Indigenous Women's Emergency Shelter

NEEDS ASSESSMENT

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For the Office of Indigenous Relations, City of Lethbridge

Executive Summary

Between 2019 and 2020, the City of Lethbridge's Indigenous Relations Office and the Reconciliation Lethbridge Advisory Committee worked with community partners to review the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Calls for Justice. During their review, members identified that one of the most pressing needs was to ensure Indigenous women's physical, social and cultural safety through the implementation of an Indigenous women's emergency shelter. In February 2022, the City of Lethbridge contracted Blackfoot researcher Dr. Gabrielle Weasel Head-Lindstrom to undertake a needs assessment using a mixed methods research approach in order to equip the city with adequate data to place them in a strong advocacy position. An environmental scan was submitted to the City of Lethbridge in June 2022.

The methodology for this needs assessment is captured through the Blackfoot cultural paradigm of "Kímmapiiyipitssini," and the methods and conceptual framework emerge from a Blackfoot worldview. A Blackfoot term that loosely translates to kindness and compassion, Kimmapiiyipitssini centers Blackfoot self-determination and philosophy for creating and maintaining balance in relationships which is a key goal within an Indigenous paradigm. Balance ensures that multiple truths surrounding the root causes of violence against Indigenous women are revealed and that the marginalization of Blackfoot perspectives is not reproduced. The needs assessment used qualitative and quantitative research methods to produce a descriptive dataset highlighting the current shelter experiences of Indigenous women up to October 2022. Semi-structured qualitative in-person interviews were digitally recorded with permission from the participants. We also conducted virtual interviews through Zoom which were either recorded on Zoom with permission or detailed notes were taken, the principal researcher. Interviews were held between July – September 2022 with Indigenous and non-Indigenous service providers, Indigenous women with lived-experience and Indigenous Elders with transferred sacred knowledge who also were in-service to Indigenous women and children through their profession. A goal of this project was to gather the perspectives of up to twenty-five Indigenous women currently utilizing emergency shelter resources within the City of Lethbridge to determine Indigenous perspectives, gaps in services and ensure their voices are included in the needs assessment in a meaningful way. Twenty-three Indigenous women with lived experience were surveyed. In addition, we conducted qualitative interviews with two women who were accessing the ICRP. Recorded qualitative interviews were transcribed and the findings were compiled utilizing an inductive coding method. Detailed findings from the interviews and survey are found in Appendices A and B.

With a focus on moving beyond the discourse found in business reports while still meeting the goals of the City of Lethbridge in determining the feasibility of the implementation of an Indigenous women's emergency shelter, the analysis synthesizes the findings into a detailed discussion of the distinct experiences and needs of Indigenous women who are in or at risk of entering into the homeless serving systems of care and the gaps that exist within the current systems that often keep women in cycles of abuse, homelessness and addictions.

Violence against Indigenous women, racism and discrimination and addictions were seen as major factors in Indigenous women accessing shelter systems. Violence inflicted on Indigenous women is not new but has been happening since the first interaction with colonizers where Indigenous women were instantly portrayed as mysterious and perceived as sexual objects. Indigenous women with lived experience described a need to access Indigenous cultural supports within women shelter systems. They indicated a comfort in having access to elder support rather than western counseling services which they felt seemed to be more readily accessible.

The discussion of the needs and program gaps also included a detailed overview of the historical context and the ideological tensions that underscore and shape both the lived experiences of Indigenous women as well as services and supports delivery approaches that are meant to mitigate risk and respond to need. Analyses revealed a lack of knowledge and understanding around the nature and impact of racism and the importance of Indigenous cultural programming. Indeed, one of the main issues to come through the qualitative data collection is the high level of racism/discrimination that Indigenous women face, both within the emergency shelter system, and by the larger settler populace within the city of Lethbridge, these experiences are acknowledged by non-Indigenous shelter entities and staff as being a factor in contributing to Indigenous women homelessness in the city, having far reaching impacts on Indigenous women from abuse and street-violence, to finding dependable housing. Failure to acknowledge racism goes hand in hand with the lack of recognition of the role of culture in the healing journeys of Indigenous women. There is a profound lack of Indigenous staff and management inclusion within the homeless serving systems of care in the city as well as a lack of physical and cultural safety for Indigenous women within the current emergency shelters. An overall lack of collaboration both within the city and with the local First Nations communities hinders meaningful and impactful change.

These areas, along with others identified in the qualitative and quantitative findings found in Appendices A and B offer critical learning opportunities and pragmatic actionable areas that must be embraced by city strategists in order to move ahead with meaningful and lasting changes. There are multiple areas for the City of Lethbridge to consider in the development of an advocacy strategy. Recommendation included the following:

- Meaningful incorporation of Indigenous -informed/Indigenous-created Cultural Programming as a Right of Indigenous Women
- Leveraging Bill C-92 as a tool for prevention to ensure Indigenous children a placed within Indigenous care should the need for apprehension arise
- Broadening professional development opportunities to include critical antiracism education
- Structural considerations for emergency shelter operations that include revamping hiring practices to be more inclusive of Indigenous representation and specific policy changes
- Developing partnership capacities to address the profound challenges around collaboration between homeless serving entities within the city and the relational disconnect with the surrounding Blackfoot nations

- Suggested areas for future research include an exploration of the depth and impact of sex trafficking on Indigenous women and developing data sharing pathways.

The needs assessment concludes with a series of high-level ‘next step’ objectives to address the needs and gaps. Budgetary considerations were offered but given the limitations associated with this needs assessment, it was not possible to provide even an accurate forecasting of costs due to the lack of data. Implementing the recommendations and suggested actions require humility, openness to learning and the establishment of trusting relationships with Indigenous partners and collaborators. The recommendations regarding structural considerations offer additional opportunities for the City of Lethbridge to move toward a future vision of developing an advocacy strategy. Collaboration must be prioritized on every level. Creating an advocacy strategy for the creation of an Indigenous women’s emergency shelter demands a concerted and collaborative effort and it starts with acknowledging the truth of how settler colonial processes of elimination have contributed to the ongoing violence against and erasure of Indigenous women.

Table of Contents

Introduction

In 2021, the City of Lethbridge released a call for proposals to conduct a needs assessment research project to determine the scope of need for the creation of an Indigenous women's emergency shelter in the city. As both an experienced community researcher and Blackfoot woman, I was contracted by the City of Lethbridge in February 2022 to undertake this work. Assisted by a small team consisting of two Blackfoot researchers and an ally researcher of settler descent, we commenced work on the first deliverable of the research, an environmental scan in April 2022. This needs assessment reflects a current status of need up to October 2022 and offers a starting point for the City of Lethbridge to consider the factors that have led to Indigenous women's homelessness in the city and determine an appropriate advocacy strategy based on the findings and recommendations of the research. For the City of Lethbridge, the pathway towards reconciliation with Indigenous nations begins with the truth. This project is rooted in Indigenous truths.

Researcher Self-Location

Oki. Nistoo Nitanikoo Tsa'piinaki. Nimook'too Akainai. My name is Gabrielle Weasel Head-Lindstrom, and I am a member of the Kainai Nations, part of the Blackfoot Confederacy. My maternal grandparents are Allen and Beulah Standing Alone; paternal grandparents, Mokakin and Poonah Weasel Head. My parents are Peter and Wanda Weasel Head. I was born and raised in Kainai and am very much connected to my nation. I work as a full time academic and researcher specializing in Indigenous research methodologies and educating around topics related to Indigenous lifeways, settler colonial history and cultural continuity. Researcher self-location is now considered a standard practice within Indigenous research. According to critical Indigenous and Indigenist researchers, it serves as a protective mechanism "because self-location prompts reflection about who ought to be empowered to carry out research that focuses on a particular group … It asks that a researcher have clarity, and such clarity can only assist in the meaning-making process of research" (Kovach, et al, 2013, p. 491). I bring to bear my cultural lens and direct experiences with some of the issues central to this research, especially with regard to violence against Indigenous women, and encounters with racism and discrimination. I am genealogically connected to the sacred Blackfoot lands which the City of Lethbridge is now situated on, and I am deeply invested in this needs assessment because it is the suffering of my Indigenous sisters that is the central theme of this research. While Indigenous researchers have been criticized for being "too close" to their research topics, we counter these critiques with the reminder that as Indigenous peoples, we have discrete knowledge of colonial history because we have lived through it. We understand the needs of the Indigenous communities because these are our needs too and we can mitigate our biases because we make our positioning and interest in the research transparent as opposed to chasing the myth of researcher objectivity. We can design

culturally appropriate research methodologies to ensure that the research benefits not only those who have commissioned the research, but also those who are the subjects of it.

Background, Purpose and Organization of the Needs Assessment Report

The City of Lethbridge had a clear vision in mind when determining the information that was required to make informed decisions around planning for an advocacy strategy based on the needs of Indigenous women. Encouragingly, the Blackfoot cultural paradigm of Kímmapiiyipitssini appears to serve as the impetus for this research. Between 2019 and 2020, the City of Lethbridge's Indigenous Relations Office and the Reconciliation Lethbridge Advisory Committee worked with community partners to review the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Calls for Justice. During their review, members compassionately identified that one of the most pressing needs was to ensure Indigenous women's physical, social and cultural safety through the implementation of an Indigenous women's emergency shelter. The City of Lethbridge wished to validate this need through the collection of qualitative and quantitative data, and to further define the target demographic. In January 2021, the MMIWG Recommendations and Work Plan prepared by City of Lethbridge and community partners was approved, including Recommendation #3 which speaks directly to undertaking an Indigenous women's emergency shelter advocacy strategy. Thus, the purpose of this needs assessment is to not only equip the City of Lethbridge with adequate data to place them in a strong advocacy position, but also to respond to the recommendations outlined in the MMIWG Final Report. As such, the compassionate lens that was applied in the review of the MMIWG final report will serve as the backdrop for the analysis of the findings that have emerged from the data.

In this document, we first provide an overview of the research design which includes a discussion and rationale of the methodology, description of the participants, data collection methods and data analysis approach. We then offer a high-level overview of the qualitative and quantitative findings (the detailed findings are provided in Appendices A and B of this report) and then provide a detailed, thematic analysis of the findings supplemented with scholarly literature and guided by the goals of the needs assessment as identified by the City of Lethbridge. We conclude by providing recommendations that are informed by the findings from our qualitative and quantitative data.

Methodology and Methods

When undertaking research aimed at understanding the experiences of Indigenous women in the city of Lethbridge who are caught in either cycles of violence or houselessness, the methodological approach must offer a framework that enables researchers to accurately and appropriately uncover both the reality of Indigenous women's day-to-day lived experiences and the factors that shape these experiences. Moreover, the methodology will frame a pathway forward that moves beyond common urban-planning approaches to address what is possible with

our current resources. First and foremost, this is an Indigenous research project which used both quantitative and qualitative data. The methodology for this needs assessment is captured through the Blackfoot cultural paradigm of "Kímmapiiyipitssini," and the methods and conceptual framework emerge from a Blackfoot worldview. As a way of viewing the world, a research paradigm will provide a distinct lens to design an appropriate approach for the participant recruitment, data collection and data analysis activities. A Blackfoot term that loosely translates to kindness and compassion, Kimmapiiyipitssini encompasses much more than a propensity to treat others with kindness and/or empathy but requires that the research be planned within a critical framework that centers Blackfoot self-determination and philosophy for creating and maintaining balance in relationships.

The maintenance of balance is a key goal within an Indigenous paradigm and is a crucial consideration in the context of this specific project because balance ensures that multiple truths surrounding the root causes of violence against Indigenous women are revealed and that the marginalization of Blackfoot perspectives is not reproduced. Moreover, Kimmpiiyipitssini as a Blackfoot research methodology means that the needs assessment is guided by the following assumptions:

- Knowledge is sacred, imbued with energy and gained through direct-experience
- As human-beings, we are in relationship with everyone and everything around us - all our related to us
- We are guided in relationships by a belief that our relatives are inherently kind and compassionate - we hold everyone and everything around us in high regard
- "Truthing" requires a balance in perspectives and is an act of kindness

Given the pattern of disregard that underpins the experiences of Indigenous women in Canada, a pattern which was well-documented in the MMIWG final report, Kimmpiiyipitssini as a research methodology is well-suited for this needs assessment research because:

- it makes space for incorporating Indigenous knowledges and honors the lived experiences of Indigenous women
- it offers a conceptual framework for respectful relationships in research which is an important endeavor given the racialized tensions that have typified Indigenous and Settler relationships within the City of Lethbridge
- it is ethically rigorous because the research is accountable to both the Indigenous community and the municipal stakeholders
- the data collection and analysis methods that flow from Kimmapiiyipitssini require a heightened level of reflexivity and accountability on the part of researchers in order to maintain a collaborative balance within the diverse perspectives that will illuminate the distinct needs of Lethbridge as an intercultural community.
- it can effectively achieve the goals of the needs assessment as outlined by the City of Lethbridge whilst ensuring that the Calls to Justice, particularly those that relate to Human and Indigenous Rights and Government obligations, guide the planning and implementation of "necessary resources dedicated to capacity building, sustainability and

long-term solutions" (National Inquiry into Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls, 2020, p. 62) aimed at redressing the violence that Indigenous women experience.

- it is a critically oriented research approach because it offers a framework for illuminating power imbalances and in doing so, space is created for an appropriate theoretical lens, in this instance anticolonial theory, that focuses the interpretation and research methods in ways that recognize and honor the inherent right to self-determination. As identified in the MMIWG executive summary (2020), Indigenous self-determination and self-governance, which are fundamental human rights for Indigenous peoples, must be guiding beacons for this needs assessment and are understood as a best practice (p. 61).

