to be given to the implementation of effective domestic violence and substance abuse treatment and prevention strategies.** The dependencies on drugs and alcohol and their relationship with domestic violence in Nunavut require a thorough assessment of current service and of the real needs. Best practices for the continuum of care for these situations are essential to achieve and maintain community wellness.

## ***Recommendation # 12 – Collect Information and Develop Inter-agency Protocols and Tools for Tracking Women’s Homelessness***

### ***Design and implement interagency protocols and tools for collecting, managing and sharing accurate and relevant information as well as for designing and tracking clear outcomes indicators***

Developing effective public policy and government programs, building creative solutions to address the determinants and impacts of homelessness, and creating viable partnerships between the public, private and voluntary sectors to implement those solutions cannot happen without accurate and relevant information. As noted in Part IV of this report, it is not currently possible to get comprehensive information about the incidence of homelessness among women in Nunavut. User data related to the primary services that these women use (e.g. shelters, food distribution sources, income support, public housing) is not generally disaggregated to track homelessness. The Housing Corporation does have useful information about the number of households in core need, but it is generally accepted that these figures are under-representative for reasons presented elsewhere in this document. Most service agencies working with women in these categories keep some type of records about the number of women accessing services, and some keep more detailed demographic data about these women, but this data is not collated in any way between agencies. Certainly, there is no comprehensive case management system that would make it possible to track the history and service use of individual women and families that are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.

Another factor that makes it difficult to get a full picture of homelessness among women in the North is that some of them do not attempt to access services, largely because they feel that these services (especially income support and housing services) are punitive and judgmental, rather than supportive. Interagency protocols and tools for collecting and sharing accurate and relevant information are needed to address this critical gap in knowledge about the incidence and determinants of homelessness for Northern women. Also vital are tools for developing service effectiveness indicators and for monitoring outcomes.

### ***Provide adequate funding to service agencies to allow them to keep appropriate records and to access and share information***

Most service agencies, especially those in the voluntary sector, are in a daily struggle to maintain basic services. They have a hard time recruiting and maintaining well-trained staff and do not have adequate resources for up-to-date equipment. If information collection, management and sharing are to be used as a valuable tool for decreasing the incidence and harmful impacts of homelessness, then service agencies need the resources (e.g. staff time and expertise, adequate technology) to carry out the information management functions discussed above.

### ***Conduct further research***

Several kinds of research would be particularly helpful in building on the findings of *A Study of Women’s Homelessness North of 60*: i) longitudinal studies that follow women through their lifespan and that track the impact of women’s homelessness on the next generation, and ii) intervention research that tracks the impact of creative pilot projects designed to reduce the incidence of women’s homelessness by working on determinants such as those identified in this current Study and to reduce the harm caused by homelessness in the lives of women and their families.

## ***Recommendation # 13 – Mechanisms for Collaborative and Creative Solution Building***

### ***Nurture the creation of collaboratives that are dedicated to addressing the full range of determinants of women’s homelessness and build their capacity to function effectively***

A social issue as complex as women’s homelessness, with its many determinants (see Parts V and VII of this report) cannot be addressed by any one agency or sector. It will require collaborative work on the part of the public, private and voluntary sectors as well as the general public. As pointed out in the best practice section of this report (see Part IX), **the participation of homeless women in designing and implementing solutions is also critical.**

Bringing all these stakeholders together in a sustained and productive way, so that the cumulative impact of their efforts makes a substantial and positive difference for women and their families, will mean moving past interagency meetings or working groups. What is required is the creation of long-term collaboratives. Successful collaboratives are inclusively democratic and consensus-driven and they have achievable action plans and a demonstrated capacity for community development and policy impact. Collaboratives work on both short-term responses to immediate needs and long-term initiatives to address root causes. Most successful collaboratives are facilitated by an “outside” intermediary (or boundary-spanning) organization whose mission is to build the capacity of ordinary people, the voluntary sector, informal community-based agencies, government and the corporate sector to work together to combat long-term systemic problems (Walsh, 1997).

These collaboratives require dedicated resources, incentives, capacity building and other types of support. They will not happen as a side effort in the course of people’s already busy lives. Mechanisms need to be created that will bring people together in a learning, planning, action and reflection process that is sustained long enough to see real results. These mechanisms must also ensure that partners have been given the authority to implement projects that cross departmental or sectoral boundaries and to share and leverage resources that any one partner may not have access to on its own, but that combine to make a real difference.

