2013-12-09

Captain of the Ship, Not Master of the Sea: The Social Organization of Service Delivery to Sheltered Homeless Families

Tézli, Annette

UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

Captain of the Ship, Not Master of the Sea

– The Social Organization of Service Delivery to Sheltered Homeless Families –

by

Annette Tézli

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE

DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY

CALGARY, ALBERTA

December, 2013

Abstract

Despite decades of research, homelessness remains a paradoxical feature of even the most affluent societies, including Canada. Since the early 1980s, there has been a renewed academic and policy interest in homelessness. Existing research is predominantly quantitative in nature and focuses on the identification of individual-level factors contributing to homelessness. A growing body of research focuses on the ways in which institutional environments produce "the homeless" as knowable subjects and shape their day-to-day experiences. My dissertation explores ethnographically the social organization of service provision to homeless families at the Guest House, a Calgary family shelter. I conducted in-depth interviews with shelter guests and staff, engaged in participant observation, and analyzed various documents, such as institutional records, policy documents, and news reports.

My discussion begins with an account of individual experiences of becoming homeless and shelter life, which is based on nine in-depth interviews with shelter guests. My attention then shifts to the social practices that shaped these experiences. To understand the context in which services to homeless families are provided at the Guest House, I examine the processes that shaped the institutional foundation of the Guest House. My discussion continues with an examination of the complex, socially organized processes, such as policy mandates, funding stipulation and structures of accountability, that shape day-to-day practices of shelter staff and administrators. This discussion is based on data I generated through extensive participation in those shelter practices as a volunteer and frontline staff member.

Using the example of shelter-admission decisions, I show how homeless families are transformed into shelter residents. While staff members have the discretion to admit or reject shelter-seeking families, their decisions are shaped by realities that are beyond the control of

individual actors, such as economic conditions, the real estate market organizational stipulations, funding provisions, and political mandates imposed by *Calgary's Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness*. My discussion demonstrates that institutional practices do not originate exclusively within the institution itself, but are organized by principles located outside the organization. In other words, shelter staff might be the captain of their ship, but they are not the master of the sea.

Acknowledgements

Conducting and writing this ethnography was an exciting, instructive, eye-opening, and sometime arduous process. I owe much thanks to all the people who were involved and supported me in this journey. For two years, shelter guests and staff shared their wisdom, hopes and sorrow with me and without their insights, I could not have written this dissertation.

Equally important was the guidance and support my supervisor Dr. Liza McCoy provided over the last few years. You provided me the freedom to venture out on my own, but your critical questions and thoughtful suggestions made sure I did not lose my focus. You believed in me and this dissertation when I didn't and encouraged me to keep going when I was ready to give up. I truly appreciate all of your help. I would also like to thank the members of my dissertation committee Dr. Gillian Ranson, whose thorough copy editing and thoughtful comments kept the list of revisions short, and Dr. David Este. For their feedback during the defence I would like to thank Dr. Alan Smart and Dr. Henry Parada.

I would like to acknowledge the faculty of the Department of Sociology for everything they taught me over the last few years, as well as Jordan Bell for always being there to chat and cheering me on. Many thanks to my former mentor, the late Dr. Margie Zamudio, who taught me to be critical and stand up for what I believe in. I also would like to thank former colleagues Dr. Tracy Nielsen and Dr. Isha Sharma for their wisdom, inspiration, and guidance. I truly enjoyed working with you and miss you every day.

Last but not least, a special thanks to my family and friends in Germany, Hungary, and Canada. Without your unwavering support I could not have made it through this process. Thank you for your love, patience, and encouragement. You mean the world to me!

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures and Illustrations

List of Symbols, Abbreviations and Nomenclature

Acronym	Definition
AISH	Assured Assistance for the Severely Handicapped
CAEH	Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness
CCEH	Calgary Committee to End Homelessness
CDA	Calgary Downtown Association
CHC	Calgary Housing Company
CHF	Calgary Homeless Foundation
CMHC	Canada Mortgage and Housing Cooperation
CUPS	Calgary Urban Project Society
DI	Calgary Drop-In & Rehab Centre
ED	Executive Director
EI	Employment Insurance
HIFIS	Homeless Individuals and Families Information System
HMIS	Homeless Management Information System
IC	interactional constructionism
IE	institutional ethnography
LICO	low-income cut off

CHAPTER I: THE MAKING OF A CRISIS

Each time history repeats itself the price goes up.
—Anonymous

I knew very little about Calgary when I first arrived in the city in August 2006. I had heard of the *Alberta Advantage* and that many millionaires call this city their home, but little else. During my first week in the city, I stayed at a downtown hostel located just down the street from the Calgary Drop-In & Rehab Centre (DI), Canada's largest homeless shelter (Calgary Drop-In & Rehab Centre 2010). The morning after my arrival, my severely jet-lagged body screaming for coffee, I started wandering around Calgary's East Village in search of my vice. The coffee brought some lucidity, and I continued my now aimless stroll which took me past the crowds scattered outside the DI, the infamous Cecil Hotel[1], the St. Louis Hotel[2], the boarded-up King Eddy, and the "Sally Ann's" [3] Centre of Hope and Booth Centre.

When I got back to the hostel, I found all the benches in the tiny park in front of the building occupied by about a dozen men, a couple of whom I had seen hanging out in front of the DI earlier. Each day, dozens of men and women would gather in the park and be periodically chased away by bylaw officers, just to be replaced by a new cohort minutes later. Congregations of homeless men and women soon became a familiar sight on my strolls through Calgary's

---

[1] The ill-reputed Cecil Hotel, "an epicenter of prostitution, drugs, murder and desperation" (Gerson 2012) said to accommodate all kinds of misfits, had long been a thorn in the City's side. In the summer of 2008, the City made an offer of purchase to the owner, and announced that it would expropriate the establishment if the two parties could not come to an agreement. They did not. In December 2008, The Cecil lost its bar's business license due to safety concerns brought forward by Calgary Police Services (Guttormson 2008a). Later that month, the City acquired the hotel for $11 million (Korn and Guttormson 2008) and shut its doors for good in February 2009 (Korn 2009).
[2] Legend had it that it was here somebody suggested to a "beer-soaked" (Calgary Herald 2010 2010) local news reporter named Ralph Klein, Alberta's future premier, to run for office, which launched his political career (CBC News 2006 2006).
[3] Nick name given to the Salvation Army.

downtown core. It struck me as odd that a reportedly affluent city like Calgary would have such a sizable homeless population.

I later learned that the East Village, located adjacent to the downtown business district, sported infamous hangouts such as the Crack Cul de Sac, known "as an area rife with drug abuse, homelessness and prostitution" (CBC News 2009). According to the City of Calgary, the "blighted 'no man's land' with serious public safety issues and very few permanent residents" (2007c, 17) is shunned by investors and the general public alike, and few people "would be willing to walk – day or night – on its dangerous, drug- and crime-riddled streets" (City of Calgary 2007c, 16).

Indeed, the economic conditions were bleak in the East Village. In 2005, the East Village had the highest share of low-income households in the city. The median household income of East Village residents amounted to a mere $17,253, 25% of Calgarians' median household income of $67,238 (City of Calgary 2010a). In addition, about half of the neighborhood's 2000 residents were homeless individuals housed at the DI or the Salvation Army and the other half low-income seniors who lived in three supported housing facilities (City of Calgary 2010b). Finally, various social service agencies are located in the East Village (City of Calgary 2005b).

After having stayed in the East Village for a week, I found news reporters' and city planners' and officials' descriptions of the neighborhood hyperbolic. As I will discuss later in this chapter, the neighborhood's negative depictions, however, have to be understood in the context of recent urban redevelopment and renewal efforts. For now, suffice it to say that staying in the East Village was an interesting and eye opening experience that would lay the foundation for this dissertation.

Once the semester started, I began to scout volunteer opportunities. Based on my initial observations during my stay in the East Village, I wanted to get involved with an agency serving the homeless. I soon came across the Guest House,[4] a small shelter that provides services predominantly, but not exclusively, to homeless families. I started volunteering at the Guest House on occasion and in fall 2006 conducted a small observation study of the nightly intake process for a methods class. About two years later, I began volunteering for the organization on a regular basis.

In the meantime I was working on developing research ideas for my dissertation research. Based on my involvement with the Guest House, I developed an academic interest in family homelessness as a social phenomenon. Furthermore, my familiarity with the organization made the Guest House a logical choice for my site of systematic inquiry. After reviewing the academic literature pertaining to family homelessness, I set out to ethnographically explore how sheltered families define themselves as a family, establish and maintain their family unit, and provide for themselves in the absence of commonly accepted markers of family life, like the privacy of a home. Furthermore, I was interested in how sheltered parents accomplish the work of raising their children under difficult circumstances, what joys and challenges they experience on a daily basis, and what hopes and concerns they have in regard to their children's future. However, while I proposed to start my research at the individual level, I intended to also examine the social and institutional contexts in which research participants were embedded to understand the social processes that organize their experience.

[4] I changed the name of the organization to protect the identity of its residents and staff.

After a lengthy ethics approval process described in more detail in Chapter III, I began my observations and interviews with homeless families sheltered through the Guest House in summer 2009. As I navigated my way through the guest interviews, however, I inadvertently started to change my research focus. I realized quickly, that I, the research, and the families I interacted with, the research participants, problematized very different aspects of the shelter stay.

For example, the assumption that shelter life had a significant impact on the day-to-day life of a homeless family was built on my middle-class notions of privacy and self-determination. For many of the families I interviewed, however, the communal set-up of the shelter did not differ markedly from the shared accommodations families had lived in before coming to the shelter. I also discovered that for many families involvement with social service providers was a taken-for-granted characteristic of day-to-day life. Consequently, shelter life with all its autonomy-abdicating processes was perceived as just another variant of the surveillance experienced by families who lived most of their lives under the watchful gaze of numerous institutions, such as the child welfare system or the social assistance system.

One topic of conversation that emerged consistently in my interviews with various families at the Guest House was their ambivalence about shelter life. While families were deeply grateful for having a safe place to stay, they felt controlled and stifled by stringent shelter rules and demeaned by the staff's enforcement of those rules. However, my involvement with the Guest House as a volunteer had provided me with some initial glimpses into the complexities and intricacies of providing services to homeless families. I got the sense that, while entirely understandable, some of the shelter guests' simplistic and generalizing perceptiona of the shelter staff as mean spirited glossed over the principles and processes that guided their day-to-day work of service delivery. Based on the accounts the interviews generated, my interest shifted slightly

from the social organization of family life in the shelter environment to the social organization of service provision to homeless families.

I returned to the academic literature for guidance, but soon realized that while much has been written on the characteristics and experiences of homeless families, the emergence and organization of the family shelter system remains "largely unexamined" (Friedman 2000, 4). Existing research in the area examines shelter life either from the perspective of the clients (see, for example, DeWard and Moe 2010; Friedman 2000; Glisson, Thyer, and Fischer 2001; Hoffman and Coffey 2008; Liebow 1993) or the institution and its staff (see, for example, Holden 1997; Joniak 2005; Karabanow 1999; Kosny and Eakin 2008). Very few studies examine in detail the complex interaction between service providers and service users (see, for example, Marvasti 2002; Marvasti 2003; Spencer 1997; Spencer and McKinney 1997; Williams 2003). Moreover, most researchers focus on what is happening within shelter walls, paying little attention to the various social processes external to the shelter itself that shape how it can delivers its services. My goal thus was to explore the complex social world of a Calgary family shelter from the perspective of clients, staff, and administrators to gain a deeper understanding of how that social world presents itself to each.

While my research started with the insights provided by shelter guests themselves, who, as knowing subjects and producers of the social world, are active contributors in the knowledge generation process (Smith 1989), my research focus shifted away from their day-to-day experience of living in a homeless shelter to the social processes that organize their day-to-day experiences. While people, through their knowledge of and activities in the world, are active producers of the social or aspects of it, individuals' activities do not occur at random but are coordinated by various social relations (DeVault and McCoy 2006). The work of service delivery

at the Guest House is shaped by various broader, translocally organized work processes (DeVault and McCoy 2006). Thus, rather than treating the shelter as an independently operating entity, I took into account that the Guest House is embedded in intricate social, political, and economic environments which all shape and thus organize service delivery within the shelter's confines.

The remainder of this chapter will set the stage for my analysis of the social organization of service delivery to homeless families at a Calgary family shelter. I will provide a description of the economic, political, and social context in which my research is situated. As I will show throughout this dissertation, this very context directly and indirectly shaped the Guest House's day-to-day work of delivering services to homeless families and thereby the day-to-day experience of those families.

The State of the Canadian Economy

By any measure, Canada remains one of the most prosperous countries in the world and experienced uninterrupted economic growth for more than a decade until the onset of the economic downturn in 2008. Canada's Gross Domestic product (GDP), one major economic indicator, declined only temporarily in 2008 and the first half of 2009 and has been increasing again since mid-2009 (Cross 2011; Statistics Canada 2010). According to Cross, the latter suggests that, compared to other G7 nations, the effects of the downturn on the Canadian economy were short lived and moderate, and that the recovery from the global recession is "essentially complete in Canada" (2011, para. 2).

However, Canada's unemployment rate remains well above pre-recession levels. Reaching a historic low in 2007 (6.0%), the unemployment rate peaked in August 2009, when it

climbed to 8.7% (Statistics Canada 2011), and has reportedly declined to 7.2% in 2012[5] (Statistics Canada 2013a). Figure 1 on page 10 provides an overview of the development of Canada's unemployment rate between 2000 and 2012.

However, while the unemployment rate continues to decrease, a sizeable proportion of the workforce remains underemployed. Considerable employment increases, for example, have been observed among part-time workers, many of whom would prefer to work full-time, but are unable to find anything but part-time employment (Gilmore and LaRochelle-Côté 2011). Furthermore, not all employees were equally affected by recession related employment loss. With the onset of the recession, full-time employment declined at a faster rate than part-time employment, and individuals who had held their job for less than a year were more likely to be let go than long-term employees.

In addition, young men, individuals with low educational attainment (high school or less), recent immigrants, and employees of Aboriginal descent experienced the highest levels of loss of employment. Finally, the most jobs were lost in manufacturing, the natural resource industry, construction, transportation, and retail. Finally, the largest job losses were reported among low-income workers. For example, employment among workers who earned less than $10 per hour declined by almost 25% between October 2008 and October 2009 while employment among workers earning $40 or more per hour increased by nearly 13% during the same time period (LaRochelle-Côté and Gilmore 2009).

Even prior to the economic downturn, not all Canadians benefited from the country's economic growth and financial prosperity. The favorable economic conditions at the beginning

[5] For 2013, only monthly and quarterly estimates, which vary by season, are currently available.

of the 21st century indisputably contributed to a reduction in the number of Canadians living below the low-income cut off (LICO).[6] That said, in 2010, 9% of the Canadian population (10.8% in 2005) or 3.0 million individuals (3.4 million individuals in 2006) continued to live in poverty (Statistics Canada 2012).[7]

While poverty rates did decrease between 1996 and 2006, the average income gap between the 20% of families with the highest and the 20% with the lowest income continued to increase during that time period (Statistics Canada 2008). Unfortunately, data is available for no later than 2008, which makes it difficult to assess the effect of the economic downturn on Canada's low-income population. The unemployment profile discussed in the previous paragraph suggests, however, that the economic downturn disproportionately affected the low-income segment of the population.

The High Price of a Booming Economy: The Case of Alberta

Fueled by the onset of the natural resources boom in 2003, Alberta temporarily experienced "the strongest period of economic growth ever recorded by any province in Canada's history," which brought unparalleled prosperity and a $7.4 billion budget surplus to the province (Cross and Bowlby 2006, 3.1). At the time, Alberta's labor market was characterized by a substantial labor shortage, extensive job creation in high-paying sectors, and the highest employment and the lowest unemployment rate in North America (Akyeampong 2007; Cross and Bowlby 2006; Statistics Canada 2008).

---

[6] Statistics Canada's low-income cut offs (LICO) are a measure of low income and identify specific income thresholds below which households are likely to spend a considerably higher proportion of their income on basic necessities, such as housing or food, than the average household (Giles 2004).

[7] Statistics Canada maintains that the LICO does not constitute a poverty line. Some have argued that the federal government thereby avoids an official recognition of the existence of "poverty" in Canada (National 1999). However, poverty researchers frequently use the LICOs as Canada's de facto poverty line (Fellegi 2004).

The tight labor market had a positive effect on the province's wage average, which grew faster than the national average. In 2006, Alberta had the lowest share of minimum wage workers in the country (1.7%) and the average hourly wage of $21.62 was the highest in Canada (Statistics Canada 2008). In 2008, Alberta households had a real median after-tax income of $69,000 which was $17,000 higher than the national median and the highest in the country for three consecutive years (CMHC 2010a).

Alberta's boom was marketed as an unmatched success story and the *Alberta Advantage* campaign suggested that Alberta was the place "where all dreams can come true."[8] The Government of Alberta website, for example, promised that Alberta was a place "where people prosper" [9] and where "employment options are almost endless." [10] The website further suggested that "if you have a good work ethic and a strong desire to succeed you can achieve the quality of life to which you aspire." [11] Consequently, an endless stream of migrants ventured to Alberta to take advantage of the promised opportunities in the land of plenty, nearly 60,000 in 2005 alone (Gartner 2006).

With the onset of the 2008 economic downturn, however, resource-intensive economies like Alberta's experienced the largest GDP declines (Statistics Canada 2010) and Alberta had the largest recession-related job loss in the country (LaRochelle-Côté and Gilmore 2009). While Alberta's unemployment rate remained well below the national average, it nearly doubled between 2006 and 2010, increasing from 3.4% to 6.5%, respectively (Government of Alberta

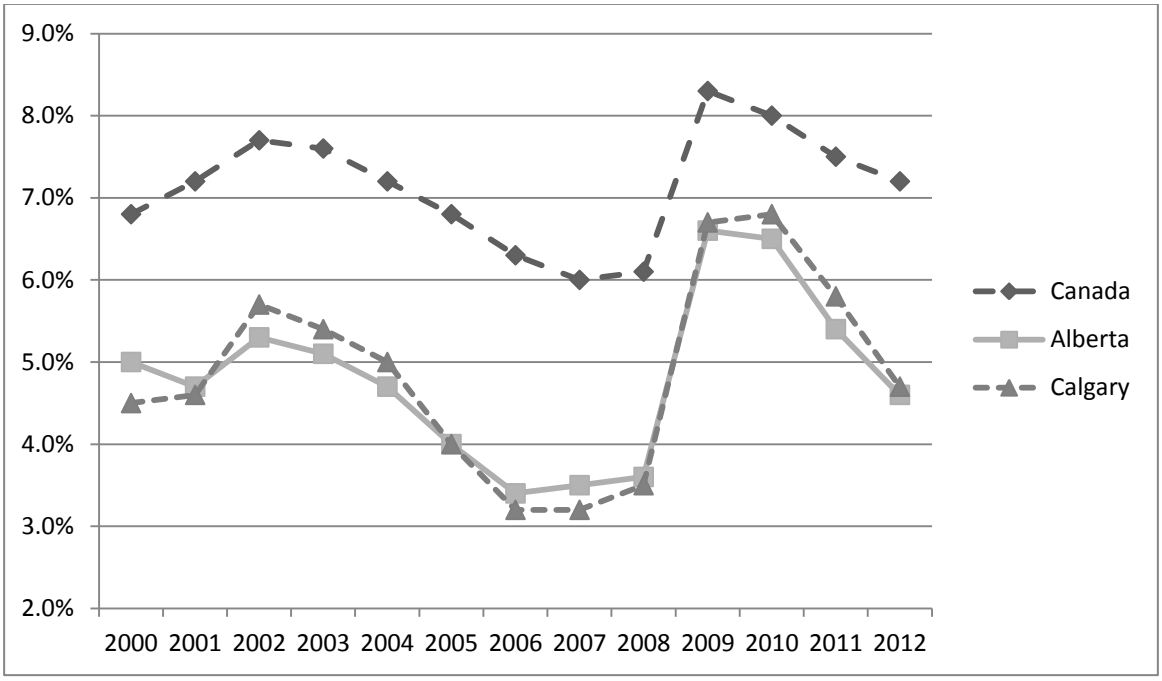
---

[8] Work in Alberta website. Retrieved May 15, 2008. http://workinabc.com/
[9] Government of Alberta website. Retrieved May 9, 2011. http://www.albertacanada.com/immigration/choosing/economic-advantages.aspx
[10] Ibid.
[11] Government of Alberta website. Retrieved May 9, 2011. http://www.albertacanada.com/immigration/choosing/economic-advantages.aspx

2011). Alberta's unemployment rate, too, has been decreasing steadily since, reaching 4.6% in 2012 (Government of Alberta 2013). Figure 1 below provides an overview of the development of Alberta's unemployment rate between 2000 and 2012.

