



Finding Our Way Home: Research on  
Indigenous Homelessness in Surrey

## **PART 2: WHAT WE HEARD REPORT**

October 2022

## Acknowledgements

*The stories described in this report reflect the lived experience of people currently residing in Surrey. These stories reflect trauma, neglect, exclusion, systemic failures, and violence. They reflect real experiences that illuminate the pathways into, and barriers out of, homelessness. This report aims to report the stories shared as faithfully as possible while protecting individual identities. These are also stories of incredible resourcefulness, resilience, mental and physical toughness, care, and compassion. We are extremely grateful to all the individuals who were willing to share their life experiences with us to help improve how people and organizations understand Indigenous homelessness in Surrey.*

*We also wish to extend our gratitude to the organizations who assisted us in connecting with Indigenous individuals with lived or living experience of homelessness, specifically staff at the Fraser Region Aboriginal Friendship Centre Association (FRAFCA), Surrey Urban Mission, Kekinow Housing, Seven Sacred Fires, and Lookout Housing + Health Society. Your generosity in staff time and support connecting us with the right people made this project possible.*

*Thank you also to all the staff who participated in organizational interviews and gave us insight into the homelessness service landscape in Surrey, including FRAFCA, Options Community Services, Phoenix Society, Surrey School District, Fraser Health Authority, Kekinow Housing, BC Housing Coordinated Access, Atira Women's Society, and Surrey Urban Mission.*

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Overview

This document represents what we heard through the Finding Our Way Home engagement process. Engagement was conducted between May and July 2022.

Engagement Method	Timing	Number of Participants
Workshop with Guide Group members	May 26, 2022	17 individuals
Interviews with people who identify as Indigenous and have lived or living experience of homelessness	May 25 to August 5, 2022	27 individuals
Interviews with organizations that provide services or supports to Indigenous individuals and families experiencing or at risk of homelessness	May to August 2022	12 organizations

The purpose of this engagement was to better understand the needs of Indigenous individuals and their families experiencing homelessness in Surrey and to identify strategic recommendations for better serving these needs in community.

In service of our purpose, the following guiding principles were used throughout the engagement process:

- Relational approach's that centre respect, transparency, honesty, humility and that honour relationships will be upheld. These approaches will promote and uphold Indigenous ways of knowing and being and support the self-determination of the local Indigenous communities.
- Application of First Nations Principles of OCAP (ownership, control, access, and possession), including the following:
- Compensation for sharing stories and experiences of people with lived experience was based on best practices at \$25 per hour (cash). In addition, tobacco ties were offered where appropriate in addition to compensation to honour the time and energy participants are sharing with us.

### SUILC GUIDE GROUPS

*The Skookum Surrey Guide Groups were created as a prototype during Skookum Lab's Indigenous Social Innovation Lab and have been foundational in ensuring that there is a broad range of perspectives on the experience of urban Indigenous peoples in Surrey. The Guide Groups create a safe space for participants to come together, share their stories, create supportive and resilient relationships grounded in culture and Indigeneity, and assist us in centering Indigenous wisdom and lived experiences. The Guide Groups include Elders, Caregivers, and Youth.*

## 1.2 Who We Heard From

Through interviews, we sought to hear from a range of Indigenous people with lived and living experiences. The list below reflects the diversity of these experiences. Household sizes and types, e.g., individuals, families, single parents and also inclusive of experiences of overcrowding and pressures places on housing providers.

- Diversity of ages; youngest interviewee was in their late teens and oldest was in their eighties
- Women and men; interviewees were not asked if they identified as 2SLGBTQ2+
- Different types of homelessness, e.g., past and present experience, street, hidden, accessing shelters
- Metis, First Nations, status and non-status individuals from a wide range of territories
- Urban Indigenous and away from home
- People who are disconnected from Indigenous identity / community
- People with disabilities and health challenges
- People experiencing mental health or substance use disorders, including those experiencing co-occurring disorders.
- Experiences, e.g., residential school survivors and those with intergenerational impacts, recovery homes, leaving criminal justice system, Sixties Scoop, aging out care, Millennial Scoop, institutionalized care, intergenerational residential school survivor

While these interviews represent many life experiences, we understand that there are those that we did not reach through this process. We also acknowledge that short interviews cannot capture the depth and nuance of an individual's life, nor did we set such a high ambition. Our intent through these interviews was to shed light on the stories of Indigenous homelessness in Surrey that Point-in-Time Homeless Counts and shelter data does not reflect adequately, and to highlight that varied pathways into homelessness, as well as common issues and barriers related to services and supports. We also sought to understand the types of services that individuals access.

Guide Groups engage the expertise and experience of a select group of people to design and implement creative resolutions and foster collaborative work environments that promote ethical leadership and bring meaningful resolution, in this case, to complex social challenges. A select group of members of the local Indigenous community who have expertise or lived experience with housing challenges were invited to share their insights and perspectives that Indigenous people face. Through these shared perspectives and collective insights, the hope was to foster a deeper understanding of the current situation including services, challenges, and ideas for solutions.

### 1.3 Key Learnings

On May 26, Guide Group members participated in a three-hour workshop to explore the pathways into homelessness, barriers to securing and maintaining housing for Indigenous people in Surrey, and existing and missing services for Indigenous people at risk of or experiencing homelessness. This session highlighted the following:

- Pathways into homelessness are complex and layered. People are often experiencing multiple issues at once and have few resources to support them. Key pathways into homelessness include a history of trauma and violence, high cost of housing, low wages and lack of financial resources lack of addictions treatment, discrimination and high risk of evictions in a competitive housing market, and the impact of the child welfare system. Participants also highlighted that colonization, the Indian Act and the reserve system have created conditions of perpetual poverty for Indigenous people.
- Key challenges for securing and maintaining include very high cost of housing; racism and discrimination in the housing market experienced by Indigenous people, especially those with larger families; substance use; mental health challenges; lack of support systems and difficulty navigating a complicated service delivery system; difficulty accessing non-market housing due to long waitlists and eligibility requirements; lack of job skills and steady work opportunities that limit income; among many others.

## FINDING OUR WAY HOME: WHAT WE HEARD REPORT

- Key organizations providing supports for Indigenous people at risk of or experiencing homelessness include FRAFCA, Kekinow, Options, School District 36 Indigenous support workers, Together We Can, and Atira.
- Numerous service gaps and barriers were identified. Participants gave consistent feedback that their experience with services reflected a lack of resources and a lack of supports that address the needs of Indigenous people.
- Participants shared a number of ideas for addressing Indigenous homelessness in Surrey including creating more opportunities for Indigenous-controlled housing, creating renter processes that meet the needs of Indigenous households, more dedicated Indigenous support services, and more lower cost housing.

### 1.4 Workshop Summary

#### WHAT DO PATHWAYS INTO HOMELESSNESS LOOK LIKE IN SURREY FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLE? ARE THERE FACTORS OR SITUATIONS CONTRIBUTE TO HOMELESSNESS?

- Challenges in home communities that push people to leave, conflict with family, lack of work, poor housing, lack of housing
- Many individuals go back and forth between their home community and the city
- People drawn to city life or opportunities in city – education, access to medical treatment, work – but city life can also be overwhelming due to cost of housing and lack of resources
- Cost of rent is extremely high and many people who move to city are not prepared for it, cost of living is a major driver of homelessness
- Displacement in other communities due to floods and forest fires
- Reserve system is set up to perpetuate poverty, root cause of poverty
- Impact of residential school system – trauma and lack of mental health supports, people turn to self-medication and suicide because they cannot get help
- City provides services unavailable in smaller communities, like counselling and mental health, some people have to leave their home community to get help
- Displacement due to redevelopment or landlords selling their homes or claiming they family occupancy to force renters out
- People have low self worth, don't feel good about themselves

## FINDING OUR WAY HOME: WHAT WE HEARD REPORT

- Lack of educational attainment
- Those most affected are low-income people, youth, Elders
- Evictions without time to find new housing
- Rent increases
- Huge proportion of Indigenous children in government care
- Elders living on minimal pensions, at risk if rent goes up
- Evictions because additional family members move in, landlords don't let you help your family out
- Ministry system perpetuates trauma
- Sexual assault, domestic violence

“To be Indigenous of the land and to be homeless does not make sense. How can that be?”

## WHAT ARE CHALLENGES TO SECURING OR MAINTAINING HOUSING IN SURREY FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLE? WHAT IS THE IMPACT ON INDIVIDUALS, FAMILIES, COMMUNITY?

