Urban Aboriginal Homelessness and Migration in Southern Alberta

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Terminology

The term 'Aboriginal people' indicates any one of the three legally defined culture groups that form what is known as Aboriginal peoples in Canada (First Nations, Métis or Inuit) and who self-identify as such. The term First Nation is used here to denote a reserve community or band. The term Indian, as used in legislation or policy, will also appear in discussions concerning such legislation or policy. The term Indigenous here does not represent a legal category. Rather, it is used to describe the descendants of groups in a territory at the time when other groups of different cultures or ethnic origin arrived there, groups that have almost preserved intact the customs and traditions of their ancestors similar to those characterized as Indigenous, and those that have been placed under a state structure which incorporates national, social and cultural characteristics distinct from their own. Statistics Canada measures Aboriginality in four different ways. Most importantly, they distinguish between Aboriginal ancestry and Aboriginal identity. Aboriginal ancestry measures Aboriginality through a self-declaration of Aboriginal ancestry, whereas Aboriginal identity asks individuals if they self-identify as Aboriginal (whether First Nations, Métis or Inuit). Moreover, individuals are given the option of identifying with more than one category (for example, one might declare oneself both First Nations and Métis). For the purposes of this study, 'Aboriginal' refers to those who self-identify as Aboriginal (whether First Nations, Métis or Inuit) and only those who choose a single category.

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Executive Summary

Aboriginal urbanization has occurred in most regions of Canada. As discussed below this should be considered neither novel nor surprising. Despite the growth of permanent Aboriginal communities since the 1970s academic and government reports have captured a startling level of Aboriginal mobility between cities and reserves, within cities, and between municipalities. This suggests that a simultaneous sense of permanency *and* itinerancy exists among most urban Aboriginal populations nationally. An elevated level of Aboriginal overrepresentation among the homeless population is also evident. What has yet to be fully explored—and what this report seeks to shed light upon—is the recently identified link between urban Aboriginal homelessness and mobility in southern Alberta, and their respective and combined impact upon municipal service delivery and programs. How urban Aboriginal homelessness impacts migration, and vice versa; how these trends are potentially influenced by, or are currently influencing municipal programming and service delivery strategies; and their overall costs, remain unknown variables. With the intention of improving our understanding of the issues, and with the objective of establishing responsive housing and policy intervention strategies, this project employs qualitative interview data for the purposes of: (1) improving our theoretical understanding of this migration stream; (2) improving our conception of whether Aboriginal mobility influences urban Aboriginal homelessness; and, (3) whether a lack of programs and services is exacerbating urban Aboriginal homelessness and mobility. The primary research questions for this project were as follows:

1)   What are the causes of Aboriginal mobility in southern Alberta? Is it influenced by urban Aboriginal homelessness? Or vice versa?
2)   Do existing programs, or the shortage of available programs influence urban Aboriginal homelessness and/or Aboriginal mobility?
3)   What are the gaps in the current service-delivery model that may perpetuate or exacerbate existing trends? What proposed correctives will aid in ameliorating existing difficulties?

We were unable to discern a direct correlation between homelessness and reserve-city-reserve churn. Similarly inter-city homelessness resulting from lack of employment and a lack of available rental opportunities (through discrimination or other means) did not trigger anticipated mobility. The most significant predictor of movement was lack of employment: those working irregularly often relocate temporarily to the reserve not to seek work but rather to stay with family until returning to Lethbridge to re-establish urban social networks and to access urban services and programs. The need to retain and renew kinship ties was a key theme to emerge from this research. It led many to travel to the reserve bi-weekly or monthly, which negatively impacts chances to secure permanent and gainful employment, or improving one's housing conditions. Kinship was not an exclusively reserve phenomenon as urban kinship networks exacted an important and often paradoxical influence. Project participants could seek social support and establish a street family in a setting that simultaneously led folks into frequently and dangerously volatile relationships. Remaining in close proximity to these support systems undermined attempts at finding or being placed in rental properties judged too far removed from the city core. Previous experiences with NIMBY and other discriminatory attitudes were cited as exacerbating factors, as were feelings of alienation from nearby reserve communities. When

combined these forces kept mobility at bay. This was also due in part to the Lethbridge Shelter's central role as a physical and social hub of kinship networks.

Absence of shelter did not mean homelessness when friends and family were nearby. Chronically homeless individuals demonstrated an inability to maintain meaningful connections with what they considered to be traditional society/culture, suggesting that enhanced familial or relational ties to their home reserves could mitigate feelings of social exclusion. Those with a proven ability to forge relationships tended to cope better as kinship ties helped avert feelings of societal alienation. Prevalent substance use/abuse would suggest destructive behaviors are coping mechanisms for dealing with overwhelming and profound historic and enduring trauma/loss. As suggested a degree of estrangement and alienation from the surrounding reserves was evident that is traceable to social and political infighting. Urban permanency has developed as a direct byproduct of reserve alienation born of family disconnect, lack of opportunities, and a desire to remain in a city. As a result, for the majority of our project participants, ties to land, culture and sense of identity are eroded to the extent that colonial forces have arguably accomplished what they set out to do: to fully assimilate individuals into mainstream society albeit without providing the concomitant rights and opportunities commonplace to non-Aboriginal citizens.

In terms of available services and informant beliefs concerning specific strategies to end personal homelessness, there appears to be a disconnect between: (a) how the service providers perceive home and ideas of how to alleviate homelessness; and, (b) the participants' articulations of what home means. Whereas the former tend to classify home in terms of shelter and house/apartment the latter envisioned home within the context of kinship and relationships. Urban Aboriginal homeless programming demands we acknowledge respect and enhance regional kinship networks that include the city and reserve. This disconnect must be acknowledged and rectified if there is any hope of successfully transitioning homeless individuals who are currently estranged from their reserves into permanent homes in the city. In sum, home is much more about relationships and positive emotions/feelings than it is about a habitable physical structure.

Part 1: Overview

Aboriginal urbanization has occurred in Canada, a trend that should not be considered surprising. The first large, permanent urban Aboriginal communities first emerged in the 1970s, and since then the level of Aboriginal mobility between cities and reserves, and within cities and between municipalities has grown (e.g., Norris *et al.*, 2004, Clatworthy, 1996). This suggests that a simultaneous sense of permanency *and* itinerancy exists among most urban Aboriginal populations. What is additionally evident is the high level of Aboriginal overrepresentation among the homeless population (Belanger, 2011). What has yet to be fully explored—and what this report seeks to shed light upon—is the recently identified link between urban Aboriginal homelessness and mobility, and their respective and combined impact upon municipal service delivery and programs (Belanger, 2007, Weasel Head, 2011). We remain uninformed of how urban Aboriginal homelessness impacts migration, and vice versa; how these trends are potentially influenced by, or are currently influencing municipal programming and service delivery strategies; and their overall costs. With the intention of improving our comprehension of the issues, and with the intent of establishing housing and policy intervention strategies, this project employs qualitative interview data for the purposes of: (1) improving our theoretical understanding of this migration stream; (2) improving our conception of how high rates of Aboriginal mobility influence urban Aboriginal homelessness; and, (3) assessing whether limited programs and services are aggravating urban Aboriginal homelessness and mobility. The primary research questions for this project were as follows:

1) What are the causes of Aboriginal mobility in southern Alberta? Is it influenced by urban Aboriginal homelessness? Or vice versa?
2) Do existing programs, or the shortage of available programs influence urban Aboriginal homelessness and/or Aboriginal mobility?
3) What are the gaps in the current service-delivery model that may perpetuate or exacerbate existing trends? What proposed correctives will aid in ameliorating existing difficulties?

This report will proceed as follows. First, it will provide a regional history highlighting the social context that emerged from a chronicle of cultural interaction that was influenced by economic and political imperatives. We contend that this Canadian-centric approach to nation build has influenced urban Aboriginal homeless trends. Second, the extant literature about urban Aboriginal mobility and homelessness will be explored. We present our methodology followed by a detailed overview of the empirical findings. The discussion section elaborating on the key themes finishes off the report. As a quick note, we are of the firm belief that knowledge of the local history adds to our understanding of the issues. However, for those uninterested or unwilling to read this material, this report has been structured in such a way that to skip over the next two sections will not be problematic. We do highly recommend reading this summary, as the elaborated social context, we maintain, continues to influence urban Aboriginal homeless and mobility trends.

The Geographic and Political Setting

Located in southern Alberta the Kainai and Piikani Nations are respectively situated on the Blood and Peigan Reserves located within the historic Niitsitapi territory. At 881 square kilometers, the Blood reserve is Canada's largest reserve in terms of land area and has a

population of roughly 11,000, whereas the Peigan Reserve measures 338 square kilometers and has nearly 4,000 residents. As member nations of the Blackfoot Confederacy, these groups were originally organized into small bands typically no larger than 30 people (Bear Robe, 1996). Prior to their mid-eighteenth century acquisition of the horse, the Piikani and Kainai traversed their territory on foot, a period of limited mobility known as the 'dog days'. The horse's introduction was followed by the development of more efficient hunting techniques and the expansion of Kainai and Piikani territorial claims (Ewers, 1955, Treaty 7 Elders *et al*., 1996, Bastien, 2004). The Kainai in particular soon were positioned as a pre-eminent military power in the plains' northwestern region (Wissler, 1910). The territory now comprising the Municipality of Lethbridge was historically central to the Kainai and Piikani land base and was protected accordingly (see Binnema, 2004).

In the late 1860s the newly confederated Canadian government was anxious to restrain American annexation of the prairies. Among several strategies adopted was the North-West Mounted Police's formation in 1873. Upon arriving at Fort MacLeod in 1874 the NWMP were welcomed, and they quickly undermined the prosperous and culturally damaging whiskey trade (Dempsey, 2002). Pleased with this outcome, the Piikani and Kainai agreed to a Crown request for treaty negotiations that culminated in the signing of Treaty 7 in September 1877, with commissioners on hand representing the British Crown and the Canadian government (Treaty 7 Elders, 1996, 114). In return for annuities, promises of protection for the last buffalo herds, and the creation of sheltered reserves, the member nations agreed to cede virtually 40,000 square kilometres of land to facilitate settler migration. Piikani and Kainai leaders considered the treaties to be nation-to-nation agreements establishing the rules of conduct that guided cultural interaction, including territory-sharing provisions (Daniel, 1980).

Federal officials dispute this interpretation despite the primary negotiator and Treaty Commissioner, Alexander Morris's notes substantiating these claims (1991). The treaty's main provision further reveals the Crown's intention of establishing working relationships with Aboriginal leaders to promote cultural interaction for the purposes of providing settler access to opening tribal lands for the purposes of *sharing* the territory (Henderson, 1994). Due to these events, a rising number of European immigrants and expatriate Americans relocated to southern Alberta.

As an aspect of the treaty, the Piikani chief Sitting On Eagle Tail Feathers and Kainai chief Red Crow selected their respective reserve sites. In 1882 Sitting On Eagle Tail Feathers chose the Old Man River, Crowlodge and the Porcupine Hills sites. The Kainai requested their reserve be located on the Belly River's south side. Both reserve sites had, in part, been occupied for at least 5,000 years (Reeves, 1988, 83). The Kainai ran into some early difficulties, and by 1880 the reserve had not yet been surveyed. Rather than wait any longer Red Crow and many followers started to move to the new site, and by the end of summer the land had been broken for cultivation and 40 houses raised (the second official survey would not be completed until 1883). The Piikani and Kainai both regard the river valley as provider and a spiritually significant site, leading elder Joe Crowshoe to proclaim that in the absence of a connection to and renewal of the relationship with the sacred geography, both peoples would cease to exist (Vest, 2005, 594). As the elder Percy Bullchild (1985, 171-173) explained in *The Making of the Oldman River*, the story represents an assertion of sovereignty that demarcates Niitsitapi territory while guiding individuals to an important point about Creation.