Similarly, Calgary's unemployment rate more than doubled between 2006 and 2010, increasing from 3.2% to 6.8% (Statistics Canada 2013b), and fell from 5.7% in 2011 to 4.8% in 2012, the highest unemployment rate in the province (Government of Alberta 2013). Figure 1 provides an overview of the development of Canada's, Alberta's and Calgary's unemployment rates between 2000 and 2012.

Figure 1: Unemployment Rates for Canada, Alberta, and Calgary, 2000-2012



Source: Figures for Canada and Alberta 2000-2011 retrieved from Government of Canada.[12] Figures for 2012 retrieved from Statistics Canada (2013a). Figures for Calgary retrieved from Statistics Canada (2013b).

[12] Government of Canada website. Retrieved June 19, 2013. http://www4.hrsdc.gc.ca/cv2@-eng.jsp?iid=16&sid=8&chrtid=1

Despite the relative prosperity brought about by the favorable economic conditions in the province, many Albertans remained confined to the margins of the booming economy. In 2010, 247,000 Albertans (6.8% of Alberta's population) and an estimated 87,000 Calgarians (7.7% of Calgary's population) lived below the LICO (Statistics Canada 2012). Moreover, not all employees in Calgary experienced wage increases in the wake of the boom. Those confined to the lower margins of the income hierarchy saw their incomes stagnate if not decrease. According to the City of Calgary (2007b), the biggest employer in the city is not the oil and gas industry, but the retail and wholesale sector. While the economy was booming and employees in high-paying sectors enjoyed considerable income increases of as much as 59%, employees in the retail and wholesale sector saw their average earnings decrease by 7.4% between 1998 and 2005, earning on average $28,700 per year.

Minimum Wage Developments

As elsewhere in Canada, the minimum wage level in Alberta has not kept pace with inflation (Kauppi and Braedley 2003). Moreover, Alberta's minimum wage is $9.95, currently the second lowest in the country. Granted, Alberta continues to have the lowest number of minimum wage earners in the country[13] and after provincial taxes have been applied Alberta's minimum wage rate was the fourth highest in the country in 2012 (Government of Alberta 2012).

However, according to Vibrant Communities Calgary, a non-profit advocacy organization, a single individual with no dependants, working full-time, year-round, and earning

[13] Between April 2011 and March 2012, 1.6% of the Alberta workforce earned the minimum wage, compared to 7.0% in the Canadian workforce. Note also that the rate of minimum wage earners slightly increased in Alberta (up from 1.2%) compared to the previous year, while it decreased in Canada (down from 7.5%) (Government of Alberta 2012).

the minimum wage would currently take home an annual before-tax income of $17,745, which is well below the current before-tax LICO of $23,298 for a single individual.[14] Consequently, in order to earn a living wage, that is an income that does not fall below the LICO, Calgarians would have to earn at least $13.00 per hour ($14.50 per hour without benefits). In 2008, 90,000 Calgarians, 60% of whom were women, in other words 10.8% of the employed population earned less than the living wage. [15]

Welfare Program Retrenchments

In light of an ever-growing government deficit, the federal government implemented a number of cost-cutting measures throughout the 1990s, which ultimately contributed to a decline of the Canadian welfare state (Fallis 2010; Gorlick and Brethour 1998; Lightman and Riches 2000). For example, in 1996/1997, Canada's Unemployment Insurance program was substantially reformed. The Employment Insurance (EI) program, which replaced the old Unemployment Insurance program, was characterized by, among other measures, tightened eligibility criteria, reduced benefit periods, and reduced maximum benefit rates to encourage employment (Van den Berg et al. 2008).

In 1996, the Canada Assistance Plan, subsuming a host of social programs and the bedrock of Canada's welfare state, was replaced by the Canada Health and Social Transfer program. Under the new policy, the federal government provides provinces with block grant transfers to cover the costs of health care, education, and social assistance programs, rather than

---

[14] Vibrant Communities Calgary website. Retrieved February 17, 2013. http://www.vibrantcalgary.com/vibrant-initiatives/living-wage/living-wage-basics/

[15] Vibrant Communities Calgary website. Accessed May 9, 2011. http://www.vibrantcalgary.com/work-vibrant/living-wage-basics/

shouldering a percentage of the actual costs as it did under the Canada Assistance Plan (Gorlick and Brethour 1998). In response to funding restructuring and subsequent transfer reductions, many provinces overhauled social assistance programs by tightening eligibility criteria and reducing benefit levels (Kauppi and Braedley 2003).

The province of Alberta, for example, has come under scrutiny for its insufficient social assistance benefit levels. In 1993, the Klein government launched an era of fiscal retrenchment in an attempt to balance the province's budget (Government of Alberta 1993b) and cuts in social assistance expenditures were expected to contribute to the overall reduction in government spending (Boessenkool 1997; Government of Alberta 1993a). After the province launched its welfare reforms in 1993, its caseload dropped by 70.5% over a 10-year period.

The decline in caseloads can only partially be attributed to the economic upswing. Tightened eligibility criteria drastically reduced the number of new cases, especially among young, healthy, single individuals, and childless couples deemed able to work (Boessenkool 1997). In 2007, 48,100 Albertans received Income Support, and 36,100 relied on Assured Assistance for the Severely Handicapped (AISH). [16] Since benefit levels were cut by nearly half between 1986 and 2003 (Roy 2004), many Albertans relying on social assistance struggle to make ends meet and often have incomes that fall well below the LICO.

As of November 2008, the monthly Core Essential Benefit for a couple with two children in the expected to work category, for example, is $521 per month. The benefit is designated for food, clothing, household needs (furniture, appliances, supplies), personal needs, telephone,

[16] Human Resources and Skills Development Canada website. Retrieved May 10, 2011. http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/publications_resources/social_policy/sasr_2007/page12.shtml

laundry, and transportation.[17] The same family's monthly Core Shelter Benefit would amount to $575.[18]

Since the early 1990s, provincial and federal funding for public housing development has steadily decreased, and, to date, Canada remains without a comprehensive, federal housing strategy (Fallis 2010; Kauppi and Braedley 2003). In 1993, the federal government ceased to provide any further funding for new public housing development (Kauppi and Braedley 2003). In 2000, the province of Alberta followed suit and opted to withdraw from the social housing market, transferring ownership of and responsibility for the administration of social housing units to the municipalities in which they were located (City of Edmonton 2001). The province thereby reduced the supply of public housing and, in the context of its welfare reform, decided to cut shelter allowances of social assistance recipients (Cooper 2001). As I will discuss below, Calgary's tight housing market, a by-product of the economic boom, presents serious challenges for social assistance recipients whose shelter allowance is no match for high housing prices in the city.

A Precarious Housing Market

Alberta's booming economy and subsequent population growth substantially increased the demand for housing, a demand not met by Calgary's existing residential housing stock (City of Calgary 2007b). The average price of a residential home nearly doubled over the span of only four years, increasing from $220,000 in 2004 to $427,000 in 2012, which is well above the

---

[17] Government of Alberta website. Retrieved May 10, 2011. http://employment.alberta.ca/AWonline/IESA/4125.html
[18] Government of Alberta website. Retrieved May 10, 2011. http://employment.alberta.ca/AWonline/IESA/4121.html

Canadian average of $350,000 (CTV News 2012a). [19] In addition, Calgary's rental apartment universe steadily decreased from 50,000 apartments in 1994 (CMHC 2009) to 33,775 units in 2012 (CMHC 2012). Many of Calgary's apartments were converted into condominiums and condominium conversion by far exceeded the construction of new rental units in the city.[20] Thus, the construction of new rental units is not keeping pace with the loss of existing units.[21] Moreover, newly constructed apartments were designated predominantly for assisted housing, such as subsidized housing for low-income households, and thus did not contribute significantly to the city's rental stock(CMHC 2009).[22] Finally, a considerable quantity of rental units have been demolished to make room for (predominantly non-residential) construction projects (City of Calgary 2007b).

Consequently, vacancy rates in the city plummeted from 4.4% in 2003 to 0.5% in 2006, with vacancy rates being particularly low for apartments in lower rent brackets. While vacancy rates increased temporarily during the 2008 economic downturn, they have been steadily declining again since, reaching 1.3% on 2012 (CMHC 2012). Low vacancies in turn drove the cost of housing up at an explosive rate. The average rent for a two-bedroom apartment, for example, increased from $806 in 2004 to $1,150 in 2012 (CMHC 2012). The subsequent shortage of affordable housing units was particularly hard on low-income Calgarians, whose income was no match for the ever-increasing costs of housing (Gibson 2007).

---

[19] Various reports suggest that compared to other Canadian metropolitan areas, high average incomes make homes affordable in Calgary despite their relatively high costs (see, for example, Bégin 2013).
[20] In 2007, for example, 1,750 apartments in the city were converted into condominiums (CMHC 2010b).
[21] In 2012, for example, 203 apartments were converted into condominiums, but only 70 newly constructed rental units were added to the housing stock (CMHC 2012).
[22] For example, in 2009, only 32 of the newly finished 146 apartment units were added to the rental stock (CMHC 2009). Similarly, in 2010, only 3 apartments were added to the rental stock as 238 of the 241 completed apartments were designated social housing units (CMHC 2010b).

The Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) suggests that households should not spend more than one third of their before-tax income on housing, including utilities. In Calgary, the average monthly rent for a market bachelor apartment was $776 in 2012. The $575 shelter allowance of the fictional family of four mentioned above falls short by $201 of the average monthly rent for a *bachelor*, and by $521 of the average monthly rent for a *three-bedroom* apartment ($1,096), arguably an adequate sized unit for that family (CMHC 2012).

In 2010, average monthly rent for a bachelor apartment was $711. A person earning minimum wage ($8.80 at the time), working full-time, year-round, would have a monthly affordable rent limit of $458 if he or she followed the CMHC recommendation. Just to recap, in order to rent a bachelor apartment in Calgary without overspending on housing, an individual would have to earn almost $14 an hour. Let me repeat the calculations for a one-bedroom apartment in the city. The average one-bedroom apartment rented for $895 per month, which is about twice as much as the monthly affordable rent limit of our minimum wage earner. In order to rent a one-bedroom without overspending, an individual would have to earn $17.11 per hour (City of Calgary 2011b). Table 1 summarizes figures for the two examples provided above.

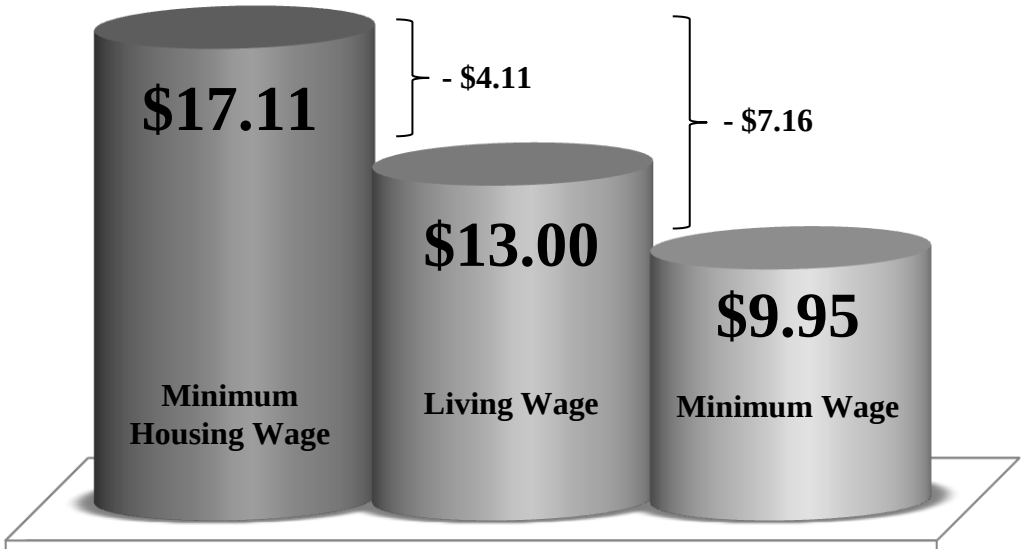
Table 1: Minimum Housing Wage for a Single Individual in 2010

	bachelor	**1 bedroom**
Monthly affordable rent limit	$458	$458
Average monthly rent	$711	$895
Amount overspent	**$253**	**$437**
Minimum wage	$8.80/h	$8.80/h
Minimum housing wage required	$13.67/h	$17.21/h
Hourly shortfall	**$4.87/h**	**$8.41/h**

Source: City of Calgary (2011b)

It is worth noting here that the figures above reflect the situation in 2010, a time where vacancies had increased and rents decreased slightly after the economic downturn of 2008. For 2012, CMHC reported an average monthly rent of $776 for a bachelor apartment, $958 for a 1-bedroom apartment and 1,150 for a 2-bedroom apartment. Although the minimum wage has increased over the last two years, so have the rents, making the situation for low-income earners even more dire. Considering figures provided above, the hourly "minimum housing wage" for 2010 was $7.36 higher than the current minimum wage of $9.95 per hour and $4.11 more than the living wage suggested by Vibrant Communities Calgary. Figure 2 below provides a graphic representation of the different wage levels.

Figure 2: Minimum Housing Wage, Living Wage, and Minimum Wage at a Glance



It is thus not surprising that many low-income Calgarians struggle to make ends meet. About 38,610 households (37% of all renters), most notably singles living alone and single parents with children, overspent on rent in 2008 and were thus at imminent risk of becoming homeless (City of Calgary 2009b). Among low-income households, the proportion of households

that overspend on housing is even higher. Of the 15,685 households in Calgary who had an annual income of $10,000-19,999 (social assistance recipients, for example), 85.2% overspent on rent each month (City of Calgary 2011a). At the same time, 33,585 households that owned their own home (12% of all homeowners) overspent on housing (City of Calgary 2009b).

Non-market housing providers, such as the city-owned Calgary Housing Company (CHC) which operates approximately 10,000 subsidized and affordable apartments, are unable to meet the demand for low-income housing. In 2011, the CHC had 3,000 applicants on their waiting list[23], and some applicants have to wait as long as two years for an apartment to become available (City of Calgary 2005a). In addition, the market approach to the provision of social housing has failed to supply sufficient low-income housing options in Calgary (City of Calgary 2002, 2005a).

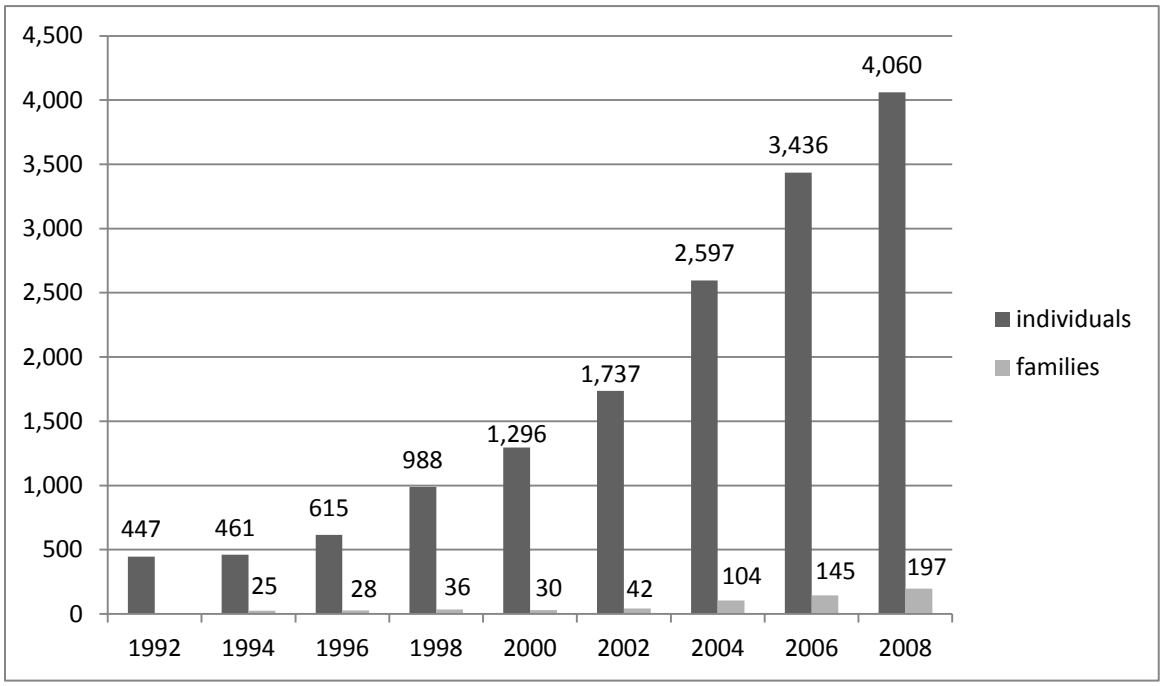
Calgary's Growing "Homeless Crisis"

In light of the structural developments outlined above, it is not surprising that Calgary, in recent years, made headlines for having the fastest growing homeless population in Canada, which is often referred to as "an *unfortunate* byproduct" of Calgary's booming economy (van Rassel 2012, emphasis is mine). The city's per capita rate of homelessness now exceeds that of urban centres such as Toronto or New York City (Laird 2007). The City's last official count, conducted in 2008, determined that 4,060 individuals were homeless in Calgary, an increase of 18% over the 2006 count (City of Calgary 2008) and an 800% increase since 1992, an increase

[23] Calgary Housing Company website. Retrieved on May 9, 2011. http://www.calgary.ca/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS_6_0_780_237_0_43/http%3B/content.calgary.ca/CCA/City+Hall/Business+Units/Office+of+Land+Servicing+and+Housing/Affordable+housing/Calgary+housing+company/Application+process/How+Long.htm

which cannot be explained by population growth alone (CCEH 2008). [24] The bi-annual count further determined that 197 families found themselves without a home in 2008; 190 of them included dependent children (City of Calgary 2008). [25] As elsewhere in Canada, families accompanied by minor children now constitute the fastest growing segment of the homeless population in Calgary (Kauppi and Braedley 2003). Figure 3 provides an overview of the increase in Calgary's homeless population between 1992 and 2008.

Figure 3: The Development of the Homeless Population in Calgary, 1998-2008



Calgary's shelter system could not keep up with the rapid increase of the city's homeless population and operated near capacity year round. During every cold season, the local

[24] Between 1992 and 2008, the City of Calgary bi-annually enumerated its homeless population on a selected night in the month of May. This point-in-time count took into account individuals who received services through more than 70 homeless-serving organizations and agencies (City of Calgary 2008). The City's count heavily relied on data provided by the different service agencies, and thus "cannot capture the true extend or magnitude of homelessness" in Calgary (City of Calgary 2009a, ii).

[25] Note that the Guest House, which is only one of several family shelters in the city, claimed to have alone served 265 separate families in 2008 (Guest House 2008a).

newspapers were flooded with articles reporting that shelters had to turn away homeless individuals due to a shortage of shelter beds. The DI's program director noted, "We are turning away 100 to 130 [people] a night and that's only the people we know of. That's not counting those who through word-of-mouth don't even bother showing up" (Cryderman and Seskus 2006). Similarly, the Guest House's executive director warned,

> The number of homeless families in our city is up dramatically from previous years. [The Guest House] is currently helping over 100 family members almost every night, which is a 40 per cent increase over the same time last year. (City of Calgary 2006)

The DI's executive director further pointed out that conditions at the DI have become intolerable when it operates over capacity for extended periods of time. He noted, "We're past the point of being able to manage…We've reached a very dangerous point, causing stress, levels of violence that are intolerable and increasing the risk of contagious diseases" (Calgary Herald 2006a).

News reports called the drastic increase of the homeless population "scary," "worrying," "alarming," "heartbreaking," and "an imminent crisis." Pointing to the province's mandate to meet its residents' basic needs, city officials called for a commitment from the provincial and federal governments to address the "homeless problem" in Calgary (Guttormson 2006a). Alberta's premier, Ralph Klein, however, pointed out that the government's "contribution seven years ago was nil. We've pumped $20 million into the homeless situation since then...so I think we are doing enough, yes" (Canadian Press NewsWire 2006).