- Lots of organizations and service providers to navigate – a very fractured service landscape, hard to know who to go to
- Racism and stereotyping in the housing market, landlords make assumptions about Indigenous people and are biased against large families, common law relationships
- Substance use contributes to people struggling to maintain their housing
- Strict eligibility requirements for housing and supports can mean people slip through the cracks
- Government and service providers do not care
- Lack of government action on housing; Indigenous people are not prioritized
- Lots of red tape to get into non-market housing and long waitlists
- Poor quality of homes
- Lack of intergenerational wealth holds Indigenous people back



## FINDING OUR WAY HOME: WHAT WE HEARD REPORT

- Lack of understanding from non-Indigenous people
- High cost of housing, people need multiple jobs to afford housing
- Lack of access to credit
- Perception that Indigenous people at risk of homelessness do not get the same supports that refugees and other people in need of support get
- Lack of steady work, job skills, barriers to employment such as lack of a computer, cellphone, transit access, showers, childcare, food, etc.
- A combination of things makes it challenging for people to maintain housing
- Landlords are not doing their part to keep units safe and clean (issues with rats, mold, unfinished renovations)
- Frenzied housing market is pushing people to sell
- Isolation from community, Surrey is so large there is little Indigenous visibility
- Lateral violence
- Addictions and substance use
- Income and disability assistance do not allow enough to afford rent
- Landlords penalize renters who ask for things to be fixed
- People are worried about getting kicked out for asking for help when they are dealing with challenges, fear having children taken away
- Constantly moving and not having a permanent mailing address
- Lack of computer or smartphone access to search for housing listings
- Lack of / insufficient rent subsidies
- Indigenous people are told to take courses, bring people as advocates, references, etc. to be allowed to rent
- Landlords do not follow Residential Tenancy Act, invade privacy, don't make repairs
- Renters not aware suites are not legal (e.g., unpermitted secondary suites)
- Reported that there is a "do not rent" list that landlords can put renters on that blacklists them from multiple landlords
- Hard to find housing with pet(s)

## FINDING OUR WAY HOME: WHAT WE HEARD REPORT

- Neighbors who do not understand complicated family dynamics and children with complex needs
- Wages are too low
- Job loss
- Relationship breakups or death of a spouse
- Violence
- Lack of financial supports
- Lack of mental health supports
- Limited housing for Indigenous people
- Rising costs because of inflation

### WHAT SERVICES EXIST TO SUPPORT INDIGENOUS PEOPLE EXPERIENCING OR AT RISK OF HOMELESSNESS IN YOUR COMMUNITY? OF THESE SERVICES, ARE THERE SERVICES THAT YOU WOULD OR WOULD NOT RECOMMEND AND WHY?

- Services available
  - FRAFCA outreach program helps people find housing, especially if they are at risk of homelessness
  - Kekinow offers supports, does good work supporting residents going through big issues (e.g., substance use, violence in building), and does not automatically evict people for substance use
  - Options provides supports and resources
  - Indigenous support workers at schools to check in on people (bus tickets, help with appointments, groceries)
  - Together We Can offers second stage housing
  - Atira has an Indigenous outreach worker
  - Surrey Urban Indigenous Leadership Committee events
- Service barriers and gaps
  - Getting a hold of service providers can be challenging – can be waiting for a long time
  - Lots of service providers to navigate

## FINDING OUR WAY HOME: WHAT WE HEARD REPORT

- Some programs have barriers, such as requiring families to attend certain programs which some people find it hard to do
- Service providers often ask invasive questions and have access to personal information like bank statements
- Turnover within service providers is extremely high – the person you are working with often leaves
- Fewer Indigenous resources in Surrey than Vancouver
- Housing eligibility and RGI (rent geared to income) requirements based on before tax income can be a barrier – temporary income increases can negatively impact your RGI benefit
- Access to transportation
- Lack of individual advocacy
- Lack of supports for seniors
- Difficulty accessing family doctor for health issues, to support getting on disability
- Lack of mental health services for Indigenous people to reduce police intervention
- Housing providers are really strict on rent delays, little room for flexibility
- Lack of supports for people with addictions
- People scared to call police when they need help – risk getting shot or psychiatrically committed
- Need better training for wellness checks
- Lack of places for Indigenous mothers
- Not enough Indigenous input into systems that are supposed to support
- Financial abuse from service providers
- No one to talk to about racism landlords
- Not enough advocacy for safe and affordable housing, anti-racism advocacy in rental market
- Lack of trauma-informed staff – e.g., individuals who cannot read or write penalized for not being able to respond to emails
- Income taxes need to be done to qualify for non-profit housing which can be a barrier
- Some participants said that there were no services or supports in Surrey
- Gatekeeping of resources, feeling like potential services are kept secret

## FINDING OUR WAY HOME: WHAT WE HEARD REPORT

- Some Indigenous service providers look down on people applying to subsidies and supports
- Hard to recommend service providers because everywhere is short staffed
- MCFD support only available once children are already in care
- Perception that money set aside for services for Indigenous people is not being used properly by organizations
- People do not understand colonial impacts
- Lack of space at non-market housing providers, small units
- Overcrowded schools and lack of housing options near schools
- Potential ideas for solutions
  - First Nations land trust in Surrey to give Indigenous people an opportunity to buy into equity
  - Guaranteed income
  - Training and employment opportunities
  - Residential tenancy rights focused on Indigenous people that include cultural supports
  - More outreach support for housing
  - Indigenous renters' directory where landlords can list properties
  - Website where Indigenous people can access supports and find advocates in Surrey
  - Indigenous shelters and resources
  - "Lots and lots" of 24/7 services dedicated to housing Indigenous people
  - More wraparound services
  - Treatment centres for families
  - Rent-to-own opportunities
  - Lower cost housing
  - Program where Elders do not have to pay for food
  - Access to garden for growing food

"We need big change, we need help, we need services, we need money. The government has the resources."

"Solution: Land back."

# 2 INDIVIDUAL STORIES OF HOMELESSNESS

## 2.1 Key Learnings

As part of this work, we conducted interviews with Indigenous individuals with lived and living experience of homelessness to understand their pathways into homelessness, as well as the barriers and supports they interacted with.

Interview respondents had varying experiences and responses to interview questions, however there were some common themes among respondents:

- Most respondents had weak ties or no ties to their home communities
- Most participants had complex trauma
- Most expressed a desire to reconnect with their culture
- Most were at risk of homelessness, were currently experiencing homelessness, or had previously experienced homelessness
- Most faced some sort of physical or mental disability that interfered with their ability to earn a living
- Most perceived increasing unaffordability and low rates of income assistance as the greatest barriers to housing
- Most experienced some sort of racial housing discrimination
- Most had negative housing experiences
- Many express a desire to be able to have a home where they could have an overnight guest or family member

Some less common, but still frequent themes also came up:

- Many respondents had experienced some sort of institutionalization
- Many expressed a desire to work and keep a job
- Many respondents were Elders or single mothers

## FINDING OUR WAY HOME: WHAT WE HEARD REPORT

- Many criticized the process involved in accessing supportive services as degrading
- Many said housing supports could be improved by strengthening family support service provisions, creating a more collective housing model that promotes interaction and communion between residents, more support for youth, more wraparound services.
- Many folks expressed the need for gaining life skills, further education, and job training, and safe spaces to encourage substance use recovery
- Most provided feedback on what services in Surrey are working well for those at risk of homelessness or are experiencing homelessness. The most frequently cited resource service providers respondents recommended for Indigenous folks are:
  - FRAFCA
  - 7 Sacred Fires
  - Kekinow
  - SUMS
  - Olive Branch
  - Lookout

Finally, experiences that were notable include:

- A few respondents told us they had experienced trauma that made their home communities an unsafe place, and others perceived that their mental health and/or substance use challenges or past conflicts made them unwelcome in their communities
- A few respondents noted having parents who were residential school survivors and a few others noted having survived the 60s scoop
- Almost no participants were born and raised in Surrey
- A few previously worked in the area of social service provision and then found themselves surprised and embarrassed that they now have to access the same supportive services they formerly offered their clients
- Experiences at shelters were mixed

## 2.2 Interview Summaries

*Names and identifying information have been changed to protect privacy.*

### **Sherry - Youth resilience and voice for self-determination**

Sherry, an Anishinaabe youth from Central Ontario, moved to Surrey with her mother in August 2018. Sherry doesn't share what happened in the time between living with her mother and moving into the care of the Ministry of Child and Family Development (MCFD). She only reveals that she currently lives in a supported housing building where she has her own suite, with her own bedroom and bathroom, and a shared kitchen and shower separate from her suite. With the assistance of the MCFD and FRAFCA, Sherry was able to move from a foster home into this suite. Of the foster home, Sherry describes being verbally abused by her care provider and says, "...it was really bad, I was scared...". It becomes clear that Sherry believes that had she not been able to advocate for herself, and threatening MCFD with sleeping on the street, she does not believe she would have received her supportive housing placement. Sherry currently feels safe and finds support where needed but is anxious about her transition out of institutional care – she is seeing a substance use counsellor and a roots worker through MCFD who assists with helping Sherry reconnect with her culture, community, and extended family. Sherry shares the challenges she has faced and asserts her frustration with the difficulty many youth face in accessing safe housing. Sherry is a strong advocate for youth being given greater self-determination over their lives while in institutional care.