Data Collection

This study used qualitative and quantitative research methods to produce a descriptive dataset highlighting the current shelter experiences of Indigenous women and how the homeless-serving systems in Lethbridge and surrounding areas meet the needs of Indigenous women with histories of homelessness and substance use to identify gaps in services. Participant recruitment for this project began in May 2022 and we targeted both Indigenous and non-Indigenous service providers, Indigenous women with lived-experience and Indigenous Elders with transferred sacred knowledge who also were in-service to Indigenous women and children through their profession. The recruitment methods included email and phone communication as well as in-person visits.

Using an interview guide, semi-structured qualitative interviews were conducted to better understand current shelter services within Lethbridge and surrounding areas to identify any gaps that may exist. In-person interviews were digitally recorded with permission from the participants. We also conducted virtual interviews through Zoom which were either recorded on Zoom with permission or detailed notes were taken by me, the principal researcher. With the assistance of emergency women shelter staff in Pincher Creek and the Indigenous Recovery Coach Program (IRCP) in Lethbridge, twenty-three Indigenous women with lived experience were surveyed. In addition, we conducted qualitative interviews with two women who were accessing the ICRP. A goal of this project was to gather the perspectives of up to twenty-five Indigenous women currently utilizing emergency shelter resources within the City of Lethbridge to determine Indigenous perspectives, gaps in services and ensure their voices are included in the needs assessment in a meaningful way. Of those women who were surveyed, they were provided with a qualitative questionnaire that asked about their experiences accessing shelters within Lethbridge and surrounding areas. The survey results and analysis are included in Appendix B of this report.

The following is a list of the organizations that engaged in this needs assessment:

- Blood Tribe Women's Wellness
- Lethbridge Police Service – Neighborhood Watch
- Lethbridge Alpha House and Stabilization

- Indigenous Recovery Coach Program
- YWCA of Lethbridge (to garner Harbor House data)
- Pincher Creek Women's Emergency Shelter
- Awo' Taan Indigenous Women's Emergency Shelter
- Streets Alive
- Alberta Council of Women's Shelters
- Lethbridge Sage Clan Patrol
- YWCA of Calgary
- Elizabeth Fry Society
- Calgary Women's Centre
- Kainai Wellness Centre: Bringing the Spirit Home Detox Program

In addition to the above, we had conversations with three Blackfoot women Elders. Including Elder perspectives aligned with our methodology of Kimmapiiyiipitssini and provided an additional "connection to Indigenous knowledge, a location within an Indigenous paradigm, a relational nature, [and] a purpose (which is often decolonizing)" (Drawson, Toombs & Mysquah, 2017, p. 4).

Protocol and Compensation

In keeping with the Blackfoot protocols of engaging with Indigenous knowledges, we offered tobacco and a cash honorarium to the Blackfoot Elders who participated in the research. For the Indigenous women with lived-experience, we provided each with a $25 gift card to a local merchant in Lethbridge for participating in the in-person interviews as well as to those who completed the survey.

Data Analysis

Recorded qualitative interviews were transcribed and the findings were compiled utilizing an inductive coding method. While our interviews were guided by predetermined discussion topics and questions, there was a need for a level of organic and fluid meaning-making when conducting the coding and analysis. Inductive coding is also referred to as open-ended coding (Saldaña, 2013), involves assigning units of meaning to interview transcripts, also referred to as raw data, in ways that enable the data to "speak for itself". There is a heightened awareness of the part of the researcher as to the interpretive nature of inductive coding. An Indigenous research approach requires that meaning is derived based on the responses of the participants and not guided by a preconceived idea of what the findings should reflect which is a typical approach in deductive coding whereby researchers have preassigned codes and then simply categorize data accordingly. An open-ended coding approach is aligned with our Blackfoot research methodology which is aimed at achieving balance because "Inductive coding is an interactive process, which means it takes longer and is more thorough than deductive coding. But it also gives [us] a more complete, unbiased look at the themes throughout [our] data" (Medelyn, n. d., para. 9). Once coding was completed, we assembled the codes into groups

of findings that were further categorized into themes that aligned with the overall goals of this needs assessment project. The need/gap analysis has been conceptualized within an anticolonial theoretical framework which enables city planners to better understand the experiences of Indigenous women within the context of settler colonialism and the legacies of displacement, cultural erasure and ongoing marginalization as outlined in the MMIWG final report.

Limitations

The primary limitations related to this project revolved around data collection and participant recruitment. A secondary challenge is found in relation to the nature of this needs assessment approach and is one that was identified earlier in the environmental scan. It is difficult to understand the very human condition of Indigenous women's experiences with violence and suffering utilizing a business model approach because the conceptual lens revolves around a cost/benefit analysis. Our findings have shown the impacts of neoliberal thinking and practice in ongoing reproduction of Indigenous women's homelessness.

Challenges around recruitment meant that neither our initial intentions of hosting circle dialogues (focus groups) with service providers did not come to fruition. Moreover, we had difficulty engaging with some non-Indigenous emergency women's shelters evident in unanswered emails, and unreturned voicemail messages. We had intended to include more Indigenous voices, particularly those providing transition home services to Indigenous women but were unable to connect with the organization due to it undergoing renovations and lack of up-to-date contact information on its website. Gathering relevant quantitative data was also challenging and our requests for data from organizations such as the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters and the Lethbridge Police Services were denied. While this implies an overall lack of willingness to meaningfully contribute to this research on the part of the non-Indigenous shelters, our methodology requires that we consider this lack of engagement from a lens of balance. It is quite possible that the demands of working in the homeless serving systems of care often lead front-line workers and managers to prioritize the immediate needs of the women thereby neglecting other job-requirements such as responding to our requests for research participation. Reticence to share data is consistent with competition for resources and funding. A recent report released by the Royal Society of Canada (Clément, 2021) identified funding inequities across non-profit organizations as well as "inequities in federal funding among jurisdictions; vast disparities in funding among provinces and municipalities; a lack of sustainable funding for nonprofits; and a funding landscape that privileges a small number of organizations" (Clément, 2021, para. 5). The need for reliable data has been identified in the MMIWG final report. Transparent data sharing practices are part of reliable data collection yet there is a history of poor data sharing by governments (Clément, 2021) which has trickled down to organizations.

Analysis

This research addresses the root causes of violence against Indigenous women,

experiences of homelessness and addictions as well as highlights the importance of achieving clarity around how problems are defined and solutions. Understanding the issue of violence against Indigenous women and the conditions of homelessness and addictions that often accompany experiences of violence must be done within the scope of the ideologies that have shaped these conditions as Indigenous people experience and understand them. Many times, policy and solutions are created without a sustained consideration of the root causes of the issues which lead to band-aid approaches and temporary 'fixes.' As such, this section of the report synthesizes the findings into a detailed analysis of the distinct needs of Indigenous women who are in or at risk of entering into the homeless serving systems of care and the gaps that exist within the current systems that often keep women in cycles of abuse, homelessness and addictions.

With a focus on moving beyond the discourse found in business reports while still meeting the goals of the City of Lethbridge in determining the feasibility of the implementation of an Indigenous women's emergency shelter, we offer a description of the experiences of Indigenous women accessing shelter spaces in the City of Lethbridge and the surrounding region which will help to situate the findings and recommendations of this needs assessment within the broader goal of the city's response to the MMIWG final report as well as its TRC strategy. We then discuss the findings that relate to the needs and gaps in programs and services that were being offered to the women at the time we conducted our data collection. The discussion of the needs and program gaps will also include a detailed overview of the historical context and the ideological tensions that underscore and shape both the lived experiences of Indigenous women as well as services and supports delivery approaches that are meant to mitigate risk and respond to need.

Lived Experiences of Indigenous Women in Need

This section highlights the current shelter experiences of Indigenous women in Lethbridge and surrounding areas and is informed by the findings. Many Indigenous women enter the shelter systems with multifaceted issues that stem from unresolved historical and intergenerational trauma. Major themes emerged from the survey data as well as qualitative findings highlighting the role of culture in healing, ubiquity of racism, and inadequate services to address needs.

Identity and Culture

Indigenous women with lived experience described a need for Indigenous cultural supports within women shelter systems. They indicated a comfort in having access to elder support rather than western counseling services which they felt seemed to be more readily accessible. One participant expressed the importance of being able to connect or reconnect to their culture and identity through an elder as a vital element in shelters. When participants were asked what services they wished women's shelters provided, one participant shared, "elders to talk to instead of, like, a counselor because sometimes they are not around, or they are talking to

other people. I feel it is more of a vibe to get from an Elder and to have smudging has helped a lot…and teaching stuff, I thought I would have to learn everything all over again" (Lived Experience 1). Culture has been identified as a key component in recovery for Indigenous women with histories of substance use. It has been reported that "programs need to be indigenized and should incorporate an Indigenous traditional worldview rather than a colonial perspective throughout. Further, facilities and housing to support individuals with addictions are needed and by employing Indigenous models and returning to traditional ways of thinking and doing, Indigenous clients can be better supported" (Lucas, Williams, Elders & Knowledge Keepers Circles, n.d., p. 5). Reconnecting to their culture through ceremonies and cultural activities are vital to promoting recovery for Indigenous women struggling with addictions. The participants were asked what was the most helpful thing offered while residing in a recovery shelter and a participant described "the Elders. I am learning crafts, I just started learning how to bead and I am getting pretty good at it. And going to sweats, and I went to Sundance" (Lived Experience 1). Further, in a survey our team conducted with twenty-three Indigenous women currently residing in shelter, we asked if there were things that could make the shelter a better experience and many of the Indigenous women suggested a need for more Indigenous staff, access to Elders, and cultural support to better support their needs while staying in shelter.

The impact of cultural loss emerged through discussions with Elders. The legacies of residential school and settler colonial policies are the main cause for cultural loss amongst Indigenous people in society. Elders described how culture and history provide awareness in how these correlate with the ongoing effects of addiction. Within our research, the elders expressed that Indigenous women need to "be connected to traditional culture and identity in helping to resist ongoing effects of colonialism is key in helping clients who are determined to make changes for the better, and to improve their situation" (Findings report).

Racism and Discrimination

Racism and discrimination were common themes identified by the participants. They all echoed the notion of how non-Indigenous service providers were unapproachable and made them feel as though their needs were ignored. One participant explained, "some workers act like they are busy, but they are not, they don't really do anything, they don't help you…they don't give you that support or encouragement to do things" (Lived Experience 1). When participants were asked what was required for a shelter to assist Indigenous women during their stay in shelter, participants stressed the importance of being able to be themselves without judgment and racism. Recent literature suggests that when it comes to services Indigenous people are accessing, "Aboriginal-led organizations that employ Aboriginal staff are the only services capable of sharing what is described as lived experience. Based on impressions of many interview participants (both Aboriginal and non), lived experience is irreplaceable in-service provisions for Aboriginal peoples who have suffered specific forms of discrimination, trauma, and unsafe living conditions" (McCallum & Isaac, 2011, p. 30). Participants echoed the need for non-judgement, compassion, and understanding approaches from service providers. As one participant indicated,

“it should make me feel comfortable in my own skin, not to feel discriminated against, to that home support kind of thing, to help you follow up on your goals, somebody there to encourage you, it’s important” (Lived Experience 2). Further, participants often expressed that they endured constant racism in Lethbridge and that the racism was reflected in how badly Indigenous people are treated and has become socially accepted. Many Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants reiterated the notion of feeling helpless because they had acknowledged that racism is learned and reproduced. As the findings report highlighted, it had been noted from participants that if Lethbridge plans to move towards reconciliation, then settler and other non-Indigenous citizens, leaders, service providers, etc., must do their part and reconcile not only with Indigenous people but with themselves by confronting their own racism and making the necessary commitments to ensure racism is not socially acceptable.

Addictions

Many Indigenous women accessing shelter systems have problems with addictions that stem from unresolved historical and intergenerational trauma. Therefore, shelter systems serving Indigenous women require services that are offered in an empathetic, non-judgmental approach. Participants noted that shelters need to hire Indigenous staff that have lived experience and histories of substance use to better understand the current state of their clients. When participants were asked what could be done in shelters to provide a better experience for Indigenous women, one participant indicated more Indigenous frontline staff, and “people who have more of an addictions background, but they are staying sober, instead of workers that have not been through it” (Lived Experience 1) as they would be more understanding and considerate of what their clients are experiencing.

It has been observed that many Indigenous women accessing shelters view addictions as the norm because they grew up exposed to it. One participant reiterated how “young girls did not think life could be any different than the current struggles they saw, they grew up in families that have addiction issues” (Streets Alive). It has been reported that the substances Indigenous women become addicted to in this day and age are more severe than previously seen with alcohol as the accompanying withdrawals and addictions cause many women to be steered away from their family homes to prevent potential risks towards family members. One participant described her previous experiences that led her to seek shelter services, she stated, “drugs, I had lost my home, but I was living in Calgary before that. I was clean, and I was just going through a depression. I talked to the wrong person which resulted in my kids being taken away, and from then on, I’ve been on the streets pretty much” (Lived Experience 1).

Safety in Shelter

The Indigenous women expressed the notion of unsafe environments as a result of other clients accessing the shelter. One participant expressed safety concerns residing in the current shelter she resides in. She states, “It’s getting really scary now out there. I am scared for my life, there have been a couple of occasions where these women want to beat me up because

apparently, I am hanging around with their man and now they want to beat me up because of it" (Lived Experience 2). The participant was asked what the shelter could do to prevent future occurrences of violence in the shelter, she suggested the shelter provide anger management therapies and counseling services to Indigenous women accessing shelter spaces to minimize threats of violence amongst clients. When the women were asked what they thought the shelter would do for them; nearly thirty-five percent of the women stated safety and support.