As local shelters unsuccessfully scrambled to keep up with the increasing demand for shelter beds, the City of Calgary turned transit vehicles into warming stations and provided funds to shelter homeless individuals in unused buildings (City of Calgary 2007a). In winter 2004, for example, the city spent a considerable sum to transform a closed hotel slated for demolition into a temporary family shelter (City of Calgary 2004a). In winter 2006, the city spent $1.5 million to

turn a former furniture warehouse slated for demolition into a temporary winter overflow shelter for homeless individuals.

The plans for the overflow shelter, however, outraged residents of adjacent residential areas, whose adamant objection to the project delayed the opening of the shelter by several weeks. One local resident argued, "Everyone I talk to, everyone I deal with day-in, day-out are completely, totally against it. We've got enough problems as it is with homeless people and crackheads, drug dealers, pimps, prostitutes. The community's had enough." Another resident living in proximity to the proposed overflow shelter reported having given notice to his landlord as he had no interest living next to a homeless shelter. He explained, "I've got too much valuable stuff to have street people hanging around" (Komarnicki 2006).

The opposition and subsequent delays forced the city to temporarily house homeless individuals in the city's Stampede Grandstand buildings until the opening of the temporary winter overflow shelter. The shelter opened mid-December 2006 and was closed on April 1st, despite pleas from the service provider community to extend operation of the shelter until the latest winter storm, which had just hit the city, had passed. However, the old warehouse stood in the way of a $90 million construction project, which was not to be delayed (McGinnis 2007). For the time being, the now-displaced residents of the winter overflow shelter were temporarily housed in the Emergency Medical Services vehicle maintenance garage (Komarnicki 2007).

In addition, concerns pertaining to the societal and financial costs of homelessness began to enter the public debate. In 2003, the Calgary Homeless Foundation (CHF) and the Edmonton Joint Planning Committee on Housing commissioned a report on the societal costs of homelessness in Calgary and Edmonton. The report was based on a survey of local service providers and suggested that service provision to Calgary's homeless population consumed an

estimated $67.5 million in 2002. [26] This estimate included shelter operating costs, the estimated value of volunteer labor, and capital costs needed for shelter upkeep and development (CHF 2003). Another report, commissioned by the CHF a few years later, estimated that the annual costs of homelessness in Calgary for 2006/2007 amounted to about $324 million, or $94,202 per homeless individual. The report further suggested that the chronic homeless consume a disproportionate amount of resources and "are responsible" for about half of the costs incurred (CHF 2008, 2). [27;28]

The increasing visibility of homeless individuals in Calgary's downtown core as well as rising "concerns about drugs, shoplifting, loitering and aggressive panhandling" "'making citizens and customers uncomfortable'" (McGinnis 2005) encouraged groups such as the Calgary Downtown Association (CDA), a non-profit organization representing local business interests, to take action. Since DCA "member businesses are angry and frustrated by aggressive panhandling on downtown streets" (Braid 2006) and "businesses and pedestrians in the downtown core had placed the problem of panhandlers as one of their top priorities" (Gerson 2005a), the CDA started a controversial "'aggressive public awareness campaign'" (Gerson 2005b).

The CDA placed ads on public transit vehicles and various downtown locations and their message was decidedly simple: do not give cash to panhandlers, donate it to homeless serving organizations instead. As the executive director of the CDA explained, "Giving to panhandlers relieves your guilt…but then you walk away and you have no idea what the consequences are"

---

[26] Since not all contacted service providers participated in the survey and many of those who did, did not keep detailed financial and/or client records, the authors suggest that the identified amount likely underestimates the actual costs of service provision "by tens of millions of dollars" (CHF 2003, II).

[27] The report suggests that the "transient homeless" cost about $72,444 *per annum*, while a chronic homeless individual incurs a cost of $134,642 each year.

[28] For a national estimate, see, for example Gaetz (2012).

(Braid 2006). One ad featured the image of a man ready to inject a coin-filled syringe into his arm and the warning caption "Your Generosity is Killing Me." Another, with the same caption featured a man passed out in a bus stop, holding a bottle from which coins spill onto his shirt. A final ad showed a man, face covered by a baseball hat and hoodie, holding on to what appears to be bars of a jail cell, but the bars are made of coins. The caption read, "Your Sympathy Keeps me on the Street." The CHF initially endorsed the campaign encouraging "all Calgarians to make a real change with [their] spare change" by "helping fund programs that address the causes of homelessness" (Roberts 2005). Similarly, Alderman Druh Farrell, who represented Ward 7 which includes the East Village stated, "I know of people who are dissuaded from coming downtown because of the amount of panhandlers and aggressive panhandlers." She continued, "I think panhandling is not solving a problem…A lot of people who give to panhandlers want to help, but there are much better ways of doing it" (Guttormson 2006b).

The ad campaign not only typecast the homeless as white, substance abusing men, it also assumed that all homeless panhandle, that they panhandle aggressively, that their panhandling makes downtown customers uncomfortable, yet they give generously when asked for money. It also assumed that the money panhandlers solicit is without exception used to feed their addictions, which ultimately keeps them on the street. Hence, giving change to panhandlers is utterly irresponsible on the part of the benefactor. The campaign was demeaning, dehumanizing, patronizing and depicted a very simplistic image of homelessness. Arguably, the campaign was not launched to help the homeless off the streets, but to sweep them off the streets "by choking off the fuel line" because "if nobody gives, nobody will beg" (Braid 2006). Moreover, various social service agencies, including the CHF, later retracted their support for the campaign, now

worried that the negative image of the homeless it depicted would discourage people from donating to the various social service organizations listed on the CDA's website.

The swelling homeless population, an overtaxed shelter system that called for the establishment of additional facilities to accommodate the ever-increasing demand for shelter beds, the problematization of the costs of service provision to the homeless, and perceived public safety issues in the downtown core all alarmed various stakeholders in the Calgary community. Recent redevelopment plans for the downtown areas, particularly the East Village and Victoria Park, sought to turn those neighborhoods characterized by vacant lots, run-down brick buildings, and desolation once again into "a thriving, productive community" (Derworiz 2006). However, development stalled as the area was "shunned by developers despite the fact it sits on a desirable riverfront stretch of land" (CBC News 2009). Wayne Stewart, former senior manager at Shell Canada and President and CEO of the CHF, pointed out that "we will not stop crime in the downtown until we solve the homeless problem…We will not regenerate the downtown until we have homes for everyone. The East Village plan is in jeopardy until we have homes for all" (Hope 2007).

Consequently, Alderman Druh Farrell, for example, stated, "It's clear that what we're doing right now isn't working. It's not just a simple solution of offering more emergency shelters" (Ferguson 2006). Similarly, then-Calgary Mayor Dave Bronconnier argued that the addition of new emergency shelters could not be the answer to Calgary's growing homeless problem, despite the evident shortage of shelter beds. He reasoned, "There cannot be more new shelters. It's not good for businesses, it's not good for the city. We want a permanent solution, not a Band-Aid approach" (Ferguson 2006).

Calgary Sets Out to End Homelessness

In 2006, after 14 years of watching the homeless population grow from count to count, community representatives decided that something needed to be done about Calgary's now evident "homeless crisis." Although the provision of Alberta residents' basic needs, such as shelter, is a provincial, not a municipal mandate, the City of Calgary decided to take matters into its own hands. The International Downtown Association had previously suggested that prevention, care, and cure are three core principles in addressing homelessness. The city accepted responsibility for prevention[29] and cure[30], but pointed out that the care for the city's homeless population, that is shelter and service provision, was not a municipal mandate, nor did the municipality have the financial resources to shoulder that responsibility (City of Calgary 2004c).

That said, the city strongly felt that it had a moral, civic, and financial responsibility to contribute to the care of Calgary's homeless population. The city noted that the majority of service providers addressing the needs of the homeless population were located in the downtown core, particularly the East Village. Contributing to the provision of care was deemed a direct city interest because the "visible evidence of unsheltered homeless people has negative impacts on the safety perceptions of other citizens and business operators, so there is indirect economic benefit to seeing that the homeless are cared for" (City of Calgary 2004c, 2).

---

[29] The City participated in the Family and Community Support Services program, a 80/20 funding partnership between the province and the city. Under the program, the city was to "design and deliver social programs that are preventive in nature to promote and enhance well-being among individuals, families, and communities…The programs developed are intended to help individuals in their community to adopt healthy lifestyles, thereby improving the quality of life and building the capacity to prevent and/or deal with crisis situations should they arise." (Government of Alberta website. Retrieved May 18, 2011. http://www.child.alberta.ca/home/1022.cfm)

[30] To that end, the City developed a Corporate Affordable Housing Strategy (City of Calgary 2002).

Apprehensive that increased municipal involvement in the care for the homeless population might further scale back provincial contributions, but lamenting the lack of leadership on part of the provincial and federal governments, the city spearheaded efforts to reduce, and ultimately end homelessness in Calgary. To that end, the CHF invited President Bush's "homeless czar" and executive director of the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, Philip Mangano, (Cryderman 2006) in September 2006 to enlighten Calgarians as to how to effectively deal with their "homeless epidemic."

Mangano, who is alternately described as a genius, evangelical apostle, and charismatic salesman, had already enticed over 200 U.S. municipalities and states to implement 10-year plans to end homelessness (Shapcott 2007). His message was clear and simple: communities have a vested moral, spiritual, cultural, and economic interest in ending homelessness, despite the erosion of provincial and federal funding (Shapcott 2007). Ending homelessness, according to Mangano, is not only a civic obligation, but also cost-effective, as eradicating homelessness is cheaper than simply managing it (Ruttan 2011). Citing Einstein's definition of insanity,[31] Mangano emphasized the need for a radically new approach to alleviating homelessness. He pointed out that "the status quo is not working. The uncoordinated, ad hoc crisis interventions for this population are more expensive and less effective" (Cryderman 2006).

Two months later, in November 2006, the president of the CHF, Wayne Stewart, announced that the city would develop and implement a plan to effectively deal with and end homelessness in Calgary (Edmonton Journal 2006). In January 2007, two dozen Calgarians, representing, among others, front-line social service agencies, foundations, all three levels of

[31] Albert Einstein is attributed to have said "Insanity: doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results."

government, and local corporations, came together as the Calgary Committee to End Homelessness (CCEH). [32]

The CCEH was determined to develop a 10-year plan modeled after reportedly successful initiatives implemented in the U.S. Snyder relayed that there "is incredible enthusiasm, momentum and determination in our city to solve this issue once and for all" (Gallagher 2007). When the CCEH embarked on its mission, Stewart commented, "It's great to see our corporate, community and political leaders stepping up. The status quo has become untenable and unsustainable. I'm especially pleased to see [the chair's] commitment to bring the key players to the table, to listen to people working on the front lines and to bring some fresh thinking and energy to the issue" (Newsdaily Canada 2007).

In January 2008, the CCEH delivered the result of the "community based initiative," which culminated in a "bold and innovative plan" (CCEH 2008, 2) to address Calgary's "homelessness crisis that is growing both in numbers and severity" (CCEH 2008, 3). *Calgary's 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness* (*10 Year Plan*) emphasizes that Calgarians have "a moral obligation to eliminate homelessness," as not doing anything to address the ever-growing number of homeless individuals would lead to a "moral and social catastrophe with serious economic implications" (CCEH 2008, 3).

The *10 Year Plan* stated that the condition of individuals suffering from mental health problems and addictions tends to disintegrate when they are homeless, leading to disproportionate and costly service use. Taking into account the projected increase in Calgary's homeless population, the *10 Year Plan* estimated that managing and warehousing the homeless

---

[32] Calgary Homeless Foundation website. Retrieved May 23, 2011. http://www.calgaryhomeless.com/default.asp?FolderID=2991

would cost Calgary's taxpayers several billion dollars over the next few years. Furthermore, the *10 Year Plan* claimed that "citizens and visitors to Calgary are often disturbed by seeing so many people experiencing homelessness on our streets. Many don't feel safe downtown at night, particularly in and near the East Village and along the Bow River pathways" (CCEH 2008, 7).

The underlying philosophy of the *10 Year Plan* is "Housing First," which suggests that homeless individuals and families should be moved into housing as quickly as possible and then be provided with supportive services deemed necessary to maintain their housing.[33] Furthermore, five broad strategies[34] and 12 guiding principles[35] now seek to address homelessness in the city. Proposed key milestones include: the elimination of family homelessness and a stabilization of the homeless population within two years of the plan's implementation, a 12.5% annual decrease of the homeless population after two years, an 85% reduction in the chronic homeless population and a 50% shelter bed reduction within five years. While the title of the *10 Year Plan* suggests that the ultimate goal is to end homelessness in Calgary within 10 years, it is somewhat misleading as the defined objective of the plan is to reduce the maximum average shelter stays to seven days within 10 years (CCEH 2008).

The City of Calgary endorsed the *10 Year Plan* in June 2008, and developed an action plan to meet the targets set forth therein that require direct city involvement (CHF 2009a). The Province of Alberta followed suit and, in March 2009, endorsed its owned agenda to address

---

[33] Conventional "Housing Ready First" approaches, on the other hand, posit that homeless individuals have to become ready for housing first by addressing their barriers to obtaining and maintaining housing before they move into permanent housing.

[34] The five core strategies are: prevention; rapid re-housing; increase of treatment options and the affordable and supportive housing stock; the improvement of data and systems knowledge; and a reinforcement of front-line agencies.

[35] Guiding principles include, for example: collective responsibility, moving people to self-reliance and independence, prioritization of the chronically homeless, consumer-centric treatment of the homeless, outcome-based service, and partnership with the private sector.

province-wide homelessness, the specifics of which are outlined in *A Plan for Alberta – Ending Homelessness in 10 Years*. As such, Alberta was the first province in Canada to develop and adopt a 10 Year Plan (Government of Alberta 2008). The municipal and provincial plans have since become the model for a national "solution to homelessness" which seeks to shift the focus "from crisis management (i.e. emergency shelters and soup kitchens) to permanent solutions" (Gaetz et al. 2013, 31). Such shift in focus, Gaetz et al. argue, has become necessary as, on the national level, "there is very little evidence of [*sic*] that we made any impact on the problem of homelessness" and thus "we can no longer justify going down the same road" (2013, 30) of "managing the crisis rather than trying to solve it" (ibid., 31).

Calgary's *10 Year Plan*, although the first of its kind in Canada, is by no means novel, but is reminiscent of existing templates, such as *A Plan, Not a Dream: How to End Homelessness in Ten Years*, a policy document released in 2000 by the U.S. based National Alliance to End Homelessness.[36] According to the CHF, the *10 Year Plan* was further informed by the report *A New Vision: What is in Community Plans to End Homelessness*, also issued by the National Alliance to End Homelessness. In a letter to the CCEH, Mangano called the city's *10 Year Plan* "most impressive and equal in entrepreneurial spirit and innovative ideas to any Plan created here in the United States." Upon the release of *Calgary's 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness*, Philip Mangano congratulated the city on its decision "to stop managing the crisis and begin ending the disgrace" (Guttormson 2008c). Mangano further applauded the city's achievement and innovative initiatives laid out in its *10 Year Plan*, some, as he said, home-

[36] The document suggests that homelessness is most effectively dealt with by taking an outcome-focused approach to ending rather than managing homelessness, to "close the front door" through homeless prevention, to "open the back door" through a housing first philosophy, and to build infrastructure to address the structural causes of homelessness (National Alliance to End Homelessness 2000).

grown and "some stolen from other places in what I call 'the art of legitimate larceny'" (Guttormson 2008c)

The CHF was entrusted with the implementation of the city's *10 Year Plan*. Founded in 1998 as a non-profit, charitable organization, the CHF has a long history of raising, managing, and allocating capital funding for projects that provide housing for homeless individuals (Calgary Homeless Foundation 2010). The organization was founded on the following core principles: "to preserve the dignity of an individual to have a place to call home, a place that is adequate, accessible, safe and affordable," "to foster respect for people experiencing homelessness," "to work in collaboration within the Calgary community" and "to advocate social responsibility to address homelessness issues."[37]

As of 2008, the CHF's new mandate is to end homelessness in Calgary. To that end, the CHF's work now focuses on providing leadership and direction to Calgary's service-provider community to address homelessness in the city. The CHF was further mandated to conduct research to identify central causes of homelessness and subsequently develop solutions to end it. In addition, the CHF oversees the creation of projects that provides access to housing to homeless individuals and family. Finally, the CHF was mandated to advocate for key policy changes required to successfully implement the *10 Year Plan* and to raise the necessary funds by soliciting land and capital donations as well as negotiating funding agreements with the City of Calgary, the Government of Alberta, and the Government of Canada. Accountable to

[37] Calgary Homeless Foundation website. Retrieved May 23, 2011. http://calgaryhomeless.com/about-us/mission-and-vision/

stakeholders, funders, and the larger Calgary community, the CHF's progress in implementing the *10 Year Plan* is monitored through quarterly progress reports (CCEH 2008).

Calgary's 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness came into effect the year I entered the field to ethnographically explore the social organization of service provision to homeless families. I will return to the specifics of the *10 Year Plan* and the ways in which it shapes the social organization of service delivery at a later point in this dissertation. I will conclude this introduction by critically discussing the CHF's highly publicized "accomplishments" in reducing homelessness in Calgary, often solely attributed to the effectiveness of the *10 Year Plan*.

Surveying Success

The city's efforts to end homelessness faced some serious challenges during its first year. The 2008 enumeration of Calgary's homeless population conducted in May indicated that the number of homeless individuals and families continued to increase (City of Calgary 2008). Later that year, the onset of the global economic downturn, which did not bypass Alberta, brought about concerns that the homeless population would grow further due to the unfavorable economic conditions, which might interfere with the timely implementation of the *10 Year Plan* (Derworiz 2008a). After initial challenges, the implementation of the *10 Year Plan* was in full swing and shelter use reportedly began to decrease.[38]

In September 2009, a 150-bed shelter was closed because the city-owned building stood in the way of the west expansion of the Light Rail Transit grid. Holding on firmly to the housing first philosophy, the city did not re-open the shelter in a different location, but its residents

[38] Reports from various agencies conflicted especially in 2009/2010, with some reporting a decline in shelter use while other agencies insisted that use of their services had remained stable or increased (see, for example, Komarnicki 2010).

reportedly moved into permanent housing (Derworiz 2009a). However, cold temperatures and record snowfalls that winter were straining the shelter system, which received additional provincial funding to meet winter demand (Derworiz 2009b). Late in 2009, the province agreed to fund 485 additional shelter beds to meet the increased demand expected for the upcoming winter (Derworiz 2009c). Rather than seeing shelter use decline, additional beds were added to a strained shelter system the first year after the *10 Year Plan's* implementation. However, the CHF's progress reports indicated that the city was right on target in its efforts to end homelessness (CHF 2009a).

In 2011, the Salvation Army closed its 189-bed Booth Centre. Some suggested that the Booth Centre had become a casualty of the city's latest East Village economic redevelopment efforts. In the past, the Booth Centre had been in the way of development projects and controversies had ensued when various social agencies lamented feeling forced out of the neighborhood (see, for example, Braid 2004; Calgary Herald 2004).

However, all parties involved in the decision asserted that the Booth Centre was slated for closure solely because demand had decreased so much that keeping the shelter open was simply unnecessary (Chega 2011). The CHF interpreted the Centre's closure as an "important tipping point" in the trajectory of the city's homeless population, and as clear evidence that the *10 Year Plan* was working (Komarnicki 2011). Whether the Booth Centre was closed because of decreased demand or to make way for yet another high-end high rise we will never know, nor does it make any difference. The end result is unequivocally the same: a reduction in emergency shelter beds. When the *10 Year Plan* was devised, its contributors were so convinced that its implementation would be successful that the reduction of the city's emergency shelter capacity by 50% within the first five years of the plan's implementation (and 85% by 2018) became a

fixed target, and the CHF accountable for its accomplishment. This goal is problematic insofar as the closure of shelter beds is not contingent on a preceding reduction of the homeless population. In addition, we currently have no clear idea how many people are homeless in Calgary.

When the city implemented the *10 Year Plan*, one key strategy outlined in the plan was the improvement of "data and systems knowledge" (CCEH 2008). To that end, the CHF sought to supersede the City's biannual count of homeless persons by data collected through the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), the first of its kind in Canada (CHF 2011b). HMIS, described as the "information technology backbone of the homeless-serving system" (CHF 2011b, 27), is an electronic data base that stores "individual-level," longitudinal, "real-time data" on homeless individuals every time they access homeless service providers (CHF 2009b, 17). The CHF argues that HMIS would facilitate the implementation of the *10 Year Plan*, because it would track the progress being made in ending homelessness.