Sherry perceives a shortage of safe shelters for youth. In Surrey, she tells us there is only one safe shelter for youth – The Native Youth Safe House through Fraser Region Aboriginal Friendship Centre Association (FRAFCA) – others are physically and culturally unsafe. Sherry shares her experiences of sexual assault and racial discrimination related to shelter stays. These traumatic experiences have pushed Sherry to move from one community to another to access safer Indigenous specific shelter services. In terms of other good resources for those facing risk of homelessness, Sherry recommends Vancouver Peak House, a live in treatment centre for youth.

The supportive housing suite is an improvement for Sherry, but she is frustrated by the strict rules at the home; she would love it if she was allowed to have friends over for visits. Overall, Sherry shares having a great deal of anxiety around aging out of care. She is struggling to find suitable, affordable housing elsewhere, and doesn't know where she will find support once she is forced to transition out of (ministry) care.

### **Henry - A will to reclaim identity and connection with family**

Henry identifies with his Ojibwe, Cree, and European heritage, and was born in Robinson-Huron Treaty territory in Ontario. Now, nearing middle age, Henry would like to gain his band membership but is unsure where that support could be accessed in this community. He says that without it, he feels a noticeable lack of belonging.

Henry moved to Surrey a decade ago after feeling dissatisfied with small town life. Henry shared that he is homeless for the first time, and that he became homeless after his child had been removed from his care. He believes that had there been more supports for single fathers, he might be in a better place. Henry stays at a low barrier shelter; he likes it because they hold places for returning clients. Henry has been homeless for several months and links his situation to rising costs in BC and growing unaffordability. He also connects his struggle with substance use with his challenges in maintaining housing. Henry shares that while he regularly sees his child who he loves deeply, he is hoping to somehow acquire his own housing, or to get into a detox centre so that he can be a better father. We hear a lot about housing discrimination practices against Indigenous folks. When we ask Henry about this, he tells us that he thinks, because he possesses a lighter complexion, he doesn't face the same discrimination as other Indigenous folks although he is unsure if the same is true for his experience with the child welfare system. Henry reveals that he hasn't had any major barriers accessing services geared to those at risk of homelessness; he finds it relatively easy to access services because of his "outgoing and open" personality. Despite his ease in accessing supports and services, Henry says there is a need in Surrey for a transitional housing for men specifically.

### **Rita - Matriarchal undertakings**

Rita is an Elder of mixed Indigenous and European heritage who has been living on Coast Salish Territory for over 30 years. She is the daughter of a residential school survivor and a sister to six siblings, only five of which are still living. Rita discloses that she had a twin who tragically drowned.

Rita, a mother to many, helped raise her eight grandchildren in addition to adopting a baby boy of her own. Rita shares that her adopted son started using drugs in his youth and that one day she found her son in a state of overdose. Fortunately, being trained in overdose response, Rita responded with expertise and rushed him to the Hospital. Rita discloses to us that despite her son's attempts at recovery, he is still using, and that despite these challenges, she is still in contact but has been faced with the difficult decision of creating boundaries between them.

Rita is a busy woman. She is currently working on reconnecting with her Metis community; is actively involved in her church; efforts to try to connect Indigenous kids



to their cultures; and works to provide supports to Indigenous families. Having her hands in so many pots and striving to support her community, Rita takes on a great deal of work – some paid and some unpaid. Rita currently works part-time with a family services organization in Surrey and is an advising Elder in her community, as a result, she faces financial insecurity.

Rita spends so much time taking care of others and struggling to make ends meet financially that she struggles to take care of her health. She tells us she suffers from both circulatory and digestive diseases. Although of retirement age, not working means Rita is limited to \$629 a month, only slightly more than what she pays for rent in her affordable housing. This is hardly enough to get by. Rita shares that she finds there is a lack of support for folks who need income assistance, and she criticizes the process to acquire assistance as dehumanizing to folks.

Rita has been more fortunate than other in her ability to acquire affordable housing through the partnership between the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA), Lu'ma and Kekinow Native Housing Society and has had access to affordable housing for the last 20 years. Before finding her current housing, Rita says she experienced discrimination which made it the process that more challenging. She has also seen many of her Indigenous clients' experience discrimination. Rita comments, "there is not enough housing available for our people". Despite Rita's knowledge on the resources available to Indigenous folks, acquired through the work she has done and currently does, providing supports and services to folks in need - she is now at-risk of homelessness. Rita says, " [It's a] humbling experience to access the same services as my clients".

### **Elmer - Ability to withstand adversity**

Elmer was born in the Northwest Territories. Although a status First Nations member, Elmer doesn't have any contact with his home community and has mixed feelings about this association. Elmer moved to Surrey two years ago. Before coming to Surrey, he had housing, a job, and was contemplating going to school. Elmer shares that he made some poor choices and was incarcerated for them. Although he had the charges dropped, he wishes things had worked out differently.

Elmer is currently under house arrest at a short-term rental. He worries about what will happen to him if he doesn't get into a treatment program following his house arrest. His hope is that he can get into treatment and then eventually go to school to receive trades certification. In the situation where he cannot receive treatment, Elmer needs to find housing. He tells us he has received some support from a local Indigenous service organization who are assisting him in finding housing. He says he has had no luck so far in finding housing and wonder whether it might be a better idea for him to

return to his former community. He finds that it is very difficult to find housing in Surrey and that he'd likely have more support elsewhere. Although not currently homeless, Elmer is at risk of becoming homeless once his house arrest term is up.

### **Nancy - Unrelenting family commitment**

Nancy, originally from the territory of the Nlaka'pamux in the Fraser Canyon, has been in Surrey since 2001 and works as a caretaker, cook and cleaner. Nancy is a mother to four children and has experienced the trauma of losing one of those children. She also has four grandchildren, one of which still lives with Nancy. She describes having to take on a great deal of caretaking for her grown children despite her own hopes and dreams of going to school.

Nancy doesn't have any connection to or support from her band. The only support she recalls was from her parents, who have since passed. Nancy shares that although her and her family are currently housed, conditions are cramped; she describes having to squeeze four people into one bedroom. Nancy worries she won't be able to make the rent since her landlords increased it. The idea of having to find alternative housing is daunting. Nancy says that she has faced a great deal of discrimination for being Indigenous, and particularly, for being an Indigenous mother with a large family. She describes being treated unfairly by a landlord in the past. She had been recommended to reach out to Keginow Native Housing Society for housing advocacy support. Even having that potential support, she states that she didn't have the time or energy to fight back. In addition to Keginow, Nancy knows that if she or any other Indigenous person she knows was at risk of homelessness, FRAFCA provides great supportive resources. Nancy says she "likes the way they handle housing". Despite the good work FRAFCA and others are doing, she sees a need for more youth programming and other supportive services for youth, as well as greater support for Elders, particularly with transportation.

Although currently housed, Nancy has needed to stay in a shelter in the past and describes her experience as positive. Nancy says she stayed at a shelter in Surrey where she was provided food and access to laundry. Nancy doesn't name the shelter, but she tells us it was a positive experience, sharing that she learned life skills she didn't have before and that those skills helped her become a better parent, and it even helped her children learn organization skills.

Nancy shares how weary she has become. She describes needing greater support for her family as they are faced with major physical and mental health challenges, addictions, and unemployment. Nancy says she never gets to rest. She cooks and cleans, shops, and plays caretaker; she goes to sleep, gets up and does it all over again. This is what she's done for years.

### **Carl - Education and reclamation of Indigeneity**

Carl is middle-aged and was born in Treaty 8 Territory in the Northwest Territories. Carl is a survivor of the “60s scoop” and was not aware of his Indigeneity until he was 26 years old which made connecting to his Indigenous identity challenging. In years past, Carl struggled with substance use and experienced homelessness, which he now sees as an impact of striving to connect with others and seeking acceptance. Carl moved from the East Coast to Surrey at the start of the pandemic to be closer with his family. He moved in with his sister and is now going to school. He is studying psychology and creative writing and has worked on the side in the film industry.