The imposition of the reserve model obliterated complex Piikani and Kainai land tenure systems, which forced reserve residents to adopt land utilization schemes that demanded they try

and fuse private property regimes with historic land use models (e.g., Treaty 7 Elders *et al.*, 1996, Bastien, 2004). This in turn effectively constrained reserve economic development, as did Indian agent duplicity (Wilson, 1921). First Nations farmers faced constant pressure from local non-Native farmers and ranchers seeking access to prized reserve lands. For a brief period in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century regional farmers and ranchers relied on reserve labour. But the growing number of immigrants looking for work quickly displaced First Nation labourers, and by the mid-1920s the regional off-reserve farming and ranching economy was outstripping and destabilizing reserve economic development (see Regular, 2009). The irony of growing regional economies to the detriment of reserve development was not lost on First Nations leaders. We would also suggest that in light of their discharge as labourers that the simultaneous exclusion from town sites also did not come as a surprise.

Structural relations between the state, civil society and the market where thus shaped, and this led to First Nations exclusion (e.g., Neuman, 2005). Initially small town government in Alberta was considered the means of achieving the power needed to directly shape the province's 'small town' futures through prescribed development and hinterland exploitation (Wetherell & Kant, 1995, 289). Town council attitudinal uniformity developed, and local newspapers and boards of trade encouraged systematized social organizations pursuing augmented localized authority. This approach never took root and local power began to erode as the economic elite in growing centres, such as Calgary and Edmonton, controlled the capital infiltrating the rural setting (Ibid., 291). What Rennie (2000) described as a 'movement culture' nurtured the evolution of the United Farmers of Alberta (UFA), an upstart political party that in 1921 swept the provincial Liberal government after 17 years in power. Created to challenge unresponsive provincial politicians, the UFA's political success compromised its community orientation (Ibid., 230). Also during this time, a potent blend of ethnic prejudice and nationalism, termed Nativism, surfaced as a means of promoting community building through the physical exclusion of immigrants (Palmer, 1992, Smith, 1993). Emerging from these restrictive measures was a rigid interactive paradigm that stressed cultural hierarchies that simultaneously ignored Aboriginal peoples now largely confined to reserves.

During this difficult period Piikani and Kainai leadership demonstrated great restraint by not challenging the Canadian government for failing to adhere to the spirit and intent of Treaty 7, which encouraged cross-cultural interaction and socio-economic interdependency (Treaty 7 Elders *et al.*, 1996). Arguing that reserve agrarian economies were failing, and that the land would be better off utilized by non-Native farmers, Indian Affairs nevertheless still exerted tremendous pressure on Piikani and Kainai leaders to surrender portions of their reserve. This strategy promoted western settlement while offering the federal bureaucracy an opportunity to rid itself of the dreaded 'Indian problem' (Martin-Maguire, 1998, Dyck, 1991).

Lethbridge

The land that Lethbridge occupies was originally known as Sikokotoki, the Kainai wintering grounds. It was not included as part of the Blood Reserve in 1883, and it abuts the city's western edge. Fort MacLeod, and later Cardston, served as the local Indian Agencies and became important regional commercial centres. Lethbridge, at roughly 60 kilometers from the Blood Reserve and 81 kilometers from the Peigan Reserve, was initially considered too far to travel. A diminished Aboriginal presence at Sikokotoki enabled non-Native settlers to establish a regional extraction economy with the first coalmine in 1872, and a strong settler presence in the 1880s with the arrival of Mormon immigrants from Utah (MacGregor, 1972). Connecting the growing number of coalmines with Medicine Hat was a railway that both integrated Lethbridge

into the Canadian prairie west and displaced Fort MacLeod as southern Alberta's economic capital (Friesen, 1984, 222, MacGregor, 1972, 156-157). Increased immigration resulted, and Lethbridge grew rapidly. This led to what Barsh (1997, 205) described as city neighbourhoods developing "strong class and ethnic characteristics. The Southside, middle class and Protestant retains its high-status associations today, while the Northside, dominated by Catholics and Orthodox 'Galacians', has always been the wrong side of the tracks." During this period immigrants and Aboriginal peoples alike considered Lethbridge an inhospitable setting, a reputation that persists (Fiske *et al*., 2010, Kingfisher, 2007, Palmer, 1992). The construction of southern Alberta's regional transportation systems resulted in Lethbridge becoming a key destination for Aboriginal people.

As Abbott (2008) has argued, cities were used as tools of colonial expansion during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, specifically as satellite stations of exploration and economic occupation. Composed of individuals spanning out from metropoles such as Toronto and Winnipeg, these satellite centres in turn permitted the slow but deliberate imposition of new political, economic and cultural ideals that drew established economies and communications networks westward into the Prairie region, consequently transmitting empire and new beliefs in civilization and nationhood. This was, as Peters (2002, 87) noted, a "colonial organization of space [that] perpetuated the colonial ordering of society." Urban architects then utilized what Stanger-Ross (2008) described as municipal colonialism to resist urban Aboriginal settlement. It son became common to write the first peoples out of municipal histories thus erasing their regional contributions; or as Wicken (2011) has noted, to employ stereotypes such as the dirty Indian, the diseased Indian, of the morally bankrupt Indian to restrict urban movement or ban Aboriginal municipal residency. Once relieved of an Indigenous presence, city fathers freely established communities of likeminded citizens who lived and interacted with one another according to liberally crafted municipal norms. Hence it should not be surprising that Aboriginal peoples considered cities to be unpleasant environments. Urban Aboriginal permanency in Canada was not normative until the 1950s, and excepting Toronto, Winnipeg, Regina and Vancouver, it was the 1980s before Aboriginal urbanization was evident nationally.

The first permanent urban populations appeared in Lethbridge in the mid-1970s, and 136 Aboriginal people were identified as residents in 1976. That number grew to 1,490 in 1991 (Barsh, 1997, 205).[1] As of 2001, there were 3,155 Aboriginal people in Lethbridge representing 4.3 per cent of the city's total population of 72,717. We suggest that the current Aboriginal population has grown to roughly 5,000 based on the following factors: (1) data collected for this study; (2) new legislation resulting in Aboriginal enumeration, ethnic mobility and migration; (3) current trends towards high fertility rates; and, (4) pronouncements by the Canada Mortgage Housing Corporation (CMHC) in 2007 predicting that 11.3 per cent of the Lethbridge city population would be Aboriginal by 2010. According to Belanger (2007), Status Indians make up roughly 88 per cent of the municipal Aboriginal population followed by non-status Indians (5.8%) and Métis (5.8%). English is the primary language spoken in 57 per cent of Aboriginal

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[1] The current numbers of Métis residing in Lethbridge is unknown, although in 1998 it was estimated that nearly 1,000 Métis lived in the Lethbridge region of which 39 per cent resided in the city itself (Gibbs 1998, 67). In relation to current trends, the Métis population nationally increased 43 per cent from 1996 to 2001, while the Canadian population increased 3.4 per cent, and it is reasonable to propose that like trends are occurring in Lethbridge. This increase is partly attributable to high birth rates, increased life expectancy, and improved enumeration, as well as the growing number of people who are newly self-identifying as Métis (O'Donnell & Tait 2003). Comparably almost half of all Métis in 2001 were under the age of 25 and children under 14 years of age make up 29 per cent of the overall Métis population (NAHO 2004).

homes, and in 27 per cent of homes both English and Blackfoot is spoken. Lethbridge's Aboriginal population is growing rapidly, and it is noticeably younger. Whereas the average age for non-Aboriginal Canadians is 37.7 years, the average age is 24.7 years for Aboriginal people. It is estimated that 82 per cent of Aboriginal people living in Lethbridge are 39 years of age or younger, of whom 44.5 per cent are below 19 years of age. This confirms the perception that there is a youthful municipal Aboriginal population, a trend that will remain prevalent due to an observed tendency amongst Aboriginal people to start families at a younger age (20-24 years) as compared to the national average (25-29 years).

Aboriginal visibility in town was initially limited and remains so today. With the exception of Galt Gardens located in the city's core, which is identified as a temporary respite for Aboriginal homeless people and a permanent refuge for substance abusers, the city's public space offers little evidence that Aboriginal people make up roughly six per cent of the city's population or of a historic contribution to southern Alberta's unique character.[2]

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[2] Recently the second author had a conversation with an Aboriginal person whose home is in B.C. He expressed concern over the fact that southern Alberta urban centers do not openly acknowledge the presence of Aboriginal history as contributing to the urban identity to the degree that urban centers in B.C. do. He blames this lack of identification with an Aboriginal inability to readily adapt to mainstream urban lifestyle while still maintaining high esteem with their cultural history and traditions. He believes that southern Alberta Aboriginal people are "far behind" other Aboriginal groups who seem to be more successful with transitioning. It is the enduring and apparent cultural divide that seems to contribute to our poor socio-economic success.

Part 2: Literature Review

The story of urban Aboriginal homelessness is dynamic and requires not only a discussion evaluating what is driving current trends but also that we understand the story of urbanization. Both narratives are complex and offer insights into Canadian Indian policy, its goals and ultimately its failures. They also intersect, leading to complex interactions for Aboriginal peoples seeking opportunities or urban permanency. But, is mobility leading to mounting housing difficulties; or is the latter driving high mobility? Arguably both issues cannot be discussed independent of the other.

Until recently it was commonly understood that Aboriginal peoples live on reserves, a belief that in many ways still enjoys substantial political currency. Canada's historiography is replete with references to reserve communities, and twentieth century social science scholars almost exclusively trained their research focus on reserves. Even the most comprehensive study probing the nature of Aboriginal difficulties, the highly acclaimed report by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) published in 1996, embraced a conceptual framework that focused almost exclusively on reserve/traditional lands to the detriment of urban Aboriginal issues. As defined by the *Indian Act* (1876), Indians were considered a homogeneous grouping of individuals administered by Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) according to the act's provisions, and it was generally understood that they would remain reserve residents until they chose to renounce their heritage. Individuals leaving the reserves were supposed to follow one of two paths: they would become farmers tending to a private parcel of land; or they would abandon the reserve and move to a nearby non-Aboriginal community. Upon relocating, they would cease to be federal responsibilities and become provincial citizens. In the process, however, they would become entitled to provincial programming (in that they were no longer eligible for federal Indian programs). Inadequate bureaucratic attention was paid to Aboriginal people who relocated but maintained their cultural affiliations. This lack of attention occurred because, from a federal perspective, these individuals were no longer legally Indians.