According to the *10 Year Plan*, HMIS was scheduled to be deployed in January 2010 (CCEH 2008). However, it was not until May 2011 that Calgary service providers started to "phase in" HMIS, and not even half of all service providers scheduled to participate actually did in the early stages of the implementation (CHF 2011b). The City of Calgary was initially committed to continuing its bi-annual counts of the homeless population until HMIS was fully operational (City of Calgary 2009a), but then decided to cancel the 2010 count, despite the delays in the HMIS deployment. The CHF, which was now solely in charge of homeless related research in the city, could not command the resources to conduct its own count and consequently the 2010 enumeration of Calgary's homeless population was abandoned (Markusoff 2011).

In May 2011, the CHF scheduled a point-in-time count of the city's homeless population for December 2011. The CHF's count was to be conducted in the same fashion as previous

counts by surveying service providers on a select night of the year, with the difference that the CHF's count was to be conducted in the winter when service utilization is presumably highest (Markusoff 2011). After further delays, the first count of Calgary's homeless population in nearly four years was set to take place in January 2012. The results of the count were eagerly anticipated, as they would be "the first indication of whether or not the plan to end homelessness is working," said Tim Richter, president and CEO of the CHF (Komarnicki 2012). Shortly before the count, representatives of several homeless serving agencies reported an increase of service use at their facilities in 2011 and did not anticipate a dramatic decline in Calgary's homeless population. Similarly, Tim Richter stated that a sharp decline was not to be expected, but "just to slow that growth in itself would be a remarkable achievement" (Myers 2012).

The count went underway on January 18, one of the coldest nights of the season, with temperatures plummeting below -30°C.[39] Ultimately, the count enumerated 3,190 homeless individuals in Calgary, a reduction of the homeless population for the first time since the beginning of the city's homeless counts. Compared to the 2008 count, the homeless population reportedly decreased by 11.4%. Compared to 2012 projections based on the growth rate of the homeless population observed between 1992 and 2008, the number reportedly decreased by 24% (CHF 2012). Tim Richter, president and CEO of the CHF, was pleased with the results stating, "The only possible explanation for the change between 2008 and 2012 versus the 16 years before that is a plan to end homelessness and provincial investment." (Myers 2012) He further declared

[39] A January count is a deviation from previous year, when the homeless population was counted in May. The CHF argued that the change was deliberate to enumerate the homeless population during the winter when shelter use is highest (CHF 2012).

that “the hard work of front-line agencies, as well as government and donor support has turned the tide of homelessness in Calgary” (CTV News 2012b).

However, the less publicized point-in-time summer count, conducted on behalf of the CHF in August 2012, indicated that Calgary’s homeless population was once again on the rise. The count enumerated a total of 3,576 homeless individuals, a 12.1% increase over the winter count (Marketwire 2012). Several Calgary shelters reported operating at or over capacity for much of the summer (Ferguson 2012b), while the official report indicated that “emergency shelter use remain[ed] relatively flat” (Marketwire 2012). The CHF attributed the increase in the homeless population primarily to structural factors, namely an increase in migration to the city due to its reviving economy and a continued shortage in rental and affordable housing (Ferguson 2012a; Jablonski, Nenshi, and Rock 2012; Marketwire 2012).

January 2013 marked the five-year anniversary of the *10 Year Plan* and its implementation is, not surprisingly, largely celebrated as a success story. In the 2011 report to the community, Tim Hearn, chairman of the CHF’s Board of Directors stated, “we continue to meet all our critical objectives in the 10 Year Plan” (CHF 2011c, 2). Similarly, Richter assured that “there is unmistakable evidence the 10 Year Plan is working and there is renewed energy going into the next phase” (ibid., 2). However, while the *10 Year Plan* was publicly celebrated as a success story, it did little to end family homelessness in Calgary. 2010 came and went without a significant reduction of family homelessness, quite the contrary. Despite the fact that the CHF began to “redouble efforts to end family homelessness” (CHF 2010, 28), family shelters across the city saw demand for shelter space increase in 2011. In fact, the Guest House reported that their Family Shelter operated over capacity for 159 days in 2011 (Guest House 2012).

Tim Richter, argued that the persistence of family homelessness despite record placements in permanent housing is attributable, in part, to the fact that the CHF is so successful in its efforts to house families. Homeless families often remain hidden from plain view, turning to emergency shelters only when all other options have been exhausted. Hence, Richter concludes, "once we began being successful in housing families, more families would come out who needed help finding housing" (Komarnicki 2010).

Dissertation Outline

The overarching goal of my research is to explore how service delivery to homeless families is socially organized at the Guest House. The introduction above provided a brief overview of the economic, social, and political context in which my research unfolded. I argue that Calgary's effort to end homelessness has to be understood in light of economic developments and associated costs, historical trends of increasing homelessness, public discourses of homelessness, and political pressures to rejuvenate Calgary's downtown core.

In Chapter II, I provide a brief discussion of the existing literature on homelessness in general and family homelessness in particular. Rather than attempting to synthesize key findings of that body of research, my discussion focuses on how homelessness has been treated as an analytic object. I argue that academic research contributes to understandings of homelessness in important ways and through the knowledge it generates informs policy decisions related to homelessness. However, I point out that homelessness research is characterized by some problematic trends that significantly shape its methods and findings. Due to these trends, homelessness research is predominantly quantitative in nature and produces predominantly individual-level examinations of homelessness.

Chapter III outlines my theoretical and methodological approach to exploring the social organization of service delivery to homeless families. Combining tenets of ethnography, interactional constructionism, the structuralist constructivism of Pierre Bourdieu and institutional ethnography I provide an outline of the analytic project of my contextual constructionist ethnography. I also describe in detail the methods of my data generation and the idiosyncrasies of my fieldwork. I conclude this chapter with a brief discussion of data analysis practices and limitations of my research.

In Chapter IV, I tell the stories of some of the families I had the privilege of meeting over the course of my fieldwork. These stories emerged in response to a seemingly simple question: What brought you to the Guest House? Rather than merely recounting the immediate events that brought on their family's current spell of homelessness, many research participants made clear that the root of their problems cannot be squarely located in a single event or a decisive moment in their lives. Instead, research participants' narratives provided glimpses into histories of lives lived in poverty, instability, uncertainty, neglect, and violence. Their accounts suggest that homelessness is a complex problem, brought about by complex, intersecting factors that are both structural and individual in nature.

Chapter V outlines how, over the course of a decade, the Guest House evolved from a small grassroots organization to a large shelter that operates with a multi-million dollar budget. However, I show that the organization's growth and the direction thereof were fundamentally shaped by realities internal and external to the organization. In addition, understandings of homelessness discussed in previous chapters re-emerge here as explanatory frameworks actors drew on to justify controversial decisions.

In Chapter VI, I describe in more detail the Guest House as it operates today. I provide a description of its program structure, the physical layout of the facility, the programs and services it provides and the staff members who run the facility, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Chapter VII continues the discussion of Chapter VI, but focuses specifically on shelter rules that govern everyday life at the Guest House. Using the example of the Guest House's no-door policy, I illustrate the complex processes that contribute to the development, implementation and modification of shelter rules. I further examine the interpretive resources used by shelter administrators to justify the existence of their rules, notably their reliance on existing public, academic, and institutional discourses discussed in previous chapters.

However, shelter rules, institutional policies and procedures, operational stipulations, and ideological lenses never fully determine the day-to-day practices of shelter staff. Instead they become interpretive resources that staff members strategically draw on when going about their work of service delivery. Chapter VIII, the final analytic chapter illustrates in more detail the complex processes through which shelter rules are enacted, using as an example the admission process. In this chapter, I illustrate the complex social processes at work that transform homeless families seeking shelter into shelter residents.

Finally, Chapter IX summarized key points of my analysis, its contribution to the existing literature pertaining to family homelessness and service delivery, and its relevance vis-à-vis the politics of knowledge in the homeless sector. I further discuss the relevance of knowledge generated through my fieldwork for the Guest House in particular and service providers in general, policy makers, and researchers.

CHAPTER II: APPROACHES TO UNDERSTANDING HOMELESSNESS

The question is not whether we should take sides, since we inevitably will, but rather whose side we are on.

—Howard S. Becker, SSSP Presidential Address, 1966

In the previous chapter, I discussed central economic, social and political processes that contributed to the steady increase in homelessness in Calgary over the last decade. I further described how that increase was worked up as a social problem of a particular kind in local public and political discourses, which ultimately led to the implementation of *Calgary's 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness*. The development and direction of this policy document was informed by existing academic and government-commissioned homelessness research.[40]

The purpose of this chapter is twofold. First, I will critically examine the academic literature pertaining to homelessness. More specifically, I will discuss how homelessness has been worked up as a social problem of a particular kind in academic research. My goal is to deconstruct contemporary homelessness research in order to critically examine competing ideas and images of homelessness, and to problematize central contradictions, shortcomings, and omissions. I argue that academic inquiries into the causes and the nature of homelessness are shaped by a number of external factors, such as funding stipulations, academic realities, and dominant homelessness discourses. These factors have contributed to the emergence of preferred methods of scientific inquiry and dominant explanatory frameworks, which fundamentally shape how we think about homelessness and what we propose to do about it.

---

[40] "Research on Homelessness," The City of Calgary, accessed April 21, 2013, http://www.calgary.ca/CSPS/CNS/Pages/Social-research-policy-and-resources/Affordable-housing-and-homelessness/Research-on-Affordable-Housing-and-Homelessness.aspx.

Secondly, I will discuss how homelessness as an analytic object has been approached in the academic literature. It is important to keep in mind that decades of homelessness research have produced a wealth of literature on the topic. Research results generated within various academic disciplines, by think tanks, government agencies, and independent research institutes have produced a "polyscopic landscape" of knowledges about homelessness (Øyen 2005). As with poverty, current homelessness research evolves in many different directions and with various foci, reflecting the wide range of approaches to studying homelessness. It has thus become next to impossible to succinctly synthesize the existing literature on homelessness and homeless families (Lee, Tyler, and Wright 2010). The following discussion thus focuses on some noticeable trends in academic homelessness research and on segments of the literature relevant to the dissertation presented here.

A Short History of Homelessness Research

Homelessness in North America is a social phenomenon with a long history (for a more detailed historical account see, for example, Cronley 2010; Daly 1996; Hopper 2003; Wagner and Gilman 2012). While academic inquiries into homelessness do not date back as far as the phenomenon itself, it has been the site of academic inquiry for more than a century (Marvasti 2003). It is important to note here that the North American literature pertaining to homelessness in general and family homelessness in particular is dominated by research conducted in the U.S. As Williams (2003) points out, homelessness discourses emerge within a particular cultural context that favors certain kinds of explanations and resolutions for "the homeless problem." Like any field of inquiry, homelessness research has a cultural-historical origin, underwent a process of development, and represents the stylized thought of the homelessness research

community (Fleck 1979). It is thus important to briefly examine the history of academic inquiries into homelessness to fully understand the diversity of analytic projects found in research related to homelessness.

The history of U.S. homelessness research indicates that homelessness as an object of public interest "goes through cycles of discovery and rediscovery by experts and the mass media" (Wagner and Gilman 2012, 6). Consequently, the problematization of homelessness tends to undergo cyclical developments with periodic moments of problematization, followed by policy action, and subsequent silencing (Cronley 2010; Daly 1996; Hopper 2003). The Great Depression of the 1930s and the Johnson administration's War on Poverty generated considerable academic and public interest in the plight of the homeless. Subsequent policy initiatives and a temporary improvement in the conditions of the poor eventually forced the issue off the political agenda and academic interest in the topic waned considerably (Rossi 1990; Shlay and Rossi 1992; Wagner and Gilman 2012).

However, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, research on homelessness surged as new trends in the development of the homeless population emerged. At the time, the homeless population grew drastically and became increasingly visible in many urban centres (Rossi 1990; Snow and Bradford 1994). In addition, the demographic composition of the homeless population began to change. The "old homeless" were often characterized as a homogenous group composed predominantly of older, unattached, unemployed, white[41] men[42]. In the 1980s, the "old

---

[41] Hopper (2003) points out that early studies on homelessness were spatially limited to skid rows, on which African-American men, for example, were rarely found because they were living geographically segregated in inner-city slums.

[42] While early studies on homelessness focused almost exclusively on men and noted the absence of women on skid rows, some have argued that women have always constituted a considerable share of the homeless population, but have been rendered mostly invisible in academic research (Golden 1992).

homeless" were joined by women, racial and ethnic minorities, youth and young adults, and an increasing number of employed individuals, also referred to as the "new homeless." In addition, homeless families emerged as one of the fastest growing segments of the homeless population (Anderson and Koblinsky 1995; Barrow and Zimmer 1998; Shlay and Rossi 1992; Waegemakers Schiff 2007).[43]

Consequently, "in the 1980s everyone discovered homelessness" (Wright 1993, 4) and homelessness re-entered public, political, and academic discourses, where it was worked up as a social problem, as "one of the great social crises of our time" (Allen 1994, 175) In fact, Snow, Anderson, and Koegel (1994) argue that in the academic literature of the 1980s "no social aggregation has been examined so intensely…as the homeless" (p. 461). However, despite decades of research on poverty and homelessness, both remain a persistent feature of even the most affluent societies, including Canada (Eberle et al. 2001; O'Connor 2001).

However, in Canada, homelessness emerged as a research and policy concern only recently (Gaetz 2010). That is not to say that homelessness *per se* did not exist until recently, but homelessness as a social problem received little attention in Canada prior to the mid 1980s (Hulchanski et al. 2009) and was not fully problematized until the mid 1990s (Gaetz 2010).

The economic upheavals of the 1980s and 1990s paired with the conservative backlash on social policies eroded the social safety net and contributed to the continual increase in the

---

[43] However, some have argued that the notion of the "new homeless" is itself a social construction rather than a reflection of a fundamental change in the composition of the homeless population (see, for example, Wagner and Gilman 2012). The distinction was likely brought about by the "politics of compassion" pursued by various advocacy groups, social justice movements, charities, and researchers in an effort to reframe homelessness discourses and de-stigmatize the homeless (Hoch and Slayton 1989). Thus, they focused on the suffering of previously ignored subsets of the homeless population, such as families, youth and the gainfully employed, which are typically considered deserving of public aid, and portrayed them as victims of circumstances beyond their control in order to generate public empathy and support for the homeless (Wagner 1993).

homeless population (Daly 1996). Nonetheless, public, media and policy interest in the homeless subsided considerably during the 1990s (Marcus 2006). The general public's "compassion fatigue" and the conservative "backlash against the homeless" (Wagner and Gilman 2012, 121), which re-emphasized deviance and dysfunction within the homeless population, effectively pushed the issue of homelessness off the social problem agenda. By the early 2000s, though, homelessness, specifically "chronic homelessness" again entered the public discourse in both the U.S. and Canada, this time as a "national crisis" (Wagner and Gilman 2012).

In response to what Laird (2007) calls "the largest homeless crisis since the Great Depression of the 1930s" (p. 6), communities in the U.S., and subsequently Canada, began to develop and implement 10-year plans to end homelessness. Calgary, which found itself "in the midst of a homeless crisis that [was] growing both in numbers and severity" (CCEH 2008, 3) launched its efforts to end homelessness in 2007 and one year later implemented *Calgary's 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness*, the first of its kind in Canada.

Some General Trends in Homelessness Research

Contemporary efforts to "end homelessness" are informed by the findings of more than three decades of academic and government-commissioned homelessness research. The body of research on homelessness in general, and family homelessness in particular, however, is characterized by problematic trends pertaining to funding for homelessness research, dominant explanations for contemporary homelessness, and preferred methods of scientific inquiry, which fundamentally shape how we think about homelessness and what we propose to do about it. These trends are problematic in that they have effectively reduced the number of explanatory

paradigms heard as legitimate and shaped who "owns" the public and academic debates pertaining to homelessness (Stern 1984, 294).

Funding Structures

Academic research has generated a cornucopia of knowledges pertaining to homelessness in general, and family homelessness in particular. However, the direction of academic research in the field has been shaped in part by funding stipulations, which have contributed to the often observed research focus on individual-level factors. Much of the academic research on homelessness requires grants, which are typically provided directly or indirectly by various levels of government, private foundations and various social service agencies (Rog and Buckner 2007). A direct form of funding is provided through government commissioned reports. However, according to Craig (1998), government commissioned reports that produce findings inconsistent with the current political agenda are frequently suppressed, their publication delayed and their findings misrepresented or downplayed.

Indirect government funding provides research grants to independent researchers. Shinn and Weitzman (1990) point out that the U.S. Alcohol, Drug Abuse, and Mental Health Administration (ADAMHA) provided the only major, federal funding for homelessness research in the late 1980s. However, ADAMHA framed the issue of homelessness exclusively in medical terms (Snow, Anderson, and Koegel 1994). For example, the U.S. National Institute of Mental Health, one ADAMHA agency, provided generous funding for homelessness research. Thus sponsored research produced ample findings suggesting that the vast majority of homeless individuals struggle with mental health problems and subsequently homelessness was framed as a mental health issue.

Similarly, the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism predominantly sponsored research that examined the prevalence of substance use among the homeless. Consequently, such research provided evidence that homelessness was a substance abuse issue (Belcher, DeForge, and Zanis 2005). In addition, professional organizations, such as the American Psychiatric Association, became actively involved in homelessness research focusing much of their efforts on demonstrating the prevalence of mental health issues as a key contributor to homelessness and calling "for more governmental support for psychiatric treatment and research" (Blasi 1994, 354).

As Shinn and Weitzman (1990) point out, the narrow, medical focus of ADAMHA provided funding for research that was consistent with its mandate and thus focused on specific subpopulations among the homeless. At the same time, ADAMHA provided significantly more research grants for research pertaining to mental illness and substance abuse than the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development for research on housing issues (Blasi 1994). Since researchers tend to gravitate towards research for which funding is available, ADAMHA's funding practices effectively undermined any research that fell outside the defined areas of concern, namely health, mental health, and substance abuse (Yeich 1994) and thus considerably narrowed the scope of academic inquiry. Moreover, such funding practices have effectively segmented the homeless population, pitting various sub-populations against each other in terms of research funding priorities, policy making, and social activism (Wright 1997).

Funding priorities, however, are not necessarily shaped by collective interests, but determined by those who hold political power. As the case of ADAMHA illustrates, funders tend to sponsor research that is consistent with their own expertise, relevance frames and perspectives on the issue at hand (Cronley 2010). Funders thereby actively frame the research agenda and

subsequent homeless debates by providing grants only to specific types of research, which provide results consistent with the funders' mandates, which in turn illustrates the need for further research in the area (Wright 1997). Funding practices have contributed to "specialism," which frames homelessness alternately as a mental health, substance abuse, or domestic violence issue, in other words as a problem rooted in individual characteristics (Wagner 1993, 5).

Thus, funding practices have effectively channeled homelessness research into individual-level research, and away from closer examinations of structural factors that contribute to contemporary homelessness (Belcher, DeForge, and Zanis 2005; Shinn and Weitzman 1990; Snow, Anderson, and Koegel 1994), or in the words of Wright (1997): "Broader questions about the distribution of power, property, and social inequality are not considered as valid subjects in studying homelessness" (p. 21). Thus funded research is problematic because it overwhelmingly frames homelessness as an individual deficiency or pathology problem, which simplifies and misrepresents homelessness and stigmatizes the homeless (Cosgrove 2006). Such research further informs policies that seek to address "the homeless problem" (Snow, Anderson, and Koegel 1994) and often serves to rationalize political inaction (Yeich 1994) or policy measures that exclusively address perceived individual deficiencies (Wright 1997).

The Structure/Agency Divide

Homelessness discourses are reminiscent of dualistic poverty discourses in that they tend to locate explanations for the existence of homelessness either at the structural or the individual level (Wright 1993). Depending on the approach taken, homeless individuals and families are framed as either victims of structural circumstances beyond their control and thus deserving of public aid or a product of their personal deficiency and dysfunctional choices. Individualistic

approaches to homelessness can be distinguished further based on their stance towards the homeless. While one camp argues the homeless are responsible for their own plight and thus undeserving of public support, the other maintains that the homeless are the helpless victims of their own deficiencies and thus need help to overcome those (Neale 1997).

