

# Mobility Strategies of Urban Homeless First Nations Individuals

## What you need to know

The reserve is a key destination for many urban homeless individuals of First Nations descent.



## What is this research about?

The homeless population is generally quite mobile. Homeless individuals may travel often or across large distances to secure material resources, access services, and maintain personal relationships. For First Nations people who are homeless, this travelling often includes visits to reserves where they may have lived previously. There are

many reasons why a First Nations person may choose to return to a reserve after living in a city, and also many reasons why they may decide to leave a reserve. These decisions are primarily based on balancing needs for resources, relationships, safety, and emotional well-being. Because of the devastating and long-lasting effects of forced assimilation

and residential schools, First Nations reserves in Canada frequently have high rates of poverty, unemployment, and social disruption. However, this study reveals how reserves are also seen as social and economic ‘safety nets’ for First Nations individuals in cities who experience housing or income insecurity.

### VISIT

[www.homelesshub.ca](http://www.homelesshub.ca)  
for more information

### ARTICLE SOURCE

The article “Everything You Want is There”: The Place of the Reserve in First Nations’ Homeless Mobility by Evelyn J. Peters and Vince Robillard was published in the journal *Urban Geography*, 30(6): 652-680, in 2009.

## What did the researchers do?

The researchers set out to **understand the travel strategies** of First Nations individuals in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, a city whose First Nations residents make up

approximately one-third of the population. They interviewed 123 homeless First Nations youth (ages 15-19 years) and adults in 2005, and attempted to focus on the 'hidden

homeless' population that may be temporarily staying with friends or family. Participants were asked questions about their housing histories for the last 18 months.

## What did the researchers find?

The researchers found that:

- For many participants, the move to a reserve was **related to inadequate income or loss of housing** in the city.
- The most common reasons for moving to reserves were: **family or partner conflicts (including abuse)** in the city; the **desire to visit family, partners, and friends**; and to **access financial or family support** on reserve.
- The most common reasons for moving away from reserves were: **family or partner conflict (including abuse)** on reserve; **getting a job** or **attending school** off

reserve; and **entering a correctional or treatment facility.**

- Women were more likely to move to a reserve because of family conflict or to visit loved ones.
- Men were more likely to move to a reserve because of attractive conditions on reserve or because they were leaving institutions.
- Youths were more likely to move to a reserve as a result of family conflict or to visit loved ones.
- Mobility patterns among homeless First Nations populations are complex, and should take into account both urban and rural activities.

## HOW CAN YOU USE THIS RESEARCH?

This research may assist service providers in understanding the mobility patterns of homeless individuals, and the unique role that reserves might play in the lives of First Nations clients. In addition, these findings may be applied to other research that examines connections between urban and rural homelessness.



### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Dr. Evelyn J. Peters**, Professor and Canada Research Chair, Department of Geography & Planning, University of Saskatchewan research focuses on urban First Nations and Métis issues and self-government.

### KEYWORDS

*First Nations, urban Aboriginal, homeless mobility, reserve*

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