Violence Against Indigenous Women

Major themes emerged in our research highlighting violence against Indigenous women as a major factor in Indigenous women accessing shelter systems. Violence inflicted on Indigenous women is not new as this has been observed since their first interaction with colonizers where Indigenous women were instantly portrayed as mysterious and strange and perceived as sexual products (Farley et.al., 2005). Melissa Farley elaborates on this idea by stating that "First Nations women were considered 'exotic' sexual commodities and were presumed by colonizers to enjoy that status, not only because they were viewed as primitive but because they were female. Men's assumption of the right to rape Indigenous women is not a new idea-whether that right is institutionalized in prostitution or not" (p. 6). Indigenous women were sexually exploited by colonists and often forced into sex slavery by which colonists would assign them to specific Indigenous men working for them and when that Indigenous man was to be rewarded, he was rewarded with forceful sexual pleasures from the assigned Indigenous woman (Whisnant, 2004, p. 111). The treatment of Indigenous women in Canada since the arrival of colonists has further permitted violence towards Indigenous women in society today. Some participants in our research emphasized that Indigenous women are being raped on the streets of Lethbridge and Indigenous women's cries for help go unnoticed as municipal governances and police enforcement are failing to address it.

Sex Trade

The colonization of Indigenous people has had a huge impact on the way society perceives Indigenous women in the sex trade industry. Colonialism has created a negative image of Indigenous women and therefore has caused Indigenous women to have a difficult time in securing employment and housing as society has adopted this notion that Indigenous people are disorderly and mistrusted therefore, much of the underlying issues are overlooked. McCormick et. al., (2005) reiterate, "Indigenous women who fled to cities in search of jobs and social services found little material aid, but faced the complicating, intensifying pressure of racism" (243). Therefore, when it involves issues of Indigenous trafficking, Indigenous women and girls are not viewed as victims but rather, voluntary participants (Sikka, 2010, p. 201). Annete Sikka elaborates on this notion:

> Historical representations of Indigenous women have often been linked to sexual availability and criminal activity. These images are then further compounded by the current overrepresentation of Indigenous women and girls in the visible sex trade as a

> consequence of colonization, residential school trauma and overarching community breakdown. Thus, things that happen to her are not viewed as exploitation to sex trafficking in persons, but rather as a natural consequence of the life that she has chosen to occupy. The image of the trafficked "victim," therefore, does not include her story. (p. 201)

Many Indigenous participants in our research indicated that there is an increasing rate of sex trafficking occurring in Lethbridge involving Indigenous women and girls. Many Indigenous females are transported to larger cities where they are groomed into the sex trade. However, while the sex trade is increasing in Lethbridge, there is a lack of services available for Indigenous women involved in the sex trade. Recent literature highlights the lack of protection services for women involved in sex trafficking, Julie Cool (2004) states, "... the quasi-criminalization of prostitution in Canada contributes to the marginalization of those engaged in prostitution, creates an illicit market that makes prostitutes open to exploitation, encourages the convergence of prostitution with other illicit markets such as the drug trade, and alienates prostitutes from the protection of services such as the police" (11).

Demographics

This section pertains to the City of Lethbridge only. Our collection efforts to gather accurate data were hampered by lack of engagement by non-Indigenous shelters in Lethbridge as well as the Safe Haven emergency women's shelter in Taber. The data we did gather reflects a high number of Indigenous women occupying the spaces in local shelters. In terms of the emergency women's shelter in Lethbridge, 158 Indigenous Women and 60 Indigenous Children stayed at Harbour House from August 1st, 2021 – July 31st, 2022. As of August 2022, 50% of the clients occupying the emergency shelters space were Indigenous women. This number includes children. Despite the high number of Indigenous women that are being supported through the Harbor House emergency women's shelter, there were no Indigenous staff employed at the time data was collected in August 2022. In interviewing the Lethbridge Stabilization and Shelter, it was shared that management did maintain statistics of specifically how many people Indigenous women were accessing the shelter within the last year inclusive of how many Indigenous women were turned away from Shelter - although management indicated they avoid banning people from the shelter. In terms of Indigenous staff, they did not appear to have an accurate idea of how many Indigenous people were employed at the shelter simply stating, "I would say four or five, and that are Blackfoot specifically." While we asked for data on two separate occasions, and after a follow-up meeting wherein they indicated they would follow-up with accurate statistics, ultimately the Lethbridge Shelter did not share their data. According to Streets Alive, they served an estimated 500 clients who were experiencing homelessness, a 30% increase since May 2022 which was partly brought on by the closure of the ARCHES safe consumption site. Although they don't keep stats on Indigenous women that utilize services, the Streets Alive representative estimated that a high number of Indigenous women were utilizing the Streets Alive services, 100-150 at any one time out of the 500, or 20%-30% of clientele – a significant number! In the Streets Alive detox shelter, which is a seventeen bed, three-stage shelter offering

a flexible, holistic approach to service delivery. At the time of our interview in August 2022, they had nine women in the shelter and four were Indigenous. The point in time (PIT) counts provided by City of Lethbridge reveal that out of the 107 Indigenous people observed as being homeless in Lethbridge, 51 of those were Indigenous women. Again, a significant number

Promising Practices within the Indigenous Women's Emergency Shelter

Indigenous women accessing shelter systems require revised shelter provision policies to incorporate Indigenous practices and programming to advance the lives of Indigenous women. All of the Indigenous agencies that participated in our research echoed spiritual wellness within an Indigenous lens as a crucial aspect in promoting healing for Indigenous women accessing shelter systems. Despite a lack of funding, many Indigenous-led agencies will go above and beyond their policies to ensure that Indigenous women and their children are provided with proper care and safety.

Awo Taan Healing Lodge

The Awo Taan Healing Lodge is an emergency shelter for women fleeing from family violence. It consists of 32-beds with emergency services provided to women and children. In our research, representatives of Awo Taan described how Indigenous women experiencing homelessness often feel a sense of spiritual disconnection because of colonialism. Therefore, service providers articulated a need for policy revisions in non-indigenous agencies serving Indigenous women to reflect the United Declaration of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) as many Indigenous women are not provided with spiritual wellness supports such as language, culture, ceremony and access to Elders, which are all deemed crucial to promote wellness and stability for Indigenous women accessing emergency shelters. Awo Taan Healing Lodge representatives described how the 21-day policy was not sufficient time to appropriately support Indigenous women especially when there are children involved. Therefore, in some cases, Awo Taan will go above their policy and extend women's duration of stay if they have not secured a safe place to stay. The Director of Awo Taan reiterates, "sometimes, we will go above our policy and we will let them stay if they don't have a place. And other shelters, they don't do that" (Awo Taan).

Further, it has been observed that many Indigenous women seeking shelter often face legal issues pertaining to children's services. Therefore, Awo Taan provides an on-site crisis worker that guides them throughout the court process and ensures that their clients are aware of their legal rights. The Director at Awo Taan Healing Lodge shared, "If they refer them to Alberta Works, they'll tell them about their rights on where they can get assistance. If they cannot give them assistance, we will talk on their behalf or if there is child welfare involved, the Indigenous workers at Awo Taan really support them through the court and right now we have a court worker that helps the Indigenous women" (Awo Taan).

Kainai Women's Wellness Lodge

The Kainai Women's Wellness Lodge (KWWL) located on the Blood Reserve

provides 24-hour emergency services for Indigenous women and children fleeing family violence. Representatives of the Kainai Women's Wellness Lodge that participated in our research expressed how cultural reconnection is pertinent for Indigenous women seeking emergency shelters. Therefore, the agency provides their clients with daily on-site Elder Support by which the Elder offers the women Indigenous teachings, and "shares their knowledge, they ground the women, their foundations of who they are, where they come from, and who their clans are, this gives them that stability" (KWWL). The Kainai Women's Wellness Lodge service providers expressed their concerns on emergency shelters 21-day policy as it is insufficient amount of time for service providers to properly care and assist their clients in achieving wellness and stability. The agency will go above and beyond their policies to assist Indigenous women within their agencies despite the lack of funding.

The service providers shared that they offered a three-month evening session to women with histories of substance use where they could engage in conversations with other recovering addicts. Service providers indicated that the sessions proved beneficial to the indigenous women attending as the women expressed their appreciation for the sessions as it assisted them in making new connections with people that were not actively using substances. However, the Kainai Women's Wellness Lodge had no choice but to terminate the programming due to a lack of funding. One service provider stated, "we did 10, and they were all young except 2 Elder ladies. It was really good. A lot of them just got off drugs. They're making new friends because the friends they had are still using and they want to stay away from them. By coming here, they have new friends. So, that program was really good…but our funds only lasted for 3 months" (KWWL).

Needs and Gaps in Knowledge, Programs and Services

In this section we discuss some of the identified needs and gaps in programs and services of the current emergency shelter systems in Lethbridge and area, as well as historical and contemporary contexts that relate to these needs. We analyze certain aspects of the findings report as they relate to the sociocultural, and systemic barriers that Indigenous women face while living with homelessness within a system of settler colonialism in Canada. We highlight the importance of culture and the cultural contexts in the treatment of Indigenous addictions and homelessness, including its role in the implementation of and operation of treatment models. The issues revolving around Indigenous women's experiences with homelessness are complex and multi-faceted, requiring a critical look into the factors and processes which help to both create and perpetuate Indigenous women's experiences that lead to cycles of abuse, addictions, and homelessness. This section will first highlight processes and concepts intrinsic to settler colonialism including racism, discrimination, violence, marginalization, and eurocentrism, and how these drive Indigenous women's experiences in Lethbridge. We then examine the importance of Indigenous culture and its essential incorporation into the structural processes of emergency shelter protocol in creating holistic methods of treating the negative and multi-faceted, sociocultural issues faced by the Indigenous women's homeless population in Lethbridge.

Understanding the Settler colonial context

In order to fully understand Indigenous women's experiences that lead them to seek emergency shelter services, it is necessary to have a basic understanding of what settler colonialism is because it is this system that is at the root of the violence against Indigenous women. Kopp and Mannitz (2022) recognize that Canada was founded on a specific kind of colonialism, settler colonialism, which establishes structures and institutions that continue to shape the societal relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people today, as settler colonialism creates an all-encompassing system with long-term effects on the social structure, economy, culture, politics, religion, health, education, historiography, and social imagination. (Kopp & Mannitz, 2022). Patrick Wolfe (2006) goes into further detail, defining settler colonialism as a structure, not an event, which perpetuates the erasure and systematic destruction of Indigenous people as a requirement for settler expansion, and in order to gain complete access and control of the land and its resources. As a mandate of the system of settler colonialism in Canada, specific policies towards the Indigenous population were created which continue to negatively impact Indigenous people, and act as a wedge to achieving true relational understanding and reconciliation between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous population in Canada.

Understanding the impacts of settler colonialism requires a look into how it functions. Wolfe (2006) suggests that settler colonialism is closely associated with genocide, both of which construct and use race to exert control and power over a population (Wolfe 2006). Wolfe asserts settler colonialism functions through a “logic of elimination” which has positive and negative proportions by which negatively, settler colonialism endeavors to end Indigenous societies and carries this out positively, by erecting a new colonial society based on stolen land, as settlers are here to stay. (Wolfe 2006). Although Wolfe (2006) uses the terms positive and negative, these are not equivalent in terms of good or bad, but rather as processes whereby negative is used to refer to taking away from or erasing Indigeneity, and positive is used to refer to erecting a new colonial society on stolen Indigenous land. Another aspect of settler colonialism as noted by Wolfe (2006) is that settler colonialism destroys to replace, by which Indigenous lives and influences are not only erased from the land, but recreated, appropriated, and stereotyped not only for nationalistic and coercive aims, but to have complete access to the territory (Wolfe 2006). Remember that settler colonialism is a structure and not an event (Wolfe 2006) and to maintain the structure, settler colonialism constantly reproduces itself in society. Settler colonialism is a worldview, a system that is obscured by the very embeddedness by which it is intertwined in social reality, which makes it a complex and extremely damaging organizing structure. Racism, though a focal point of Indigenous women's experiences in Lethbridge, is a social construction that operates within the system of settler colonialism to solidify unequal hierarchical power relations within society, which results in the reproduction of settler colonial worldviews and social and structural relationships. The matrix of settler colonialism encompasses not only racism, but other interrelated and damaging traits such as discrimination, eurocentrism, marginalization/segregation, and genocide/violence (lateral, gender and race-based

violence). These traits, along with the historical and contemporary trauma, which includes intergenerational trauma experienced by Indigenous people, are some of the factors which both cause and perpetuate Indigenous cycles of abuse, addictions, and homelessness. Analysis of the gaps in programs must be foregrounded with this discussion since Indigenous women's experiences are framed within this system of settler colonialism.

Program and service gaps

When discussing the needs/gaps in programming currently being offered through the emergency shelter systems in Lethbridge, the findings point to a number of needs which include, addressing racism/discrimination, adequate hiring practices, collaboration among the various shelter service agencies in Lethbridge and area, including Indigenous on-reserve affiliations, incorporation of Indigenous cultural lifeways and instruction, and a general lack of understanding and awareness of Indigenous (cultural) contexts within the city of Lethbridge. These needs are due to structural, administrative, economic, and most importantly a lack of basic understanding and empathy within the emergency shelter system in the city of Lethbridge.

Lack of understanding and acknowledgement around racism

One of the main issues to come through the qualitative data collection is the high level of racism/discrimination that Indigenous women face, both within the emergency shelter system, and by the larger settler populace within the city of Lethbridge. These experiences are acknowledged by non-Indigenous shelter entities and staff as being a factor in contributing to Indigenous women homelessness in the city, having far reaching impacts on Indigenous women ranging from abuse and street-violence, to finding dependable housing. One interview participant stated that even though Lethbridge is a fair-sized city, it still very much has a small-town attitude. Studies show that smaller Canadian towns and cities struggle with higher levels of racism and discrimination, often employing mechanisms such as subtyping, ideology-based homophily, and political avoidance, which are rooted in historic and structural conditions such as settler-colonialism and small-town dynamics (Esses, et al. 2022; Denis, 2015). It is important to understand that Indigenous experiences in mainstream society are defined by settler colonialism processes and policies. Processes such as racism, discrimination and prejudice that the white populace in Lethbridge reproduce, whether they are aware of it or not, hinders positive mutual relational understandings between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples and is an area that consistently emerged in the findings.