From a popular and policy standpoint, reserve residents were and remain Canada's authentic Indigenous peoples. Various mechanisms led to these values becoming politically entrenched, not the least of which was the *Indian Act*, which confined Indians to reserves thereby buttressing the physical marginalization begun with the treaties (Dockstator, 1993, Mawhinney, 1994). It further constructed identities based on racial categorizations for purposes of ensuring cultural assimilation through policy (Napoleon, 2001, Lawrence, 2004). A Prairie pass system was created in 1885 to frustrate attempts at political activity (in particular regional organizing) by forcing individuals to obtain permission to leave the reserve to visit friends or family members located on another reserve (Barron, 1988, Belanger, 2006, Carter, 1985). Indian agents in 1889 were given powers as justices of the peace for the purposes of the *Vagrancy Act*, its intended target Indians (Leslie & Maguire, 1978). Paradoxically the treaties offered settlers (generally) risk-free access into western Canada, which they utilized to create at first small settlements, many of which later grew into large cities. Federal policy unwittingly manufactured a reserve-urban binary that acknowledged First Nations as political communities that simultaneously offered no provisions for urban Aboriginal peoples. This inflexible dichotomy between reserve and urban populations fuelled a process that permitted the state to determine Indian authenticity, which, in turn, informed federal funding formulas that rendered "invisible the complexity of historical interactions and the diversity of social groups" (Furniss, 1999, 18). The Supreme Court of Canada concluded in January 2013 that non-Status Indians and Métis were now considered Indians according to the Constitution albeit not the *Indian Act*. Canada has

since appealed the decision; hence we do not know the substance of this decision from a policy perspective. We must keep in mind that the lived environment is an infinitely complex setting consisting of intersecting identities, which frequently coalesce to formulate new identities ad infinitum, something the Canadian government refuses to acknowledge.

Between 1961 and 2006, national Aboriginal urbanization increased from 12.9 per cent to 53.2 per cent (Peters, 2002, Norris *et al.*, 2004, Canada, 2009, Norris & Clatworthy, 2011). During this period mobility became synonymous with urban Aboriginal peoples even though Aboriginal people became progressively more urbanized: most large cities and mid-sized municipalities boast large, permanent, and growing Aboriginal populations. These peoples are not specifically reserve émigrés, but often times represent the fourth generation of family members to be born in and live in the city. High fertility and birth rates have enabled the formation of sturdy cultural identities, which for some academics had led to specific urban Aboriginal identities surfacing in cities located within distinctive cultural regions Aboriginal peoples identify as their traditional land base (Belanger, 2013). Critics of Canada's failed Indian policy have suggested that these identities are at best responsive, at worst artificial and consciously constructed to ensure ongoing right of entry into reserve communities relatives call home; or eligibility to government programs available increasingly restricted to status Indians living on reserve; as a response to racism endemic to Aboriginal peoples living in urban centres; and to counter socio-economic disparities characteristic of urban Aboriginal living (e.g., Alfred, 2009, Clatworthy, 2003, Lawrence, 2004, Proulx, 2003, Warry, 2007). As Alfred and Corntassel (2005, 597) define it, "Indigenousness is an identity constructed, shaped, and lived in the politicized context of contemporary colonialism."

Several reasons for urbanization have been posited in the last two decades. Among the more popular ideas was that it reflected a mass exodus of individuals fleeing reserve conditions that had finally bottomed out (Norris *et al.*, 2004, Norris & Clatworthy, 2011). Additional causes included a lack of reserve economic and educational possibilities and population pressures (Peters, 2002). Additional academic work confirmed that a multitude of push and pull factors influenced reserve-urban-reserve migration, which led to unanticipated findings suggesting liberal movement—or churn—between the cities and reserves was occurring (i.e., Norris & Clatworthy, 2003). But research also confirmed consistent net inflows to reserves and uneven net inflows and outflows in rural and urban areas (Norris & Clatworthy, 2011). As a result it appeared that people were not specifically fleeing reserves; and that many of those who were born or had lived in the cities for a long period often chose to relocate to the reserve. In an attempt to grasp its complexities Aboriginal mobility is set apart into three categories: (1) residential mobility, characterized by frequent moves within urban centres; (2) migration, between two different communities; and (3) churn, which is the frequent movement between city and reserve (Norris & Clatworthy, 2003, Norris *et al.*, 2004, Peters, 2005). Yet mobility for most academics and policy makers personifies social, economic and political instability that results from both a lack of opportunities and an inability to adjust to the exigencies of urban living (Norris *et al.*, 2004, Norris & Clatworthy, 2011). Diverse factors leading people to leave the reserve range from a lack of employment, housing and educational opportunities, demanding social and economic conditions resulting in lower quality of life standards, poor health facilities, and increasingly divisive Aboriginal politics (Norris & Clatworthy, 2003, Norris *et al.*, 2004; Cooke & Bélanger, 2006, Peters & Robillard, 2009). Correspondingly the city is seen as potentially offering a better quality of life, superior schools and job opportunities, and less exposure to negative influences such as drugs and alcohol (Cooke & Bélanger, 2006, Clatworthy,

& Norris, 2007). Pulling people back to the reserve is a blend of traditions, Aboriginal rights specific to reserves, potential housing and other programmatic opportunities, cultural space and contact with history and homeland, and a less overtly discriminatory environment (Peters, 2004, Wilson & Peters, 2005, Cooke & Bélanger, 2006, Richmond & Ross, 2009, Weaselhead, 2011). This focus on inter- and intra-community movement tends to obscure the meaning and roles that both reserve and off-reserve communities located in historic homelands play in the lives of many Aboriginal peoples.

As Wente (2000) has suggested, urban Aboriginal homelessness emerged with the urban Aboriginal community's appearance. Memmott *et al.* (2006) have identified high mobility between places of residence as a contributing factor of Indigenous homelessness in Australia. In a Winnipeg study upwards of 45 per cent of research participants moved more than 3 times in a 6-month period thereby highlighting the high level of residential instability (Distasio *et al.*, 2005). The same project also found that nearly one-fifth of project participants demonstrated a seasonal attachment to their home-reserve communities that in turn increased their frequency of movement (Distasio *et al.*, 2005). This would suggest that homelessness has regionally specific characteristics, and that a one-stop approach to policy creation intended to resolve these issues is pragmatically questionable and unworkable in practice. Reserve homelessness is unique from urban Aboriginal homelessness, but it must be noted that their dynamics nevertheless influence the other.

Peters and Robillard's (2009) work showed urban Aboriginal people identified reserves as origins or destinations in their mobility paths in the previous 18 months. Circumstances on reserves forced individuals to move elsewhere, but a lack of urban resources and the desire to maintain social connections led them back, which resonates with Letkemann's discussion of 'urban nomads' (2004). Belanger (2007) has suggested that the need to move quickly proves a hindrance to stable shelter arrangements due to discrimination and racism, both of which act as barriers to achieving adequate shelter. Colonial history's ongoing effects on homeless people's lives are also evident, and this emphasizes the need to study the geographic pattern and scale of homeless individuals' mobility patterns (e.g., Christensen, 2012). The literature indicates also that Aboriginal people, especially those who fall under the *Indian Act*, are unique in that they are fluid in their homelessness and have the option to "live part-time in cities and on reserves" (Letkemann, 2004, 242, Peters & Robillard, 2009). As Weasel Head (2011) has provocatively suggested, based on an empirical study involving southern Alberta urban Aboriginal homeless, certain participants preferred a fluidity of movement reminiscent of traditional pasts. The most recent literature indicates that, despite evidence of improved urban Aboriginal educational and income levels, reserve-city-reserve churn has not subsided (Beavon & Cooke, 2003, Siggner & Costa, 2005). What is often ignored in lieu of presenting statistical overviews is the 'whys' of mobility, something Cooke and Belanger's (2006) work is helpful in determining. Specifically, it encourages inquiries into the significance of cultural connections and economic opportunities, and the diversity of ongoing connections between sending and receiving communities. However, as Guimond (2003) has warned, the intricacy of urban Aboriginal identity development and the related social affiliations—neither of which are permanent or automatically transmitted intergenerationally—complicates how we choose to identify and grasp socio-economic characteristics and other demographic phenomena.

There is therefore a need for studies detailing how mobility is influenced by or how it informs Aboriginal homelessness trends, how it impacts service delivery and programming, and its influence on an individual's ability to both secure and maintain housing. Census data

highlight lower than mainstream socio-economic and social outcomes, which places urban Aboriginal individuals at an increased risk of homelessness. Generally speaking Aboriginal labour market success is greater for those whose ancestors intermarried with non-Aboriginals, and for those who live off reserve (Kuhn & Sweetman, 2002). Recent research in Ontario highlights that many women lacking adequate reserve supports in the 1970s and 1980s moved to a nearby city thus leaving home to ensure personal safety (Janovicek, 2003). A Montreal study showed a high level of psychological distress among the urban Aboriginal population as well as elevated levels of substance abuse, suggesting that the city remained a hostile environment (Jacobs & Gill, 2002). In the late 1980s, urban Aboriginal people in Saskatoon found access to traditional healers impaired (Waldram, 1990). Earlier generations of reserve expatriates' experiences aside, nothing has been written of late to suggest whether this remains an issue. Irrespective of place of residence, as Liberman and Frank (1980) demonstrated, urban U.S. Indians (trends likely evident in Canadian urban Aboriginal populations) perceived greater levels of stress and therefore compromised health conditions living in the city and on reservations.

In spite of these obstacles an urban Aboriginal community has flourished in countless regions of Canada. And there remains a desire for urban recognition and acceptance, and in certain cases, exciting and increasingly complex dialogues probing the foundation of urban citizenship's variants have emerged as folks seek to secure a degree of Aboriginal rights in urban settings (e.g., Belanger 2011, Fiske, Belanger & Gregory, 2010, Walker, 2006, Wood, 2003). Wilson and Peters (2005) have explored how cities shape relationships to the land and how they inform regional kinship networks that include satellite First Nations. Preserving kinship networks, it should be noted, also tends to challenge the state's imposition of physical and ideological boundaries and complicates attempts to assign unambiguously rigid categorizations concerning who is and who is not an 'Indian'. This in turn often influences how successfully one is able to navigate the urban setting. Ironically, these ties have helped foster conditions that are suggestive of Aboriginal ghettoization in various cities across Canada (e.g., Anderson, 2005, Belanger, 2007, Cohen & Corrado, 2004). This should not be surprising for three reasons. First, ethnic and social class (and more recently gender) have—for the last four decades—been considered among the key drivers of segregation, and this increases the possibility of socio-economically depressed Aboriginal émigrés from reserve communities becoming isolated on the basis of class and phenotype (e.g., Backhouse, 2001, Darroch & Marston, 1971, Hou & Balakrishan, 1996, Jaccoud & Brassard, 2003). Secondly, urban émigrés did and continue to seek out and live with family members, from which municipal Aboriginal neighbourhoods evolved. Further perpetuating this process were émigrés living in multi-family and multi-generational homes and other immigrants from surrounding reserve communities moving into recently vacated local rental units (Peters & Starchenko, 2005, *cf* Driedger & Peters, 1977). Third, these acknowledged Aboriginal neighbourhoods offer reprieve and temporary housing to a mobile group who 'churn' (Norris & Clatworthy, 2003). This increases the prospect of perpetuating cycles of ghettoization, something Peters (1996) anticipated in the 1990s. Specifically she expressed alarm at the popular academic tendency to categorize Aboriginal urbanization as a social problem (the "study of lack", deficit paradigm), both in terms of urban migration's drivers (i.e., better employment and education opportunities), and the alleged Aboriginal inability to adapt to urban living.