Carl says he’s faced an unprecedented amount of discrimination since living in Surrey. He says he even cut his hair to appear less Indigenous. Carl says receiving support hasn’t been a major issue for him because he fills a lot of the needs-based resource requirements. He has received the odd bursary because he is Indigenous, has a disability, and has a high-grade point average. He tells us he has also received health support from the Indigenous Centre at Kwantlen Polytechnical University in Surrey. Carl shares that if he knew anyone at risk of homelessness, he would recommend a shelter he is familiar with, stating that they provide you with somewhere to sleep and connect you to other resources. Carl is appreciative that he has a place to stay with his sister, but he really misses living by himself and enjoying the independence and privacy that comes with living alone.

### **Ned - Seeking roots**

Ned is a middle-aged man originally from Treaty 6 Territory in Saskatchewan. Ned and his mother moved back and forth between BC and Saskatchewan throughout his youth. Ned tells us he doesn’t identify with any particular First Nation but is aware that his mother was Cree. Ned has been in and out of homelessness ever since his mother passed from cancer. Since then, Ned has been precariously housed and moved from Surrey’s Emergency Response Centre on to one shelter after another. He shares that he had acquired housing at one point but was evicted when his landlord sold the house. Ned would like it to be known that he doesn’t use drugs or drink alcohol but still feels discriminated against, both in his search for housing, and in his treatment at shelters. Ned has attempted to find affordable housing through some of the local non-profits without any luck. He tells us he doesn’t like staying at the shelters. He says the staff are often dismissive, the food is low quality or inedible, and some other users of the shelters create an unsafe and even violent space. Ned also finds it disheartening that the shelter available does not allow user autonomy and independence. For example, he says he is unable to take his cat with him to most places.

### **Andrew - Desires to walk alongside**

Andrew, a middle-aged man from Treaty 4 Territory in Ontario, says he has been homeless since he was in his early teens. He grew up in an environment of extreme violence and was incarcerated early in his young adulthood. Despite this, Andrew pushed himself and became a self-taught handyman.

Andrew has been homeless in Surrey for around several decades and, much of this time, he has struggled with addiction. He shares with us that he also has mental health challenges and would like to receive help but struggles to find a doctor. Andrew knows he has roots in a First Nation community somewhere, but since his mother passed, he has lost all hope of connecting back to his community.

Andrew's physical and mental health challenges make it difficult for him to work despite his desire to do so. In the past, Andrew has had work as a landscaper, a handyman, and performing magic at parties. In addition to his past work experience, Andrew is also an artist who draws and carves. Since he is now unable to work, Andrew receives disability, but says it is not enough to cover housing costs. He shares his frustrations in being discriminated against and stereotyped for being Indigenous and disabled.

Andrew has had poor experiences with the services offered in Surrey to those experiencing homelessness. He tells us he is not a social person and doesn't function well in a crowded environment. Therefore, the shelter experience is really overwhelming and alienating for him, and he has gotten into fights at shelters as a result. Andrew believes that resources such as shelters could be improved if clients using these services had more independence and privacy, and more counselling services were available. Further to this, Andrew finds that there should be more peer support workers who understand client experiences - something Andrew is particularly interested in returning to school to pursue himself. He is trying to find a way to participate in a social work and drug counselling program. Andrew's ultimate dream is to have a cabin and live on the land with only himself and all the animals.

### **Hal - Persistence and industriousness in accessing supports**

Hal is a Coast Salish man born in Surrey and raised in between Surrey and Prince George. Hal is not as connected to his home community as he'd like to be because of his substance use disorder. Hal started using drugs when he was a teen when his mom was going through medical treatment. He started experimenting with the pharmaceutical drugs lying around the home and became addicted to opioids. Although Hal has had periods of sobriety, he has always ended up returning to using substances. He says the most supportive service out there he has found is the

Injectable Opioid Agonist Treatment (IOAT) program at Lookout. He says this program has helped him stay away from dangerous street drugs.

It has been eight months since Hal lost his housing due to his landlord selling the building. He is currently on the BC housing waitlist and expects to hear back in good time. Until that happens, Hal will continue to rely on the support services available to those experiencing homelessness in Surrey. Hal says that his biggest challenge is finding and retaining housing. Even the shelters in Surrey can fill up, Hal shares that last winter he had to go neighbouring communities to access emergency shelter services.

Hal works from time to time doing landscaping and garbage removal through an employment agency but is limited by his disability. He tells us he often feels discriminated against for being Indigenous and stereotyped because of his drug use. Having spent a great deal of his life in Prince George, Hal says he has experienced less racism there than in Surrey, and likens this to Prince George having a higher population of Indigenous folks. Hal knows there is support he could access from his home community and there are some supports he already has accessed. He describes travelling to receive distribution cheques from his home community. When he informed the resource centre worker that he was homeless, he received a gift card from her. Hal says, "I never thought someone would reach out to me and offer to help without even knowing me".

### **Agnes - Instinct for self-preservation and a good life**

Agnes, a mother of four, moved to Surrey from Treaty 4 Territory after fleeing an abusive relationship. Since being in Surrey, Agnes has struggled to find resources that can help her situation. Agnes is familiar with the system and tells us she used to be the person helping others, now she is in the position where she needs help. Agnes says she was adopted and grew up in a well-to-do family and describes herself as "too white for the brown and too brown for the white".

Although Agnes is currently housed, she is at great risk of becoming homeless again as she describes being bullied and discriminated against by her current landlord. If she doesn't find a solution, Agnes anticipates needing access to a shelter once again within the month. She has faced challenge after challenge retaining housing. She describes being discriminated against for being Indigenous, turned down from shelter access, and having to settle for housing that is inappropriate for children. Agnes says she found some support from local organizations, but also had a negative experience with an abusive staff member. She knows resources are available, but she thinks there are too few available for Indigenous folks despite those being the resources most needed. Agnes is worried about her children, they have no extended family, are precariously

housed, and Agnes herself has not been able to deal with the PTSD she has from the violence she's faced because she's been too busy trying keep her family afloat.

As a result of her difficulty in accessing the resources she has needed, Agnes can see the gaps clearly. She sees a great need for housing resources that have a more interactive Indigenous community-building model. She would love to be linked up with other Indigenous folks facing similar challenges. She also sees a great need for more life skills programs for Indigenous folks. Agnes says that the skills people learn in on-reserve communities do not translate into urban life. Agnes also sees a need for a more networked, streamlined, and goal-oriented approach to helping clients. She says she doesn't want to just see a file on people, rather, there should be an end goal for each client, not just a one-off emergency response approach.

### **Jack - Transformational success through cultural healing**

Jack identifies as European and Cherokee. Now middle-aged, Jack describes his childhood and youth, growing up in MCFD care, as rife with substance use and violence. He says he spent most of his youth in juvenile detention and most of his early adult years incarcerated and institutionalized. Jack also describes losing his partner, who he had a child with, to an overdose three years into his sobriety. He is now raising his child with his current partner.

Jack shares that going through counselling and participating in talking circles really helped him in his recovery. He transitioned from a one-year Indigenous treatment centre to Indigenous transitional housing. He was then offered a harm reduction position with a local Indigenous service agency and has worked there for four years now. Jack has stable housing and lives in a 2-bedroom home where he is fortunate to have a good landlord.

As a result of Jack's history of institutionalization and his need for a variety of resources coming out of those institutions, he is well placed to provide input on Surrey's current resource availability and quality. Jack says that he would recommend the Lookout Society rooming houses for anyone at risk of homelessness. He tells us their rooms are only \$375 per month. He also thinks that Surrey's hotel program and the SUMS shelter are good resources for finding housing and receiving rent subsidies. Jack says that Surrey needs more shelters and supportive housing. The current availability does not meet the demand. He also reflects on the Modular housing program that began but was removed in Surrey. He thinks that program had great promise if they would only have provided wrap around services.

### **Sandra - Knowledge keeper regeneration**

Sandra is an Elder who has been in Surrey for nine years now. She is originally from a First Nation in Central BC but has no current connection with her home community. She is a survivor of the “60s Scoop” and was placed in foster care at age three after witnessing the murder of a relative. She experienced physical and sexual violence as a child and started using drugs in her late teens. She has now been sober for almost four decades.

These days Sandra is trying to reconnect with her culture. She started sun dancing last year and will be attending a naming ceremony this year. She also dances pow wow and volunteers supporting a wellness circle. Despite these positive components of her life, Sandra reiterates numerous times that she doesn't feel safe. She left her living situation in Vancouver for this reason. Now, even in her current housing situation she doesn't feel safe. She says just “just last week there was a stabbing in the building”. She says the only reason she has stayed in her housing accommodation for three years is because of limitations brought on by the pandemic and because she worries no where else will be as affordable. Sandra criticizes society and emphasizes that there should be full support for Indigenous Elders considering the historical treatment of Indigenous folks by the government. She shares her embarrassment with having to ask for basic resources and says, “Elders should be taken care of. Each Elder is one paycheque away from being homeless”.