Lack of Indigenous culture in shelter programming

Another important area in the needs/gaps in services include the lack of, and incorporation, of Indigenous cultural healing practices and lifeways within the emergency shelter system model and programming. The importance of culture in aiding Indigenous women to heal from the trauma associated with settler colonialism, including intergenerational trauma brought on by policies such as Residential Schools and the 60's Scoop, is not something that is

recognized in ways that go beyond simple acknowledgement. These processes and policies created through the system of settler colonialism in Canada have not disappeared, but as stated by critical anticolonial theorist Patrick Wolfe (2006), have merely changed in form. From residential schools, to the 60's scoop, to the high level of Indigenous incarceration in Canadian prisons, to the Indigenous murdered and missing women and girls, not to mention the constant reproduction of racism and marginalization, all these social outcomes have been created through the system of settler colonialism in Canada. During the qualitative interviews both Indigenous staff and clients, and non-Indigenous staff and management, admitted that Indigenous cultural practices such as prayer and smudging, had a positive effect within the shelter environment. Indeed, one source claimed that after an elder prays and smudges, a certain calmness takes over within the shelter, hostilities and anxieties are decreased and a welcoming and friendly atmosphere takes over (Lethbridge Shelter Staff, personal communication). Literature confirms that Indigenous cultural practices and lifeways have a positive effect on both treating Indigenous people's addictions, and restoring cultural identity, thus confronting the effects of ongoing settler colonialism, such as intergenerational trauma (LaVille & Saskamoose. 2021; Fiedeldey-Van Dijk, et al., 2016). Providing space for cultural practices in the shelter system is part of Canada's responsibility to reconciliation which is not only for Indigenous benefit. Settler Canadians are also called to take responsibility in forming better alliances with Indigenous peoples, as well as to recognize Canada's colonial history and its far-reaching traumatic effects on the Indigenous peoples. Reconciliation is a difficult because it often fraught process requiring people to examine the truth of settler colonial violence which is critical in overcoming years of bitterness and animosity, and moving beyond generations of racism and prejudice, is exceptionally difficult (Coates, 2021).

Lack of Indigenous staff employed in shelter systems in Lethbridge

Another obvious gap that emerged was the lack of Indigenous peoples working in the homeless serving systems of care. The void of Indigenous presence in this sector is consistent with the pattern of Indigenous marginalization in the employment and economic industry on a national level and while this is an established pattern, it must no longer be accepted. Generally, reasons for lack of Indigenous staff and management presence in employment are often attributed to lack of skilled and educated Indigenous applicants as opposed to restructuring hiring practices to ensure organizations are more appealing to Indigenous candidates.

Lack of collaboration and reliable funding

When speaking to participants, it was apparent that organizations continued to work in silos. Shelter entities, as well as local samaritan watch advocacy groups stressed the lack of collaboration among the various shelter agencies as stemming from a lack of funding. Almost all the participants who spoke on behalf of their organization expressed a lack of funding as a major factor in not being able to carry out, or sustain, programs and services that benefit Indigenous women living on the streets, such as Indigenous cultural programming, and/or having the

relational network capacity with other shelter providers to accompany the complex circumstances Indigenous woman often seek help, as many have children, and/or suffer from drug addiction, causing some women to be turned away. Some participants stated that collaboration is difficult because all the various shelter entities are competing for the same funds, the same Government dollars, causing many shelters to adopt a siloed approach. Along with the lack of funding, jurisdictional issues also get in the way of meaningful collaboration, especially since First Nations fall under Federal obligation, while many of the shelter services providers rely on federal, provincial, and charitable funding outlets.

Collaboration is the action of working with someone else to produce or create something and requires a mutual understanding by two or more parties. Settler colonialism processes and policies impede meaningful collaboration not only between Indigenous-led and non-Indigenous-led shelter agencies and affiliated groups, but also within non-Indigenous shelter entities themselves. The competition for resources which is so embedded in the capitalist system, causes shelters to adopt a siloed approach, impacting the effectiveness to search for viable solutions to problems in a collective fashion. Racism and discrimination is a barrier to achieving collaboration, as it prevents relational understandings while severing the link with the very people you are trying to help. Meaningful collaboration between Indigenous peoples and the Euro-settler populace has always been difficult within the system of settler colonialism in Canada. The true spirit and intent of the treaties, apart from protecting Indigenous lifeways, is to form a mutually beneficial relationship between Indigenous people and Euro-Canadians, and the responsibility to maintain these relationships fall on all Canadians, Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike (Treaty 7 Elders, et al. 1995). Literature shows how the Treaties, which are themselves processes of ongoing collaboration and relationship building between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada, have been contorted from their true spirit and intent, through settler colonial processes of elimination, such as the practice of framing Indigenous people through a deficit lens, and have caused a collective resentment toward Indigenous people by which the term Treaty, has been contorted to mean privilege (Lindstrom 2022). Until relationships improve, collaboration within the city of Lethbridge will remain elusive.

Lack of safe space for Indigenous women in Lethbridge shelter system

Findings from our conversations with participants, both Indigenous women with lived-experience as well as those providing services and leadership, point to a lack of safe spaces for Indigenous women within the current shelter system in Lethbridge and surrounding areas. At the time of data collection for our needs assessment, the Lethbridge Shelter and Stabilization was the primary shelter refuge for Indigenous women, but multiple sources informed how unsafe this space was for women. The risk of Indigenous women experiencing more violence was imminent and one of the women with lived-experience described how unsafe she felt there.

Recommendations

Through the analysis of findings and environmental scan, it is evident that there is a need for an Indigenous women's emergency in the City of Lethbridge, yet the current 21-day emergency shelter system structure is not necessarily conducive to supporting the complex needs of Indigenous women. When speaking with management within the Indigenous-led emergency shelters, it was evident that the provincial women's shelter system itself has marginalized Indigenous representation within its governance structure. This is reflective of the broader pattern of Indigenous peoples' marginalization within society in general. Moreover, the ongoing marginalization and blatant disregard of the Indigenous homeless population in Lethbridge is indicative of a deeply rooted problem of collective racism and denial that while being beyond the scope of this project, we have attempted to both illuminate its origin and how it functions as the foundation of settler colonialism. From an outsider perspective, Lethbridge residents have a reputation for normalizing anti-Indigenous racism and collectively embodying racist and divisive attitudes and behaviors towards First Nations and other Indigenous groups in ways that are socially acceptable by other non-Indigenous peoples. In addition, our data emphasizes how the city's current homeless serving systems of care models are siloed with very little collaboration and communication. These areas, along with others identified in the sections above as well as in the qualitative and quantitative findings (see Appendices A and B), offer critical learning opportunities and pragmatic actionable areas that must be embraced by city strategists in order to move ahead with meaningful and lasting changes. There are multiple areas for the City of Lethbridge to consider in the development of an advocacy strategy. We recommend the following considerations:

Incorporation of Indigenous-informed/Indigenous-created Cultural Programming as a Right of Indigenous Women

This recommendation is informed by the gaps in current services and best practice of Indigenous-led Indigenous women's emergency shelters. It is primarily geared toward the non-Indigenous entities that are providing emergency shelter supports and services to Indigenous women. An Indigenous women's emergency shelter must include the following services:

- Onsite counseling services that are based in an Indigenous lens of trauma-informed care. More Indigenous nations are becoming weary of Western trauma-informed approaches that are rooted in a deficit construction of Indigenous peoples which leads to further marginalization of Indigenous cultural practices and ways of knowing. The city of Lethbridge along with local First Nations can learn from other Indigenous nations around the globe who are working on decolonizing trauma-informed care. For example, Māori health researchers (Pihama, et al., 2017) assert that,

    > While trauma is an experience that can impact on all people, Māori experience trauma in distinct ways that are linked to the experience of colonisation, racism

> and discrimination, negative stereotyping and subsequent unequal rates of violence, poverty and ill health. Given that Māori are impacted by trauma in specific ways, it is important to explore and identify practice principles that contribute to the development of a framework that supports Māori Providers, counsellors, clinicians and healers in working with Māori. (p. 18)

Like the Māori Indigenous peoples in New Zealand, First Nations and other Indigenous women in Canada have very similar trauma experiences that are closely connected to impacts of settler colonialism described in the excerpt above. Our conversations with Indigenous-led, Indigenous women's emergency shelters highlighted the need for self-determination in therapeutic approaches.

- Implementation of an Elders' resource network to ensure Indigenous women are provided access to cultural knowledge, language and Elders support. Given the severe lack of cultural programming within the current shelter structure in Lethbridge, it is clear that access to Elder knowledge must be prioritized.
- Rights-based approach to access to culture. International and national policy documents such as UNDRIP (2007), the TRC (2015) and the MMIWG Final Report (National Inquiry into MMIWG, n. d.) explicitly outline that access to Indigenous cultural practices is a human-right for Indigenous peoples. From a legislative perspective, Indigenous rights are enshrined in the Canadian constitution and upheld by legal precedence. The right to access and practice Indigenous culture is neither an allowance afforded by a benevolent and generous government nor is it to be equated with the policy of multiculturalism. First Nations peoples have a distinct relationship with the Crown which is inclusive of federal, provincial and municipal governments which means they are not to be treated as simply another minority. Far too many of the participants in this project conflated Indigenous experiences with other "diverse" minority groups which clearly points to a severe lack of knowledge around the distinct rights of Indigenous women.
- Gender-based/family-based capacity building programming. Indigenous culture is based in balance and traditionally, each community member had a role to play, and women and men's roles were well-defined. Today, there is a tendency to pathologize Indigenous men as sites of violence and abuse against Indigenous women and many times, Indigenous women enter into the shelter system only to feel isolated from family and friends with no support in healing from trauma in ways that are consistent with an Indigenous paradigm. Safety is a first priority but there also must be a consideration of the role of healthy men in women's healing such as fathers, uncles and brothers and even the spouses themselves. The pathologizing of Indigenous men must stop and cultural programming should be geared towards family and community healing as opposed to an individual focus.

Leveraging Bill C-92 as a Tool for Prevention

This recommendation is geared toward service providers, especially shelter managers, on-reserve child welfare authorities and to the policing systems. It is focused on ensuring that Indigenous

children remain within Indigenous families if child apprehension becomes necessary due to being deemed ‘at risk’ of or not having needs met. Bill C-92 is an Act passed by the federal government delegating child welfare authority and power to First Nations. While the Act itself isn’t without its drawbacks, it currently offers a pathway to ensure that Indigenous children whose mothers are experiencing domestic violence or are homeless have an opportunity for kinship care. Our findings highlight how there must be a pathway of communication between shelter intake, policing services – in the case of domestic violence – and on-reserve Child Welfare authorities to ensure that Indigenous women can seek culturally-safe support and services without having to deal solely with mainstream, provincial Child Welfare authorities. Subject to the ruling of the Supreme Court of Canada, the sections of Bill-C92 subject to the prioritization of placement of an Indigenous child should come into effect if provincial child welfare is called which would ensure that Indigenous children are kept in Indigenous culture and help to disrupt the pattern of culture loss that has long been established through settler colonialism.

Broadening Professional Development opportunities

When interviewing participants, it became evident that mainstream diversity training inclusive of unconscious bias and Indigenous awareness training were common professional development educational approaches to fill in knowledge gaps regarding Indigenous history and current realities. Established research (Kempf, 2020; Kowal, 2013; Noon, 2018) is providing compelling evidence that current cultural competency, diversity and unconscious bias training approaches are not enough to dislodge deeply embedded and collectively held beliefs and attitudes that emerge from racist ideologies. In my professional experience, I have had far too many requests by non-Indigenous organizations and professionals working in health, education and business for Indigenous awareness training. The logic behind the training is that in learning more about Indigenous people, their history, cultural norms and values in professional development sessions, non-Indigenous workers will be more tolerant, accepting of Indigenous people and able to provide culturally safe care or service provisions (Young, 1999). Essentially a workplace strategy (Fredericks, 2008), Indigenous cultural awareness training comes with its own shortcomings since it is often initiated and controlled by non-Indigenous entities. Instead, the focus needs to shift to providing safe spaces to critically confront racist attitudes and beliefs in ways that encourage learning and mitigate the shame and guilt that often accompanies such educational initiatives. Critical reflection on the ideologies of colonialism and settler colonialism and one’s relationship to those ideologies must be embedded within the knowledge delivery model because “just to learn about other cultures is not to learn about the racism of one’s own” (Kowal, et al., 2013, p. 321). New research perspectives are showing the long-term ineffectiveness of diversity and awareness training in dismantling deeply entrenched racist attitudes and beliefs that are either denied or recognized as such.

Structural Considerations for Shelter Operations

This recommendation is geared toward city strategists and shelter management. The findings revealed a number of gaps in structural operations which should be addressed in the development of an advocacy strategy geared toward improving capacity, safety, and the cultural inclusiveness of clientele and staff.