In recent years particular attention has been directed at examining the overrepresentation of urban Aboriginal girls and young women in the homeless population (Baskin, 2007, Novac *et al*., 2002, Taefi & Czapska, 2007). Deiter and Otway (2001) have concluded that Aboriginal

women in Canada are disadvantaged by social factors and structural inequalities, which pose barriers to their optimal wellness (also Elias *et al*., 2000). Socio-economic depression is evident among women-led, single-parent Aboriginal households, the latter of which represent a large group among the poorly housed. Notably Aboriginal homeless women have often experienced childhood homelessness, which in turn normalizes homelessness (Ruttan, Laboucane-Benson & Munro, 2008). Based on current trends, one can anticipate amplified rates of urban Aboriginal female homelessness. Baskin (2007) has identified Aboriginal youth at higher risk of becoming homeless as compared to other youth in Canada: they are seriously overrepresented in the homeless youth population (roughly one-third) and the hidden homelessness rates are high. Furthermore, they experience high rates of mental health concerns, including depression and conduct disorders, both of which are confirmed pathways to homelessness (MacNeil, 2008, Whitbeck *et al*., 2008). Ruttan, Laboucane-Benson and Munro (2008) established that homeless Aboriginal youth experienced poverty, health problems, systemic bias, and the effects of historical trauma, and have advised reinforcing Aboriginal community-based prevention and healing programs to prevent youth homelessness.

The literature demonstrates that no clear-cut answers are evident when assessing mobility's impacts on homelessness and vice versa hence the need to engage in empirical research to try and capture these trends. These data will be presented following a brief discussion about the project's methodology.

Part 3: Methodology

Building on the work of Peters (2004) and Cooke and Belanger (2006), this project used qualitative interviews and relied on contemporary formulations about relationships between people, places and identities, to develop a more nuanced approach to interpreting the Aboriginal experience, and better understand the interrelationship between current Aboriginal homeless trends and mobility; and their impact on service delivery and programming. A distinctive feature of this study is that results will be based upon the views and perceptions of Aboriginal peoples to obtain an on-the-ground outlook about these experiences regarding living and/or transitioning into a non-reserve environment; to locate their experiences within and responses to social dynamics influencing mobility and their homeless experience; and to further our understanding of the role social systems and service delivery models continue to play in perpetuating mobility and Aboriginal homelessness. We were also interested in identifying the existing administrative and policy barriers to improved Aboriginal housing and rental opportunities.

We conducted interviews with 15 Aboriginal homeless individuals utilizing the Lethbridge Shelter and who have resided (briefly or long-term) in both Lethbridge and one of the surrounding First Nations/reserve communities in the last year. The data collection instrument was the person-centred interview, an exploratory, discussion-based method designed to "clarify the relations of individuality, both as output and input, to its sociocultural context" while eliciting behaviours and attitudes that suggest "hidden or latent dimensions of the organization of persons and of the sociocultural matrix and their interactions" (Levy & Hollan, 1998, 334). The participant voices are needed to allow those individuals to "tell the story" of the issues and concerns influencing their mobility and homelessness. Each interview lasted roughly one hour. The participants' short-answers (i.e., to questions posed during the interview) were noted "in the moment" (pen and paper and/or typed into a word file). The interviews followed a general format whereby the researcher engaged each participant in a discussion while subtly posing, in no particular order, a number of pre-determined questions designed to keep the interviewer attuned to the major themes being investigated while eliciting the participants' stories that, in this instance, act as a source of understanding to provide insight into personal decision-making (Cortazzi, 2001). Ferrier has argued, "knowledge is constructed by people and groups of people; reality is multiperspectival; truth is grounded in everyday life and social relations; life is a text, but thinking is an interpretative act; facts and values are inseparable; and science and all other human activities are value laden" (quoted in Mitchell & Egudo, 2003, 1).

Interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. The lead researcher then reviewed and finalized the coding process using NVivo software, which was followed by the production of a thematic analysis central to the characteristics and meaning of Aboriginal mobility and homelessness. The coding process identifies important comments or interview moments prior to proceeding with data interpretation (Boyatzis, 1998). Encoding enables the organization and categorization of data from which central themes are identified and developed (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Data collection and analysis proceeded simultaneously, and transcripts were read and re-read to ensure accuracy and thematic applicability to the original data. As an expression of our appreciation for the time provided and in honour of the knowledge made available to us, each participant was provided a $50 honorarium.

Defining Homelessness

Prior to proceeding we need to define homelessness, as this will influence our measurement format. There are statistical and cultural definitions of homelessness, for example,

making it imperative to formally respond. And how do we determine who precisely is homeless? Menzies (2005) suggests that current definitions of homelessness emphasize the physicality of the term relative to actual shelter and do not address homelessness as it affects Aboriginal people. Alternately, he contributes a new definition of the term and identifies it "as the resultant condition of individuals being displaced from critical community social structures and lacking in stable housing" (2005, 8).

The Canadian Parliamentary Research Branch has with little success tackled these vexing questions (Casavant, 1999). In lieu of one specific definition, it opted instead to generate three meanings for "homeless" that are different, yet deemed essential categories that label people as belonging to a certain "kind" of homeless population. First, there are the chronically homeless, individuals who live on society's periphery and who often face problems of drug or alcohol abuse or mental illness. Second are the cyclically homeless group, or individuals who have lost their dwelling as a result of some change in their situation. These folks intermittently utilize safe houses or soup kitchens and often include women escaping family violence, runaway youths, and persons who are unemployed or recently released from detention centres or psychiatric institutions. Third are the temporarily homeless, or those who lack accommodations for a relatively short period; and persons who lose their home as a result of a disaster (e.g., fire, flood); and those whose economic and personal situation is altered by family separation or loss of job (Casavant, 1999).

Since then, various agency-specific definitions have been devised and/or proposed that utilize a continuum, which measures degrees of homelessness. Hulchanski (2000) is critical of this approach for, in his opinion, it enables government to avoid taking action for anyone who by definition may not be homeless, thereby masking the inherently political issue of homelessness as a statistical or definitional problem (also O'Reilly-Fleming, 1993). But what does it mean to be homeless? In its recent effort to develop a pan-Canadian definition of homelessness, the Canadian Homelessness Research Network (CHRN) developed the following working classification (Homeless Hub, 2012):

> Homelessness describes the situation of an individual or family without stable, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect, means and ability of acquiring it. It is the result of systemic or societal barriers, a lack of affordable and appropriate housing, the individual/household's financial, mental, cognitive, behavioural or physical challenges, and/or racism and discrimination. Most people do not choose to be homeless, and the experience is generally negative, unpleasant, stressful and distressing.
>
> Homelessness encompasses a range of physical living situations, organized here in a typology that includes:
>
> 1) Unsheltered, or absolutely homeless and living on the streets or in places not intended for human habitation;
> 2) Emergency Sheltered, including those staying in overnight shelters for people who are homeless, as well as shelters for those impacted by family violence;
> 3) Provisionally Accommodated, referring to those whose accommodation is temporary or lacks security of tenure, and finally,
> 4) At Risk of Homelessness, referring to people who are not homeless, but whose current economic and/or housing situation is precarious or does

not meet public health and safety standards.

It should be noted that for many people homelessness is not a static state but rather a fluid experience, where one's shelter circumstances and options might shift and change quite dramatically and with frequency.

Liberal definitions of homelessness such as this tend not to be the norm, as the majority of the academic, government, front-line agency, and grey literature tends to only statistically identify rough/street sleepers, while mentioning other forms of homelessness anecdotally (e.g., couch surfing). Consequently, while those sleeping rough are captured empirically (roughly 20%), the remainder are classified as 'hidden homeless', thus hindering attempts to generate an accurate national homeless rate or to capture the national urban Aboriginal rates of homelessness.

Part 4: Empirical Findings

Determining whether mobility is influenced by homelessness or vice versa is a complex endeavor. In an attempt to initiate the discussion, we start by first identifying the participant's reasons for their current period of homelessness. To begin, 27 per cent (n=4) of the participants indicated that they were not homeless despite frequently using the Lethbridge Shelter. Although one male had an uninhabitable home at Standoff in need of repairs he did not consider himself to be homeless—he was just temporarily shelterless (or more accurately without a house). One female still owns a residence that she cannot access according to a peace order sworn against her by her estranged husband. Interestingly 20 per cent (n=3) owned a house or has access to land on the reserve but chose to live a shelterless city life (this is explored in detail below). Two others did not consider themselves homeless, one because he lived with his daughter periodically and the other because he is not a social burden—he can take care of himself. The remaining 73 per cent (n=11) considered themselves to be in various states of homelessness. As mentioned by the two shelterless individuals, this group's perspective on homelessness varies. All but two individuals had been previously housed as either renters or homeowners. The other two left home in their teens and have remained chronically homeless. Based on the participant profiles, the majority were members of the Kainai Nation: none of the participants identified membership with Piikani (one individual born in the U.S. who migrated into southern Alberta with his family as a child). Standoff is roughly 60 kms from downtown Lethbridge, and hitchhiking or catching a ride occurs regularly whereas similarly traveling to Brocket 81 kms away is less viable. This would suggest that the nearby centres of Fort Macleod and Pincher Creek act as sites for homeless individuals from Piikani, and further research is required to substantiate these trends. It was, however, telling that many did not consider themselves to be homeless, even if the majority did consider themselves to be lacking permanent housing. Based on these trends we explored why people remained in the city despite their limited options.

Q.1: What are the causes of Aboriginal mobility in southern Alberta? Is it influenced by urban Aboriginal homelessness? Or vice versa?

Homelessness

The people interviewed in this study were homeless for various reasons. Some became homeless after failed attempts at seeking employment and educational opportunities. In most cases respondents stated that they remained in Lethbridge because medical care was available at local clinics and the hospital, to access bargain stores and thrift shops, and to continue seeking work and schooling. Agencies such as the Lethbridge Shelter, Streets Alive and the Salvation Army were considered to be Aboriginal-friendly, and the soup kitchen and food bank were accessible to all. Several also cited the close proximity of licensing and insurance agents, services such as ADAAC, and Lethbridge's generally safe environment. As one female (42) stated, "I find it easier here to live in the city because of all the free services you can use and I try use them as much as I can because I need to." Others suggested that they didn't have anywhere to go and that the city was a natural residential choice due to municipal services such as the Lethbridge Shelter and Outreach (Pathways to Housing). Many stated that they simply liked living in Lethbridge. One male in his thirties found Lethbridge "homey." A 37-year-old female liked to eat out and enjoyed access to the "variety of food" and "the friends that are here." She considered Lethbridge to be clean: "I just enjoy the environment, and being around here." Others appreciated the amenities such the city buses, which enabled freedom of movement for work and

visiting with relatives and friends. Some cited practical reasons for remaining in the city such as the cost of traveling from the reserve for work.

Project participants frequently cited employment and family as the primary reasons for remaining in the city. One 32-year-old male and a 75-year-old male stated that the day jobs they need to get by are all in the city. As the 32-year-old male indicated, "It's pretty hard on the reserve. It's easy for natives to do it here. If you go to Lethbridge and you're young, you can get day jobs." A 36-year-old male, who stated, "I've tried to work but they think all Indians are all the same", contradicted this statement. Reflecting on this account, the work the participants were referring to was not full-time or even part-time professional, industrial or service sector work. Rather the jobs in question would best be described as make-work employment characterized by picking cans and collecting paper that was recycled and the refunds used for subsistence purposes. Those participating in this type of work nevertheless consider it gainful employment that provides for their lifestyle. Most were quite clear that they did not want to go on welfare or become a burden on family or society. When questioned about their use of the Lethbridge Shelter in this regard, they indicated that it is seen a place to temporarily rest and sleep. After that it is back on the street to work. For the two who relocated to the city for work, it ended badly. According to one male (20) who moved from the reserve for work, he soon lost his job and regrets his decision. He stayed in Lethbridge because he was ready to start a new job. A female (29) moved to the city after being fired from her only job on the reserve. The blow to her ego was evident and something from which she has yet to fully recover for she suggested that employment opportunities were plentiful. She was nevertheless reticent about once again trying to secure work.