While Lee, Tyler, and Wright (2010) attest that the academic and ideological controversies pertaining to the causes of homelessness have been reconciled and structural and individual-level explanations conceptually integrated, several researchers have pointed out that academic research on homelessness is clearly biased towards individualistic explanation of homelessness (Belcher, DeForge, and Zanis 2005; Cronley 2010).[44] Only a limited number of studies have examined homelessness at a macro-level, linking it to structural developments (Snow and Bradford 1994). Such studies explain contemporary homelessness in terms of economic transformations and occupational changes, unfavorable economic conditions, an unequal distribution of resources and wealth, insufficient wages, wage developments, earning disparities between men and women, racism, under- and unemployment, lack of affordable and reliable childcare, the erosion of the social safety net, insufficient social assistance benefit levels, lack of affordable housing, and eroding housing policies (see, for example, Bassuk 1993; Bassuk and Geller 2006; Blau 1992; Choi and Snyder 1999b; Dolbeare 1992; Gould and Williams 2010; Gulati 1992; Johnson 1989; Lee, Price-Spratlen, and Kanan 2003; Shinn 1997; Shinn and Gillespie 1994; Susser 1996).

---

[44] The discussion of the primacy of individual-level explanations reflects my reading of the academic literature on homelessness. Whether the scholarly literature is biased towards individualistic explanations of homelessness is contested, however. Some argue that structural explanations of homelessness are more common and influential than individual level explanations (see, for example, Main 1998). Novac, Brown, and Bourbonnais (1996) argue that individual causes dominate the U.S. literature, reflecting culturally bound ideological debates, while structural causes of homelessness dominate Canadian discourses.

The vast majority of homelessness research, however, focuses on individual characteristics of the homeless population (Blasi 1994; Buck, Toro, and Ramos 2004). The focus on individual-level factors contributing to homelessness has led to the adaptation of individual deficit interpretations of the "homeless problem" whereby homelessness and the homeless have become pathologized and subsequently medicalized. Professional groups, such as psychologists, psychiatrists and social workers have framed the problem of homelessness in terms that render themselves the experts in analyzing the problem and the ultimate authority in alleviating it through problem diagnosis, treatment and case management (Snow 2001; Wagner 1993).

The prevalence of individual-level examinations of homelessness can be attributed in part to trends in funding provision outlined above. Secondly, the publish or perish logic of academic promotion paired with a tendency of funders and academic journals to shy away from promoting research that demonstrates the need for widespread structural reforms has led to a further manifestation of individual-level research (Belcher, DeForge, and Zanis 2005; Wright 1997). Consequently, funding stipulations and academic realities effectively silence research that seeks to examine systemic factors contributing to social problems such as homelessness (Cronley 2010; Wagner 1993).

Finally, as Blasi (1994) points out, the sciences are shaped by the same culture, discourses, and interpretative resources that inform public discourses. The pathologization of the homeless noted above is reminiscent of the cultural explanations that have dominated poverty-related discourses since the 1960s (Wright 1997). Individual-level explanations resonate with larger cultural and ideological trends that tend to locate individual success and failure within the individual rather than structural deficiencies (Williams 2003; Wright 1997). The propensity to explain social problems in individual terms has been a longstanding practice (Blasi 1994), which

has been exacerbated by the rise of neoliberalism during the 1980s. The neoliberal consensus has significantly narrowed the range of possible public policy directions and the scientific research agenda (Goode and Maskovsky 2001; Lyon-Callo 2004; Maskovsky 2001).

The lens through which homelessness is examined has significant implications for proposed solutions to the "homeless problem" (Belcher, DeForge, and Zanis 2005). The focus on individual factors contributing to homelessness is intentional as it diverts attention from structural causes of homelessness, such as shifts in the economy and policy decisions that have eroded the social safety net (Allen 1994; Bassuk et al. 1998; Mathieu 1993). The "homeless problem" is thereby effectively depoliticized (Snow 2001), which serves to maintain the status quo (Yeich 1994).

The Quantitative/Qualitative Divide

Much of the research published on homelessness is quantitative in nature (Buck, Toro, and Ramos 2004), especially the body of literature that focuses on individual-level factors contributing to homelessness (Marvasti 2003). Research funders and policy makers alike have long favored quantitative research and privilege numeric information over other ways of knowing (Cloke, Milbourne, and Widdowfield 2001). Quantitative research rests on the premise that homelessness can be prevented, alleviated and eradicated, but successful strategies rely on the accurate understanding of homelessness and such understanding is best achieved through standardized data. Statistical measures are said to be objective, value-neutral, and apolitical. As Lyon-Callo points out, "statistics are popularly perceived as objective representations of social phenomena" and "are often given widespread credence as non-subjective and empirical data (Lyon-Callo 2004, 73) Thus generated, knowledge about homelessness is said to provide policy

makers with the neutral foundation upon which they can make informed, reliable, and effective homelessness-related policy decisions.

Qualitative research on homelessness in general and family homelessness in particular is considerably harder to find. Where qualitative research has been conducted, policy makers' and the media's preference for numbers, tables, and charts has, at times, led to the quantification of qualitative research results (Cloke, Milbourne, and Widdowfield 2001). In addition, when qualitative research in the field is conducted, it often complements larger, quantitative research studies (see, for example, Barrow and Lawinski 2009; Bogard 1998; Boydell, Goering, and Morrell-Bellai 2000; Gardiner and Cairns 2003; Gerstel et al. 1996). Some researchers suggest that qualitative and case study research are suitable *supplements* to quantitative research (Bassuk 1991).

The general research trends outlined above privileged certain ways of knowing that characterize certain academic disciplines, namely medicine, psychiatry, psychology and social work, and have contributed to their dominance in homelessness research (Blasi 1994). The following review of the literature is thus not exclusively sociological in nature, but spans a variety of disciplines. It is important to keep in mind, however, that the vast majority of research on homeless families focuses on shelter residents and thus does not capture the phenomenon in its entirety (Paquette and Bassuk 2009; Rossi 1994). Furthermore, results presented here pertain predominantly to research conducted in the U.S. as there is limited Canadian research on family homelessness (Kraus and Dowling 2003; Novac, Brown, and Bourbonnais 1996; Waegemakers Schiff 2007).

Homelessness as an Analytic Object

The Quantitative Literature

While my dissertation explores family homelessness and service delivery to homeless families qualitatively, a discussion of the quantitative literature is nonetheless essential as it has significantly shaped contemporary knowledges pertaining to the nature of family homelessness. As Lyon-Callo points out, the development of statistics in the social sciences is intimately tied to social reform efforts. Statistics then "grew into a technology for diagnosing and mapping characteristics of populations" and a means "for the determination of difference between people" (Lyon-Callo 2004, 73). However, the purpose of the discussion is less to summarize key findings of the quantitative literature, which has been done elsewhere (see, for example, Haber and Toro 2004; McChesney 1995). Instead, I will focus on a critical examination of how quantitative research approaches family homelessness as an analytic object, the kind of questions it seeks to answer, and the shortcomings of that body of literature.

Early quantitative research that emerged in the wake of the problematization of family homelessness in the 1980s focused exclusively on the description of the demographic characteristics of homeless families (see, for example, Bassuk 1990; Bassuk and Rosenberg 1988; Bassuk, Rubin, and Lauriat 1986; Khanna et al. 1992; LaVesser, Smith, and Bradford 1997; Mills and Ota 1989; Nuñez and Fox 1999; Ryan and Hartman 2000). One frequent strategy to identify characteristics of homeless families is to compared them to poor housed families, in order to isolate protective and risk factors and thereby the type of family most susceptible to becoming homeless (Bassuk et al. 1997; DeAngelis 1994).

Subsequently, poor housed and homeless families are compared in terms of their demographic characteristics (see, for example, Bassuk and Rosenberg 1988; Johnson et al. 1995;

Wood et al. 1990), the prevalence of mental health problems (see, for example, Banyard and Graham-Bermann 1998; Bassuk et al. 1998; Weitzman, Knickman, and Shinn 1992) and substance use (see, for example, Bassuk et al. 1998; Weitzman, Knickman, and Shinn 1992), experience of sexual and physical abuse during child- and adulthood (see, for example, Goodman 1991a; Weitzman, Knickman, and Shinn 1992), social support networks (see, for example, Goodman 1991b; Letiecq, Anderson, and Koblinsky 1998; Toohey, Shinn, and Weitzman 2004), the prevalence of mother-child separations (see, for example, Cowal et al. 2002), and housing challenges (Wasson and Hill 1998).

In addition to comparisons between poor housed and homeless families, some researchers compared homeless families with each other. For example, Bassuk, Perloff, and Dawson (2001) compared families who had been homeless only once to families who experienced multiple episodes of homelessness to examine the predictors and dynamics of chronic family homelessness (see also Rocha et al. 1996; Stojanovic et al. 1999). Similarly, other researchers sought to develop typologies of homeless families based on service use (Culhane et al. 2007), various family characteristics (Danseco and Holden 1998; Stretch and Kreuger 1992; Wong, Culhane, and Kuhn 1997), mental health outcomes during and after the shelter stay (Karim et al. 2006), and housing arrangements prior to becoming homeless (Weitzman, Knickman, and Shinn 1990).

Finally, some researchers have compared different groups among the homeless, such as homeless women with and without children. Burt and Cohen (1989) and North and Smith (1993), for example, compared single homeless men with single homeless women and homeless mothers to identify differences among those three groups in terms of demographic characteristics, personal problems, and service utilization. Others explored differences among homeless women

who were accompanied by their children and those who were not (see, for example, Glick 1996; Metraux and Culhane 1999; Smith and North 1994) or compared the characteristics of families housed by different types of shelters (see, for example, Stainbrook and Hornik 2006).

While a considerable segment of the literature focuses on the characteristics of homeless families and the determinants of their homelessness, other research has focused on the impact of homelessness on the family, mothers, and their children, either by examining homeless families individually or, again, comparing them to poor, but housed families. While some researchers examined the effects of homelessness on overall family functioning (see, for example, Swick 2005; Wood et al. 1990), others focused on homeless mothers' parenting practices and functioning (see, for example, Gorzka 1999a, 1999b; Hausman and Hammen 1993; Paquette and Bassuk 2009; Perlman et al. 2012; Torquati 2002), their children's well-being and development (see, for example, Bruckner 2008; Davey and Abell 2004; Fox and Roth 1989; Gewirtz, Hart-Shegos, and Medhanie 2008; Huntington, Buckner, and Bassuk 2008; Nuñez 2001; Rafferty and Shinn 1991) and the prevalence of child welfare interventions (Park et al. 2004). Another segment of research on homeless families is primarily concerned with assessing homeless families' service needs (see, for example, Bechtel 1997; DiBlasio and Belcher 1992). Others focus on the evaluation of programs provided to homeless families (see, for example, Davey and Abell 2004; Glisson, Thyer, and Fischer 2001; Shinn et al. 1990) and service providers' perspectives on family homelessness (see, for example, Barge and Norr 1991; Lindsey 1998b).

While different studies report slightly different, and at times conflicting, findings, the general consensus seems to be that the typical homeless family in the U.S. is headed by a young, black single mother with little education and work experience, receiving social assistance. She is typically accompanied by two or three pre-school-aged children. Furthermore, researchers

frequently note the prevalence and complex intersection of histories of residential instability, family disruption during childhood such as foster care placement, experience of sexual and/or physical abuse during childhood, spousal abuse, weak social support networks, health and mental health problems and drug and/or alcohol abuse among homeless mothers.

Researchers further noted the prevalence of family trauma and dysfunction, high levels of parenting stress, and negative parenting behaviours. In other words, homelessness was found to impede mothers' "ability to function as a consistent and supportive caregiver" (Hausman and Hammen 1993, 358) and families' capacity to create "enjoyable and meaningful relationships" (Swick 2005, 194). Not surprisingly, researchers problematize the effect of homelessness on child well-being and development and frequently link those effects to parental functioning, or lack thereof. Research indicates that children in homeless families tend to face numerous, and at times chronic, health issues, mental health challenges, behavioural problems, delays in cognitive development, learning disabilities, and poor academic performance (Perlman et al. 2012). Since the negative impact of homelessness on children is said to in turn make them more susceptible to becoming homeless themselves, researchers stress the important of fostering positive parenting behaviours in homeless parents to offset some of the negative effects of homelessness on their children (Gorzka 1999b; Perlman et al. 2012).

This body of research has produced problematic knowledges that have become accepted as factual representations of reality. First, the early academic consensus that the vast majority of homeless families are headed by a single mother shaped the research agenda in that subsequent research, both quantitative and qualitative, focused almost exclusively on single-mother-led families (Meadows-Oliver 2003). Only a limited number of studies include homeless families led

by two parents (see, for example, Gorzka 1999a) and even less is known about homeless families headed by a single father (see, for example, McArthur et al. 2006; Schindler and Coley 2007).

Secondly, while many research articles begin with a formal recognition of structural factors contributing to family homelessness, the research results subsequently presented discuss almost exclusively individual-level explanations outlined above. In essence, structural-level factors, such as poverty, income inequality, and the lack of affordable housing leave families vulnerable to becoming homeless, while individual level factors, such as drug abuse, mental health problems, and poor social networks are invoked to explain who, of those at risk of becoming homeless, ends up losing their home, because it is those factors that "impede residential stability even under the best housing conditions" (Bassuk and Buckner 1994, 417).

Similarly, while most researchers acknowledge the complexity and historical trajectory of events that led to a family losing their home, they nonetheless seek to isolate specific risk factors that brought on the most recent episode of a family's homelessness. The identification of risk factors in general is problematic insofar as researchers frequently uncritically accept that the identified factors are the cause rather than the effect of homelessness (Shinn 1992).

Third, as discussed above, the vast majority of research on homelessness is now comparative in nature. The logic of group comparisons is to identify between-group differences. Comparative research thus rests on the premise that comparisons can isolate and thus pinpoint the causes of family homelessness. The differences between subgroups, however, are often located on the individual level, which further reinforces individualistic explanations and thereby stigmatization of the homeless (Cosgrove 2006; Wright 1993). In addition, the creation of typologies and subgroups among the homeless has effectively segmented homelessness research,

which now focuses on the particularities of each group rather than the common challenges they face (Wright 1997).

Fourth, for reasons outlined above, the vast majority of research on homeless families focuses on the prevalence of substance use and psychiatric disorders as key explanatory factors of family homelessness. However, researchers rarely question the politically charged nature of defining what constitutes substance abuse, addictions, or mental illness (Kyle 2005). Instead, they often uncritically draw on psychiatric inventories and scales to determine the prevalence of mental illness or addictions. Such inventories, however, treat possibly situational responses to homelessness, such as lack of appetite, sleeplessness, or anxiety, as evidence for mental illness, when such responses "may be artifacts of homelessness itself or perhaps adaptive and even normal responses to a strikingly abnormal situation" (Snow, Anderson, and Koegel 1994, 465).

Similarly, the concern for homeless children's well-being has led to an increasing focus on the prevalence of family and parenting dysfunction among homeless families. Again, such research invokes an individual deficit explanation and creates the notion that there is something inherently dysfunctional about homeless families, which has led to the development and implementation of parenting education in many shelter settings (Gorzka 1999b). The assessment of parenting practices, however, is also political in nature. White, middle-class standards of parenting have long been used as the standard against which the parenting practices of all other groups are measured and having to parent their children in public makes homeless families particularly susceptible to the critical assessment of their parenting practices (Friedman 2000)

Finally, the quantitative body of research rests on the notion that "reducing or ending homelessness requires knowledge of why people become homeless" (Shinn et al. 1998, 1651). It thus falls to the research community to gather clear, relevant facts about homelessness and to

identify its constitutive elements, underlying causes, as well as possible alleviation strategies through the correct application of scientific methods (Alcock 2006; Blumer 1971; Yapa 1996).

Consequently, much of the academic debate does not revolve around the problematic underpinnings of the current research discussed above. Instead, the debate focuses on methodological shortcomings, such as the use of non-representative samples, cross-sectional rather than longitudinal research designs, and descriptive rather than explanatory analysis (for a detailed discussion, see, for example, Buck, Toro, and Ramos 2004; Neale 1997; Rog and Buckner 2007; Shinn 1992). Methodological shortcomings are said to undermine the discovery of the true nature of family homelessness, which in turn is "bound to reduce the chance that any policy development process will have a satisfactory outcome" (Bavier 1999, 1).

Thus, it may appear as if scientific research can lead to value-free and objective knowledge pertaining to family homelessness, which policy makers can then use to come to informed political decisions. This assumption implies that the scientific community can and should reach a consensus with respect to the central, relevant facts of family homelessness. Since the researcher is seen as adhering to scientific standards of rationality as well as objectivity, the subsequently generated homelessness knowledge is conceived of as neutral, apolitical, and nonideological discovery and mere description of pre-existing facts (Yapa 1996). The idea of neutral, value-free, apolitical discovery of pre-existing facts is flawed, however, because, as shown above, research on family homelessness is based on a number of inherently political research decisions.

The Naturalist Qualitative Literature

An increasing number of researchers have turned to qualitative research to chronicle the particularities of the lives of homeless families, more specifically those of homeless mothers and their children (Meadows-Oliver 2003). This line of inquiry is based on the presupposition that the accounting of personal experiences with homelessness "contribute[s] valuable information to the researcher's understanding of the problem" (Averitt 2003, 86). In addition, researchers increasingly turn to qualitative research to correct the tendency of quantitative inquiry to render those affected by homelessness invisible and thereby provide research participants with a voice in the research process and subsequent publications (Cosgrove and Flynn 2005; Hodnicki and Horner 1993; Johnson 1999).

Qualitative research has explored a variety of topics, such as the meaning and experience of being homeless (Bauman 1993; Menke and Wagner 1997; Seltser and Miller 1993; Styron, Janoff-Bulman, and Davidson 2000; Takahashi, McElroy, and Rowe 2002), causes of homelessness (Bassuk 1986a; Choi and Snyder 1999a; Johnson 1999; McChesney 1992), the shelterization process (DeOllos 1997), the experience of finding housing (Choi and Snyder 1999b; Fogel and Dunlap 1998; Francis 1992) and family welfare following re-housing (Dunlap and Fogel 1998; Halter 1992; Lindsey 1996, 1997). In addition, researchers have explored homeless mothers' perceptions of various service providers (DeWard and Moe 2010; Sznajder-Murray and Slesnick 2011), different facets of shelter life, such as service needs (Kissman 1999), food access (Richards and Smith 2006), the reality of shelter life (Choi and Snyder 1999c), and the impact of shelter life on the family (Boxill and Beaty 1990; Fogel 1997; Lindsey 1998a).

Furthermore, some research focused on precursors of mother-child separations (Barrow and Laborde 2008; Barrow and Lawinski 2009), parenting practices (Hodnicki and Horner 1993;

Schultz-Krohn 2004) and parents' perceptions of the impact of homelessness on their children (Morris and Butt 2003; Morris and Strong 2004). Finally, some researchers have focused on describing the strength and resilience of homeless families in an effort to challenge negative stereotypes and individual deficiency models pertaining to homeless families (Banyard and Graham-Bermann 1995; Cosgrove and Flynn 2005; Thrasher and Mowbray 1995). Rather than describing each study in detail, I focus on one study that illustrates central features of this body of research (for a meta-synthesis of the qualitative literature see Meadows-Oliver 2003).

Banyard's (1995) study, for example, explored survival strategies and stress coping mechanisms of sheltered mothers. To that end, Banyard conducted qualitative interviews with 64 women. The study's goal was to understand family homelessness in depth and to identify homeless mothers' skills and shortcomings in dealing with the stress of being homeless to inform the development of suitable programs and policies. The study was part of a larger study on family homelessness and the preparation of the manuscript for publication was funded by the U.S. National Institute of Mental Health.

To elicit coping narratives, research participants were asked to recount a difficult situation they had faced over the past week and describe how they dealt with it. They then were asked to recount a difficult situation that involved their children and one that involved money and again to describe how they dealt with it. In addition, research participants completed a questionnaire that collected demographic information, and data pertaining to their levels of stress and coping strategies. Interviews were transcribed and thematic coding was used to identify central "categories" for the purpose of "systematic description" (Banyard 1995, 876). Those categories "were created from the words of the women, although the coping literature served as a background for this process to enhance 'theoretical sensitivity'" (ibid., 876). Categories were

then grouped into higher order categories or themes, such as types of stress and types of coping strategies. The discussion of those two themes included quantified textual data, for example the frequency with which different stressors were reported, and short interview excerpts.

Qualitative research conducted in the naturalist tradition discussed above has been dominated by academic disciplines such as social work and nursing, and, to a lesser extent, psychology, psychiatry, and sociology. They share some disconcerting characteristics with the quantitative body of literature discussed earlier. First, they too focus on single mothers; Lindsey (1996), for example, argued that "the study sample was limited to mother-headed families, because this family type constitutes the vast majority of homeless families in the United States" (p. 203). Similarly, Styron, Janoff-Bulman and Davidson (2000) argued their study focused on mothers "because they are most representative of the composition of the majority of homeless families" (p. 147).