- Improving hiring practices to ensure more Indigenous staff. This is not simply about inclusion but creating cultural safety for Indigenous workers and making space for Indigenous leadership by creating management positions. A restructuring of staff hiring practices to reflect a greater degree of Indigenous inclusion at all levels, including management positions. This would be of benefit toward achieving a greater degree of relational understanding among staff and clientele. The findings revealed a severe lack of Indigenous workers in management positions, as many of the clients interviewed expressed a disconnect to non-Indigenous shelter staff.
- Other recommendations include policy changes to allow for longer stays, as the findings revealed that some women require extended stay periods while they look for reliable housing. The Indigenous women's emergency shelters would often need to extend women's occupancy beyond the 21-day period. An integrated three-stage shelter system would ensure that Indigenous women are supported along a spectrum from crisis, to transitioning to stability and finally, independence.
- Aside from the structural changes that allow for greater length of stay, changes that allow for greater flexibility of inclusion allowing for more Indigenous women with complex needs to be accepted into Shelter services, as the findings show the reasons Indigenous women use shelter services are complex and multifaceted. An increase in mental health disorders and the ever-increasing opioid epidemic requires that service providers look beyond narrow definitions of domestic violence to address the broad range of experiences that bring Indigenous women into the homeless serving system of care.
- Safe consumption and detox spaces are important considerations, as participants expressed that the focus on operating a dry shelter pushes away many individuals from using shelter services, so a safe consumption area within the shelter system in Lethbridge would do a lot to bring in more individuals off the street, to ensure they get the help they need.

Developing Partnership Capacities and Pathways

This recommendation and the actions associated with it are geared toward city planners, including the Indigenous Relations office, RLAC, Kainai Wellness, Pikunni Health services, the local Indigenous Women's Emergency Shelters both on and off the reserves, other urban homeless serving entities such as the Indigenous Coaching Recovery Program, Sage Clan, the Neighborhood Watch and the LPS. The gap analysis revealed profound challenges around collaboration between homeless serving entities within the city and the relational disconnect with the surrounding Blackfoot nations happens at multiple levels and has a long history. The

capitalist model itself, at work within the shelter systems in Alberta, causes shelter entities to adopt a siloed approach to shelter services. On a relational level, racism and discrimination remains a barrier to achieving meaningful collaboration at all levels between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous population in Lethbridge and area. Indigenous Treaties in Canada are the earliest forms of alliance making, with the true spirit and intent of these Treaties entailing a responsibility to maintain positive relationships with one another. Indigenous and Euro-Canadian relationships have been defined by Settler Colonialism processes and policies through which Indigenous deficit frames of reference continue to drive non-Indigenous Canadians understandings of their Indigenous relations, resulting in the reproduction of racist ideologies and further marginalization of Indigenous peoples in Canada. These factors are the roots of lack of collaboration between Lethbridge and surrounding reserves yet more than ever, collaboration is necessary to address ongoing violence against Indigenous women especially with regard to the sex trade and reach data sharing agreements.

Areas for the Future Research

It is recommended that future research pathways include exploring how sex trafficking is shaping Indigenous women's experiences with violence as well as looking at ways to gather relevant race-related data and develop data sharing agreements. Addressing sex trafficking requires collaborative research around the impact and the level of sex trafficking. Findings revealed a lack of police agency to address the sex-trafficking occurring in the city of Lethbridge. According to the LPS, they are aware that sex trafficking happens yet are unable to do anything about it due to a lack of Indigenous women filing police reports. Despite the LPS claims, qualitative data from other sources such as the Sage Clan contradicts police claims. Race-related data is required as is increasing transparency practices through data sharing agreements among both Indigenous and non-Indigenous shelter service providers. There must be clearer data tracking pathways between homeless serving entities and the organizations that are associated with providing assistance to Indigenous women either at risk of or experiencing homelessness such as Income Assistance, child welfare, affordable housing, the LPS, and Alberta Health Services within the City of Lethbridge.

Next Steps

This section offers a high-level vision of possible solutions to address the needs and gaps identified earlier. These 'next step' objectives are as specific as is possible and directly speak to the factors listed in the gap description. Budgetary considerations are also offered. However, given the limitations associated with this needs assessment, it is not possible to provide even an accurate forecasting of costs due to the lack of data. It must be noted that implementing the recommendations and suggested actions with regard to capacity-building around Indigenous cultural practices and critical knowledge require humility, openness to learning and the establishment of trusting relationships with Indigenous partners and collaborators. The

recommendations regarding structural considerations offer additional opportunities for the City of Lethbridge to move toward a future vision of developing an advocacy strategy. Collaboration must be prioritized on every level.

- Working closely with the Indigenous Relations Office with the City of Lethbridge and the Reconciliation Lethbridge Action Committee (RLAC), advocacy strategists may consider *creating an Indigenous engagement and action plan to work towards implementing recommendations* pertaining to incorporating cultural supports, structural considerations and developing partnerships.
- Budgetary consideration: Developing an engagement and action plan requires significant consultation within the city and with local Indigenous communities. Below is a high-level budget forecast:

Resource	Cost
Consultant ($100/hour x 150 hours)	$15,000
Elder Honorariums ($100/hour)	$1500
Engagement gathering expenses	$2500
Miscellaneous	$500
Total	$19,500

With regard to Bill C-92, City of Lethbridge planners can begin contacting the appropriate entities within the emergency women's shelter system, provincial Indigenous child welfare liaison and on reserve children's services authorities to begin further exploration.

- Further research on the part of the city strategists is required around the pros and cons of Bill-C92 (Chiefs of Ontario, 2019) especially the ramifications of the Supreme Court of Canada's ruling around the validity of the Act which is expected in early May 2023.

Despite the unstable status of Bill-C92, exploring how it can be leveraged to ensure Indigenous families stay together even within the emergency shelter system.

It is vital for city engagement planners to understand that implementing the recommendation pertaining to antiracism training involves moving beyond common Indigenous cultural training models. Facilitators knowledgeable in critical antiracism professional development delivery are specialized in their fields.

- Reaching out to the surrounding First Nations as well as leveraging contacts with Indigenous researchers and educators are vital steps to identifying possible facilitators and are ones requiring collaboration and relationship building.
- Budgetary Considerations:

Resource	Cost
Facilitator	$10,000

Miscellaneous	$1000
Total	$11,000

Development of critical intercultural knowledge through a lens of humility and ongoing self-reflection will provide the foundation that is needed to embrace new learning opportunities such as the movement towards critical antiracism curriculum.

Conclusion

The data that has emerged from this needs assessment has demonstrated that there are profound gaps in services for Indigenous women experiencing homelessness resulting from complex factors that are rooted in the legacy of colonialism and today, situated within a social context of trauma, and deeply entrenched cycles of violence and addictions. The legacy of colonialism is evident in rampant racism, ongoing disregard of the violence that Indigenous women experience, and an overall lack of meaningful and culturally relevant approaches to programming continue to both create and exacerbate the conditions of homelessness in the City of Lethbridge. Creating an advocacy strategy for the creation of an Indigenous women's emergency shelter demands a concerted and collaborative effort and it starts with acknowledging the truth of how settler colonial processes of elimination have contributed to the ongoing violence against and erasure of Indigenous women.

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Appendix A: Qualitative Data Findings

The following report includes perspectives gleaned from qualitative interviews we conducted with service providers, Elders as well as two Indigenous women with lived-experience. The report covers July 2022 – September 2022 timeframe. The findings are detailed and are representative of a range of topic areas that emerged from our discussions with participants and are organized into a series of categories that encompass causes for Indigenous women to access emergency shelter, gaps in the current shelter systems, the role of Indigenous culture in shelter programming and services, and solutions.

Experiences that cause Indigenous women to access emergency shelter

The findings from the data demonstrate how Indigenous women's experiences that lead them to seek shelter services are multi-faceted and relate to those that are not confined to domestic violence situations. Interviews with participants highlight the role of historically situated and contemporary traumatic experiences as foregrounding addictions and mental health issues which are the primary conditions, according to the Albert Council of Women's Shelters (ACWS), that lead Indigenous women into the emergency shelter systems of care. One source working within the Lethbridge homeless serving system placed the onus on the shoulders of Indigenous women stating, "I think a big one is their lifestyle that they have on the street. A lot of women work in the sex trade industry. We do see a lot of women accessing the shelter to get dolled up for the night, get ready for the night's work. I think that is the biggest one that we see" (Lethbridge Shelter, P1) and furthered that many Indigenous women accessing the Lethbridge Stabilization and Shelter (LSS) were working in the sex trade industry. Service providers at the LSS informed that that the sex-work lifestyle led to family rejection because many families don't accept their choice to work in the sex trade. As a result, many women are kicked out of the family home. While the findings were nuanced, the primary reasons that cause women to access emergency shelter that were identified by service providers include the following:

- Addictions – foregrounding addiction, the history of trauma, and genocidal and colonial violence (as acknowledged by the ACWS) that have impacted Indigenous women's vulnerabilities thus pushing them to the margins. Many women are on suboxone. One non-Indigenous service provider informed that she saw a normalized lifestyle of addictions: "I've chatted with young girls who did not think life could be any different than the current struggles they saw, they grew up in families that have addiction issues" (Streets Alive). The complexity of addictions creates cycles of abuse. The participant furthered, "we do know there is a significant amount of violence, and that is the norm, as we see a lot of individuals who have not had a chance to escape that, and that is the number one reason that we see our young Indigenous girls on the streets, and again, we see that with some of our older ones as well" (Streets alive).
- Trauma experiences - Trauma is the core issue that must be addressed as addictions and vulnerabilities to violence are only the symptoms. Intergenerational trauma rooted in settler colonization was identified.

- Domestic violence and spousal violence were identified by law enforcement, Elder participants and service providers although addictions overshadow it.
- Lack of affordable housing and financial and community support for Indigenous women
- Difficulty finding housing due to racist/discriminatory landlords was consistently mentioned by Indigenous participants, as well as non-Indigenous participants to a certain degree, as a major cause of Indigenous women's homelessness.
- Difficulty keeping a place due to family/kinship relations, lifestyle
- Lack of resources such as shelter and treatment options on reserves and lack of opportunities led many women to choose to stay in the city, although a trend in urban migration was identified. It was identified that inadequate shelter services may contribute to ongoing cycles of gender/spousal abuse and addictions. Overcrowded housing on reserve means that it is a challenge to find housing for women in need.
- Lack of government support for housing coupled with high cost of rent means that many women are forced to remain in cycles of violence.

Culture Loss

Culture loss emerged primarily in the context of our conversations with the Elders. Working directly with Indigenous women, the Elders pointed to a lack of agency and responsibility among women as well as lack of parental experience with regard to Indigenous parenting styles. This is directly related to the effects of colonization such as the residential schools, settler colonial policy. An over-reliance on extended family to raise children takes away responsibility from the women who then lose the respect of families, are at risk of getting kicked out of their home, thus contributing to the high number of Indigenous women in homelessness. The Elders shared how important it is to understand history and culture to give insight into the current problems with addictions. Being connected to traditional culture and identity in helping to resist ongoing effects of colonialism is key in helping clients who are determined to make changes for the better, and to improve their situation. In terms of the cultural supports and practices learned in Indigenous women's shelters, the cycle of homelessness makes continuing the cultural practices difficult.

Lack of Services for Homeless Women with Addictions

A major finding from our interviews demonstrates how addictions are overshadowing domestic violence yet despite the alarming and overwhelming rise in Indigenous women's homelessness driven by addictions, there is a lack of funding and resources to offer cultural/holistic treatment for Indigenous women. The Lethbridge area has a high amount of drug addiction, and the drugs are stronger than anything people have seen. One source stated that drug addiction is complex and differs from alcohol addiction and is akin to taking over the soul/spirit of those under the influence. The complexity of addictions and accompanying withdrawals means some women are turned away from homes because they put others such as their families and children at risk and then they end up on the streets. Management from the women's emergency shelters we spoke with, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, state they are dry shelters with no tolerance for drug/alcohol use. Individuals on drugs pose a safety risk to other women and the risk is intensified if children are involved. Alpha House is also a dry shelter, and

according to one source, people needing to use shelter services don't like Alpha House because it won't allow them to use drugs. Shelter staff also stated that addictions are often accompanied with mental health issues that complicate shelter services ability to offer support and the current shelters are sometimes forced to offer services they are not equipped to handle such as detox. Underfunding means they are already unable to assist with addictions let alone having any staff expertise to deal with the complexities of providing mental health supports.

Overall, the findings point out that there is a demand for an emergency women's shelter that offers treatment services and that the sorrows and deleterious effects brought on by addictions in Lethbridge far outweigh the available resources. Although what is needed is a more integrated harm reduction model such as detox departments within shelter services, one source working with the Indigenous women's shelter system stated "I think the idea of having a detox center attached to the shelter, I don't know how the women would feel about that. That becomes another extraordinary cost simply because you have to have a medical person in there. A medically supervised detox. You'd have to have medical staff, you'd have to have 24-hour staff, you'd have to have security, etc., and depending on what that looks like" (Awo Taan)
Shelter service providers offer narrow treatment options.

Violence Against Indigenous Women

While addictions surfaced as the root for accessing shelter systems, violence against Indigenous women was a significant factor. According to Indigenous shelter service providers, violence must be understood in broad contexts and holistically considered. Colonial state violence is a contributing factor to Indigenous vulnerabilities. The ACWS has a narrow definition of domestic violence, despite the fact that violence is complex and multi-layered. Shelter policy needs to include more than just intimate partner abuse but other forms as well such as violence against women's children, i.e., child abuse perpetrated by an intimate partner. According to some sources we interviewed, Indigenous women's cries for help fall on deaf ears and it was revealed that Indigenous women are getting raped on the streets, and no one is doing anything about it, not law enforcement and not municipal governance. Racism and discrimination were identified as another source of violence which intensified disregard and put Indigenous women at risk for further violence. On-reserve violence was identified in the form of lateral violence. According to the YWCA of Calgary, women are 6 or 7 times higher in terms of being at risk of femicide in the first 14 days of leaving an abusive relationship.

Law enforcement sources suggested that there is a normalization of violence against Indigenous women and that traditionally women are not encouraged to leave partners or seek help. Gender-based control was identified as Indigenous women's reliance on their spouse which creates cycles of abuse. Exploitation by men in the drug trade was also identified as higher for Indigenous women and are seen as essential to the drug and sex trade in Lethbridge.