***Ensure that all relevant stakeholders are “at the table” when public policy related to women’s homelessness is being developed and when government program decisions are being made***

While a great deal of progress could be made through the formation of collaboratives as argued above, there will continue to be many other consultative processes related to the shaping of housing, social service and poverty reduction policy and programs. It is vital that voluntary sector agencies and homeless women are consistently brought to the table for these planning and decision-making processes.

***Recommendation # 14 - Public Awareness & Attitude Change***

Homeless women can suffer from discrimination and racism due to negative attitudes and stereotypical conceptions of homelessness. These attitudes and conceptions do not reflect the reality of experiences of homelessness for women and can affect homeless women on a community, and broader level, in terms of societal indifference and punitiveness. Misconceptions about causes and responsibility for homelessness in women can negatively influence efforts to reduce homelessness in women and adequate funding. **The public needs to be educated about the realities of homelessness in women.** Public awareness can change attitudes and decrease stigmatization and discrimination that homeless women face, e.g. the common “not-in-my-backyard” opposition to shelters, public housing developments and other service centers for homeless women. Public awareness will also help communities continue their efforts to reduce and alleviate homelessness and thus allow them to increase support for homeless women and to focus on longer-term solutions such as transitional and second-stage housing. Public awareness will also increase homeless women’s access to the supports and interventions they need. **Public awareness will help change negative attitudes and make informed decisions that address and prevent the challenges of homeless women.** Adequate funding is needed to support activities directly focused on enhancing public awareness of homelessness and homelessness-related issues in women. These activities could include the production of tools and documents for public awareness and utilizing the available media.

## A Personal Note from the Territorial Researchers

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Government bodies tend to require hard statistics, figures, and numbers to understand the magnitude of Northern homelessness, but this data is virtually impossible to achieve. One of the reasons this is so is connected to current public housing policies, which prohibit anyone not listed on the tenancy agreement from occupying the unit. Inuit are therefore hesitant to report information about the number of people occupying a dwelling accurately, for fear that they will be evicted and thus become homeless themselves. Overcrowding is a national disgrace and offers no promise of a flourishing future for Nunavummiut. “Tunnganarniq” is an Inuit societal value that fosters good spirit by being open, welcoming, and inclusive. Today, the predominant Southern paradigm forces them to turn away members of their own family, in stark contrast to their traditional sense of community.

High levels of family violence coupled with Nunavut’s extreme housing shortage, make the incidence of homelessness much higher than in southern Canada. Nunavut currently has virtually no services available for homeless women. The Kataujaq Society Safe Shelter in Rankin Inlet, a community with a population of just over 2,000, has already housed 158 different women since April, which is three times higher than the count from the previous year. However, Kataujaq has an intake criteria of current abuse and is constantly forced to turn away women who are homeless for other reasons. This suggests an immediate call for action.

Many service providers suggest the fear and unwillingness to talk about homelessness creates the assumption that it does not exist, so it is encouraging and inspirational to be able to share the stories of these women. Women across Nunavut have come together and spoken in a single voice. They are taking a stand for their basic rights as citizens of Canada, and it is time that we listen. Providing adequate shelter is necessary to give Inuit back a sense of themselves, to maximize their capacity, and to protect their right to preserve their culture within the nation of Canada.

While we cannot offer a single dramatic statistic to depict the desperate situation, we hope the candor in the words of the women who live in these horrific conditions will prove to be of greater value. We applaud them for their bravery in sharing the intimate details of their lives. During several focus group sessions, women approached us to say thank you, explaining how good it felt to talk about their experience for the first time and to know that they are not alone. As one woman interviewed put it: “Attention. We just need attention. No one has taken an interest in our lives before you. You ladies are the first people we’ve seen that actually care.”

The interviews were powerful. Talking about how homelessness has affected their children always triggered a deep emotional reaction in the women. It became obvious that this is the core of their suffering and concern. Many of the women were also deeply shamed to admit that they sometimes gave sexual favors to men just to provide a roof over their heads for the night. These women have spoken honestly and sincerely, with pain etched on their faces, expressing a shared feeling of hopelessness. They genuinely feel that there is nowhere left to turn, as they have drained every avenue available to them. The time has clearly come to listen to “the little voices of Nunavut”.