Outside of the potential for finding work the most important reason offered for remaining in Lethbridge was to reside nearby family. Nine of the participants had children or grandchildren in town and one individual's father lived in Lethbridge. One male (77) moved from Fort Macleod to be closer to his son and granddaughter, both of whom he periodically lives with. Another male (42) frequently stays with his daughter and pays for her rent, thus compromising his own ability to afford rental property. However, he voluntarily leaves to return to the street, thus offering his daughter and her family the needed space and privacy. One female (42) believes she cannot leave Lethbridge "because all my kids are here and I can't just leave them to move away. They need me the most now and they're all girls." In this case there was added pressure to find a secure home because neither of her children had status.[3] The concern here was that as non-status Indians her children would not be entitled to a house on reserve. Two others said they would consider living in another southern Alberta town to ensure regular visits with their children currently staying with relatives living on the reserve.

When asked to reflect on their current episode of homelessness most project participants identified a noteworthy personal loss in their life or moments of trauma as the causes. Six indicated that their homelessness was directly traceable to treatment experienced in residential schools. This resonates with Menzies' (2007) work linking homelessness and intergenerational trauma and residential school experiences and Thurston and Mason's (2010) projected pathways to homelessness. The current shortage of empirical studies exploring this connection is troubling, especially considering that Canada's colonial history includes not only the institutions of residential schooling, but also aggressive child welfare services and processes of systemic bias (Dion Stout & Kipling, 2003, McKenzie & Morrissette, 2003, Whitbeck *et al*., 2004). More work

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[3] A status Indian is a legal category assigned to an Aboriginal person in Canada who is registered under the Indian Act.

at this point is needed to clarify the issues, but based on existing studies and the data collected for this report we would argue that the current state of Aboriginal homelessness in Canada is in part influenced by collective trauma that has superseded traditional social regulating mechanisms that, if active, could assist individuals in coping with the "individual traumas/ruptures" (*cf* Crop Eared Wolf, 2007). A 60-year-old female spoke directly to the issues: "It goes back to residential school. That's where I started getting abused and I kind of lost it. After I got out of school, I moved to the city and my plan was to go to college. I got an apartment and I got some work going and then the bottle took over my life." A 56-year-old male, upon further thought, drew a strong connection between his current lifestyle—characterized by few close relationships and constant movement—and his time spent in a residential school. He was however unable to elaborate further, but his experiences echoed that of a 55-year-old male who provided added context:

> I went to boarding school at a very young age. I was six and if you came from a family that had more than five kids you were automatically put in the school and I was there until I was nine. That's not really a home and you end up getting institutionalized because of all the rules and you come out there and it's like you're a little child, even though you may be an adult, because you don't know the first thing about this or that and it's a scary feeling. They really segregated you in boarding school.

The next noteworthy category explaining the causes of urban Aboriginal homelessness was what we would generally define as loss, which is also linked to trauma. A mid-thirties male traced his problems with homelessness to a young age, when his grandmother's house burned down. This was followed by an extended period of movement to several family members' homes. The family remained fairly stable until his mother died, which he said also hit him hard. After that everything seemed to unravel. His subsequent marriage failed and when his father died he resigned himself to life on the streets. Another mid-thirties male related this story: "I was brought here [Lethbridge] because my mom and dad were alcoholics; I guess I got taken away by child welfare. I got brought up north and living with white people." A 36-year-old male indicated that he has been drifting since his mother's passing when he was 17-years-old. Another 20-year-old male started running away from home at 16-years-of-age, the year following his father's death, after which he also started drinking and occasionally utilizing the Lethbridge Shelter. One particularly heart wrenching interview with a 56-year-old male ended with him breaking down in tears while stating "I haven't had a home since my mom [died]."

Historic loss was a factor leading to homelessness, but so too was the impact of enduring loss. A male (32) who had been affected by the death of his uncle, father, mother, and grandparents recently witnessed his best friend pass away at the Lethbridge Shelter after getting beat down in Indian Battle Park.[4] One female (29) who was raped and abused by her spouse refused to be around her children because she felt "dirty". They were consequently sent to live with a close family member. Three female participants were currently on the street as a result of failed spousal relationships. As one 51-year-old female stated, "I just broke up with my husband and that's why I'm sitting in the homeless shelter right now." What is perhaps most disturbing is that the majority of the project participants don't know how to extricate themselves from their

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[4] Indian Battle Park is located just west of the downtown and is an historic site of the last large Indian war in Canada in 1870. It is by day a picturesque picnic and hiking site and by night the homeless frequent it.

current situation. Outside of the obvious resources such as the Lethbridge Shelter, clinics and hospitals, and Outreach, to name a few of the more prominent, few knew what types of services were available to help them or how to access them.

Destructive personal behaviours in the form of alcohol or drug abuse and criminal behaviours (mostly in the form of assaults)—sometimes due to loss and trauma—were factors in each of the participants' lives and remain exacerbating factors in relation to homelessness. Studies show that Aboriginal homeless people present with higher levels of substance abuse than do non-Aboriginal people (Beavis *et al.*, 1997, Belanger, 2011, Kingfisher, 2005, Westerfelt & Yellowbird, 1999). Alcohol and drug abuse prevalency is often higher on reserves and the behaviors remain with individuals upon moving to the city (Beavis *et al.*, 1997). Kingfisher (2007) has confirmed that many people tend to associate Aboriginal people (males in particular) with alcoholism, or at the very least as predisposed to substance abuse. And, according to contemporary mainstream norms, these outcomes are deserved for those who are purveyors of their own misery (Walker, 2005). Thirteen interviewees admitted to participating in destructive behaviors such as alcohol and drug abuse whereas six claimed a criminal record that kept them from finding work or securing adequate housing. Many indicated that their time in jail removed them from the workforce and housing, and that returning to either upon their release was a difficult task.

An observation is that during early discussions, the project participants originally offered positive testimonials about living in Lethbridge, and suggested that the city contained everything needed to get by. But when we inquired as to why they remained houseless, we started to sense some reluctance to examine or convey their experiences. Although the city had everything they needed, they were unable to gain access. Eventually, four participants indicated that they were currently seeking a rental property or wanted to purchase a home. A 42-year-old female communicated that she had submitted numerous applications for rental properties, and all were denied. Several times when she didn't hear back she called the landlords only to be told the property had been rented. Further investigation exposed that the properties were still available for rent, and that the landlords who didn't want to rent to an Aboriginal person had filtered her out of competition for the property (see also Fiske, Belanger & Gregory, 2010).

Others strategies were more subtle. For instance, one interviewee suggested that, based on her credit rating, she was too significant a financial risk, so they had to deny her rental application. A 42-year-old male, who currently has the money to rent a place, indicated that as soon "as they know I'm a native guy they say 'no'; or they don't phone me back. The reason I'm homeless is not because I don't have money. I mean I tried to buy a house and went there with all that money and due to prejudice they wouldn't sell me that house. I still can't even get rent now but I pay my kids' rent. They won't rent to me and I don't know why, maybe because I'm Native." A male (55) echoed these sentiments: "If you're lucky you may find a place here but there's a lot of prejudism [sic] with the landlords and references, too. They give people a really hard time from here because they figure that you already have a place to stay and you're already on assistance so why would you need this and that."

As one male (32) suggested, distrustful landlords and neighbours often display "Not In My Backyard" (NIMBY) attitudes to make life difficult for unwanted renters. And the available dwellings utilized by Outreach and other comparable agencies were described as "shithole apartments and it's not fair." A 42-year-old male stated that "If I was to apply for a house, I guarantee a white person would get first choice instead of me but it's Lethbridge; I already know." Racism is a contentious issue, especially in conservative communities where members

work at projecting tolerance (Fiske, Belanger and Gregory, 2010, Kingfisher, 2007). Evidence from Winnipeg and Thompson, Manitoba, for example, highlighted discrimination against Aboriginal people in the housing rental market (Corrado Research and Evaluation Associates Inc., 2003, Mochama, 2001). Conclusions like these remain difficult to act upon when nationally "the extent and seriousness of discrimination against Aboriginal people, and the impact of this on homelessness, are hard to measure" (Beavis *et al*., 1997, 10, Barsh, 1997, Belanger, 2007, CMHC, 2003, Carter & Osborne, 2009, Cohen & Corrado, 2004). In these scenarios the individual's capacity to become a homeowner is undermined, as is the likelihood of securing affordable and suitable rental accommodations. In response, multi-family and multi-generational households flourish and this frequently leads to overcrowding, thereby leaving the residents homeless, by definition. As a result, a high proportion of individuals and families start to utilize temporary and permanent shelters or sleep rough.

Despite these experiences, the majority of the participants did not consider Lethbridge to be an overtly discriminatory environment. Most suggested that the identified racism and discrimination were limited to their attempts to acquire rental accommodations or purchase a house. But once again, further discussion unearthed a notable trend: the majority of the participants expressed a sense of social alienation or dislocation in Lethbridge, and consequently had difficulty feeling/experiencing a sense of home. As Aboriginal persons living in Lethbridge, they felt exceptionally conspicuous, albeit rejected. In addition to being homeless due to various personal and systemic reasons, white privilege had led to a form of double alienation. As eight of the participants suggested—which a 42-year-old female captured—non-Aboriginal people have "more open doors" and they "don't get discriminated [against] like we do." A 51-year-old female recounted a personal experience while living with a non-Aboriginal male. She laughed while she explained how he "could get away with murder and me, I can't. I'm always interrogated. Him? All he said was that he was suicidal, and hearing things and seeing things and he automatically got on AISH for life." This sense of privilege extended to the Lethbridge Shelter where one male (56) claimed that fellow non-Aboriginal homeless people "have the advantage, though, because of color ... everything's black and white. It's always going to be that way." So the participants' general sense of community acceptance was contradicted by their personal experiences of social alienation, which suggests that they have either become accustomed to this treatment; or they choose to ignore it and focus on their own relationships.

Participant response to this type of treatment had led to social bonding and many identified how close they had become; and their general reliance upon one another for support. A community was forged and people maintain relationships, thus ensuring social stability and saliency. As Andersen (2002, 20) notes, Aboriginal people "have created new and distinct communities while concomitantly creating new cultural norms, adapting, as we have always done, to the material circumstances around us." One male (20) indicated, "I have friends and people who care about me" whereas a 75-year-old male wanted to be around people so he could tell stories: "It makes me feel happy they want me to say prayers here. I don't want to go into a nursing home or anything like that. I don't feel very comfortable being alone." In addition to making and maintaining personal connections local events drew people out. One male (42) visited various local parks to watch youth baseball and football games. He also spent plenty of time in the downtown as he and others who do not drink gather to talk and hang out with one another. A 77-year-old male relayed the sense of community. Recently hospitalized he missed his friends and others he regularly interacted with on the street. As he stated, "I missed their voices and being at home." The sense of community extended beyond friendship. There is a

family aesthetic at play as articulated by one participant who indicated that his relationships represent "my street family–all my brothers and sisters." One lamented the lack of resources available to strengthen ties, specifically being able as a group to attend funerals of fallen friends. He suggested that people want to say goodbye and pay their respects, but that this is often not possible "because there's no transportation or no one to bring us."