### **Rachel - Strength of community**

Rachel is a middle-aged woman with children who previously had stable housing in Surrey but due to a string of extremely challenging circumstances occur her whole family has been put at risk of homelessness. Rachel used to be a homeowner, but her home burned down. Following this unfortunate circumstance, Rachel had multiple strokes and was forced to seek shelter at a hotel paid for by social services. Rachel was previously working at a local non-profit social service provider as a support worker in low-income supportive housing for women. Now, she is focusing on getting well. Rachel also did quill work and beading prior to her health problems, and at one time was a champion Pow Wow dancer. Fortunately, because of Rachel's dire circumstances, her and her family were quickly provided affordable housing. She is appreciative of the stability of her current housing, and she's been enjoying getting to know her neighbours, telling us, “they call me auntie”. Although her housing is affordable, she finds it cramped, and tells us she had to rehome her former pets to be able to move in. Rachel feels fortunate that she had a good friend who works for the Mother's Centre in Surrey who was a strong advocate for her and her family in their time of need. Rachel says if she was going to recommend something to anyone Indigenous facing challenging housing circumstances, she would recommend the

Indigenous resource guide offered by Kekinow, and additionally that they reach out to FRAFCA. Rachel does point out some gaps she sees and says Surrey needs more programs for single parents, daycare, and childcare. She also thinks there should be greater outreach services focused on preventative help for youth.

### **Mary - Open to receiving support**

Mary is a middle-aged woman from Treaty 9 Territory in Ontario but spent most of her youth in Vancouver. She tells us she got into trouble in her teenage years and her parents sent her to Vancouver to live with relatives. Mary tells us she has been homeless in Surrey since she was in her late teens and describes herself as having a lifestyle of drugs and alcohol. Mary tells us she has reached out to her Chief for help but that help never came through. She receives support in the form of glasses and dental from FNHA, but she says it's not easy – “there are many hoops to jump through”. Mary says she has “experienced both sex work and selling drugs to pay for the things that [she] needs”. She tells us that she had two years where she was sober and became a clerk at grocery store but lost that job when she relapsed. Mary primarily stays at a coed, low-barrier shelter in Surrey. She describes the shelter as a challenging place to stay. Mary emphasizes that her biggest challenge is accessing resources. She is either unaware of the existence of certain resources or she says he doesn't receive call-backs, or she misses phone calls about receiving resources. She explains to us that she needs a support worker to help with applications and making phone calls. She says she hasn't had any positive experiences with any of the support organizations, Indigenous or not.

### **Ricki - Seeking stability**

Ricki is Haida but was born and raised in East Vancouver. Although born in Vancouver, Ricki visited Haida Gwaii frequently as a child. These days she is not connected to her home community. She tells us that after experiencing sexual violence as a child, it became an unsafe space for her to return to community. She left home when she was barely a teen and survived by couch surfing all over the Lower Mainland. She tells us she developed an alcohol dependency at a young age and had a child when she was still a teen. She also tells us, the father of her child passed only five days before she gave birth. As a teenager stricken with grief, she gave up custody of her child and leaned harder into alcohol and started using other substances later on. She has had long periods of sobriety and long periods of substance use. Ricki says she's been housing insecure for most of her life. Now, almost passed her young adult years, Ricki shares that she had a lot of anger when she was younger and frequently got into fights. She says she is learning to let go of that anger.



Ricki worked previously in the trades industry. She tells us that she is no longer working due to a culture of substance use within the workplace and that impacts her desire to stay maintain recovery. Ricki suffers from social anxiety and has an emotional support dog to help her cope. Ricki is currently housed at a coed recovery home for Indigenous folks, but says it is not stable. She can only stay at her residence for one more year, and she can't afford to live elsewhere. Her disability income is not enough. She says she would go to supportive housing, but she is worried about the drugs there. She is also attached to where she is – she says it feels like a home, not a facility.

Ricki tells us that she has had a relatively easy time accessing services in Surrey, but she is quick to note that not everyone has the same luxury. She feels like she knows the ins and outs of the system because she has been homeless for so long. Still, she is keenly aware of how difficult it is for many to access the same services. Ricki shared with us that she would lie about her ethnicity to attain housing. She would tell potential landlords that she was either of mixed Asian or Filipino descent to mitigate the racism perpetuated against Indigenous folks in her community.

Although she's been able to access resources for finding temporary shelter solutions, she hasn't had the same luck with substance use support and trauma therapy. Ricki says FRAFCA, Access, and 7 Sacred Fires offer helpful resources for those at risk of homelessness. She points out the gaps in Surrey's resources as well. She says there needs to be more dignified food supports available. Rick says her greatest need is for safe long-term housing where she is safe to stay sober. She also shares her desire for training and education. Although she has experience in the trades, she knows that it is not a safe space for those in substance recovery.

### **Ernie – A hunger for healing**

Ernie was born in Alberta and moved to Surrey when he was a child. Now a young adult, Ernie is a survivor of complex trauma. He moved to Surrey with his mom when she separated from his father. Ernie recalls that both his parents were challenged by alcoholism and as a result his Auntie helped raise him. His father was unable to be a caregiver after the family experienced collective trauma. The family was in a motor vehicle accident that resulted in his mother and sister traumatic injuries. His younger sister was severely injured and never fully recovered; she became disabled, non-verbal and passed away prematurely. Ernie shares that since that event, the family dissolved and he has never received any grief support, he only feels numbness, and shares that the incident resulted in a great deal of anger, violence and substance use for him. He discloses that he became addicted to methamphetamines before his teenage years.

Ernie doesn't have any connection with any Indigenous community. He says since the accident he has felt abandoned with no connection to his Indigenous family or community aside from his Aunt. He shares that he is trying to reconnect with his

culture and spirituality through ceremony. Ernie has struggled with homelessness four times in the past year and is “hungry for [his] life back”. Ernie says he is receiving good support at a coed recovery home for Indigenous folks, his housing is stable but that it is not a ‘forever home’. He’s worried that if he relapses, he will lose his housing. He seems pleased to be housed somewhere Indigenous and culture-based but says, “I don’t have a home, I am comfortable, and I enjoy the company, but a home is where you plant roots and plan a future – this is not a home for me”.

Ernie has been fortunate enough to have a relative who is well connected in community and works within the social serving sector, she has guided him to resources like the 211 number, Options and FRAFCA. Ernie says his greatest needs are education, greater access to information, and financial stability. He would love it if he had a stable house in Surrey with ongoing support and the opportunity to live close to his family.

### **George - A displaced Elder**

George was born and raised in the Vancouver area. He is a member of a First Nation with traditional territories nearby but hasn’t been to the community in over a decade. He is elderly now but worked in the fishing industry for most of his life. He is currently housed in a transitional housing unit that he enjoys because both him and his partner have units there. He says he has a bed, access to a kitchen and bathroom, and good food. In the past, he has lived in a tent and has been in and out of shelters for a long time. He has had many negative housing experiences in his life and says his worst experience was a house that was cold and unsafe, and where other people living there were using substances.

To others experiencing homelessness, he would recommend SUMS who helped him find his current housing. He would like to see more storage options for people in Surrey. He says that while his shelter experience was okay, the shelters can make you feel bad and there is yelling and disruption at night.

### **Caroline - The impacts of complex trauma, grief, and loss**

Caroline is a 33-year-old two spirit Cree woman originally from Saskatchewan but relocated across Canada when she was a small child, but she some family in the areas and graduated in Surrey. Caroline has not received services from her First Nation other than an opportunity to attend treatment programming, but she declined as she felt that it was too far away from her son who lives with his father. Caroline shared that she would like to receive support for substance use but that she doesn’t want to be locked up or sent away. Caroline shares that the child welfare system has had an immense impact on her life. After her wife passed away from ovarian cancer both her and her

son took it hard, she had an overdose which led to an apprehension and eventually losing parental rights for her child.

Currently, Caroline is newly sheltered but had previously spent a lot of time outdoors, she shares that while she was outside, she has accessed Outreach services from Lookout, FRAFCA and ATIRA that provided her food, clothing, harm reduction supplies but found that a 'Street Pack' was most helpful that included sleeping bags and a tent. Although she has not spent a lot of time in shelter, she shared that emergency weather shelters got her through. The experience shared was that there was a willingness to stay indoors but that there were challenges accessing the services due to not having a phone. The pandemic made it increasingly difficult to receive services, and she shared that it's also hard to keep up with what programs and services are available, that navigating is challenging and that most caseloads are full and that she feels like a hindrance accessing support. A negative experience shared was being asked to leave a shelter with a partner because she was unable to maintain cleanliness of her room due to being ill with sepsis, she shared that there was a lack of empathy, flexibility and understanding.