Secondly, as in the quantitative literature, there is a tendency in the naturalist qualitative literature to acknowledge structural contributors to family homelessness, but then focus the discussion of research results on individual-level factors. For example, in a clinical, qualitative study exploring the causes of homelessness among families, Bassuk (1986b) makes mention of poverty, low welfare benefit levels, and the shortage of affordable housing as key contributors to the surge in family homelessness. However, poverty is then attributed to family breakdown and subsequent single-motherhood. Furthermore, the qualitative interviews revealed that the majority of research participants came from "disorganized families." Consequently:

> Although generally not psychotic, two thirds of women suffer from personality disorders: they are unable to form and maintain stable relationships, they have poor or nonexistent work histories, they have been unsuccessful establishing stable homes even when housing is available, and, most important, they have extreme difficulty parenting (Bassuk 1986b, 48).

Again, mental health issues and/or substance abuse are brought to the forefront of the discussion, reflecting and reinforcing findings from the quantitative body of literature that tends to pathologize homeless families (Cosgrove 2006).

It is important to note that naturalist qualitative research conducted in the field often serves to complement quantitative research studies (see, for example, Barrow and Lawinski 2009; Bassuk 1986b; Boydell, Goering, and Morrell-Bellai 2000; Gardiner and Cairns 2003; Gerstel et al. 1996). In other cases, qualitative interviews are complemented with questionnaires surveying research participants on various topics or psychiatric inventories and scales assessing participants' mental health (see, for example, Banyard 1995; Bassuk 1986b; Sznajder-Murray and Slesnick 2011). Furthermore, to provide glimpses into the lives of homeless families and to illustrate substantive findings, naturalist qualitative researchers frequently support their main analytic themes with interview excerpts or composite stories (Lindsey 1997). That said, researchers frequently provide quantified representations of textual data in addition (see, for example, Banyard 1995; Barrow and Lawinski 2009; Choi and Snyder 1999a; Johnson 1999).

Finally, not unlike quantitative research discussed above, qualitative research conducted in the naturalist tradition is committed to producing factual accounts and true representations of a reality out there, albeit from the perspective of research participants, but without calling into question the facticity of the reality (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995; Harris 2003; Holstein and Gubrium 2008). The researcher is assumed to be able to transcend the multiplicity of interpretations and arrive at generalizing and definite descriptions of the phenomenon under investigation, which then are treated as accurate depictions of reality (Denzin 1997; Gubrium and Holstein 1997; Harris 2003). To that end, researchers subject interview data to a thematic analysis, which is frequently aided by data processing software, in order to identify systematic

patterns in research participants' responses. However, such analysis neglects the extent to which participants' responses are pre-structured by interview schedules that are derived, in part, from the existing quantitative literature (see, for example, Francis 1992).

Unquestionably, the research discussed above has greatly contributed to our understanding of the complexity of family homelessness and has provided homeless families with a voice in the research process and subsequent publications. However, rather than challenging taken-for-granted assumptions about the structure of homeless families or their characteristics produced by quantitative research, these assumptions are further reified by some qualitative research. The mutual commitment to treating homelessness as a "naturalized objective fact" (Latour 2005, 227), characterized by inherent, unambiguous, and stable characteristics accessible to scientific inquiry is challenged by the constructionist literature, to which I will turn next.

The Constructionist Qualitative Literature

Similar to the naturalist qualitative research, the constructionist approach is committed to exploring people's lived experience. However, rather than treating people's accounts as factual representations of reality, constructionists highlight the situated and conditioned nature of accounting work. Accounts then are social constructs that are produced by particular actors, under particular circumstances, and for a particular purpose. The research discussed in this section is constructionist in nature and while not all studies I discuss pertain to homeless families *per se*, their methodological approach substantively shaped my dissertation research. Furthermore, while the subsequent discussion is by no means exhaustive, it serves as an illustration of the constructionist paradigm and its relevance for this dissertation.

Cultural Representations of "Homelessness" and "the Homeless"

Some researchers examined how "homelessness" and "the homeless" are discursively constructed in a variety of settings. Kingfisher (2007), for example, explored how the homeless were constructed as a particular class of people during public hearings pertaining to the relocation of a homeless shelter. Kingfisher argued that different constituencies engaged in social problem construction during those hearings, and in the process drew on available interpretive resources, seeking to convince others of the facticity of their accounts. During those meetings, the "homeless problem" was framed in individualistic and medicalized terms and the homeless categorized as substance-using Aboriginal men. Such discursive constructions do not merely reflect pre-existing, natural categories, but are the outcome of struggles over definitional authority.

Similarly, different researchers have explored the discursive construction of "the homeless" in various media outlets.[45] Again, the rationale behind such analysis is to demonstrate that news coverage, for instance, does not merely report objective facts, but frames and thereby actively produces understandings of social issues, such as homelessness (Schneider, Chamberlain, and Hodgetts 2010). Forte (2002), for example, examined the rhetorical devices employed by various claims-makers in media discourses surrounding the relocation of an agency providing services to the homeless. In the process, different constituencies offered different problem definitions ranging from sympathetic accounts of the homeless to outright hostility.

[45] Some of the media studies discussed here take a quantitative approach to content analysis. However, they are discussed here due to their dedication to explore the social constructedness of depictions of homelessness and how those depictions shape public understandings of the problem at hand.

Pascale (2005) employed poststructural discourse analysis in her examination of media representations of homelessness. She argued that newspaper coverage produces and reproduces cultural knowledge of a variety of topics, including homelessness. Huckin (2002), on the other hand, focused his media analysis not on what was said, but what was not said. His analysis of textual silence, namely the omission of crucial information, in media coverage pertaining to homelessness showed that images of homelessness are created as much by what remains hidden as by what is made explicit.

Conducting a content analysis of Western Canadian newspapers, Schneider, Chamberlain, and Hodgetts (2010) found that narrative depictions of homelessness varied between Calgary and Vancouver outlets. However, they shared certain commonalities, such as the absence of homeless individuals as speakers and the portrayal of homeless individuals as helpless victims of their own deficiencies and thus in need of regulation and control. In addition, Schneider (2011) examined visual representations of homelessness in a Calgary newspaper. Her analysis indicates that visual representations reinforce the notion of difference between homeless and housed individuals. Furthermore, homeless individuals tended to be depicted in a state of despair, isolated from the larger community and engaging in activities typically associated with homelessness. Schneider also examined news coverage on homelessness in three Canadian newspapers and found that journalists rely predominantly on various experts as sources for their coverage. While homeless individuals were not entirely silenced, their narration of their hardships tended to reinforce individualistic explanations of homelessness and thus inadvertently further marginalized the homeless (Schneider 2011).

Identity Management

While research examining the representations of homelessness and the homeless focuses on how understandings of homelessness are created by outsiders, others have explored how homeless individuals create notions of self and their personal identity in efforts to manage the stigma associated with being homeless. Snow and Anderson (1987), for example, explored the "identity work" through which homeless individuals construct their personal identity. The authors found that in constructing their identity, homeless individuals tend to distance themselves from the homeless in general, embrace their homelessness, or create fictive identities to manage stigma. Similarly, Letkemann (2004) ethnographically explored the practices and identity management of what he called "urban nomads": Aboriginal, sporadically homeless individuals living in various Canadian cities. He found that urban nomads frequently distanced themselves from "the homeless" and defined themselves as "travellers" whose practices constitute survival strategies in a society characterized by constraints. Drawing on Goffman's (1963) concept of impression management Boydell, Goering, and Morrell-Bellai (2000) examined the narrative construction of identity of homeless individuals.

Focusing on sheltered homeless fathers, Schindler and Coley (2007) explored how men manage their masculine identity and meaning of fatherhood in an environment that challenges both. Likewise, Roschelle and Kaufman (2004) ethnographically examined the strategies of homeless children in managing the stigma of homelessness. The authors found that while some of the strategies employed successfully mediated stigma, other strategies only reinforced the children's "spoiled identity."

Critiquing the work of Snow and Anderson, Marvasti (1998) argued that identity construction is a situated practice that unfolds in a specific context. He points out that Snow and

Anderson's (1987) notion of fictive identities presupposes that homeless individuals have a "real" identity against which their accounts can be measured. Marvasti (1998) showed that the biographical work of homeless individuals resembles "storied performances" (p. 171) that are constructed situationally for a specific audience and for a specific purpose. Marvasti's analysis was inspired by Spencer's work (1997), which analyzed intake interviews social workers conducted with homeless individuals seeking support at a social service agency. The research focused on how client candidates construct themselves as service worthy. Spencer argued that client candidates' biographical narrations do not necessarily represent factual accounts of the events leading up to their homelessness. Instead those accounts are best understood as "client work" in which client candidates draw on "general, culturally grounded representations of the type of person who was worthy of assistance," (p. 159) which constitute "situated rhetorical devices" (Spencer 1994, 39). Similarly, Bogard (1998) argued that homeless mothers use "strategic self presentation" (p. 247) in order to receive the services they need.

The Social Construction of Client Categories

Some researchers have pointed out that shelters' admission criteria actively shape the characteristics of a shelter's residents. The prevalence of single mother families in homeless shelters noted in the quantitative literature, for example, has to be critically assessed in light of restrictive shelter admission criteria that systematically exclude men (Allen 1994). Susser (1993), for instance, "documents the institutional processes which divide poor families" (p. 269) and thereby structure homeless families as single-mother families. Consequently, single motherhood cannot be interpreted as an inherent characteristic of homeless families, but rather an institutional accomplishment.

Other researchers focused less on how institutional guidelines bring about types of clients, but explore how staff members strategically draw on those guidelines in their client work. Spencer and McKinney (1997), for example, analyzed intake interviews conducted with candidate clients at a human service agency serving homeless persons. In light of scarce organizational resources and increasing caseloads, social workers used the intake interview to selectively allocate services to candidate clients. The authors found the costlier a service to the agency in terms of monetary value, time and effort, the more stringent criteria social workers applied for granting access to that service. Throughout the intake interview, social workers used discursive strategies to steer client candidates towards outcomes that were in the best interest of the organization rather than the clients.

Marvasti (2002) conducted ethnographic research at a homeless shelter to examine the socially organized processes that create "the homeless" as a knowable entity in the first place. He described in detail the collaborative interpretive practices social workers and client candidates engaged in during the intake interviews. It was in those intake interviews that service worthiness was interactively created, which in turn justified the allocation of the shelter's scarce resources. Only those deemed service worthy at the end of the interview would be granted access to an organization's host of services. Marvasti (2003) argued that social service agencies do not merely provide various services to their clients, they also "construct the very clients they need to do their work" (p. 89).

Marvasti (2003) further illustrated how shelter policies "help construct various types of clients not solely based on their needs, but also in relation to organizational contingencies and necessities." (p. 61) In other words, "organizational contingencies…condition how clients tell their stories and how these stories are locally interpreted" (ibid., 89). Since the vast majority of

research on homeless individuals and families is based on shelter residents, client selection processes inadvertently shape the characteristics of the shelter's population, and subsequently the information generated through as well as the conclusions drawn from shelter-based research.

De Montigny (1995) ethnographically explored "fact making practices" (p. 27) of social workers in the context of child abuse investigations. He showed how social workers strategically draw on discursive resources pertaining to child neglect and abuse to determine whether a particular case constitutes child abuse. Moreover, in their documentation of the case, the social workers' fact-making as well as the clients' interpretation of the situation is silenced. The ensuing report in turn is treated as a factual representation of "the actuality of the situation itself, independent of the projects of organization and the constitutive work that produced it" (p. 33).

Similarly, Loseke (1992) explored how "the battered woman" is socially constructed in a shelter for women fleeing domestic abuse. For the institutional purpose of client selection, social workers' interpretive practices bring about classifications of women turning to the shelter as appropriate and inappropriate clients, the former being "battered" and the latter "not battered." Loseke illustrates that shelter staff, in their decision-making process, take into account available interpretive resources of what constitutes a battered woman, perceived needs of the shelter-seeking candidate and her fit within organizational mandates and requirements, as well as institutional stipulations such as space availability. What emerges from the analysis is the messiness of shelter staff's admission decisions that have to take into account clients' and institutional needs.

Institutionally Mediated Lives

A growing body of research focuses on the ways in which institutional environments shape clients' and staff's experiences and practices (Meanwell 2012). Loseke (1992), for example, points out that shelter-based client construction continues after the admission process. She showed that shelter workers continue the interpretative resource of "battered women" to make sense of shelter clients' behaviours, but in the process construct women as good, demanding, ungrateful or defiant clients. These characteristics, however, do not reflect inherent characteristics of the client herself, but are the outcome of practical sense-making activities of the shelter staff.

Similarly, Marvasti (2003) showed how shelter staff members construct their clients' identity. Although staff members draw on a variety of broader discourses in their accounting work, what emerges from their narratives is a locally produced "institutionally preferred gaze" of "the homeless, their needs, and their reasons for being who they are" (p. 110). Although the staff's narratives take into account the complex and intertwining factors that contribute to individuals' homelessness, they continually identify individual deficiency as the root of the problem. Consequently, control and behavioural correction by trained professionals become the dominant strategy for alleviating homelessness within the shelter setting. At no point do staff members question the logic, fairness, or underlying ideologies of shelter rules and practices, but instead frame individual infractions of those rules and "treatment-resistant" clients as problematic (Marvasti 2002).

Other researchers have examined the work of service providers in detail, concluding that many homeless shelters tend to be paternalistic, focus on intervention, demand certain behaviours from their clients, and tend to emphasize self-help approaches to self-sufficiency

(Cosgrove and Flynn 2005; Lyon-Callo 2001). Davidson and Jenkins (1989) point to the social class differences between shelter staff and residents. Behavioural expectations for clients and the assessment of clients' child rearing practices and future planning thus have to be understood in the context of such social class dynamics. In his analysis of service delivery at a youth shelter, Armaline (2005) noted that much of the staff's work is organized around the notion of providing structure, because the shelter has identified the lack thereof as the key contributor to the youths' homelessness. Similarly, Joniak (2005) showed how staff members' "therapeutic ideologies and their perceptions of clients" informed their exclusionary practices in cases of staff-client conflict (p. 973).

Lyon-Callo (2000) pointed out that the establishment of homeless shelters was the preferred response to the "homeless crisis" that emerged in the 1980s. Part of the "continuum of care" approach to alleviating homelessness, shelters meet homeless individuals' immediate, basic needs for food and shelter and provide services deemed essential to address the underlying causes of homelessness, such as addictions and the perceived lack of life skills. Deficit-oriented approaches to helping the homeless to become self-sufficient dominate many shelters' practices, which emphasize individual pathology, self-help, self-improvement, and self-empowerment. However, the framing of homelessness as disease has effectively undermined alternate, structural explanations of homelessness. Instead, shelter practices focus on the diagnosis of pertinent individual deficiencies, development of suitable treatment plans to address those deficiencies, and the implementation of surveillance and control mechanisms to aid the transformation of the dysfunctional self (Lyon-Callo and Hyatt 2003). Such service practices in turn create, maintain, and reinforce dominant, individualistic understandings of the causes of homelessness and shape the day-to-day experience, identity, and practices of homeless individuals (Lyon-Callo 2000).

In an ethnographic study of homeless women in Ontario, Harman (1989) explored how institutions such as emergency hostels seek to address homeless women's perceived lack of domesticity. The home as property and locus of the family is a powerful ideology tied to capitalism and patriarchy. Institutional rehabilitation efforts thus focus on reintegrating homeless women into mainstream society by connecting them once again to a home and family, in other words "domesticating" them. Along similar lines, Williams (1996) argued that shelter practices turn the homeless person into an "object of inquiry, control, and correction" (p. 81). Again, a deficiency approach to homelessness informs the creation of stringent shelter rules that seek to monitor, control and correct clients' dysfunctional behaviours. Rules instituted at the family shelters that were part of Williams's research, for example, set restrictive boundaries around acceptable child rearing and supervision practices, mandated parenting classes, implemented curfews, and prohibited drug and alcohol use. Such regulatory practices are rooted in the assumption that family dysfunction is a key contributor to family homelessness. The regulation of individual lives then becomes the basis for "'disciplinary technologies' to 'transform' the homeless resident" (Williams 2003, 61) and thereby break the "cycle of dysfunction" (p. 64).

Some have described shelters as total institutions (see, for example, Armaline 2005; DeWard and Moe 2010; Stark 1994), shelter stays as "therapeutic incarceration" (Gerstel et al. 1996), and prolonged shelter use as rendering shelter residents passive, demoralized and dependent on shelter services (see, for example, Grunberg and Eagle 1990; Mulder 2004). However, Williams (2003) points out that shelter residents are not passive and docile recipients of shelter services. Instead shelters are sites of resistance, where homeless individuals actively challenge representations of homelessness as well as the surveillance of and intrusion into their lives.

Finally, in her book *Parenting in Public*, Friedman (2000) compared the experience of homeless mothers in five different family shelters in the U.S. Friedman argued that shelters, not unlike public assistance programs, are another form of institutional control through which the lives of poor families are monitored and regulated. Friedman approaches the shelter environment as a "microcosm" and focuses on the staff's and clients' perceptions of service delivery as well as the day-to-day interactions between staff and clients. Friedman's analysis indicates that homeless families staying in shelters that pursue a family-oriented approach to help-giving emphasizing the family's strengths have a more positive experience than those staying in shelters, which approach help-giving from a prescriptive, deficit-oriented perspective.

The Shelter System

The discussion above indicates that homeless shelters are "inhabited institutions," arenas where institutional discourses, practices and logics are produced and reproduced through the interaction between service users, service providers and institutional mandates (Meanwell 2012). It is important to keep in mind that frontline staff members are "employees working for agencies and organizations" and as such "they are bound to carry out the legislative mandates, policies, and directions of their organizations" (de Montigny 1995, 47), which inevitably shape their work practices. However, it is through their day-to-day practices that staff members reproduce and reinforce those institutional mandates (Brown 2006).

While a number of researchers have explored how institutional discourses and practices shape and are shaped by staff and clients embedded therein, few have explored how those institutional discourses and practices are shaped by the context in which the institution itself is embedded. Institutions such as homeless shelters do not operate in a vacuum, but are themselves

embedded in a larger, socio-political context. As such, the establishment and operation of homeless shelters is shaped, for example, by funding processes (Belcher, DeForge, and Zanis 2005; Nichols 2008b), religious mandates (Mulder 2004; Sager and Stephens 2005), government policies (Lyon-Callo 2004), societal and academic discourses pertaining to homelessness (Cosgrove 2006; Lyon-Callo 2004; Williams 2003), neo-liberal ideologies (Bogard 2001; Smith 2007), stakeholder interests (Bridgman 2001, 2003, 2006; Williams 2005), and institutional interrelations (Nichols 2008a).

Like other social services, the operation of homeless shelters is increasingly oriented to and organized around principles of new public management (Nichols 2008a). Those principles include outcome measures documenting the efficiency and success of programs and service interventions, performance assessment through program evaluations, and the focus on best-practice development, bureaucratic management and accountability (Hoffman and Coffey 2008; Nichols 2008a, 2008b; Smith 2007). Those measures seek to standardize and improve service delivery under resource constraints (Nichols 2008a). At the same time, "evaluation or auditing practices that subject practitioners' work into fixed measurable accounting terms limit how they are able to respond…to the particular needs of the individuals with whom they work" (Nichols 2008a, 688).

Thus, not only are shelter clients monitored, controlled and corrected, but so are service providers. They themselves are monitored by and accountable to funders, managers and governments, which limits their range of feasible practices. While much of the research on service delivery examines how staff attitudes and shelter regulations shape the lived experiences of homeless individuals and families, most research does not place the shelter itself in the broader societal and policy context. Thus, the researchers' analysis remains at the level of

individual attitudes and behaviours of staff and clients and recommendations for change exclusively target attitudes and practices of shelter administrators and staff.

The Social Constructedness of Knowledges Pertaining to Homelessness

Most of research on homeless families is conducted in the U.S. Canadian researchers have contributed little to existing knowledges about homeless families (Decter 2007; Novac, Brown, and Bourbonnais 1996; Waegemakers Schiff 2007). In addition, knowledge about homeless families generated in Canada is based largely on commissioned, non-academic reports that vary in quality and public availability (Waegemakers Schiff 2007). Finally, knowledge on homeless families is generated by researchers of various disciplinary backgrounds such as psychology/psychiatry, anthropology, geography, social work, nursing, medicine and to some extent sociology (Blasi 1994). Data collected is predominantly quantitative (Marvasti 2003), although mixed method projects collecting both qualitative and quantitative data are increasingly common and a number of qualitative studies have provided much insight into the lived experience of homeless families (see, for example, Banyard 1995; Choi and Snyder 1999a, 1999c; DeOllos 1997).