The importance of a street family to one's sense of social stability has been noted, but the volatility of this community is also a source of concern, specifically the violence that is a common thread in the project participants' daily experience. Recent research in Lethbridge confirmed that violence is a constant threat to the health of both homeless people and the sheltered population, in the form of interpersonal and spousal violence experienced prior to and subsequent to becoming homeless; and violence experienced on the street after one becomes homeless. Whereas a Toronto survey found that 40 per cent of homeless individuals had been assaulted and 21 per cent of homeless women had been raped, in Lethbridge 42.7 per cent of men and 40.5 per cent of women had been the victim of a violent attack since becoming homeless. This study also confirmed that violent attacks occur consistently among all age groups, while also demonstrating that voluntarily becoming homeless is not a pathway out of domestic and other forms of violence (Belanger, 2011). It was not unusual during the interviews conducted for this project to hear about someone being beat down during a disagreement, or for a discussion to suddenly turn violent. We also discovered that drugs and alcohol play a central role. Some have a history of confrontations as a result of a short fuse. Others often feel they are frequent victims of circumstance. This was evident in the stories told about having to defend one against aggressive individuals who were part of their street family. In all cases, criminal records were quite common which in turn kept most from obtaining steady work or from acquiring rental accommodations. Notably incarcerated individuals lose benefits drawn from income support, and upon discharge they have to reapply and wait for reinstatement. This is yet another potential factor increasing the risk of recidivism.

Mobility

As the literature suggests, Aboriginal people regularly move between cities and reserves. What is frequently overlooked is the mounting movement within cities and between municipalities. This suggests that a simultaneous being of permanency *and* itinerancy is developing. These high mobility levels fall into three categories: (1) residential mobility characterized by frequent moves within urban centres; (2) migration, between two different communities; and (3) churn, which is the frequent movement between city and reserve (Norris & Clatworthy, 2003, Norris *et al*., 2004, Peters, 2005). We could conclude that non-Aboriginal society unconsciously considers mobility to be a natural consequence of a previously nomadic culture that has yet to progress to civilized urban permanency characterized by living in one community, albeit not attributable to systemic racism or programmatic inequities. Aboriginal mobility is in this scenario a cultural by-product, which we contend "frees" up the mainstream collective conscience thus reducing social responsibility for the increasing sense of alienation experienced by the urban Aboriginal homeless. Hence the responsibility for being homeless and extricating oneself from homelessness is placed squarely upon the shoulders of the Aboriginal homeless population. But to summarize, mobility's impact on homelessness remains an untested assumption even if research has acknowledged a correlation (Belanger, 2007, Weasel Head, 2011).

Among the project participants nine had moved between city and reserve frequently whereas six did not. And most did not relocate within Lethbridge, choosing instead to remain

close to the Lethbridge Shelter and the city core. At the beginning of the interviews most of the participants had given little thought to the issue of mobility within and between cities, and churn between the reserve and Lethbridge, and the questions were structured to help build project participant awareness of the subject matter thus leading to a thoughtful end discussion. By the start and the end of each interview we asked the same question (albeit phrased somewhat differently each time): is constant movement hindering your social and economic progress? For three participants it was clear that they would remain hard-to-house and likely in a state of chronic homelessness; accordingly their answers were ambiguous and not that helpful. Six others stated that their movement was not a negative influence even if their other related interview responses suggested otherwise (this will be discussed below). And six indicated that the need or desire for constant movement was hindering their social and economic progress. As for the latter group, four indicated that constant movement was having a negative impact. According to one female (55), constant movement meant that "you're a transient and you can't really relax or fit in anywhere. [Landlords] give people a really hard time from here because they figure that you already have a place to stay and you're already on assistance so why would you need this and that." For one mid-thirties female, even though her mobility may have undermined her partner's economic standing it was needed to combat the negative influences that were compromising his health. As she explained, "I come back [to the reserve] for a few days and when it [drinking] starts getting out of hand here, like people drinking too much, everybody offering my husband drinks when I'm trying to quit drinking and I was going through that too, like drinking, people always offered me drinks and I got really sick." Once she has regained a sense of equilibrium she returns to the city until it is once again time to abandon the city for the reserve's regenerative properties. For one male (20), stability is all he craves. He would like to live on reserve where he suggests his "whole situation" could be remedied. Another female (42) indicated that the constant movement kept her from succeeding: "I would have been going to school and getting an income."

For those who believed that the movement was not problematic, the interviews suggest that they are unaware of or they choose to ignore key issues. A 77-year-old male who does not consider himself homeless, admitted "I have nowhere to go." He later disclosed that he had moved from Fort Macleod to Cardston and then Lethbridge in the last few years trying to maintain relationships with his children and to seek out temporary shelter with the hopes of one day having his reserve house repaired. Another male (75) admits to regular movement but that it was needed to seek out work similar to how his mother used to acquire resources (i.e., hunt and fish) throughout the territory when he was a child. This transient way of life has led to four divorces/separations for him and a lack of stable employment resulting from an unvarying state of economic insecurity. Or, as he put it, "I hate being broke all the time." At the same time, remaining homeless has in his opinion allowed him to practice traditional "ceremony". He has been asked to perform prayers and blessings for significant urban events, and the general sense is that his remaining on reserve would not result in the same opportunities. It has brought some degree of meaning and usefulness to his life and has allowed him to practice traditional healing.

Even though project participants did not make the connection, steady movement is exacting a substantial social and economic toll on urban Aboriginal peoples. As Liberman and Frank (1980) verified in their work, urban U.S. Indians perceived greater levels of stress and compromised health conditions living in the city and on reservations (we are unsure whether these individuals would have experienced similarly high stress levels living on reserve). Similar trends are evident in Canada, and for our purposes southern Alberta. Nationally reserve-city-

reserve churn continues despite proof of improved urban Aboriginal educational and income levels (Beavon & Cooke, 2003, Siggner & Costa, 2005). Census data highlight lower than mainstream economic and social outcomes, which appears to place urban Aboriginal individuals at an increased risk of homelessness. A Montreal study showed a high level of psychological distress among the urban Aboriginal population as well as elevated levels of substance abuse, suggesting that the city remained a hostile environment (Jacobs & Gill, 2002). In the late 1980s, urban Aboriginal people in Saskatoon discovered their access to traditional healers was impaired (Waldram, 1990). These trends are notable and while not universal to all urban Aboriginal homeless individuals' personal experiences they must nevertheless be considered within the context of this study.

The evident churn between reserve and the city implicated several trends. It was offered as a way of remaining in contact with family that have chosen to remain on the reserve, and as a temporary respite from destructive behaviours and damaging influences such as substance-abusing friends and family. One 32-year-old male wanted his brothers and sisters to acquire a house at Standoff, the reserve's central community, to the reserve so that they could "all be together on the reserve, but we can't get everyone together." But for the rest their travels were not about seeking accommodations but rather to personally reconnect with a community that was no longer a central aspect of their lives. Six others expressed no connection to the reserve and as such did not visit at all. Three of these individuals however did seem bitter and two were angered by the sense of detachment from the reserve, almost as if it was forced upon them. In a sense the city was the only refuge due to this lost connection. This group's collective experience suggests that urban permanency is a product of reserve alienation; fear of the community itself; and an attitude that it has nothing left to offer on a personal level. The last point will be discussed below in the section exploring program deficiencies.

From a legal and policy perspective, band members living on reserve are considered federal responsibilities, whereas band members living off reserve are acknowledged to be provincial citizens. Bands are considered federal political entities under the *Indian Act*, and they are located on reserves originally established to segregate First Nations from Canadian society (Dockstator, 1994, Mawhinney, 1993). At the time these reserves were established, assimilation was the primary goal, and urban immigration was aggressively championed. Once abandoned, the reserves would be decommissioned and the lands turned over to provincial jurisdiction. Although actively promoted as a means of improving their socio-economic standing, policy makers and band officials considered Indian emigration to be the conscious act of voluntarily abdicating individual Aboriginal rights to federal programming. A model delineating use of reserve resources for band members living in the city was never developed, and Canadian political orthodoxy presumes that an Indian's "home" cannot be sited in multiple centres (read "cities"), even if these sites fall within pre-colonial homelands (Borrows, 2000). Prior to the first noteworthy movement of Indians from reserves to the cities in the 1950s, the federal government, through its Indian Affairs department (1880–1935; 1966-present) and Indian Affairs branches (1936–1966), delivered Indian-specific social benefits and services. These and similar policies were ad hoc in scope and expected to lapse upon Indian assimilation into Canadian society (Shewell, 2004). The Métis and Inuit were largely ignored. However, beginning with the Indian integration-into-the-family allowance and the pension regime in 1945, followed by the federal grant of citizenship in 1960, the provinces were unwittingly drawn into the management of Indian Affairs and as such were forced to adopt augmented responsibility for Indians. Note that the provinces resist accepting responsibility for Aboriginal people, whom they believe are

exclusively a federal responsibility. In addition to being abandoned by Ottawa, and never accepted by provincial politicians, First Nations leaders burdened with limited budgets and growing reserve populations have suggested through their actions and words that band members willingly residing off reserve were rejecting their traditional culture, thus abdicating any and all claims to local resources. Yet First Nations often acknowledged cities as extensions of traditional lands that inform the construction of identities both uniquely urban and informed by reserve social and political norms (Andersen, 2005). The black and white world of federal Indian policy made it literally impossible for one person to be a reserve resident and able to access programming, and band councils were forced to make difficult decisions, thus restricting who precisely could access local programs. This increasingly limited urban Aboriginal peoples' access, which has in recent years been growing even more restricted.

These program restrictions have manifested themselves not so much in direct references to a lack of available programming: only one participant claimed the band council was failing in this instance. There is however a perceived lack of support and feelings of abandonment. The participants do not identify whether this has been precipitated by tight budgeting or has been influenced by myriad complex Indian legislation. They only articulated a feeling that they no longer feel personally or politically connected to a place they once called home. A 51-year-old male indicated that he received "absolutely no support from the reserve." A 42-year-old female echoed these concerns: "I've tried to get them [band council] to help me to get into school and they wouldn't help me." These attitudes extend to and have negatively impacted familial relations as one male (56) noted. His family doesn't acknowledge him and when he attempted to interact with them by visiting the reserve "it fell apart."

A 51-year-old male was critical of how reserve issues have started to influence urban non-Aboriginal attitudes that in turn impact his access to programs and housing. For instance, he believes that his access to municipal services has been restricted because, as he sees it, "white people think we can go to the reserve and get stuff. I can't get anything unless I'm actually out there. They think you can just move in and out but no, you can't do that." And clearly people desire that flexibility. Yes, three participants stated that they have lost contact with reserve relatives and have no desire to pursue these relationships. But the remaining 12 suggested that the band council should respect their urban band members and assist them with urban housing and by helping those who want to spend time in the community to travel back and forth (e.g., once a week a bus could pick up folks in Lethbridge and take them to the reserve to visit family and friends). One 60-year-old female told the following story: "There was a bunch of us sitting in the park and everybody wanted to go to Indian Days and we thought "geez, why can't the Blood reserve have a bus service to come into town and pick us up, bring us there for the day, then bring us back." But she ended by simply stating, "We're just forgotten about."