Sex trafficking.

There was a great deal of ambiguity surrounding this particular finding. Mainstream shelter and homeless serving sources shared that prostitution amongst Indigenous women was common, but sex trafficking was seen as not as common. Our interviews revealed that there is

high amount of sex trafficking occurring in Lethbridge. Indigenous sources directly involved intensive street outreach shared that Indigenous women get picked up and are brought to larger communities like Calgary to get groomed into the sex trade. Women/girls are sex-trafficked to Medicine Hat to work the streets and truck stations. Lateral violence amongst the Indigenous population means that women are not only at risk of being exploited by non-Indigenous peoples, but also their own community members. It is not only men targeting women, but women are exploiting one another as well being targeted by different ethnicities, not just white or Indigenous. While some organizations such as the SAGE Clan report sex trafficking and spread word of it, there is a need to build greater awareness of it. Sources shared a belief that the while sex trade will keep escalating, there is a lack of services and programming to deal assist women caught up in the sex trade workers and that members of the local law enforcement are unresponsive to sex-trafficking, and claim no women are coming forward to report it. According to our Indigenous sources, the local law enforcement in Lethbridge need to take the issue seriously build awareness around sex-trafficking as a threat to the safety of Indigenous women. It was confirmed by law enforcement sources that sex trafficking of Indigenous women is occurring in Lethbridge, but they cannot do anything about it because it is going unreported. It was also suggested that many sex trade workers do such to survive - to feed themselves and their children. Addictions are a driving factor in sex trafficking and many sex traffickers use online platforms to lure women. There was evidence of victim blaming on the part of non-Indigenous service providers without trying to understand root causes such as the ongoing and profound effects of trauma brought on by settler colonialism.

Settler Colonialism

The findings related to the processes of settler colonialism are inclusive of a historical pattern of exclusion/marginalization, disregard, racism and a general lack of compassion and understanding from the settler society in Lethbridge. The findings are to be considered in the broader context of political, economic and social factors that are going unacknowledged and unexplored in meaningful ways at the systemic level. Interviews with Indigenous shelter sources revealed a pattern of exclusion wherein Indigenous-led shelter service providers not part of the ACWS although this was explained as being of their own choice. The logic of elimination is at play through state-sanctioned administrative bodies which exclude Indigenous-led shelter service providers and promote the idea that Indigenous women must only deal with the police rather than have the right to access culturally appropriate supports. Indigenous led-shelter managers indicated that they are aware of how settler colonialism operates in Canada through policy, state-sanctioned coercion, and the members of settler society themselves. Requests for data sharing have gone unacknowledged. Interviews highlighted how Indigenous hiring practices are surface level and act as a smokescreen by being able to say there is Indigenous inclusion, yet white people still maintain all control over Indigenous people. One source asked, how many Indigenous lives could have been saved if the ARCHES safe injection site was not shut down? In terms of the homeless population, sources working to support Indigenous women shared that anything that serves the betterment of Indigenous people is taken away thus accelerating the

destruction of Indigenous people from the land. While shelters in Lethbridge understood the need to take into consideration the effects of colonization as a driving factor in homelessness, this understanding was not reflected in policy or operations.

Racism

Racism was a major finding and is connected to both the experiences that cause Indigenous women to be in situations of violence. While our interviews with one service provider revealed that racism is not seen as a problem at the shelter she manages, this perspective was not shared by others. Encouragingly, the shelter manager shared that, "We try to treat everybody equitably, but each case is different. So, one client might need different things from our staff members than another client. We try to treat our clients based on their cases and what their needs are at the time" (personal communication). When asked about racism as a problem, one shelter manager from Lethbridge stated, "We can spend many days on this conversation alone" (personal communication). He further revealed how the Indigenous shelter clients talk often of racism and how bad they are treated in the community. Findings reveal how racism is normalized and socially accepted, even socially expected, in Lethbridge. Some sources shared how either they themselves grapple with racist thoughts or how they've witnessed open racism by others in leadership positions in health, social serving systems of care and city council. Cultural training was seen as the answer to address racism. In terms of shelter operations, racism is expressed in nuanced ways. Indigenous staff are automatically thought to be shelter clients and numerous examples of racism were offered by interview participants demonstrating how common encounters with racism are. Assaults such as being bear-sprayed or physically beaten against Indigenous homeless people on the streets were identified as becoming more prevalent. Indeed, one non-Indigenous participant shared how Lethbridge "politics are driven by racism" (personal communication). This same participant stated that "this community has always suffered with racism and when you start to bring that conversation forward a lot of rhetoric and back pedaling as if it doesn't exist. We even have a council member now who will be openly racist in council chambers. Nothing is done about it; nobody confronts it because it's become more of a norm. At one point you would see it was quite overt. At one point you would see that it went into the shadows, like you just said. You knew it was there, you just never saw it happening over. Which in my mind, is the most dangerous kind of racism" (personal communication). Feelings of helplessness were expressed by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants, and many acknowledged how racism is learned and reproduced. Participants working outside of Lethbridge commented how Lethbridge is particularly driven by racist ideology. When interviewing one non-Indigenous participant, racism was clearly evident in some of their comments and excuses were made for the lack of web-based information that would be helpful for Indigenous people on women's shelter websites. Over and over again in the interview, there was an acknowledgement of racist policies as driving women's shelter systems. Perpetuation of racism is seen in control of data and data are used by settler society as a tool to control the representation of Indigenous people in ways that reinforce stereotypical views and distrust of Indigenous bodies. Even in our recruitment efforts, we were met with unprofessional and rude

behavior by shelter staff when dealing with outside bodies/entities. One participant shared how large municipal, non-Indigenous-led shelters can be indifferent to both Indigenous-focused shelter service providers, and Indigenous women's plight of homelessness, and feel Indigenous women should cater to their program, and not the other way around. Overrepresentation of Indigenous women in criminal, child welfare and homeless shelter systems is captured through data which leads to more punitive policy measures against Indigenous women to the effect that Indigenous women become stuck in a cycle of dependency and disregard. The aggressive and unsympathetic actions directed toward the homeless population in Lethbridge were seen by some participants as further evidence of racism. Indeed, racism was identified as the biggest barrier to change. One participant also shared that if truth and reconciliation is ever to be achieved in Lethbridge then white citizens, leaders, service providers, etc. must do their part and reconcile not only with Indigenous people but with themselves and confront their racism.

At the systemic level, violent/aggressive and racist attitudes within public service organizations such as health and policing has led to a lack of proper screening in the hiring process such as hiring known racists to work in essential public services within the city of Lethbridge. City council was seen by some participants as unwilling to enact positive change despite having the power to do so. Resources exist that can help the homeless population in Lethbridge such as empty buildings that are not used, but the city remains unwilling to implement solutions and points policy barriers and lack of resources. An Elder we interviewed shared that for Indigenous women, “One of the main things is their homeless, there is not enough housing for people and when they do apply for housing, they’re discriminated against by landlords telling them they should just go back to the reserve. Sometimes when they phone the landlord and they are told over the phone that the place is vacant but when they get there, the landlord tells them the property has been rented; that’s another part of discrimination” (Elder 1).

Victim blaming.

This finding emerged in the context of how some participants shared that Indigenous people were on the streets due to their own choices such as drug-use and prostitution. When asked why they thought Indigenous women were on the street, one participant stated, “one of the challenges Alpha House has is because they won’t allow them [Indigenous people] to use, and I have heard that has happened, why they don’t like them is because they don’t allow them to use drugs, so they get kicked out for using inside. Again, there are three sides to every story, yours, mine, and the truth. That has been a challenge, and we’ve heard, at the street level, that they are looking for someplace where they don’t have to leave their bags, they can take their stuff with them, and be able to use drugs when they want, that is one of the appeals of encampment life because there is no restriction with their drug use.” The LPS perspective is that Indigenous families blame them for breaking them up rather than looking at the roots of the problems.

Indigenous marginalization within the provincial women’s shelter system.

In speaking to the Indigenous women’s shelters, it was shared that they felt segregated by the Alberta Council of Women’s Shelter and felt their concerns were not heard due to their

small size in relation to ACWS. It was also verified all but one of the Indigenous women's shelters operating in Alberta had broken away from the ACWS.

Lack of Understanding of who Indigenous People are

Generally, there was a great deal of misunderstandings around Indigenous/First Nations people. One non-Indigenous participant shared how many non-Indigenous people believe Indigenous people don't pay taxes and have everything paid for including education. Others expressed a narrow view of Indigenous culture and despite Indigenous awareness training, misconceptions are rampant. According to the LPS, "As a police organization we've done a really good job in educating our people with respect to what Indigenous culture looks like, the matriarchal piece of it, where we are with the treaties, and the mother earth, and all the components of culture, tradition, and ceremony as it goes. So, we have a good handle on those pieces, given that we are the police service." A prevailing belief is that organizations can easily figure out who Indigenous people are through professional development initiatives.

Jurisdictional Barriers

Participants pointed to jurisdictional challenges in terms of factors that would prevent the implementation of an Indigenous women's shelter. For example, one participant highlighted how the Edmonton shelters are funded through the province while Indigenous people are under federal jurisdiction. Another shared how we must move past jurisdictional issues and on to true collaboration at the Federal, Provincial, Municipal, and Tribal/Band level. Funding would also be an issue because a shelter in Lethbridge would be on provincial land but because it is targeted as an Indigenous initiative, the Federal government will not fund the province. Reserves do not qualify for many of the supports the city does.

Funding

Another barrier that was highlighted by numerous participants was a general lack of funding to support the following areas:

- implementation of more shelters
- cultural programming even though cultural programming is successful
- health professionals to provide appropriate services for detox

Moreover, it was highlighted by one participant that provincial non-Indigenous shelter services providers such as the ACWS are unwilling to work collaboratively with Indigenous people on Indigenous-focused issues. For other homeless serving organizations such as Streets Alive, public funding helps them to avoid the problems that arise from a federally funded system. The Indigenous Coaching Recovery Program informed that their operations are stretched thin, but they do what they can such as fundraising to make ends meet.

Neoliberalism

Ideologically, the politics of neoliberalism influence how shelter services are approached. Participants from the Indigenous Coaching Recovery Program (ICRP) and LSS shared that government priorities to prevent duplication of services hinders the incorporation of Indigenous cultural programming and translates to an overall lack of government funding and support to carry out beneficial programs for Indigenous people. The unwillingness to recognize Indigenous

cultural healing practices as fundamental to homeless and addictions treatment programming implies an eagerness on the part of the settler government to cast Indigenous people as fully assimilated. Neoliberal funding models and approaches reflect settler colonialism and reinforce its function to erase to Indigenous identities and bodies. The homeless shelters' operational structure is indicative of how the government and municipalities want to see outcomes through an investment model lens. Getting around neoliberal barriers means garnering "political advocacy and really paying attention to the need." Publicly funded shelter providers adhere to a capitalistic neoliberal approach congruent with settler colonialism principles of hierarchy and individualism.

One participant criticized Lethbridge residents stating, "they are living in these big fancy homes, and they go to work on the misery of Indigenous people. That needs to change." Non-profit shelter services are dependency-based and benefit from the misery of Indigenous people with another participant sharing, "for many years non-profit have benefitted from the misery of our people. We have a very high overrepresentation in all assistance and services. If you look at most of the non-profit models they are dependency-based, they are vying to get a person to a certain status, and then they can walk away, and they have their time limits, they have their targets, their outcomes; but it moves away from that concept of actually supporting people, and empowering people because you would be very surprised what people can achieve, even if you think they are at the limit of their capacity, either it is a cognitive capacity or a drug addiction, whatever it may be, is that there is an underlying assumption that these services will always be needed and required and so, there is no motivation by organizations to switch the needle" (Elizabeth Fry Society). The findings point out that neoliberal capitalist models are ineffective and cause division within the homeless serving sector that is often devoted to philanthropist efforts.

Gaps in Policing Services

This finding relates primarily to unresponsive policing. Participants working directly with the Indigenous women shared how the LPS do nothing about street-level assaults. There is a need for LPS to create new relationships with Indigenous people and groups based on reciprocity as part of truth and reconciliation. Another participant who is on the street providing basic needs and relational support to the homeless population witnessed police violence/brutality on the homeless population and disclosed that Indigenous women face sexual violence on the streets and yet the LPS turn a blind eye to the sex trafficking occurring in Lethbridge even after many women, including non-Indigenous women, have reached out to the LPS for help. Clearly, some participants felt that LPS did not listen to the victims that are experiencing assaults. The same participant shared how he felt that The Lethbridge Watch is simply an arm of LPS and inexperienced. When speaking with Indigenous participants, there was an overall distrust of LPS and that despite groups such as the Sage Clan offering advice and guidance to the LPS in terms of how to work with the street population and the need for the Lethbridge Watch to have respect for those they deal with on the streets, there was little faith in LPS to follow through with recommendations. Indeed, the findings point to how the criminal justice system only exacerbates

the problems homeless people face since now they have warrants for charges such as public nuisance in addition to coping with being on the streets.

Diversion away from Indigenous issues/upholding disregard

This finding relates to how the issues central to the needs of Indigenous women on the streets were directly disregarded or specific participants diverted to broader issues that effectively assimilated Indigenous women into broader categories related to gender and/or immigrant issues. Despite the fact that Indigenous women are by far the largest proportion of the population using emergency women's shelters, some participants chose a multicultural focus to the conversation. ACWS pointed to how Indigenous women alone account for 1/3 of domestic violence cases. Another tactic for diversion was making excuses for the lack of Indigenous inclusion. The topic of our data collection was a focus on Indigenous women specifically, yet it was not unusual for some non-Indigenous participants to talk about immigrant issues citing that they cannot just consider Indigenous issues alone.