Caroline shared a positive experience, being housed temporarily with the support of FRAFCA at a site intended as a tear down, she was housed for about 6 months and has been homeless again for at least a year and a half. When searching for housing, Caroline shared that she has faced discrimination for being Indigenous as well as based on class and for receiving a disability pension. An ideal housing situation for her would be a newer unit with some support and stability, with climate control and the opportunity to transition.

### **Kate - Matriarchal responsibility**

Kate is 41 and Cree is from central Saskatchewan, she shares that much of her family has been displaced and has relocated to the Vancouver Island area. She shared an experience of being recently sheltered alongside her adult son who has been suffering with extreme mental health and substance use challenges, and recently overdosed and was hospitalized. Kate shares proudly that she has attended a handful of universities, and that at one time her son was sponsored to play professional sports. A relationship breakdown occurred for both Kate and her son resulting in relapse for both. Kate shares that prior to being sheltered, she sometimes stayed with friends, but it is not always safe to stay with males and that there are often expectations to engage in un-consensual sex. Although Kate has not stayed in a shelter recently, she has had a positive experience in the past with a shelter when leaving a domestic violence situation.

Kate shares that barriers to housing include unaffordability, limited housing, her own substance use and caretaking her adult child, including attempting to support him in

managing his finances and access services. Kate shares a story of seeking support from RCMP to have her son hospitalized, and him being released into community with no shirt or shoes in the pouring rain, she questions systemic racism. The biggest challenge she faces are the grey areas of Mental Health services, and inability to access housing that meets both of their needs. While accessing support at the local centre she left because she was unable to have her son visit.

Kate realized that her greatest need is to continue working on herself and that her ideal housing situation is one where she has her own home, healthy food, and access to nature.

### **Marie - Experiencing homelessness, relocation and greater Harms**

Marie identifies as Ojibway, is 34 years old and came to Surrey following a domestic violence incident with family, she was brought to the shelter from another lower mainland community because it was the closest shelter that would take pets that wasn't full at the time. A care aid in the past, she shares that she has been in and out of shelters for the last year and a half. Two years ago, she felt her situation was ideal, living in a small community in the Shuswap, and paying \$550.00 a month to rent a trailer with a small, fenced yard. At this time, she worked retail and was happy, this is the longest she has ever lived without a home.

Barriers to housing include expense, lack of transportation, having a pet, smoking and shared accommodation being challenging, she states that she "just has to ride it out here in Surrey until some housing becomes available." Marie has accessed SUMS, Income Assistance and OAT therapy recently in the community and shared with immense shame that she had not previously used Fentanyl until she came to Surrey and now feels like she cannot get clean without housing.

Marie declined housing where she could not have her mother spend the night after a long drive to visit, she shared that she couldn't afford a hotel and believed that she should be allowed to have a family member share her space temporarily.

### **Brian - An intergenerational survivor's pathway to housing through the healthcare system**

Brian is 61-year-old Cree artist whose family originates from Manitoba but was born in the United States and travelled across Canada. No one in his family has status due to disenfranchisement along the way, although he is a first-generation survivor of the residential school system, he has never received support from any First Nation or Metis community other than FRACA, who provided him some groceries and there is no cultural support in her current housing.

Brian shares that he is feeling stable staying at the Nest for the past 6 months, in what he calls harm reduction housing. He proudly shares that he has been able to put some weight on, and that he was referred through the hospital after being on multiple housing lists for years. Challenges he had previously faced included price, discrimination, and the impacts of substance use. When it comes to services, he recommends taking any that are offered, and that Lookout has supported him as well, and is where he accesses OAT programming and that staying in the harm reduction housing allows him to top up or chip to manage chronic pain. Although he is thankful for his housing, he really wished that he was able to have an overnight guest stay occasionally, either a family member or one day a partner.

In the past, Brian has stayed in shelters, but the experience was not positive due to theft, cleanliness, and it being difficult to abstain from substances. He shared that he did not feel safe, as he was also severely beaten over an accusation of theft by a dealer who later found his supply.

### **Thomas - An advocate for stronger health supports in shelter**

Thomas is a 32-year-old Sodo man, born in Manitoba but tells a story of living in every municipality and city in the lower mainland, and shares that he has been in every institution within British Columbia since the age of 12. Today, he proudly shares that currently he has been out of the correctional system for 4 years, the longest stretch yet. Thomas remains unsheltered and stays with a partner and group of friends, most use substances daily. Although he prefers to stay outdoors in the company of his peers, he has stayed in a shelter in the past. Thomas was unwilling to share reasons why he preferred being outdoors and the company of peers, only that he would rather maintain a positive outlook and attitude.

Even though he has not worked recently, he shared that it was rewarding to have been part of a peer-peer program within corrections and shared that he was part of developing a violence free unit. Thomas shared that accessing substance use services was a bit challenging, especially navigating where and how he might access OAT therapy. Thomas communicated that he is on PWD, and often seeks support of a clinic for any first aid needs, but that finding the motivation and hope for receiving other services was tough. Thomas wanted to share that a challenge of being unsheltered, included bylaws removing belongings and having to constantly start over. Something that also didn't sit well with him was that he had a close friend that was denied access to a shelter due to seizures, and what he called intense medical needs. It was upsetting for him that the local shelters had denied this friend shelter stay due to the inability to deliver the appropriate medical support. Unfortunately, this creates a service gap and elevated risk for the most medically vulnerable out on the street without support. Thomas felt that it would have been better to have limited support than none.

### **Terry - Relying on survival crime**

Terry, of Cree and Ojibway descent originally, is a 41-year-old man that has been in and out of recovery for 12 years. Terry describes working in several fields of work and has experience as a laborer, landscaper, within the oil and gas industry, and the social sector supporting recovery homes but in the last couple of years he has been surviving by selling substances. Although Terry has been unsheltered for months, he presents well, and does his best to maintain his hygiene. Currently he sleeps in a tent and showers at friends and shared that it's not too bad in the summer but worries for the winter months.

Terry's pathway into homelessness occurred when a close friend and roommate passes away and he could no longer pay rent, he shared that he lost everything, and that the property owner had forged documents. Terry shared his greatest challenge in securing housing is the cost, that there is just nothing out there available, a bachelor suite is roughly \$1400.00 and income assistance for a single person who does not have a disability is \$935.00. Terry feels like there is no hope or incentive to seek housing, and that he would be discriminated against. Other experiences he has had include unreliable roommates and getting sidetracked while looking for housing.

Although he knows services are available, finding housing seems futile. Terry accesses outreach services and income assistance but resents that there are so few services focused on Indigenous men.

### **Lynn - A young person's struggle**

Lynn, 18, has ties to a coastal First Nation Community in Northern BC, the Cree people and Anishinaabe roots from Ontario. Unfortunately, she is not connected and shares that she receives no support directly from these communities. Surrey Central is her home where she remains unsheltered, coping with substances and addicted to Fentanyl. Lynn shares that she has been without a home on and off since she was 12 years old and has been in care since she was three years old. Lynn shares that often shelters are full, and accessing as a youth is difficult, and that there is a big misconception around all homeless youth being runaways from foster care. Lynn wanted it understood that she was asked to leave both foster homes and a group home and was taken as far as Chilliwack for one night before going to the street, although she was unable to share details, the emotion she shared is feeling like there is nowhere to go.

At 18, she is 'transitioning out of care', has no income but does have a worker at Anika Youth Services who provides some support. Lynn is frustrated because she has been unable to access funds and shares that she has been called stupid for not accessing the services by people within her circle, and that she is just unable to and had no idea

that options existed for her. She wishes she knew about clothing and food allowance years ago. Lynn felt that resources had intentionally be hidden from her and that the system was not transparent, she suggested that the Ministry should have a clearer process.

Lynn has had a positive housing experience recently at what she calls a harm reduction house, but it's not clear why she is no longer housed there. There are also some positive but painful memories of periods of reunification with her mother that were short-lived and shared that the pain of being torn way was unbearable. Another positive experience was when a friend's mother was willing to support her though an agreement with MCFD, but this was temporary too. An ideal housing situation would be renting out her own apartment one day, perhaps with roommates.