This disconnection is sad to see, but so too is their demonstrated fear of the reserve community. Many of the project participants have lived away from the reserve for many years, and others left at a young age. Many of the stories they hear in the media and from friends, family and strangers inform their perceptions of the reserve. Because so many have not lived in the community for some time they have come to fear the unknown, and as such feel that the city is the sole remaining residential site. A 20-year-old male stated that the "reserve is a foreign place. It's a whole different place for me and I wouldn't know my way around and I'm scared of dogs and that I would get bitten." A 52-year-old male expressed no desire to return and would not allow his children to live there: "There's nothing there for me. Absolutely nothing. I wouldn't allow my kids to grow up on the reserve … because of the way things are there." In

reference to the latter statement, violence on the reserve was considered a major issue for all of the participants and many related graphic stories from personal experience. One male (42) believed the reserve to be a dangerous place due to gangs that are running loose, and "I don't want my kids around that. It seems more civil here [Lethbridge]. On the reserve, my daughter got beaten up there. I guess she got piled by a bunch of girls. So I don't go to the reserve now because it's too rank and too dangerous." A 32-year-old male confirmed this impression, saying that there are "more kids getting into gangs together and fighting each other" while lamenting the inability to get along and "always fighting each other and killing people." A 77-year-old male indicated that youth in gangs "in Lavern and Moses Lake … beat you up and take your money."

Some interviewees indicated they felt they had just been away too long. According to one mid-thirties male, "I think I'd rather be in the city. I've been off the reserve too long." Another mid-thirties male stated, "I would prefer to live among white people even though I get treated differently. At least I stand a better chance here than on the reserve." A 42-year-old female concluded, "I tried to live on the reserve. I couldn't handle it because I was too used to the city."

Finally, all participants noted what they described as infighting on the reserve that was leading to/had led to social instability, and their corresponding desire to stay in the city was a strategy to stay out the line of fire. The key issue related to reserve political instability that in turn led to reserve social instability. A 36-year-old male indicated that political corruption is an issue: "Like people who work at the food bank, they take all the good stuff and just give a family one small box of food with junk food. Yet, some families are getting all the good stuff." Nepotism was also mentioned, which has one 77-year-old male interviewee supporting his reserve family's attempts "to get [a new] head chief because the other one's are just taking the money." The lack of resources directed to the local police force resulted in a diminished local presence, which a 20-year-old male stated led to higher incidences of death on reserve. A 42-year-old female stated that gossip is a force that has become increasing destructive in recent years because it leads to infighting. A male (56) was also critical of what he described as a lack of community support: "On the Blood reserve, just by saying you need help, they're going to put you down and say 'Ahh, gee this guy can't work or handle himself'." Many mentioned drug and alcohol use in passing, but it was clearly not considered as important an issue. The project participants did indicate that these and other concerns led to increased destructive behaviours, but that these could be mitigated once the larger political and social issues were effectively dealt with.

Q.2: Do existing programs, or the shortage of available programs influence urban Aboriginal homelessness and/or Aboriginal mobility?

Programs for the homeless are scattered and their responsibility housed with an assortment of agencies. As there is no single provincial government ministry or department responsible for all homeless services and supports, determining precise responsibility is difficult. Those experiencing homelessness in Lethbridge are aware of the central agencies such as Outreach, which seeks out permanent housing for the homeless, or the local hospital and local health clinics. Less well known are Alberta Health Services programs and other available services. For the most part the majority of participants initially expressed their satisfaction with the general availability of services in Lethbridge. Yet further discussion unearthed concerns about the existing lack of municipal services and its negative social and economic impacts. Only one individual—a 60-year-old female—was able to formally pinpoint what these impacts were: if the programs were effective "I believe I would have a home now." The issue it seems is about

effectiveness of existing programs, not that the programs are non-existent, or there are not enough of them.

Despite not being able to identify specific systemic weaknesses no one suggested that they would abandon Lethbridge due to a lack of services. There were several concerns presented, however. A 42-year-old male stated "the social services are getting too difficult and make me do things they want me to do; like go to ADAAC and if I don't they will cut me off. I'm trying to do what they want me to do but they're still giving me a rough time." A 32-year-old male also stated that his hope of landing day jobs is what kept him in Lethbridge: "There's day jobs at 5th on 5th [Youth Services]. I'm too old for the day jobs, but I've been lying about my age, so I go to the job and get paid the same day. I've been doing this for about 5 years. I'm 32 but I say I'm 22 or 23. They still take me." But as one 20-year-old male stated, if supports and programs were available on reserve he would relocate "as long as I get to come back [to Lethbridge] and visit." Finally, a 55-year-old female was pleased with how she was being treated: "I'm looking with staff now and he asked me how I would get the damage and I said Outreach would help me. They just want me to find a place. He's really good and he understands us for who we are and he doesn't condemn us. Its good when you people come in because at least we can say our part to the outside." But she also highlighted an important point raised by others: "If it was advertised more that would be good." A key theme emerging is about overly restrictive eligibility criteria and other requirements rather than the availability/lack of availability of programs, particularly on reserve, and whether the people who require greatest access know about the programs.

As previously noted eight of the participants specified that they wanted to move back to live on reserve, whereas four others expressed an interest in relocating once issues of concern improved. Hence, 80 per cent of the participants would consider moving to the reserve if presented with the opportunity. As discussed above, there are definite issues that kept people from living permanently on reserve. However the perceptions of reserve services need to be explored to determine if this is an exacerbating factor that forces urban Aboriginal homeless individuals to remain in the city. Whereas one mid-thirties male indicated that the reserve was missing everything in terms of services and supports, overcrowding and a lack of reserve housing stock were most often identified as the key factors keeping people from moving to the reserve. As a 77-year old male indicated "there's no place to stay and now my kids are all over the place because of it."

Reserve reports confirm that there is a housing shortage, and provide additional details. In 2007, 1,280 homes were counted on the Blood Reserve at a time when the community population surpassed 10,000, which amounts to 7.8 persons per dwelling (Magzul & Rojas, 2005). For comparative purposes, in 2010 there were 41,555 dwellings in the Lethbridge municipal census agglomeration for a population of 105,999, which amounts to 2.6 persons per dwelling.

Lack of employment opportunities was also regularly cited as a factor that forces Aboriginal homeless people to remain in the city. In 2006 he Blood Reserve had a 23.4 per cent unemployment rate, whereas Lethbridge hovered around five per cent at that time. What is more telling are the comparative employment participation rates: the rate for the Blood Reserve in 2006 was 33.2 per cent, whereas for Lethbridge the rate was 65.4 per cent. Therefore, remaining in the city is statistically advantageous for those seeking housing and employment.

For one 55-year-old female interviewee, the lack of a homeless shelter on reserve was another factor keeping Aboriginal homeless people from returning to their reserves: "The reason

they're here … and they sleep on the outside now because it's warm, is because there's no place to go on the reserve. They may have family but the families are big."

One 60-year-old female believes that looking to the future and helping today's youth is a good strategy to keep them from becoming tomorrow's urban homeless, and she suggested constructing a drop-in centre, "in each area of the reserve like Moses Lake, Standoff, Laverne, something … for the youth after school or during summer holidays–community activities, whatever! That would keep them out of trouble or from coming into the city just to be drunks. I'm sure they would love to go to those kinds of things – even just to hang out." A 32-year-old male elaborated by indicating the need for a community centre that includes activities such as horseback riding and camping, because not every child is interested in competitive sports. A 36-year-old male expanded on this:

> First of all, there's nothing to do for the youth [on reserve]. Sure, there's a hockey rink but not every kid's into hockey. They should have it all set up by now–chief after chief–they should have been way ahead. I grew up there but when I was younger, I came to the city and my dad would come look for me. I played a lot of sports when I was younger, like with a lot of the boys. I did judo and boxing and my dad kept me busy at that time. It's about time they get something going for the youth. I mean, you go to Standoff and there's all these spray paintings [tagging] and there's no yards.

A lack of essential services such as medical care on reserve was also cited as a factor that drives people to Lethbridge for longer term and in-depth care. Something as simple as getting a prescription filled was identified as a day-long event. A 77-year-old male had to hitchhike off the reserve to get a new pair of glasses, and then accidentally left them behind in the gracious driver's truck.

A 55-year-old female identified the need for additional local counselors. She stated, "a lot of the older people went through the residential schools and a lot of them went to jail because they fell into the system of institution and the government. They don't know how to operate on the outside. That's where most of the addictions come from because they're always hearing 'No, no!' They want a place and they want a safe environment. It's really hard like they try to tell you to reside back on the reserve but you don't have a place to go." The evidence of ongoing trauma traced to the residential school experience underscores the need for improved counseling services.

Q.3: What are the gaps in the current service-delivery model that may perpetuate or exacerbate existing trends? What proposed correctives will aid in ameliorating existing difficulties?

In 2007 Alberta Premier Ed Stelmach and the Province of Alberta announced that a 10-year plan to coordinate initiatives to address provincial homelessness would be created. In addition to establishing the Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness, the Province committed more than $285 million that year to address immediate housing pressures. The Alberta government's affordable housing strategy led to the development of more than 11,000 units over the subsequent five years.

Homelessness remains a high profile issue provincially and in the City of Lethbridge. Social Housing in Action (SHIA) was established in Lethbridge in 2000 with a mandate to minimize the impact of homelessness and prevent homelessness. Since then it has created and

supported a range of projects, programs and approaches to that have resulted in the development of additional housing units and the 'right housing' options and supports.[5] In Lethbridge, available municipal programming to combat homelessness falls into four key categories: (1) emergency shelters (Harbour House, Emergency Youth Shelter, Lethbridge Shelter and Resource Centre); (2) supportive homes; (3) affordable permanent housing; and, (4) Housing First programs (Community Outreach, Blackfoot Family Lodge Society, Wood's Homes, Lethbridge Resource Centre, YWCA Residence, and YWCA Hestia Homes). As of April 2013 there are 104 beds available for people who are homeless at Harbour House and the Lethbridge Shelter and Resource Centre, and eight beds at the Emergency Youth Shelter.

The other non-shelter bed programs for homeless people in Lethbridge are what the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness (CAEH) would describe as the infrastructure needed to prevent and shorten the homeless experience. These programs help people meet their basic needs and direct individuals to other required support services. However, these programs have extensive intake processes that can be off-putting to individuals seeking immediate responses.

This brief overview is necessarily abridged due to space limitations. Suffice it to say the ongoing drop in the number of homeless people in Lethbridge in recent years suggests that approach is becoming increasingly effective. When evaluating the Lethbridge approach, we find strong correspondence with to the CAEH's ten essential points to ending homelessness.[6] However, there aren't many shelter beds or once in the system available units available specifically for urban Aboriginal homeless individuals, and the majority of beds are directed towards women and their children. This is apparent with Blackfoot Family Lodge Society, the Native women's transition home. The lack of a men's transition home is evident and is a much needed facility, as Aboriginal males compose the highest percentage of the city's urban Aboriginal homeless. Transition housing is not suggested by CAEH, nor is it necessary for Housing First, which skips the transitional stage and puts homeless people directly into permanent housing, whether in private apartments or in permanent supportive housing. More generally, beyond one dedicated agency, and other 'first-come-first-served' services, there is a noticeable lack of Aboriginal-specific services in Lethbridge. Based on our findings it is suggested that transition is a necessary part of ending homelessness.

At the core of the program are service providers and agency leaders who believe that curing homelessness begins with providing people with permanent housing. We asked project participants about what home meant to them, and their responses fell into three categories: 1) belonging; 2) being close to family; and, 3) safety. Perhaps most importantly, the participants indicated that feelings of home were not specifically related to acquiring permanent housing. That is not to say that this was discounted, for as discussed above, many project participants are actively seeking rental and home ownership opportunities. For a 50-year-old female, "home would be a dream where my grandkids and kids could come. If I ever got a home I'd make it stable."