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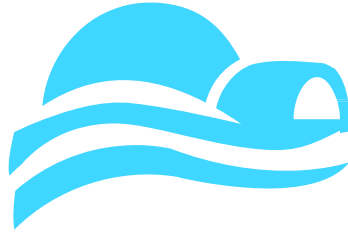
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# **Appendix A - Participant Consent Form/Orientation Sheet/Demographic Profile**

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## ***Nunavut Women and Homelessness***



### **We have to end homelessness...**

The Qullit Nunavut Status of Women Council is working with other groups, in all three northern territories, to learn more about how homelessness is affecting northern women.

We are hoping you will agree to share your experiences, and your ideas, so other women won't have such a hard time finding a place to live. We are also going to talk to people who provide services, like women's shelters, to get their ideas.

In the end we hope we have enough information, stories and ideas to convince the government, and non-government services, to make it easier for homeless women to find decent, affordable housing.

### **This interview is confidential...**

Everything you say in this interview is confidential. The researchers will not attach any names identifying information to your comments.

### **You will get the final report...**

If you are interested, when this research is finished in early 2006 the Qullit Nunavut Status of Women Council will share the results with you. You will see what other people had to say, and what we will try to do to make it easier for women to get the kind of housing they need.

**OK, I'll participate in this interview...**

I agree to be part of this survey and accept the \$20  
honorarium \_\_\_\_\_ (signature)

My age is \_\_\_\_\_.

I have \_\_\_\_\_ children in my care. Ages \_\_\_\_\_

I have \_\_\_\_\_ children in someone else's care. Ages \_\_\_\_\_

My cultural background is \_\_\_\_\_

My home community is \_\_\_\_\_

I have these health problems \_\_\_\_\_

My education is \_\_\_\_\_

My income is \_\_\_\_\_

My housing goal is \_\_\_\_\_

My relationship status is \_\_\_\_\_

**If you think of other ideas later...**

You can contact the researchers anytime by calling Jeanine Nowdluk or Shylah Elliott at 867-979-6690. If you want more information about this research you can contact Lyda Fuller, Executive Director at the Yellowknife YWCA, at 867-920-2777, extension 310. Thank you for helping!

I would like a copy of the final report: YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B - Focus Group Transcript

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### 1) How did you become homeless?

- running away from abusive partner
- abusive father
- Alcohol and drug problem I was kicked out of the shelter for that reason
- “because my ex-boyfriend was vandalizing
- “came down from Ottawa and thought maybe I could pick up on things and get an apartment – no luck”
- I was on the waiting list (housing) for 2.5 years and I was living at the women’s shelter at the time.
- Left my home community

### 2) How did you manage to meet your basic needs?

- income support
- Going to your sisters or your brothers and collecting a little bit of food from them
- or from friends, but it’s not very easy when they don’t have much themselves
- I find friends easier to turn to than family
- **RESEARCHER: Why is that?** “because of violence within the family”
- Go to relatives house/friends asking for a little bit
- Soup kitchen
- Odd jobs here and there
- Income support – if you don’t go by their rules they cut you off no good

### 3) What has been the hardest part of being without a home? 10:00

- when you have kids. I sleep on the floor with my son
- my parents when I was 9 years old and I was staying at my aunts and they were drinking a lot and one night I tried to go back there they wouldn’t answer maybe they weren’t there I don’t know, but I had to sleep under the house in December.
- when you don’t have no one to go to or turn to anybody, you have to stay where you are not wanted. Very hard.
- maybe sometimes, I’m pretty sure, that was not just one incident for me
- one time when my husband was being violent, I kept going back to my brothers and he kept saying “Annie, I have a family.” I didn’t know where to turn to. And it was very hard for me to go to my other siblings. No where to turn to.
- **12:00** you feel like, you feel embarrassed so you try to hide it as much as you can.
- Don’t know where to go at nights. Nowhere to sleep. Especially winter coming it’s worse then
- Locked out of where you’re staying, some people won’t let you in so its kinda hard.
- I have a family here but they have family too to take care of
- Keeping track of your things



- If you are uncomfortable where you are staying you feel like you're in the way of them. They want to help you but they are still pushing you away, make you feel uncomfortable.