### **Sarah - No place feels like home**

Born in Vancouver and raised in Surrey, Sarah is 21 and has Cree roots on her maternal side but is not well connected to her First Nations community and shares that she is unsure how to make the connection since her mother has passed. Sarah is living unsheltered, not because she doesn't anywhere to go to when she needs, but because nowhere feels like home or welcoming in anyway. Sarah believes that it's her lifestyle that doesn't allow her to go home because of use of alcohol, crystal meth and sometimes other substances, she has younger siblings on her dad's side but is not welcome when she is under the influence, so she stays with friends. Sarah also has a challenging time aligning herself with her family's religious views and shares "I can't see myself having a better life or going anywhere because I am constantly trying to escape from where I am, I feel like I can't be myself".

Sarah shares that she has been connected to Littles Place and that was a positive experience, but she left because she had an opportunity to try living with a friend as roommates, which she now regrets and sees that she was not ready but takes it as a learning experience. Sarah is connected to MCFD, and is looking into housing but the biggest barrier for her as a young person is the limitation of having guests, and shares that being social is big for her and might be one of the reasons why she uses substances.

A service that she would recommend is the Youth Hub, it's been helpful because she has been what she calls a ward of the court since her mother passed away when she was 16 years old. Another positive experience for her was having an Indigenous social worker that understood what she was going through. Sarah shared that it could feel like you are going in circles trying to access services, especially without a phone and that 1-1 support works best for her. Sarah shares that she is too scared to stay in shelters but would consider if she absolutely had too, an ideal space would be one that is for women only but where she could have a guest occasionally.

### **Stuart - The overlooked Indigenous community**

Stuart is 34, and a member of a First Nations community within interior BC but had never been there and was unsure where it was. He shared that he is eligible to receive his status because an extended family member came into some money and paid to have their ancestry completed. The challenge for Stuart is that he has no address or safe place to have a status card mailed, and no knowledge of how to access any services through his community. Stuart also is white presenting and is not always able to access Indigenous services without disclosing his identity, which he is still coming to terms with.

The relationship with housing for Stuart has been spending the last four years of his life unsheltered and that his home is where he pops up his tent. In the past, he has accessed various shelters, but preference is the tent because he picked up an infection in a local shelter. Stuart shares that he believes he is on every list there is, but also shared that he had never received VAT and was unsure what that was, or the process to access housing. A big challenge for him is having local bylaw and RCMP remove his belongings often.

What brought him back to the lower mainland from the island, and then later Alberta, was a relationship and child. For a time, he was able to make ends meet by supplementing income with side jobs and having roommates but sadly both his relationship and housings situation dissolved and created a pathway into homelessness. Stuart believes he would need at least 2 jobs to have a home and can't get one because he needs a home to get a job.

He accesses outreach services, but shares "what services, they can't really do much more than food and clothes because there is no housing." Stuart believes that the community needs more housing, adding that there is a lot of hardships for people like him, that terrible things that happen on the street including violence against both women and men, theft and worse. Stuart also thinks more advocates would be helpful. Stuart shares that he is depressed, and a dream would be to get off the streets, get off substances and get back to work but that it is a vicious circle with no safe place to go.

### **Andrea - A request for basic human rights**

Andrea shares that she is from the region, is Coast Salish and her journey of substance use is what brought her to Surrey. Technically she is connected to on-reserve income assistance, but she does not make it there often. Her experience with shelters is that they are often full, or that there are bed bugs, scabies, and lice so she chooses to sleep outdoors. Andrea has been homeless for over 5 years, sometimes stays with friends and has been forced into survival sex for accommodation. Andrea shares that she has



felt discriminated against and that “It was a rude awakening searching for housing, overwhelming, and people had no understanding for someone in my situation”.

The hardest part about living outdoors is the relentless judgement based on her appearance, she shares that today is good day today because she had showered recently. Andrea describes the support of outreach services including FRAFCA and Night Shift as helpful with the provision of food, clothing, and harm reduction equipment but shares that more services for mental health are needed. Not having a phone number, address or a job makes seeking services and housing challenging, as does her substance use and post-traumatic stress disorder. Andrea is unaware of any shelters or services that are designed for Indigenous people other than FRAFCA.

Andrea also shares that she has received more than one loss of service, or a ban from shelters and that in her frustration her temper got the best of her. Andrea wanted it known that it is nearly impossible to heal in that kind of an environment (shelter). Andrea wishes that she had a bed, running water and a door that locks, her greatest need is a willingness to want to become sober and wishes she had something to look forward to.

“We should all at least be a lot more unjudgmental to an addict, we don’t get high because we want to, it’s a coping method and that the only way we know how to make the pain stop”.

# 3

# ORGANIZATIONAL INTERVIEWS

## 3.1 Key Learnings

The project team interviewed participants from organizations across Surrey, including FRAFCA, Options Community Services, Phoenix Society, Surrey School District, Fraser Health Authority, Kekinow Housing, BC Housing Coordinated Access, ATIRA and Surrey Urban Mission. These interviews were used to understand trends and factors that contribute to Indigenous homelessness in Surrey, to identify programs for Indigenous people and how well they are being used, as well as service and housing gaps that are contributing to Indigenous homelessness in Surrey.

### PATHWAYS INTO HOMELESSNESS

- Participants observed several common pathways into homelessness including the existing housing crisis, access to education and employment, systemic issues including colonization and racism, relationships and violence, and mental health.

### ACCESS AND BARRIERS TO SERVICES

- Participants identified ways to better enable Indigenous people to access services which included communication, cultural supports, and a client's trust in the service provider. The participants most commonly identified barriers to access services were location and accessibility, past experience and trauma with institutions, and the lack of Indigenous representation in service providers' staff.

### ENABLING THEIR ORGANIZATION TO SUPPORT INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

- Participants believed the best way to enable their organization to support Indigenous people was to improve communication and partnerships, deliver a different model of care than they have been providing, and increased funding. The most common barriers for their organization were the lack of funding opportunities, high real estate costs, and attracting staff.

### INDIGENOUS STAFF

- Several organizations had Indigenous staff. However, there were no common responses regarding whether appropriate training or supports were available.
- Indigenous service providers were not aware of how to access or advocate within the Coordinated Access model of services in community.

### IMPROVING SUPPORTS IN SURREY

- The most identified gaps in services for Indigenous people in Surrey were the lack of communication and information for people accessing services and a lack of supports other than housing, specifically childcare. The most common ideas to improve supports were to focus on prevention and diversion, improve communication, introduce more targeted approaches for Indigenous people, expand access to housing, and increase the number of non-housing services available.

## 3.2 Interview Summaries

### PATHWAYS INTO HOMELESSNESS

Participants were asked what pathways into homelessness they were observing with individuals their organizations work with. The most common pathways included:

- The Housing Crisis [6]
  - The market price for housing is a huge factor for pathways into homelessness (4). It makes it difficult to maintain housing and income assistance does not cover rental prices.
  - There is a lack of housing options including safe housing. Growing families need more room but cannot find affordable and appropriate options. People struggling with mental or physical issues are also unable to find housing and when they do, the conditions are subpar.
  - People in existing units, including vulnerable populations, are being pushed out of their homes through renovictions
  - Landlords are taking advantage of people with limited incomes (poor quality, poor privacy, etc.).
- Lack of Access to Education and Employment [3]

## FINDING OUR WAY HOME: WHAT WE HEARD REPORT

- Access to education is a key driver. Their existing job may not pay enough but they do not have the money to further their education. They are capable, smart, and just lack the support.
- Many parents are forced to do low income or under the table work and have low wages. Families are working hard and still unable to meet their needs and qualify for Income Assistance (IA).
- Not having an equal opportunity for employment is an issue, especially for parents. Being a single mother/parent and taking care of kids was a big challenge for many individuals.
- Systemic Issues [3]
  - There are huge systemic issues as a result of colonization - residential school and history and the ongoing healthcare, media, and television that drive homelessness.
  - People are dealing with stigma, trauma, and racism. There is stigma against those who use Income Assistance and/or those who struggle with substance use.
  - Indigenous people face enormous discrimination in the housing system.
  - Indigenous people are overrepresented in the justice system.
- Relationships and Violence [2]
  - A key driver is a breakdown in relationships and violent relationships in general. Partners fleeing abusive relationships becomes a key pathway.
- Mental Health [2]
  - Families suffer from sickness, death, grief, and loss; the mental health piece is important.
- Fixed-Income Seniors [2]
  - There are seniors who can't survive off their fixed incomes.
- Youth
  - Lack of supports, housing experience, income limits youth housing options.
- Lack of Life Skills and recreational activities due to poverty.

Several participants noted that the pathways into homelessness for Indigenous people have evolved over time. The key trends include:

- The pathways used to be mainly linked to mental health and substance use, but now it is compounded by housing, stigma, and lack of income.

## FINDING OUR WAY HOME: WHAT WE HEARD REPORT

- There is a recent trend in the aging population on the street.
- During COVID, a major pathway was the loss of income and jobs being made part time.