On-Reserve Factors

Mental illness was seen as a significant issue leading to addictions and Indigenous women's homelessness. A lack of programs for Indigenous people with disabilities, and a lack of resources and funding overall on reserve intensifies issues. The detox center on the Blood Reserve is being used as a treatment or transition center yet it lacks funding and resources. There is a need for accurate and legitimate data. The need for treatment and shelter on the reserve is profound for both men and women are admitted at the same frequency. Strict admittance guidelines are a detriment to many Indigenous women seeking shelter services on-reserve. Lethbridge agencies use Standoff Detox as a referral for shelter but providing emergency shelter is not its mandate. It was also identified that there is a lack of safe places to go for women on the reserve, only a detox.

Gaps in Current Women's Shelter System: What needs to be improved in the emergency shelter services?

Our conversations with individuals and organizational representatives highlighted many areas for improving the current emergency women's shelter system with participants highlighting that Indigenous women don't feel safe in the shelter system. Shelters only offer a temporary solution, and many Indigenous women are still facing dangerous situations even in shelters. A co-ed structure is not appropriate for them. One participant from the Lethbridge Shelter stated that "We know that there are unsafe relationships, where for whatever reason they will stay in that relationship to meet other needs, but it's not safe for them" (LSS). Safety of clients is a primary concern. The same participant shared that "A lot of these folks are in that trap because they don't have the capacity to heal, necessarily what's happening for them inside or even understand the language for it. Meaning that psycho- social support of understanding the trauma and how to address it" (LSS) Indigenous peoples are not able to access cultural supports to heal and the limitations of Western therapies need to be acknowledged. Overall, there is minimal incorporation of Indigenous culture and healing traditions at the shelters we accessed for this project.

Physical and Policy Structure of Emergency Women's Shelters

The very structure of a shelter is to offer only basic necessities for homeless people but they don't offer the kinds of support for Indigenous people to heal appropriately. The physical shelter is only one part of the issue. In the context of addictions, one participant shared,

> I think when people are having conversations about the encampments and stuff … They are saying housing, housing, housing. Yeah, it's big but lots of these folks are high; they have a lot of things they need to work through. You can't put them up in a house and hope for the best for them. We actually have people we helped to get housed and we see them back here. They have a house but they live in a shelter" (ICRP)

Moreover, the small size of the shelters is inadequate to meet the high demand. The emergency women's shelter policy does little to help Indigenous women outside of a temporary fix and the model is ineffective in addressing the actual needs of Indigenous women – especially cultural needs. Other participants highlighted how province-wide, the shelter services are inadequate and there is a need for shelter programs that work with Indigenous families as a whole, rather than splitting up men and women. It was shared there was a lack of proper policies and guidelines to deal effectively with the homeless population in Lethbridge. The shelter websites provide no indication of any Indigenous-focused programming on websites which is the most accessible way to access information. Other participants cited lack of proper training on the part of staff to deal with the rapid influx of drug addiction(s) in addition to the policy which limits who shelter can take in. Moreover, current shelter policy doesn't allow for full coverage of Indigenous women's needs as shelters can only provide temporary relief and women risk getting kicked out if not following the rules and regulations. Participants also disclosed reports that Indigenous people are not being treated well in Alpha House/Lethbridge Shelter which has led to an underutilization of their services.

Lack of Municipal Support

Participants pointed to a lack of support from municipal agencies with one participant informing that "hospitals, police, child welfare, they will all bring women to the door and leave, without providing the shelter with any resources." The lack of funding means that current shelters must raise their own funds to hire health professionals. It was noted by participants who managed the Awo Taan Indigenous Women's Emergency Shelter and the Pincher Creek Women's Emergency Shelter that supporting women detoxing from drug addictions required on-site medical professionals which was seen as a challenge to fully supporting the women.

Competition for Resources and Funding

Another finding relates to how larger non-Indigenous shelter service providers within municipalities see Indigenous-led shelter services as a threat to their survival, which leads to a lack of support and meaningful collaboration by the larger non-Indigenous-led shelter services providers. One participant was critical of the Lethbridge Shelter/Alpha house model and felt it was losing direction by trying to shift focus to program implementation instead of concentrating on providing shelter for clients.

Lack of Indigenous Inclusion

Our findings demonstrate an underrepresentation of Indigenous peoples employed in the emergency women's shelter system and the general shelter in Lethbridge despite an overrepresentation of Indigenous women accessing shelters. There is a general lack of Indigenous inclusion and a dire need for shelter service providers to include a greater degree of Indigenous culture. Critiques by some participants included inattentive non-Indigenous management with no relational understanding of the Indigenous clientele. Most of the Lethbridge city shelter workers are all non-Native. Even the police perspectives highlighted how current shelter services offer limited focus on Indigenous culture and that shelter services need to address a wider range of issues. In speaking with the YWCA in Lethbridge, management admitted a lack of focus toward Indigenous women and offered no indication of Indigenous inclusion in hiring practices. Overall, our findings show that there is a severe lack of shelters that cater specifically to Indigenous women. The 21-day shelter system is not enough time to make a meaningful difference and some Indigenous women's emergency shelters are forced to keep women longer if they have no place to go.

Place of Children

Participants, particularly the service providers working directly with Indigenous women, cited fear on the part of Indigenous women to access emergency shelter services around losing their children to child welfare. One participant expressed frustration with the system and shared, "Policy tells us to call child welfare because now we have kids in need" (Awo Taan). The child welfare exacerbates problems and Indigenous women often lose custody of children if Child and Family Services is involved leading to a downward spiral for many Indigenous women. The child has to suffer through the child welfare system which often times means getting separated from their siblings and placed in foster care. Shelter policy can work to the detriment of women with children seeking safety especially when Child and Family Services are involved. While it was noted that Bill C-92 is supported by the Federal Government, there remains difficulty in determining how to translate it into emergency shelter service policy and how that might impact the way support services are provided for Indigenous women with children. The Elders shared that communal/kinship supports are not funded despite the overwhelming number of relatives and grandparents who end up taking care of children.

Indigenous Antiracism Capacities

This finding relates to the general lack of antiracism capacities within the City of Lethbridge and the need to develop antiracism training for both on and off reserve. Currently, there is no way to curb racism without active Indigenous involvement which means that settler organizations and urban governance must share control. Antiracism capacity-building also relates to truth and reconciliation in that new relationships must be forged based on mutual understanding and respect. Participants, especially Indigenous ones, highlighted how more support is needed from Indigenous leadership. For Indigenous people, there is a need to learn to cope with racism (as change is slow,) with a focus on preventing internalization of racism which

could be reflected back onto society. Turning to traditional teachings for guidance will build antiracism capacities.

Lethbridge-Specific Barriers

Our findings point out that Lethbridge is different that other cities and what works in Calgary, for example, won't work in Lethbridge. In our conversations with participants, we found that the majority of them identified a lack of collaboration and coordinated efforts among shelter services and other municipal agencies in arriving at effective and humane ways of addressing the needs of Indigenous women facing homelessness and associated barriers. Indeed, as we were conducting this study, we found a lack of support from the local emergency women's shelter in Lethbridge and the nearby town of Taber which was made evident through a refusal to engage with us. It was identified by a participant that the city's approach seemed to ignore the root cause of homelessness and addictions which was rooted in colonial trauma. Moreover, a lack of Indigenous peoples in leadership positions within municipal governance intensifies the politics as a barrier to properly dealing with the homeless situation since there are no Indigenous people with lived experience at municipal meetings. Essentially, some participants felt city politics translated to a group of settlers dictating policies that directly affect Indigenous people. Indeed, others blatantly accused racist politicians within city council as hindering progress and identified the real problem as racism within the city council. In speaking with participants who were not from Lethbridge, their perspectives suggested that racism in Lethbridge and the surrounding area differs from other areas of the province in that racism is overt, socially acceptable and normalized in Lethbridge. According to some participants, racism has only gotten worse over time and the Lethbridge City Council only listens to the wants of the settler population who are not affected by homelessness.

In speaking with participants providing direct supports to the homeless, they shared how Lethbridge has a lot of unused space, but the city is prioritizing other areas instead of helping the homeless. The size of shelters is inadequate to meet needs yet there is a lot of unused space such as the empty civic area. The city of Lethbridge leadership is unsupportive of Indigenous partnerships and does not collaborate with Indigenous groups such as Sage Clan. Instead, one participant felt that the city takes ideas from Sage Clan and try to implement programs on their own with little if any Indigenous involvement, even though Indigenous people make up the bulk of cases. The Neighborhood Watch was seen as one such program. The Sage Clan has many non-Indigenous active participants who see the way Indigenous peoples are treated in Lethbridge and want to make positive change so there is also hope. Another participant stated, "I would say just the culture of Lethbridge has a little ways to go. Even with their leadership and nonprofit leaders, it's a bit of a kind of pull yourself up by the bootstraps kind of thinking. Really, what it says to us, even given the extremely inappropriate answer that you received about shelter usage, it speaks to ignorance" (Calgary YWCA). At least three participants indicated that Lethbridge is a dumping ground for homeless people.

Role of Indigenous Culture in Emergency Women's Shelters

This finding emerges from participant responses with regard to cultural programming and supports for Indigenous women accessing emergency shelter services. Many of the participants we spoke with acknowledged that without access to an Indigenous cultural compass, Indigenous women on the streets "are lost." There was also an acknowledgement that the shelter system can do more in terms of supporting cultural programming. Many times over participants pointed out how there was minimal incorporation of Indigenous culture and traditional healing. Others shared that Indigenous women should be a top priority for shelter services because they are the most vulnerable and largest group on the streets but to meet their needs, the connection to culture is critical to healing. Indigenous service providers were adamant that access to culture and the rights to practice Indigenous cultural ways are a human right and must be respected. Elders we spoke with affirmed that traditional Indigenous culture/ceremony is used in healing and recovery and is favored by Indigenous women. Implementation of Indigenous culture and traditional healing methods can be easily sustained, and lack of funding should be no excuse for larger organizations. In terms of policy, homeless serving organizations must prioritize Indigenous culture and traditional healing methods and make culture part of their policy. Culture is a key component for Indigenous women whose strength can be found in traditional roles. The LPS shared that they are aware of the benefits culture plays in the well-being of Indigenous people and felt that more cultural programming for Indigenous women and their children was needed within the shelter system.

The Indigenous shelters we spoke with also affirmed that a lot of their clients express an interest in learning more about their traditional cultural practices. One Elder shared that, "A lot of times the women, once we start going through the programs, they start to understand themselves, they start to love themselves … in our Indian way, our culture is an important part in our lives. Our spirituality is important, if we don't have that relationship with the Creator, we feel hopeless and stuck. But, when we pray and attend ceremonies, we are able to face our current situation with strength. It improves our self-esteem and helps us to think more clearly" (Elder 1). Cultural practices reconnect Indigenous women to their identity and act to remedy the trauma associated with colonization

Indigenous Framework for Addictions Treatment

Data from our interviews point to how the role of Indigenous culture must be considered in the context of addictions treatment through the incorporation of Indigenous cultural and spiritual practices. The Indigenous women's shelters we spoke each shared how they either have Indigenous staff who are Elders with transferred knowledge or that they ensure that their clients have regular access to Elders. Successful programming for addictions treatment also involved a collective, communal approach which was seen as more welcoming and directly building relationships with Indigenous women. It was advised by Indigenous participants that any new shelter service staff have to be trained to deal with addictions and the different types of addictions because treating addictions takes time, compassion and patience. Current city shelters have a very westernized/capitalistic focus on quantitative data to inform results when in reality

treatment takes time and patience. It also shared that shelters need to employ more consistent and permanent workers because people respond better to familiar faces which points to the need for understanding the importance of relationships. Frontline work to mitigate the harms of addiction begins right on the streets and culture and identity play a huge role, particularly with the Sage Clan and the work they do. Providing traditional foods such as berry soup was seen as a practice that is important for Indigenous recovery. Beliefs and spirituality are an important part of the healing journey. Another participant shared the complexity of addictions issues sharing that addictive behavior indicates lack of self-connection. Given the gravity and ubiquity of addictions as a factor Indigenous women's homelessness, domestic violence shouldn't be the main focus. Treating addictions must be part of holistic and trauma-informed programming grounded in Indigenous ways of knowing. Parenting programs were also seen as part of a holistic approach. Access to culture is essential in addictions recovery and more support is needed for projects like a place for Indigenous people to gather and provide cultural activities and to raise awareness.

Indigenous Women's Shelter Perspectives

This finding reflects the perspective of Indigenous service providers. The level of relational engagement and understanding of the root causes of violence against Indigenous women is much higher with an Indigenous-focused shelter provider: "All the judgements and the blaming, and not understanding that, and you know we talk about family violence as being very complex, very multi-layered. I'm not sure that service providers understand the multiple layers that are involved" (Awo Taan). Indigenous women's shelters are holistic and family oriented but they face a disparity in access to resources. It is easier for non-Indigenous and immigrants to access emergency services than it is for Indigenous women despite the fact the need is higher with Indigenous women. Oftentimes numerous types of shelter services work to the detriment of Indigenous women because they end up experiencing more violence in the systems. It is important to provide Indigenous women with the freedom to choose how and when they heal from violence and shelter policy must be adaptable. For example, going over and above the 21 day-stay policy. Although Indigenous-led services based in culture are most appropriate, there is a lack of proper facilities on reserve and Indigenous women's emergency shelters are woefully underfunded. Indigenous women's shelters employ Indigenous peoples who understand Indigenous issues and try to go above and beyond to help and provide structure in women's lives. Aside from cultural support, Awo Taan and other Indigenous women's shelters also help clients with other areas such as legal procedures and childcare; "Sometimes we will go above our policy, and we let them stay if they don't have a place. And other shelters, they don't do that" (Awo Taan).