When we attempted to subtly guide the participants towards considering home in terms of physical housing, they inevitably responded by drawing the conversation back to what home meant. One person indicated that home was the reserve. But it wasn't the land itself (although

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[5] Comprehensive municipal and provincial planning approaches such as these are not widespread across Canada.
[6] According to the CAEH in order to end homelessness, a community needs a clear, deliberate, and comprehensive strategy. The 10 essentials to a successful Plan to End Homelessness are: planning; data, research & best practices; coordinated system of care; income; emergency prevention; systems prevention; housing focused outreach; rapid re-housing; housing support services; and permanent housing.

this was alluded to). Rather it was the family, as one mid-30s male suggested: "I think home would be on the reserve, yeah, on the reserve, with my family. That's my home." Another mid-30s male stated, "Home is like [pause] having a loved one there." A 29-year-old female agreed that home was "where all my friends and family are." For a 20-year-old male home was a sense of family and interacting with those individuals, wherever that may be. He said that when he had family around, he experienced less stress because he didn't have to worry.

A 51-year-old female echoed these comments while adding the component of not being a burden on family: "Home to me is having your own space, your privacy, your territory, your peace. What you want to make out of your home … . Being homeless is all the negative things. It's negative to be knocking on family's door and asking to be put up when they have their own problems. Home is where you feel safe and comfortable." A 60-year-old female interviewee confirmed this perspective when she said that home is where you "feel secure, confident. I would be happy."

For some interviewees, freedom is a key part of the definition of home. A 75-year-old male stated that for him, home is "when I'm able to do the things I want to do like cook for myself." For a 32-year-old male, home "means to sleep and relax whenever you want, watch TV whenever you want, play games whenever you want, have friends over whenever you want. You have your own space. That's a home."

Existing services and programs are increasingly responsive to multiple sub-groups but they fail to fully consider the needs of homeless Aboriginal people. The fleeting and frequently transitional nature of an urban Aboriginal homeless lifestyle, if we may, must be taken into consideration and integrated into response and prevention policies as a means of helping to mitigate movement and encourage those who desire to do so how to establish permanent urban residency.

Part 5: Discussion/Final Thoughts

First Nations and Aboriginal community members and academics alike have begun to challenge the certainty that Aboriginal people in Canada live exclusively in reserve communities. The federal government has however yet to acknowledge these trends, as evidenced by a policy orientation that considers reserve residents to be Canada's authentic Indigenous peoples. This is somewhat curious considering that current figures illustrate that roughly only one-quarter of the nation's Aboriginal population continue to live on reserves. In Lethbridge, for example, currently 5,000 urban Aboriginal people claim municipal residency (6% of the city population). The Blood and Peigan Reserves together account for 14,000 residents in total, but while many of those on the band membership roles may be considered community members others still have chosen to reside in Fort Macleod (365, or 11.9% of the town population), Pincher Creek (75, or 2.1% of the town population), and Cardston (440, or 13.3% of the town population). Upon closer examination when one factors in the expense of maintaining urban Aboriginal programming it is easier to comprehend why the federal government maintains its conviction in reserve populations as Canada's authentic Indigenous peoples and as such due the majority of programming dollars. The reasoning is defective for the national Aboriginal population is more and more an urban community, and federal officials remain responsible for "Indians, and lands reserved for the Indians" [note that urban and reserve Indians are not differentiated in the BNA Act's wording]. Clearly new policies are needed for the urban Aboriginal community, and this includes those aimed at eliminating homelessness and mitigating housing risk. Canadian officials are however not going to let this issue go quietly if recent events are any indication. In 2013, the Canadian government appealed a Federal Court ruling that concluded Métis and non-status Indians belong under section 91(24) of the *BNA Act (1867)*, which assigns the federal government responsibility for "Indians, and lands reserved for the Indians." Interpreting Indians to be reserve populations makes it difficult for all non-reserve groups and non-status Indians from accessing programs and services readily available to status Indians.

This hasn't stopped a sense of urban permanency from developing even if people do frequently move within the city limits, and even between towns for work. But the project participants suggest they return to the reserve not for work as much as for family connection and attempts to temporarily improve their quality of life. The hope of one-day obtaining reserve employment is a compelling issue that cannot be overlooked, especially for those consistently falling short of finding work in the city. But everyone in this study acknowledged the endemic lack of reserve employment prospects and that they had a better chance of securing urban employment. Interestingly, only two of the project participants left the reserve to find work or go to school in the city. Many simply moved to the city to change things up or to be near urban family members. The city is also attractive for those fleeing poor reserve conditions in search of access to improved education, employment and health care. Yet from the 1990s until the present a steady increase in the number of urban Aboriginal homeless people is noted. The reasons for this vary from choosing to remain homeless to not being able to find adequate housing. For example, many project participants currently choose to live without a formal home or permanent shelter because securing a house may mean moving away from their social circle, which chooses to confine itself within a short radius from the Shelter. This is considered a means of stability: rather than moving away and losing touch of friends and family for a short period of time only to ultimately return many choose to remain homeless in the hopes that a rental unit or house will become available "closer to home". The level of NIMBY in Lethbridge combined with low vacancy rates and few dedicated units to house homeless people means that not only is finding a

place to live difficult, but it often requires frequent movement in search of better and more socially acceptable accommodations. Participants who highlighted their connections with friends and family on reserve echoed this sense of urban belonging, while further suggesting that bouncing between two social networks was challenging.

Even though homelessness suggests an unstable lifestyle wrought with hardships, it was presented by some to be the opposite, for as demonstrated securing housing in the city does not necessarily result in housing security. Many were shown to lose their newfound residences after a short period thereby forcing them once again into homelessness. Many individuals who would have preferred to live on the reserve chose to remain in Lethbridge, despite being homeless there, in order to live in close proximity to family, in particular children and grandchildren. This, in part, was a function of their low income, as all indicated that driving to and from the reserve was too costly, and in these circumstances living homeless in the city was preferred, for it allowed individuals to remain socially connected. For many their reserve visits were about reconnecting with family and had nothing to do with seeking services and other programmatic opportunities, employment, or asserting reserve-specific Aboriginal rights. Frequently seeking out cultural space and contact with history and homeland was noted, as was the importance of temporarily relocating to a less overtly discriminatory environment. A lack of urban resources and services was not specifically identified as causing churn, and neither was a desire to live part-time in reserves and cities (even if the project participants were unaware of its negative impacts). A lack of existing and adequate reserve housing was however, as was the proclivity towards over crowding, which led to diminished churn since individuals chose to remain in the city. One site of residence was preferred, and the participants were generally split between their desire to live in either the city or reserve. As demonstrated the lack of reserve resources was an issue that compelled people to remain in the city.

For those interviewees who chose to regularly relocate between reserve and the city, the general trend unfolded along these lines: living in the city keeps folks in close proximity to job opportunities and urban services and programs, until such time that the need to return to the reserve for a few weeks or a month compels people to temporarily relocate. In this instance, for many, Lethbridge remains home and the reserve becomes a temporary respite from the city's negative influences. Their decision to continuously relocate has however negatively impacted individual chances at securing permanent and gainful employment, or finding improved housing. This indirectly suggests that mobility between places of residence is a contributing factor to homelessness in southern Alberta. Generally speaking Aboriginal labour market success is poor in Lethbridge, and we would argue that this, along with NIMBY and overt discrimination, has resulted in a high level of urban Aboriginal psychological distress. This needs to be confirmed, as does the proffered link between greater stress levels and poor health conditions. For now we are comfortable in concluding that the city is considered a fairly hostile environment even if the majority of the project participants overlook these influences and consider it to be home.

The level of churn was not as substantial as hypothesized. This may have to do with the developing sense of community to which the project participants frequently alluded, which offers stability and comfort. The homeless in this case chose to remain in the inner city and did not wish to live in Aboriginal neighbourhoods that could legitimately be classified as ghettoized. At the same time, even though the participants had forged new bonds and familial relationships it was evident that they were wary of their newfound family, suggesting the relationships were unstable and fortified in abusive behaviors, and the basic need for survival is what brought the groups together to form their street family. Given all we know about human behavior this isn't

surprising. However, to focus on it as a positive aspect of street survival might be a bit of a stretch as it is these same 'brothers and sisters' who do violence on one another if they do not conform to the will of the group.

Those participants we would tend to label as chronically homeless demonstrated an inability to maintain any meaningful connection with traditional society/culture as symbolized within the reserve boundaries. Others with ties to family in the city and the reserve tend to cope better, through their proven ability to forge relationships. They may indeed be homeless by definition, but often these kinship ties help trump destructive feelings of societal alienation. Hence, lacking housing did not mean homelessness to many, as long as friends and family were nearby. Prevalent substance use/abuse would suggest that destructive behaviours are a means of coping with overwhelming and profound trauma/loss, both of which the participants experience in the historical sense (as by-products of the destructive forces of colonialism such as residential schools) and contemporarily (as most continue to experience loss and trauma that is persistent and enduring). The degree of estrangement and alienation from their reserves is much greater than had been anticipated, but the majority of the participants indicated that it still represents the last remnants of traditional society (Weasel Head, 2011). On certain levels this must as suggested be emotionally debilitating, for the general consensus indicates that, despite being a traditional home, the reserve is deemed a cauldron of infighting and violence. It is, in a word, dysfunctional. For many of the interviewees, urbanism was a product of reserve alienation bred of family disconnect, a lack of opportunities, and the desire to remain in a city that, while considered discriminatory, is simultaneously considered to be a "step up" from the reserve (see also Belanger *et al.*, 2003).

This speaks to another level of loss that is incredibly profound and widespread: that for the majority of Aboriginal people in Canada, ties to land, culture and sense of identity have been eroded to the extent that colonial forces have accomplished what they set out to do. That is, many Aboriginal people have become assimilated into mainstream society albeit without being provided with the same rights and opportunities common to non-Aboriginal citizens. In return for assimilating mainstream society has not reciprocated by offering an inclusive and welcoming site of transition. Instead, it recoils when people consciously choose to not adopt the preferred values of citizenship that demand Aboriginal people leave the reserve and immediately and successfully transition into urban society.

Finally, after reviewing the interview data and juxtaposing participant attitudes about local services with the available programs, there appears to be a deep disconnect between: (a) how the service providers perceive their role as housing providers for those in need; and, (b) the participants' articulations of what home means to them and their desires (i.e., remain closely located to their kin residing in or nearby the city core). Ending urban Aboriginal homelessness from our perspective requires that not only a shelter be provided to vulnerable individuals; but also more aggressive and coherent policies be established to ensure social health and well-being resulting in happiness and contentment with the new residence. Urban Aboriginal homeless programming in Lethbridge, according to the Aboriginal participants, demands we enhance existing kinship networks through a policy response that ensures that housing is offered nearby the city's core. As these kinship networks extend to the reserve, it is vital to consider the role of those connections in individual well-being.

The current disconnects must be acknowledged and rectified if there is any hope of successfully transitioning homeless Aboriginal individuals, who are currently estranged from their reserves, into permanent homes in the city. Outreach will need to focus on the healing

aspects of healthy relationships and build these into programming, as home for these project participants is much more about relationships and positive emotions/feelings than it is about bricks and mortar.

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