### SUPPORTING ACCESS TO SERVICES

Participants were asked what best enables Indigenous people to access their services. The most common answers included:

1. Cultural Supports [5]
  - This is part of a holistic approach to housing that offers cultural support. Clients get very excited about this.
  - Spaces need to be welcoming, less institutional, and honour culture. Some employ Elders who offer spiritual care.
2. Communication [2]
  - Informing and reminding clients that supportive services exist is crucial.
3. Trust [2]
  - Clients need to feel they can trust us and feel cared for. This is why one to one support and personal attention makes a difference.
4. Early and Post Intervention
  - Individuals need housing post substance use and addiction. Youth, in particular, need a place to stay when they age out of care. Often supports are not available until the challenges are extreme.
  - Individuals need early intervention through supportive housing.
5. Hope
  - The biggest motivation would be to have a better life and becoming capable of not only helping oneself but also the other people in the community.
6. Providing Additional Supports
  - Client services need to be offered supports (e.g. prescriptions, baby food, clothing, cell phones, medical supplies, and transportation).

Participants were also asked about key barriers that keep Indigenous people from accessing services. These barriers included:

1. Past Trauma and Experiences with Service Providers [4]

## FINDING OUR WAY HOME: WHAT WE HEARD REPORT

- Indigenous mothers' trauma and stigma associated with being at-risk of homeless and being homeless is terrible and the process of dealing with the Ministry looking to take your child away is reflective of past practices [2]
  - They are taken away from their communities to access services, which may not be the best approach.
  - A worker can make or break an experience. An interview participant noted that some of their families reach out to the principal, because they are not getting the support from the community.
2. Lack of Indigenous Representation Among Service Providers [2]
    - Indigenous representation on the side of the service providers is lacking.
    - One participant said: "If we consider culture as a body, eyes are the Elder and the legs are the youth, you need both Elders and youth to move initiatives forward."
  3. Lack of Transportation to Services [2]
  4. Lack of Connection Between Unhoused Community and Organizations
  5. Stigma and Shame
    - There is stigma and shame around having to reach out to others to discover their culture.
  6. Respondents also noted that particular groups may experience additional barriers including:
    - Women [2]
    - Seniors [2]
    - LGBTQ+ individuals
    - Youth
    - Parents

## ENABLING FACTORS FOR ORGANIZATIONS

Participants were asked to identify what best enables their organization to support Indigenous people. Their responses included:

1. More Coordination and Partnerships [5]
  - The Coordinated Access and Allocation Table run through BC Housing, a process for identifying individuals in need, is huge.
  - Relationships and partnerships in the community are starting to be reactivated since the beginning of COVID.

## FINDING OUR WAY HOME: WHAT WE HEARD REPORT

- They partner with Indigenous partners and understand the situation that many people are in.
  - They are willing to go to people where they are at versus expecting everyone to come to us.
  - Instead of only asking what a First Nations partner can do for our services, the organizations need to ask what we can do for the community. It's a part of a decolonizing lens that is not dictating to people what others should offer our organization.
  - Creating and delivering opportunities is listening to the needs of the community while also being flexible.
  - Communication and working collaboratively in the community to address stigma and pragmatic concerns are important.
  - Organizations need to work with Indigenous families.
2. Increased Funding [3]
- A large influx of funding was received during the pandemic. The pandemic instigated the funding needed to create new programs geared toward homelessness.
  - Funders include BC Housing, local governments, residences, and businesses.
3. Delivering a Different Model of Care [2]
- Prioritizing a holistic continuum of care is important, recognizing that recovery is non-linear and requires flexibility to move between support services.
  - Some housing units are too tiny to support extended family connections which may not be culturally appropriate.

Participants also identified some key challenges their organization has faced when supporting Indigenous people:

1. Community Pushback
- The diversity of needs reflected in the housing also helps with the level of community support. For example, for housing those with the highest level of support needs, there is often the most pushback from the community.
2. Lack of Funding [2]
- The housing minister and BC Housing need to be convinced to change the grant to loan ratio. The funding model is flawed as they are not creating big enough units for families and too many units have to be market housing to pay for it.
3. High Real Estate Costs [2]

## FINDING OUR WAY HOME: WHAT WE HEARD REPORT

- Building more housing is a challenge due to the cost of land in the community.
4. Issues Staffing Positions [2]
    - All organizations want to hire Elders and cultural advisors and it's challenging to hire for those positions. Indigenous staff are needed for all roles. It is very competitive for organizations.

### INDIGENOUS STAFF WITHIN ORGANIZATIONS

Participants were asked if they have any Indigenous staff within their organization or strategies in place that support meeting their needs. Their responses include:

1. Cultural Safety Training for Non-Indigenous Staff
  - One respondent was unsure if there were Indigenous staff at their organization, but a lot of staff had taken cultural safety training. This is not offered through their organization but staff come to their positions with the training. At their organization, the conversation around cultural safety is ever-present.
2. The Organization has Indigenous Staff [3]
  - One organization had a goal of 2/3 of Management Level positions to be Indigenous and 70% of their frontline staff are already Indigenous.
3. Unsure How to Support Indigenous Staff
  - One respondent mentioned they had Indigenous staff, but they were unsure about what strategies should be used to support Indigenous staff hiring and training.

### CURRENT SUPPORTS FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

Participants were asked about the programs, services, resources, or other opportunities their organization offers to support the well-being of Indigenous people, and Indigenous people experiencing homelessness. Their responses included:

1. Programs Offered for Everyone - Not Specific to Indigenous People [4]
2. Indigenous Focused Programs [7]
  - Keginow Indigenous Programs and Services Society – this includes outreach services and resources. They have budgets for prevention and shelter diversion, employment, and training.
  - Several organizations had positions created to provide cultural support including cultural advisor that provides an Indigenous lens on supports and services, cultural outreach worker, cultural liaison, and cultural facilitators. [4]



## FINDING OUR WAY HOME: WHAT WE HEARD REPORT

- One organization had a building opening soon that will focus on Indigenous people that are experiencing or at risk of homelessness.
3. Adjusting Existing Programs for Indigenous Clients [2]
- One respondent detailed their Reaching Home program where individuals have to be chronically homeless to do an intake. Indigenous applicants are able to bypass these indicators.
  - One organization supports clients with things including 60s Scoop claims, upgrading treaty card, etc.

## GAPS IN SERVICES FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLE IN SURREY

Participants were asked to identify the gaps in the programs, services, events, resources, or other opportunities available to support the well-being of Indigenous people in Surrey. Their responses included:

1. Lack of Support Services [3]
- Community Care can often be lost when care is provided in an urban setting. Organizations need more support for families and maternal childcare, especially from a parental advocacy lens.
  - Childcare needs to be a part of the initiative [2].
  - There is a lack of medical resources and access to medical support, especially primary care and detox supports. When someone wants to get help, there's a small window to help them.
2. Lack of Communication and Information [2]
- Indigenous individuals accessing their services are unaware of the Indigenous-specific service providers that exist.
3. Current "One Brush Stroke" Approach
- Organizations need a more in-depth understanding of the different Nations and go deeper into customization. Not every Nation smudges or uses the medicine wheel.
4. Lack of Indigenous Focused Housing [2]
- Organizations need culturally specific housing and shelters, especially for women and families that identify as Indigenous.
  - Need for Indigenous supported housing.
  - Lack of shelters for Indigenous women with children.

### IMPROVING SUPPORTS FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLE IN SURREY

Participants were asked what they think is needed to better support Indigenous people experiencing or “at-risk” of homelessness in Surrey. Their responses included:

1. Added Focus on Prevention and Diversion [4]
  - Organizations need to create awareness around programs available to people to keep people from becoming homeless.
  - People need greater access to rental subsidies
  - Organizations need to create early life interventions and support for young Indigenous people and their families during tumultuous teen years. Surrey doesn't have a drop-in Indigenous youth center or Urban Native Youth Association.
2. Improved Communication [4]
  - More communication is needed for people at risk, and they need more support and connections to the Band level.
  - More communication between Indigenous Partners is needed. Organizations could offer an open house model where they can go in and see all the programs and services.
3. More Targeted Approaches for Indigenous People [2]
  - They would like more peer support workers identifying and supporting the Indigenous community and working with communities, which would build the capacity of the Indigenous community.
4. More Housing [2]
  - Surrey needs more affordable housing and housing that is culture based.
  - Organizations need to create more intervention and transitional housing. Affordable housing across the board is currently non-existent.
5. Additional Supports [2]
  - Individuals need a transitional or recovery space to discharge from the hospital, heal, and get their health back. Then they can be moved into something more permanent.
  - Legal advocacy for individuals is needed.