Spirituality/Connection

Our conversations show that Indigenous women's shelters respond to spiritual needs of Indigenous women. The data highlights a need to incorporate spirituality in daily life and a choice to access holistic healing such as land-based healing. Emergency women's shelters need to incorporate more traditional Indigenous healing methods because there is a severe lack of culturally appropriate services that are appropriate for so many Indigenous women who face

trauma. Spirituality is demonstrated through the need to connect to something larger than self. A non-Indigenous participant shared the positive impacts of Indigenous cultural inclusion; “we have Elders coming in, you can feel a shift in the energy, in a positive way. People were always respectful of the space at that time, and you could see that it mattered, that it was important for them” (Lethbridge Shelter). The presence of Elders had a noticeable, positive effect, on both clients and staff. According to another participant, “Because Indigenous women are not getting the services and supports that relate to spiritual wellness, that means they will not have access to language, culture, ceremony, and Elders. We know how important that is when we are feeling rejected. But on the other hand, I’ve also seen Indigenous women, Indigenous women are strong, and they will do everything to keep their children close to them. We need to build on that personal resiliency and keep families together” (Awotaan). The incorporation of Indigenous culture and traditional healing must be genuine and not simply doing it to fill in a checkmark. Cultural support and collaboration with Elders and other knowledge keepers are key to increasing spiritual/self-connections and shelters need to place a greater focus on spirituality. Many young people who end up in shelters don't practice spirituality and were not taught how to smudge.

Relationships/Connection

The importance of building safe and positive relationships was also a large part of the work of Indigenous women’s shelters. One participant stated that some people choose to be on the street because they feel connected to others. Again, it was felt that clients are more receptive to Indigenous staff. It was also mentioned that Indigenous men were part of healthy relationships. The question emerged of what the role of men/males in Indigenous women's health are. Participants stated that it’s not helpful to simply criminalize and demonize Indigenous men as sites of violence. An example brought up was the Crazy Indian Brotherhood who are stereotyped and discriminated against by white settler society because they are an all-Indigenous group. It was surmised that white settler society feels threatened even though they do good work for Indigenous people. Non-Indigenous shelters like the Lethbridge Shelter lack meaningful relationships with Indigenous women because there is a disconnection with the staff in relation to the clients - it feels institutionalized and not welcoming and staff seem to disregard the importance of relational understanding among staff and front-line workers.

Solutions

The following findings are grouped in accordance with what the participants highlighted as either possible solutions that have not been incorporated or as practices they see as making a positive difference in the way service provision is approached and delivered. Indigenous women face complex challenges which require a combination of solutions. Many Indigenous women don't choose to leave the reserve, but there is a lack of services and opportunities on reserves that drive many people away. The impacts of settler colonialism mean that approaches must be holistic. There is a dire need for more comprehensive shelter services that provide support for both single women, and women with children with Indigenous-focused support. Any new shelter services must take into account women with children. While the focus of this report is on the

opportunities and challenges in implementing an Indigenous women's emergency, participants shared that there was a need for transitional housing support. Many Indigenous women have difficulty finding housing when they leave an emergency shelter. Band-aid solutions' approaches of emergency shelter services contribute to reproducing cycles of homelessness because the institutions are only required to take a person in for a certain amount of time and then the women are turned back onto the streets. Shelters must employ a holistic outlook when implementing services such as more comprehensive services that offer long-term support for Indigenous women. Changes in policy would allow more Indigenous women to access services. It is also important to ensure the safety of all Indigenous women in the shelters. One participant shared that "people who are in active addictions maybe shouldn't mix with people who are trying to stay off drugs."

Expanding on Indigenous cultural and traditional healing aspects and building a better network of support connections was mentioned by one participant. Our research found that non-Indigenous shelter providers are attempting to bring in cultural 'stuff' but there was no mention of bringing in Indigenous partners to assist in implementing cultural programming. While some of the non-Indigenous participants expressed support for more Indigenous cultural inclusion in professional development, the focus was also on increasing cultural competency, yet it is not at all questioned why training is needed to treat other people with respect and dignity. The Lethbridge Shelter participants highlighted how "We do cultural training" and unconscious bias training. Empirical research has found that unconscious bias is ineffective for people who are accepting of racism which does very little to destabilize the normalization of racism in Lethbridge because it is socially acceptable and encouraged.

To mitigate cultural disconnection and increase relational connection, participants expressed that there must be a prioritization of Indigenous inclusion in hiring practices with more Indigenous peoples in leadership roles. Hiring Indigenous people with lived-experience means they are better able to connect with Indigenous women because they've been through the suffering and offer a perspective consistent with the everyday realities that Indigenous women face. Other participants cited a severe lack of involvement from the local First Nations' leadership and given that it's the Blackfoot people who are most affected by the high number of Indigenous homelessness in Lethbridge, Blackfoot leadership involvement is needed.

Transitional housing programs should incorporate Indigenous culture and traditional healing practices such as Elders' advising and support, smudge, and drumming as well as holistic practices such as healing circles. Another participant mentioned the importance of basic life skills such as opportunities to increase cooking and cleaning. Group activities allow for fostering collective consciousness and healthy relationships based in trust and healing to mitigate the ongoing effects of disconnection rooted in colonialism. Cultural development is key and our conversations with some participants advance the need for shelters to decolonize both their philosophies and methods.

When asked what an ideal outcome for an implementation of an Indigenous women's shelter would be, participants answers were varied but all spoke to the making more space for

women and children and while it isn't ideal to focus on just women, there was an acknowledgement that Indigenous women are the most vulnerable to abuse and violence. Confronting and addressing lateral violence was also seen as part of the solution. The city of Lethbridge must form more meaningful partnerships with Indigenous-led groups and reserve leadership. In terms of law enforcement, some participants highlighted that LPS needed more meaningful training to respectfully deal with Indigenous people beyond the Indigenous awareness training they already engage in.

In terms of physical location, an Indigenous women's emergency shelter needs to be placed in a safe location in order to keep clients safe from further victimization, violence and chances that would risk them falling into addictions or relapsing. Municipalities must make better decisions as to where to house the vulnerable and shelter providers must be more inclusive and provide staff with critical antiracism education to work with Indigenous women more effectively. The complexity of Indigenous women's experiences often requires separate solutions apart from settler or immigrant approaches. Indigenous women are not immigrants and approaches to service provision cannot be a one-size-fits all. Shelter services providers require more trauma-informed training and the focus should be on keeping families together rather than separating them.

Indigenous Women's Rights

Part of a solutions-based approach, according to critical participant perspectives, was to ensure that Indigenous women are aware of what their rights are. Moreover, reframing shelter provision policies to embed Indigenous practice and programming as a right of Indigenous women was seen as vital to change the current outcomes and ensure that Indigenous women receive the kind of support that would make a difference in their lives. Awo Taan has proven to be a trailblazer in this arena. The Director shared that,

> There are the crisis workers at Awo Taan who informs them [women] of their rights. If they refer them to Alberta Works, they'll tell them about their rights on where they can get assistance. If they say they cannot give you assistance, we will talk on your behalf or if there is child welfare involved, the Indigenous workers at Awo Taan really support them through the court and right now we have a court worker that will help the Indigenous women if they are going through court."

Informing women of their rights should be seen as a right in and of itself.

Need for Collaboration

Our conversations with participants further highlight that improving current approaches must involve increasing collaboration. Lethbridge has high racism and an overall lack of collaboration with larger Lethbridge municipal agencies making little effort to collaborate with each other or the surrounding communities. There must be an acknowledgement of the lack of collaboration amongst municipal agencies to stand together and support one another. Within the ACWS, support for Indigenous women's shelters must be prioritized as opposed to simply stating that "Indigenous women's shelters are choosing to walk their own path." Our conversations with Indigenous shelter providers revealed that they didn't choose to walk their

own path but were marginalized within the ACWS structure to the point that they felt no alternative but to break away. This begs the question of where the support is of the much larger ACWS. Indeed, improved collaboration is needed between varying shelter providers as well. There is also a lack of collaboration among Indigenous shelter agencies in Alberta and one Indigenous women's shelter is led by a non-Indigenous director who refuses to work with the other Indigenous-led shelter agencies. The Indigenous participants informed that non-Indigenous-led shelter organizations are unsure how to implement programs that work collaboratively with Indigenous people. Competition for resources is a barrier to achieving true collaboration. The western capitalist system is a hindrance in an area that requires a collaborative effort. Another participant pointed to Lethbridge as having small town attitudes which make many organizations resistant to collaboration.

The fractured relationship between the city and surrounding reserves must be addressed. Further, on reserve challenges need to also be addressed such as lateral violence and one non-Indigenous shelter provider stated that lateral violence is a problem within the women's shelter structure with both clients and staff. Better communication strategies are needed to mitigate gossip, lateral violence.

Success has already been seen with the collaboration between the Sage Clan which advised the Lethbridge Watch on how to interact with people on the streets, so they are more effective in building relationships. Currently, Sage Clan regularly collaborates with the City and that partnership could be used as a model. The Indigenous participants stated that there must be close collaboration with Indigenous partners, organizations, and communities/reserves and support from leaders from the surrounding Blackfoot reserves.

Humility

This finding reflects what is needed for collaboration to take root. Collaboration with Indigenous-led shelter organizations requires that non-Indigenous people accept that they have something to learn from Indigenous organizations. Non-Indigenous people must relinquish control and listen to Indigenous voices. Humility is a precursor to respect and based on the perspectives of our Indigenous participants, the city needs to show more respect to the homeless populace. Humility is required to effectively work with Indigenous people, groups, and health professionals in order to provide exceptional care for the homeless population in ways that incorporate cultural programming, Elders, Indigenous health care professionals. It was expressed that Indigenous-led organizations like the Sage Clan are not taken seriously by the city. Indeed, non-Indigenous municipal shelter services need to take on a learning role to make collaboration with Indigenous-led shelter service providers possible. Decolonization also requires humility.

Data Needs

In order for effective planning to take place, the participants highlighted that there is a need for data. On the reserve, the focus is on developing quantitative data collection to better assess cases. One way to mitigate lack of government support is to develop data to appeal for government funding. Indigenous people are by far the highest population on the streets. There is limited data sharing and a lack of collaboration/cooperation by organizations to share data even

for the sake of this needs assessment. The ACWS refused to share data to support this needs assessment. Many times over, participants spoke of the need for more precise and clearer data to inform service implementation, as well as collaboration with other organizations yet gathering data for this needs assessment was incredibly difficult.

Appendix B: Survey Findings

In July 2022, we reached out to two agencies, the Indigenous Recovery Coaching program in Lethbridge and the Pincher Creek Women's Emergency Shelter, and provided them with a questionnaire to distribute amongst their clients that identified as Indigenous women. The survey results concluded in August 2022. In total, 23 Indigenous women with lived-experience currently residing in emergency shelters or experiencing homelessness agreed to complete the questionnaire. The following is a summary of the quantitative findings.

Question 1: How long have you been in your current situation?

The question was categorized to days, months, and years. Twenty-six percent of the women indicated days, thirty percent stated months, while over forty-three percent of the women stated years.

Question 2: What does this shelter offer that has made your stay comfortable?

Majority of the women that responded - thirty percent stated that the supportive staff in the shelter made their stay comfortable. Twenty two percent said having access to their basic needs such as food, clothing, and shelter helped them stay comfortable. While the remainder of the women that replied said that the safety it provided them made them feel comfortable; and some mentioned referrals to different resources while some said staff were unfriendly causing their stay to be uncomfortable.

Question 3: What services do you wish the shelter provided?

Approximately thirty-five percent of the women that responded said they wish there was better community advocacy provided to them in shelter. Over seventeen percent reported that they wish there were ethical sensitivity within the shelter. Thirteen percent stated cultural services would be helpful to access while staying in a shelter.

Question 4: Have you accessed a women's shelter more than once?

The participants were asked if they had accessed a women's shelter prior to this stay, sixty-one percent reported their current stay in the shelter as their first time. While thirty-five percent of the respondents indicated that they have used shelter spaces more than once. One participant chose not to respond to the question.

Question 5: When did you decide to come here, what did you think this shelter would do for you?

The participants were asked what they thought the shelter would do for them when they decided to come here. Nearly thirty-five percent of the women thought they would receive safety and support. While twenty-two percent of the women assumed they would be assisted in accessing housing and financial support. Thirteen percent stated they'd hope to access useful resources to assist them in their current situation. Twenty-four percent of the participants assumed shelter would help them with childcare/family connections and teach them life skills.

Question 6: What was the most helpful thing that happened when you were staying in a shelter?

When participants were asked what was the most helpful thing that happened for them while staying in a shelter, over thirty-four percent said having access to counseling and support. Twenty-six percent of the women responded that having access to their basic needs were helpful. While thirteen percent of the respondents indicated that staff relationships were deemed beneficial while staying in shelter.

Question 7: What was the least helpful thing that happened when you were staying in a shelter?

Over thirty-four percent of the respondents stated that unsupportive staff in the shelter was the least helpful thing they encountered while staying in a shelter. Nearly twenty-two percent of the respondents chose not to answer the question while thirty-nine percent of the women reported that either theft, illicit substances, or other clients were the least helpful.

Question 8: To finish, we'd like to know if this shelter is working out for you?

Out of the twenty-three respondents that replied, ninety percent said Yes that the shelter is working out for them while ten percent reported No.

Question 9: Are there things that could be done here that could make this shelter better for Indigenous clients?

Thirty-five percent said No that nothing needs to be done to make this shelter better for Indigenous clients. Twenty-six percent of respondents said more Indigenous staff, elders, and cultural support offered in shelter. Seventeen percent of the participants said the service providers need to be more understanding. While the rest of the respondents indicated that there needs to be more aftercare services, housing support, intergenerational trauma education and therapy/counseling.