Not unlike other social problems, understandings of the nature of "the homeless problem" are socially constructed (Blasi 1994; Bourdieu, Chamboredon, and Passeron 1991; Fleck 1979; O'Connor 2001). Academic research informs policy decisions, which directly shape the material experience of those affected by those policies (O'Connor 2001). Thus, social scientists, through their work, do not just describe and diagnose an objectively existing reality; they also actively contribute to the meaning producing processes (O'Connor 2001; Yapa 1996). Belcher, De Forge, and Zanis (2005) have pointed out that through their research some researchers, intentionally or

inadvertently, help to justify and protect the status quo. In part due to funding conditions, much research tends to reflect the perspective of the power elite, individualizing and justifying forms of social inequality and provide justification for inaction (Yeich 1994). Although academic researchers have little control over how their research is taken up, interpreted and applied, they nonetheless bear responsibility in the knowledge construction process (Blasi 1994; Wright 1993).

CHAPTER III: CONTEXTUAL CONSTRUCTIONIST ETHNOGRAPHY

The perfectly commendable wish to go see things in person, close up, sometimes leads people to search for the explanatory principles of observed realities where they are not to be found…namely, at the site of observation itself.

—Pierre Bourdieu, The Abdication of the State, 1999

Before setting out to explore ethnographically the social organization of service provision to sheltered homeless families, I consulted a plethora of textbooks, monographs, and journal articles in search of a 'how to' guideline. I was hoping to find a manual that would tell me how to be an ethnographer, how to conduct ethnographic fieldwork, and how to write an ethnography that was both scientifically relevant and enjoyable to read. I have to agree with Bourdieu (1996) that the consultation of the methodological literature on ethnographic inquiry was not particularly helpful. While it provided me with an understanding of some core principles pertaining to the ethnographic mode of inquiry, I found many suggested strategies and prescriptions rather impractical for the specific idiosyncrasies of my own fieldwork. I discovered that I had to respond with flexibility to the contingencies I encountered when making difficult methodological, pragmatic, ethical and moral choices.

This chapter outlines the particularities of my ethnographic inquiry into the social organization of service provision to sheltered homeless families, which was theoretically informed by the constructionist paradigm. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to trace the various ethnographic and constructionist currents that informed the ethnographic mode of inquiry presented in this dissertation. I will thus only briefly outline pertinent theoretical, ontological, epistemological and methodological underpinnings that informed my ethnographic approach. Secondly, I will discuss theoretically pertinent data generation strategies, and then provide an account of the challenges and choices I faced in their practical application. Next, I

will discuss relevant data analysis procedures and then conclude this chapter with a brief examination of the limitations of my research.

The Analytic Project of Contextual Constructionist Ethnography

Unlike ethnographies conducted in the naturalist tradition, which strive to provide detailed, true-to-life descriptions of subjective meanings actors attach to social phenomena, constructionist ethnographies seek to understand the "indigenous organization of representational practices" (Holstein and Gubrium 2008, 373). My particular ethnographic approach is theoretically and methodologically informed by the constructionist paradigm, particularly interactional constructionism (IC) as outlined by Amir Marvasti (2008), which provided the ontological, epistemological, methodological, and practical underpinnings of my empirical inquiry. I combined constructionist guiding principles with analytic insights offered in the work of Pierre Bourdieu and by institutional ethnography, as conceived by Dorothy Smith, to fully capture the dynamic interplay of individual practices and social relations that socially organize such practices.

Interactionist Constructionism and Ethnography

The constructionist project can be characterized as a "distinct way of seeing and questioning the social world" (Gubrium and Holstein 2008, 5). Contrary to the objectivist tradition, the constructionist paradigm challenges the ontological status of social phenomena and the social world they constitute as objectively existing (Hammersley 2003). The constructionist paradigm highlights the interactive meaning-making practices and strategies through which social actors assemble, maintain and transform elements of the social world (Gubrium and Holstein 2008; Harris 2008). Consequently, society is conceptualized as "a collection of actors

whose interpretations construct reality in relation to the variable ‘demands’ of everyday settings” (Marvasti 2008, 315).

Debates among various constructionists continue to revolve around questions of what exactly is constructed through interactive meaning-making practices and the ontological status of objective conditions (Best 2008). It is beyond the scope of this chapter to provide a detailed discussion of the various constructionist approaches that have emerged in response to questions pertaining to the nature of reality, which remains one of the “sticky points” of social constructionist approaches (Hacking 1999). Suffice it to say that the varying approaches are best understood as organized along a continuum and vary in the degree to which they integrate social context in their analysis.

Strict constructionism focuses solely on the interpretive and interactive processes underlying social actors’ world-making (Best 2003, 2008; Harris 2008). Contextual constructionism, on the other hand, conceives of social context as an integral element in constructionist analysis (Best 2003). Contextual constructionists argue that in their interpretive and interactive practices, actors take up and respond to the social context in which they are embedded and thus produce, maintain, and modify that context (Holstein and Gubrium 2003a). Contextual constructionists then examine *how* reality constituting processes unfold and *what* becomes manifest through individuals’ accounts and practices (Gubrium and Holstein 2008).

IC is particularly informative for contextual constructionist ethnography because it draws “uncompromising attention to the construction process as it is enacted in concrete settings”

(Marvasti 2008, 315).[46] Based on the premise that meaning is not inscribed in social phenomena, but is produced, maintained and changed through human interaction, IC empirically explores the "*situated practices* that create reality" (ibid., 315, emphasis in the original). To explore the constitutive qualities of individuals' practices, IC focuses on what individuals in a certain setting are *doing*, the kind of *work* they engage in, the *practices* that become visible in their interaction and the discursive resources they invoke when *accounting* for experience (Marvasti 2008).

When people talk, they do not simply provide description or representations of an objectively existing reality (Miller 2008). All talk is purposeful and intentioned as individuals promote their preferred version of reality, seek to persuade others of the facticity of their account, and try to disqualify alternative versions. Individuals are thus understood as artful actors who actively and strategically employ language to construct the world, or aspects of it (Miller 2003; Potter 1996). Language, either in texts or talk, is a central medium of action through which versions of reality are brought into being. Not all talk, however, bears the same authority or has the same chance to be heard as legitimate (Cheek 2004). Thus, all talk is a struggle over meaning and thereby essentially power struggles seeking to establish, maintain, or defy dominant interpretations of the world (Bourdieu 1991; Carabine 2001; Miller 2003, 2008).

However, talk is not only construct*ive*, it is also construct*ed*. Individuals are not the "autonomous maker[s] of meaning" envisioned by some symbolic interactionists (Miller 2008, 259). Instead, their talk is situated within and mediated by the context in which it emerges. Individuals, in building their accounts, draw on already existing classifications, categories,

---

[46] According to Marvasti (2008), IC's focus on the interactional work through which social phenomena are brought into being distinguishes IC from discursive variants of social constructionism (see, for example, Potter and Hepburn 2008).

meanings, and interpretive repertoires (Berger and Luckmann 1966; Garfinkel 1984; Schütz 1967). Discourses, for example, are such an interpretative resource. I rely on Dorothy Smith's interpretation of discourse here, which proposes that,

> discourse refers to translocal relations COORDINATING the practices of definite individuals talking, writing, reading, watching, and so forth, in particular local places at particular times. People *participate* in discourses, and their participation reproduces it. Discourse constrains what they can say or write, and what they say or write reproduces and modifies discourse (2005, 224, emphasis in the original)

Thus, discourses are both construct*ive* and construct*ed* in nature.

IC emphasizes the reality-constituting role of discourses, focusing predominantly on "discourse in practice" (Gubrium and Holstein 2000). IC explores how actors skillfully use contextually contingent interpretive resources or repertoires, which structure their everyday practices (Marvasti 2008). IC conceives of all facets of social reality as a process, perpetually emerging from human beings' interpretive and interactional practices, which in turn are socially conditioned as they are shaped by contextual contingencies (Marvasti 2008; Snow 2001).

However, contextual contingencies are never equated with determinate social structures in the objectivist sense, but are perceived as shaping the conditions under which constructive processes unfold. The integration of context draws attention to the material, social and cultural limits of constructive practices (Holstein and Gubrium 2008). An IC-informed analysis thus simultaneously attends to the reality-constituting practices organized through interaction and talk (the *how*), the conditions of such practices (the *when* and *where*) and subsequent product of such practices (the *what*). Such multifaceted analysis allows the exploration of "reality constituting processes without blindly reifying, nor needlessly ignoring, the contexts, conditions, and resources of the construction process" (Holstein and Gubrium 2008, 376).

It is important, though, to carefully balance the analysis of interactional practices and contextual contingencies so as to not privilege one domain over the other. Such balance can be achieved through what Gubrium and Holstein (1997, 2000) call analytic bracketing. This *methodological* move allows "the analyst to momentarily focus on the *hows* and *whats* of the construction process" (Holstein and Gubrium 2008, 390, emphasis in the original). Throughout the analysis, reality is approached as both accomplished through individuals' practices and as a resource that reality-constituting practices draw on (Holstein and Gubrium 2008).

Ethnography is a mode of inquiry particularly suited to document in depth the "real-time interactional contingencies of the social construction process" (Marvasti 2008, 316) IC seeks to explore. However, while the analysis of the social organization of service provision to homeless families is informed by IC, I deviate from the approach in two important ways. The first deviation is grounded in the contingencies of my fieldwork, namely the types of interaction I had access to (or not) and the nature of those interactions. For example, the spatial (i.e. working on different floors) and temporal (working different shifts) separation of different types of Guest House staff (particularly case workers and residential staff) undermined any face-to-face interaction, and different types of staff communicated through email correspondence. I would argue that the analysis of such non-verbal communication slightly deviates from the analysis of "real-time" interactional practices through which reality is created, the focal point of IC.

Secondly, IC focuses predominantly on *locally* relevant social conditions that shape and are shaped by individuals' interactional practices (Marvasti 2008). It is here that I further depart from IC. As Bourdieu (1999, 181) argues, "the explanatory principles of observed realities" are often not found at the site if inquiry itself. The question then is how to take the contextual focus beyond relevant local particularities to include translocal contingencies that organize reality-

constituting practices. To that end, I draw on the work of Pierre Bourdieu and the analytic insights offered by institutional ethnography as conceived by Dorothy Smith.

The Structuralist Constructivism of Pierre Bourdieu

The *structuralist constructivism* of Pierre Bourdieu (1989) goes beyond a phenomenological description of individuals' common-sense apprehensions of the social world (Bourdieu 2000). Bourdieu emphasizes that the researcher will come to a full understanding of social phenomena only through the exploration of human practice in relation to the social contexts in which members generate structured perceptions, dispositions, and social practices (Bourdieu 2000).

The crux of Bourdieu's theory of practice is the dissolution of dualistic oppositions that characterize the social sciences such as objectivism and subjectivism, society and individual, or structure and action (Thompson 1991; Wacquant 2007). Rather than abandoning either mode of knowledge, Bourdieu's theory of practice synthesizes objectivist and subjectivist approaches (Bourdieu 1977; Wacquant 2007). This synthesis treats the primary experience of actors as constitutive of the social world while taking into account the generative principles that structure individuals' perceptions and practices (Bourdieu 1990). Bourdieu's approach thus explores subjective experience in relation to the social context that provides actors with the schemes of perception and action through which they interpret, understand, and produce the social world (Bourdieu 2001).

The cognitive structures through which individuals apprehend and subsequently construct the social world they are embedded in are the "product of the internalization of the structures of that world" (Bourdieu 1989, 18). Those internalized cognitive structures are structured to the

extent that they are the product of the social context in which they emerged and in which they operate. Cognitive structures produce specific, differentiated practices and forms of representation, which are themselves available for classification through internalized schemes of perception. The recursive correspondence between objective and mental structures guarantees the recognition of the social order as natural and the misrecognition of its foundation in socially constructed, arbitrary principles of vision and division (Bourdieu 2000). That means that the embodiment of the interactively created social order, including its relations of power and domination, guarantees its relative stability because individuals perceive the world according to structured schemes of perception, which are the product of the existing relations of domination (Bourdieu 2001).

Analytic Insights Offered by Institutional Ethnography

Another perspective that informed my analytic framework is institutional ethnography (IE), which contributes to an understanding of how exactly social context shapes individual practices. While IE is not necessarily "a constructionist approach" per se, it nonetheless shares important intellectual, ontological, empirical and analytic tenets with social constructionism (McCoy 2008). While the ethnography presented in this dissertation is not a full-fledged institutional ethnography, it adopted several key IE insights. The following discussion does not, however, do justice to the complexity of the IE project. I will focuses on the ways in which specific IE tenets informed the analytic project of the contextual constructionist ethnography presented here.

Similar to interactionist constructionism, IE seeks to describe and analyze how social organization is accomplished through the practices of individual actors. However, IE extends that

objective by examining how the local practices of individual actors are coordinated by translocal social relations (DeVault and McCoy 2006). To that end, IE takes as its point of departure the local actualities of people's everyday practices and experiences (Smith 2005). Empirical inquiry at that stage focuses on what people do, the kind of work they engage in. IE draws on a broad conceptualization of work that includes any activity "done intentionally under definite material conditions and taking definite amounts of time" (Griffith and Smith 2005, 124).

However, everyday experiences and practices are not the final analytic object of an IE guided inquiry (McCoy 2008). Institutional ethnographers argue that the everyday practices of social actors are connected to, shaped by, and generative of the institutional relations that IE seeks to explore (DeVault and McCoy 2006). While the everyday experience of social actors is the entry point into the investigation, the analysis proceeds with a shift in research sites to explore "translocal relations, discourses, and institutional work processes" that shape individuals' experiences and practices, which become visible in people's accounts of their experience (DeVault and McCoy 2006, 755). Thus, the analytic interest of an IE-informed inquiry of the social is the concerting of people's practices and work activities (McCoy 2008).

IE posits that "ruling relations" are the dominant form of coordination and control in contemporary society. Dorothy Smith (1990, 6) defined "relations of ruling" as,

> …those forms that we know as bureaucracy, administration, management, professional organization, and the media. They include also the complex of discourses, scientific, technical, and cultural, that intersect, interpenetrate, and coordinate the multiple sites of ruling.

Coordinative processes, however, cannot be reified as determinate social structures in the objectivist sense and are best understood "as an ongoing historical process in which people's doings are caught up and responsive to what others are doing; what they are doing is responsive to and given by what has been going on" (Smith 2005, 65).

According to IE, the day-to-day practices of social actors are shaped by institutional processes. Institutions are conceptualized as "clusters of ruling relations interconnected around a specific function" (McCoy 2008, 703). As functional complexes that address matters of education, health care, child protection or social service provision, institutions typically subsume multiple organizations (Grahame 1998). Institutional text-based social relations transform local practices into "standardized, generalized, and, especially, translocal forms of coordinating people's activities" (Smith 2005, 101). Thus, individual experiences and practices can be conceived of as being structured – but not determined – by such generalizing relations.

Social relations and institutional work processes that coordinate and organize local practices and experiences translocally rely increasingly on text-based forms of knowledge and discursive practices (DeVault and McCoy 2006). Texts, defined as a form of representation, tie together local experiences and relations of ruling by coordinating individuals' practices across contexts (McCoy 2008). Text-based institutional discourses simultaneously inform, coordinate and control local courses of action and coordinate those local courses of action with translocal social relations (Smith 2005).

Bringing it All Together

So far, I have provided an overview of pertinent theoretical, ontological, epistemological and methodological underpinnings that informed my particular ethnographic approach. I draw on interactionist constructionism as outlined by Marvasti (2008) and expand its scope by combining it with tenets of the structuralist constructivism of Pierre Bourdieu and analytic insights offered by institutional ethnography. My particular research program thus remains sensitive to the specific practices and processes through which social reality is built up, maintained, and altered,

but then contextualizes those practices by examining how, and which, conditions and resources shape the construction process.

I treat social phenomena as practical accomplishments that are brought into being by individuals' everyday practices. To explore the constitutive qualities of individuals' practices, I explore what individuals in a certain setting are *doing*, the kind of *work* they engage in, the *practices* that become visible in their interaction and the discursive resources they invoke when *accounting* for experience. However, contextual contingencies shape the conditions under which constructive processes unfold. A contextual orientation draws attention to the material, social and cultural limits of constructive practices.

While interactionist constructionism focuses predominantly on *locally* relevant social conditions that shape and are shaped by individuals' interactional practices, I follow the advice of Pierre Bourdieu and institutional ethnographers to seek the organizing principles of individual practices beyond the locally relevant context. Individual meaning-making processes and resulting practices are not built up from scratch in each and every interaction, but are informed and shaped by socially organized resources. Those resources, be they texts, stocks of knowledge, or discourses, are generated through social relations and institutional work processes that are situated outside the locally relevant context. My particular variant of constructionism thus strives to understand social phenomena through the ethnographic exploration of human practice in relation to the social contexts in which members generate structured perceptions, dispositions, and social practices.

Methods of Data Generation

In order to explore how the service provision to homeless families is locally and translocally organized through discursive and interactional practices, I drew on data from four different sources: in-depth, semi-structured interviews; participant observations; institutionally generated texts; and pertinent policy documents, official statistics, and newspaper articles. I will now turn to a brief theoretical discussion of the data generation methods I employed.

The Ethnographic Interview as Reality-Constituting Conversational Interaction

The methodological literature on qualitative interviews focuses predominantly on ways to standardize the interview process in order to avoid bias, error, and other forms of contamination of naturally existing data (Bourdieu 1996; Holstein and Gubrium 2002). Such concerns are based on the presupposition that "facts" about the social world can be apprehended by soliciting information from "research subjects." The latter are treated as epistemologically passive informants, as repositories of knowledge, as vessels filled with answers from which correct, uncontaminated, reality-representing responses to the researcher's questions can be extracted (Fontana 2002; Holstein and Gubrium 1995). The interview itself is treated as a means to "elicit true, valid, factual answers to interview questions" (Rosenblatt 2002, 893), as "a conduit of information from informants to researchers" (Ellis and Berger 2002, 583).

However, congruent with the constructionist framework, I do not conceive of the interview as a data *collection* strategy, but as an occasioned conversational interaction through which data are *generated*. The interview situation thus understood is conceptualized as an occasion for, and site of, interactive meaning-making and knowledge production (Fontana 2002; Holstein and Gubrium 2002, 2003b). The conceptualization of interviews as a collaborative

production of meaning and knowledge treats research participants not as the object of study, but rather as knowing participants and producers of the social world, who actively contribute to knowledge generating processes (Koro-Ljungberg 2002; Smith 1989).

The Relationship Between Interviewing and Participant Observation

According to Rock (2001), participant observation is the bedrock of any interactionist research. Participant observation lends itself to exploring and describing in detail what people *do* and what they *say* in a given social setting. In order to grasp the meaning-making processes that are constitutive of social phenomena, ethnographers fully immerse themselves in the setting under study to learn first-hand about people's interpretive and meaning-making work as well as particular actions and interactions that occur in a given setting (Smith 2001).

Interview and observation data are frequently combined for the purpose of triangulation, where observational data is used to "fact check" interviewees' accounts (see, for example, Becker and Geer 1957; Fetterman 2010). The notion of triangulation, however, rests on a problematic understanding of the social world as objectively existing and characterized by unequivocal features that are accessible to the researcher's perceptions through scientific methods (Atkinson and Coffey 2008). Consistent with the constructionist framework outlined above I conceive of observations as constitutive of the social world they seek to describe (Atkinson and Coffey 2008; Gubrium and Holstein 1997; Hammersley and Atkinson 1995).

Both interviewing and participant observation have their respective methodological shortcomings. There are experiences and forms of knowledge that are not fully accountable. At the same time, some facets of individuals' working knowledge are not necessarily observable as they never become fully visible in day-to-day action and interaction. Thus, a combination of

participant observations and interviewing allows researchers to see for themselves what happens and elicit accounts pertaining to the social phenomenon under study (McCoy 2008).

However, Silverman (1993) points out that participant observation should not be treated as a means to "fact check" possible distortions and inaccuracies of interview-generated data, nor should interviews be used as a proxy for direct observation in instances where the researcher does not have direct access to pertinent events. It is thus imperative that neither method be privileged over the other. Further it is important to keep in mind that data generated from both observations and interviews cannot necessarily be treated in an additive fashion (Atkinson and Coffey 2008).