#### 4) How does your homelessness affect your children?

- **13:11** it was really hard on my kids, cuz you don't really have to voice it, like for instance, you're living under somebody else's roof, and if that person's kids are being bad to my children you can't really say anything cuz if you do, you're gonna be turned around and told to go out or its going to be a real conflict. So it's really hard on the children, and it was hard on me too. My kids were being slapped around and carried around. They were just like little dolls. It was hard.
- **14:26** My daughter kept asking me, "where are we going to sleep tonight" (6 years old at the time). I kept telling her, I will find somebody.
- very hurtful.
- it is.
- I have to run run run run
- **RESEARCHER remembering those feelings I can see the tears, the feelings you felt as moms, and how difficult that was.**
- and I didn't want to go to my mothers because my husband's gonna go there and scare everyone
- I felt like I wish I never had kids because we just stood outside in the cold
- **17:00** I miss my sister so much but I can't go visit her anymore. It's really hard on me and my kids cuz I can't go there because my common-law might go there and he keeps calling
- If affects mine a lot cuz they really wanna be with me. Me not having housing I cannot have them. If I had housing they would be with me
- "I haven't contacted them for awhile. They are in Cape Dorset and I can't go there."

#### 5) What are the special challenges of being homeless when you are a woman?

- they got no kids to take care of
- they have shelters here for men
- no family support
- You are more likely to be taken advantage out there. People pushing you around. "you're that kind of a person because you are homeless, calling you names, a person that you are not even."

#### 6) What are the main reasons so many Nunavut women become homeless?

- **20:36** abusive relationship
- family violence
- having a home through your work and they had to let her go so she had no place to go
- We were homeless for a few months, my husband and my kids because...he burnt my house down.
- lose job – lose housing
- "not willing to have sex – you have to go"

- Relying on husband to take care of bills
- Men
- Violence and vandalizing
- Bills keep going up
- Break ups
- addictions

**7) About how many women do you *know* that are homeless?**

- So used to being controlled
- Additions - running away from the pain – an escape
- Maybe 7
- 14-16
- 14

**8) How many women in total do you *think* are homeless?**

- No available housing
- Waiting lists
- Mostly Inuit
- Fast relationships just to get out “Gone back to abuse just to have a home”
- “to keep my kids together”
- Very big problem “too many”
- 20’s
- 30’s
- Women running from their communities

**9) Is the housing situation different in the summer than in winter?**

- “no difference if you’re homeless you’re homeless”
- “lucky to even have a tent”
- You can’t sleep outside in the winter. It’s not like down south”
- You need more in the winter because its cold. Hard in the summer but winter is worse.
- “cold right to the bone”
- You can put out a tent in the summer – you can’t do that in the winter
- You don’t get anything for free – you’re lucky if you have a tent.

**10) Where have you found the most help?**

- Social services – income support for food
- RCMP “last time my husband almost killed me”
- Safe House in Pang – stay there for 3 days
- Friends
- “tiring to keep asking for help”
- Husband/common-law won’t help with milk or pampers
- “waiting for me to give up hope so I will go back”

- “make you sick inside – make you lose your mind”

**11) Where is it hard to get help?**

- Can’t go to RCMP cuz partner would haunt you forever, even though I know they would help”

**12) What services are needed to improve the lives of homeless women?**

- shelter
- Stronger voice about abuse
- Where are the houses the government promised the Inuit?
- Go back to Inuit culture
- More sources like down south – different levels of income support
- Programs that fit need
- Its more expensive and colder here and we don’t have the help they do down south!
- Treating everyone equally
- Existing buildings that aren’t in use

**13) Women who have left their home communities, why have you done so?**

- no place – no room
- Abusive family – addictions
- Healing journey

**14) Women who are not currently homeless, how did you manage to find a home?**

- “social services trying to help me”
- RCMP helped get husbands name off the lease
- Application forms from shelter – 3 different applications to different places

**15) How does your Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit help you or relate to your life?**

- Used to be more community-oriented. Everyone helped each other out
- Easier being homeless in Ottawa, better shelters
- “go back to the traditional way of life
- Can’t just build a house now you have to pay for the land
- White have more houses in Iqaluit
- Gov’t didn’t keep promises
- White share less
- “I think they (gov) want all Kalunak in Iqaluit
- “Kalunaks are running the show”
- Inuit are more sharing

**“Never give up on the person – even if they keep going back – never give up on them”**