Texts

In my analysis, I drew on two broad categories of texts. The first set was generated *within* the organization, such as press releases, newsletters, annual reports, operational manuals, email communication, and institutionally generated statistics. In addition, I drew on texts that originated *outside* the organization itself, but were pertinent to its operation. These included official statistics related to poverty, homelessness, the economy and the housing market in the region; newspaper articles about the Guest House, and pertinent policy documents, such as *Calgary's 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness*.

Texts are often treated as a source of information, as representing factual facets of a world out there. It is important to keep in mind, however, that any form of documentation is produced under specific conditions, for particular purposes, and for an identifiable audience (Best 2001; Garfinkel 1984; Kitsuse and Cicourel 1963; Linders 2008). Texts translate a

complex social order into neat, reality-simplifying categories that are always political, as they impose a certain dominant version of reality (Linders 2008).

Consequently, I treat texts as sociological phenomena in their own right (Smith 1990) rather than as a source of objective information, which shifts the analytic focus to the constructive moments that become visible in those texts (Linders 2008). Consistent with the constructionist agenda outlined above, I used texts to examine processes of social construction. I explored who was involved in the production and enactment of texts, what the interpretive content of the text was and which discursive practices members drew on in structuring their reality-constituting claims (Linders 2008).

Institutionally generated texts were an important site of inquiry during my observational fieldwork. Such texts provided a window into exploring how day-to-day practices were coordinated among shelter staff members who rarely interacted with each other face to face and yet worked towards a concerted goal, albeit on different ends of the frontline. While institutional texts do not determine individual practices, they are an important element of the "decision-making horizons" that shape those practices because they are "'encouraging', 'privileging' or 'preferring' some interpretations over others" (Miller 1997, 79). Discursive practices that emerged in institutional texts also provided insights into how practices were coordinated across specific organizations as they shed light on translocal social relations (DeVault and McCoy 2006; McCoy 2008; Nichols 2008b).

The Idiosyncrasies of Ethnographic Research

I will now discuss the idiosyncrasies of my ethnographic fieldwork, explicating some of the challenges and difficult ethical choices I was confronted with while in the field. First, I will

address issues pertaining to the selection of my research site, gaining institutional access, and finding my role as observer. Second, I will discuss issues pertaining to the recruitment of research participants. Next I will provide an account of my experience as an interviewer and participant observer. I will conclude by addressing challenges I encountered in the context of informed consent procedures.

Selecting a Research Site and Gaining Institutional Access

To explore ethnographically the social organization of service provision to homeless families, I needed access to one such service provider. I strategically selected the Guest House as my site of inquiry for two reasons. First, I had previously completed a qualitative research project at the Guest House for a methods class. Secondly, I had volunteered with the organization on several occasions since September 2006 and on a regular basis since the fall of 2008. I was thus familiar with the organization and knew some of its staff members in person, which I hoped would facilitate access to that research site. However, gaining institutional access proved to be more cumbersome than I had anticipated.

In December 2008, I submitted an ethics application to the University of Calgary's Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board (CFREB). While I had already obtained verbal approval of my research from the Guest House's executive director (ED), the CFREB requested that I obtain the ED's approval in writing. Between December 2009 and February 2010 I made every effort to reach the ED, sending her several emails, calling the shelter multiple times, leaving messages, and accepting the unsolicited support of various staff members – to no avail. After months of concerted efforts, a chance encounter with a Guest House Board member, who advocated on my behalf, provided me with the one-page document I so urgently needed to finally

begin my fieldwork in March 2009 (for a detailed time-line see Appendix A). I submitted the document to the CFREB, which, after several revisions, approved my research in April 2009.

After receiving ethics approval, I started hanging out at the Guest House for a few hours here and there, trying to find my way into being a participant observer. Early on I realized that my personality did not lend itself easily to walking into a room full of strangers and striking up a conversation. I decided that I needed a more structured role that would allow me to become more of a participant and less of an observer. However, just like the process of negotiating access to the organization, finding a purposeful role within the organization to facilitate my participant observation was a lengthy and frustrating process (see Appendix A for a detailed time-line). The organizational barriers I faced prompted me to delay my observations. In June 2009 I thus turned to interviewing shelter guests, initially planned as the second phase of my fieldwork.

The Recruitment of Research Participants

I had been serving dinner at the Guest House with a group of volunteers the first Sunday of every month for almost two years when I began my fieldwork. The CFREB requested that I recruit research participants, both staff and guests, through general invitations only. I was to provide information pertaining to the research and my contact information and wait for interested individuals to contact me.

To recruit research participants among shelter guests, I made an announcement before our June dinner service. I told guests that I wanted to write a book about homeless families in Calgary, indicating that I would like to learn more about how families ended up in the shelter and what living in a shelter was like. I emphasized that, while the Guest House had given me permission to approach their guests for help, none of the information relayed to me would be

shared with the organization. As the CFREB requested, I informed shelter guests that all research participants would be remunerated with $30 in cash.[47]

I kept the announcement short so as to not delay the dinner service, but put a stack of flyers providing additional details and my contact information on the cutlery station. My selected recruitment strategy proved effective as many guests approached me after dinner to ask further questions or to set up an interview. Over the next months, additional shelter guests were recruited for my research in essentially the same fashion, at the beginning of the month through pre-dinner announcements.

While recruiting shelter guests was comparatively unproblematic, finding research participants among shelter staff was cumbersome and trying. As the CFREB had directed, I sent general participation invitations to staff via email, asking them to contact me if they were interested. This recruitment strategy, however, proved to be ineffective. My emails remained unanswered and I was later told that interview requests are, for the most part, ignored unless the Board, the Communication and Media Relations department, or the ED explicitly instruct the staff to cooperate. Consequently, my requests were disregarded as those of "yet another hack" and simply deleted.

In September 2009, I secured a job as residential staff member at the Guest House. My tasks involved supervising the family floor, interacting with adults and children, and providing

---

[47] Whether or not to remunerate research participants, particular low-income individuals, is a widely debated issue (see, for example, Cook and Nunkoosing 2008; Fry et al. 2006; Grady 2001; Head 2009; McKeganey 2001; Russell, Moralejo, and Burgess 2000; Seddon 2005; Thompson 1996). Despite existing reservations I applied for and received a $1,500 research grant from the University of Calgary in order to be able to remunerate shelter guests for their participation. Only once did I question my decision to provide monetary remunerations when two research participants whom I had interviewed in the morning showed up at the shelter drunk and high in the evening. While this episode haunted me for days to come, the comments of other research participants pertaining to the helpfulness of the remuneration solidified my conviction that withholding cash payments was not the solution to the dilemma I had encountered.

support and essential items as needed. Assuming a staff position proved invaluable for establishing contact with the shelter's staff.[48] I began talking about my research with other staff members and verbally invited them to participate. It was fairly unproblematic to recruit staff members with whom I interacted regularly during my shifts, such as other residential staff members. However, it was difficult to engage staff members I never crossed paths with, such as case workers. I sent an email to all eight case workers, only two of whom returned my email.

For my dissertation research, I conducted a total of 34 interviews with shelter guests and staff, which varied in length from 22 minutes to two and a half hours. Between June 2009 and February 2010, I interviewed 24 shelter guests. I also interviewed two Guest House Board members and eight staff members between November 2009 and September 2010. Figure 4 provides an overview of all research participants who were formally interviewed for my study (number of research participants in brackets)[49].

The Interview Guide

As part of my ethics application, I had developed elaborate interview guides for shelter guests and residential staff (see Appendices B and C[50] respectively). Going into my fieldwork, I initially intended to explore what daily life for a family residing in a homeless shelter looks like. The guests' interview guide covered five substantive areas through which I hoped to learn more about sheltered families' backgrounds, pathways into homelessness, challenges of shelter life,

---

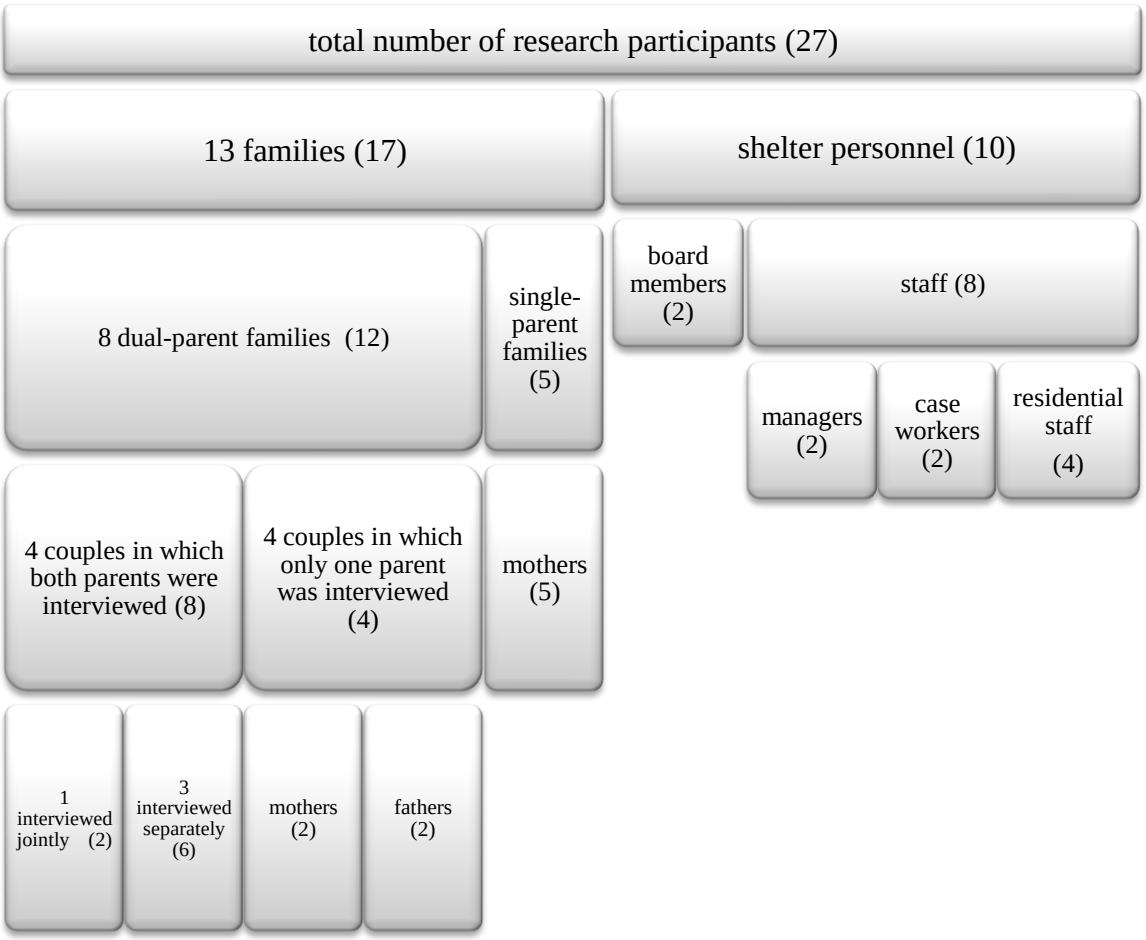
[48] It did, however, hamper the recruitment of shelter residents, only two of whom responded to flyers I handed out after my shifts.

[49] The numbers presented in the table do not include the seven participants of the senior program who I interviewed for this study, but whose contributions did not pertain to the analysis presented here.

[50] I included the interview guide for residential staff as an illustration.

maintaining family relations in a shelter environment, and guests' general outlook on homelessness.

Figure 4: Total Number of Research Participants



The first three interviews, all of which were conducted on the same day, left me frustrated, because I felt as though the interview guide and my approach to interviewing did not work. Among the topics covered in the interview, shelter guests seemed to be most interested in providing accounts of their life and the circumstances that brought them to the Guest House. They also talked at length about their perceptions of shelter life and the challenges they encountered on a daily basis. Family-related questions, on the other hand, such as how caring for

their children in a shelter environment differed from caring for them in their own home, generated less detailed answers. Moreover, some of my questions, such as how parents pictured their children's future, generated nothing but blank stares on my interviewees' face, which prompted me to reconsider my questions.

In hindsight, many of my initial questions were too abstract and relevant only to the academic realm at best. I realized that the interview guide I had so carefully engineered based on the existing literature had been crafted for an entirely different purpose, namely an ethics application. My questions did not seem to have much relevance for interviewees and they seemed to struggle to answer questions to which they had hitherto not given much thought.

My approach to interviewing changed the day after I conducted my first round of interviews. I received an early-morning phone call from a shelter guest, inquiring when I could come in to interview her and her husband as they were out of cigarettes and needed money. When I got to the shelter later that morning, I took her out for a cigarette before embarking on the interview, concerned that, craving a cigarette, she would rush through the interview. While smoking outside, she started telling me her story without much prompting. As soon as we got to the small room I used for interviewing, I turned on the audio recorder and let her chronicle the particulars of her life, which she did for nearly two hours, producing an account that was captivating, poignant, and tremendously insightful for my research.

The subsequent interview with her husband proceeded in much the same fashion and when I compared the couple's interview transcripts to those generated the day before, they seemed incommensurably more free-flowing, detailed, and rich. The richness of their self-directed accounts prompted me to follow a more intuitive approach to interviewing. At the beginning of the interview I would tell research participants that I wanted to learn more about

how families end up in a shelter and what living in a shelter was like, giving them sufficient leeway to decide what they deemed important to tell me. Many interviews unfolded in unexpected ways, drawing my attention to issues I had previously not considered, and offering me perspectives I had not come across in the existing literature.

I had to realize, though, that self-directed talk was not for everyone. Some research participants struggled with the lack of structure and direction, and pointed out that they needed specific questions, because they did not know what they were supposed to talk about. In those cases I would return to my interview questions, which I continuously revamped based on the things I had learned from previous interviews. Thus I was able to provide struggling interviewees with more guidance.

To illuminate institutional work processes from a variety of angles,[51] I conducted interviews with Guest House Board members, managers, supervisors, case workers and residential staff. The purpose of the staff interviews was to learn more about how service provision to homeless families was locally organized, which work processes staff were involved in, and what staff members orient towards when doing their work.

The interview guide covered four areas: staff members' professional and organizational background; guest admission; shelter programs and services; and the organization of shelter life. Through interviews, I sought to explore what different types of staff *do*, how their work relates to that of other staff members within the organization, and which organizational processes and institutional relations shape their everyday work practices. Following Bourdieu's (1999) advice

[51] I accounted for the differences in perspective by developing separate interview guides for different types of staff. While there was a certain overlap in questions, each interview guide contained a specific set of unique questions pertaining to the specific tasks of each position.

to search for practice-shaping principles outside local settings, interviews with staff members served, in part, "to identify the translocal relations, discourses, and institutional work processes that are shaping the informants' everyday work" (DeVault and McCoy 2006, 755).

Becoming and Being a Participant Observer

In late August 2009, I received an email from the frontline manager, with whom I had been in regular contact over the last months, with a job posting attached. The Guest House was hiring two support workers to facilitate the *Naptime Program*. According to the job description, the idea behind the program was to provide

> families with babies and pre-school age children the opportunity to let their children have a healthy and regulated nap or quiet time in the [Family Shelter] in the 3rd floor living quarters.

The job description further specified that through the *Naptime Program*, the Guest House intended to provide homeless families with "some private time with their children" and "some sense of normalcy while they are homeless," encourage "positive parenting opportunities" through "routines and structures," and strengthen parenting skills "through role modeling, support and guidance." The formal qualification requirements for the position included:

- must have an understanding of homelessness (*I thought I did, so: yes*)
- enjoy working with families and young children (*families yes, young children not so much*)
- have patience and tolerance (*sort of*)
- have a strong understanding of child development, routines, and structure (*no*)
- a background in the human services field (*no*)
- must be non-judgmental, have a sense of humor, be open and receptive to feedback, and work well independently (*yes, yes, no, yes*)
- must have an understanding of risk assessment / Crisis intervention skills (*no*)
- some university/college education (*yes*)

After all the delays and detours I had experienced in setting up my observations, I immediately jumped on the opportunity. Despite my obvious shortcomings in regard to the

required qualifications, I was hired, without much further ado, to cover the three-hour long shifts three times a week. I assumed my position in mid-September and my duties from there on included:

- Supervision of community living quarters.
- Ensuring *Naptime* expectations are met by the participant families.
- Maintaining a positive relationship/rapport with the shelter families.
- Engaging families to participate in positive "quiet time" activities (story time, play, etc.)
- Role modeling routine follow through to the shelter families (structured nap and quiet time during the day).
- Log note follow through during or after shift to applicable staff (case workers, residential staff and management) about observations, behavioural concerns and general interactions with family participants.

It is no understatement to say that assuming a residential staff position was the breakthrough I had been working on so arduously for five months. Rather than being a participant-as-observer (Gold 1958), feeling like an outsider who stuck out like a sore thumb, I had assumed an active role within the organization. As a staff member I now had access to institutional work processes that had remained off-limits thus far and my research picked up considerable momentum. My position as staff member not only facilitated my observations, but also, as described earlier, provided access to the organization's staff members, who, as an outsider, I was unable to reach.

Both as a researcher and as a new staff member, I had a lot to learn. I received no formal training or introduction and spent much of my time during the first few weeks on the job "figuring things out." Walking into the organization as a complete novice and without any formal training certainly had its advantages. Initially, I learned much about the shelter's formal rules, for example, by studying the numerous signs that adorned the shelter's walls. My early fieldnotes thus focused on the structural setup of the family floor and the various rules that regulate communal living on the family floor.

Those fieldnotes entries are, in a sense, a diary documenting the learning of an institutional language that I did not understand. Many times I would try to make sense of the seemingly ludicrous micro-management of individual behaviour. In hindsight, it was the naïve stance that I unwillingly assumed during my first weeks on the job that was so invaluable from a researcher's perspective. The complete lack of guidance created many puzzles that my observations had to piece together; the outcome was an entirely unexpected range of phenomena my research could explore.

I covered predominantly *Naptime* shifts, but soon began working other shifts as well. For me, this is where the learning really began. While I worked in solitude during my *Naptime* shifts, all other shifts were covered by several staff members. Due to the lack of direction, I had started working quite intuitively, responding to particular situations as I saw fit. Working alongside other staff members, however, drew my attention to institutional mandates that guided staff.

I learned that the lack of training and formal guidance for new staff members was by no means unique to my case. New staff members typically learn the ropes from seasoned staff members, a form of workplace socialization I was not subject to during my first few weeks. Thus, through working extra shifts with others staff members I was able to observe the day-to-day interactional practices, including both families and staff members, involved in the service provision to sheltered homeless families. In addition, I was able to seek answers from other staff members to the questions that had emerged during my first few weeks on the job, slowly unpacking the institutional processes that guided everyday staff work (DeVault and McCoy 2006).

Working with other staff also made me aware that staff members typically worked in small, shift-based teams that were fairly isolated from each other. Except during shift

changeovers, teams seemed to interact little with each other. I learned that teams communicated with each other mainly by email. Moreover, email communication was often the only form of interaction between different types of staff. Residential staff members hardly ever crossed paths with case workers and management, and yet the work efforts of all three levels of staff seemed coordinated. Emails thus emerged as a valuable source of data as they shed light on how staff members' everyday work practices were textually organized.

Informed Consent Procedures

Before beginning each interview, I asked research participants to read and sign the *Project Information and Consent Form*. Although the CFREB initially objected to the idea of a verbal consent procedure, it proved useful that I had insisted on that option. I was thus able to verbally relay the content of the consent form to guests who could not read, had very little formal education, or who were not fluent in English.

The informed consent procedure for the observational segment of my research was a more delicate matter, marked by conflicting formal, practical, and ethical contingencies. I had convinced the CFREB that *written* consent for the observation element of the study was neither feasible nor necessary. I had, however, committed to informing shelter guests about my role as researcher when conducting observations, interpreting their engagement with me as consent, and refraining from taking fieldnotes about guests who wished not to be part of my research. However, keeping members in the setting informed about my research was a complex enterprise. While I can say in good conscience that I did everything to make my research public knowledge, I cannot guarantee that everyone was aware of the specifics of my research at all times. Sticking to the consent procedure suggested by the CFREB was complicated by field idiosyncrasies.

First, I occupied multiple roles while in the field, often blurring the lines between work and fieldwork. Secondly, it was the nature of my position as residential staff member that I interacted with certain types of staff members more than with others. Inevitably, some staff members knew more about my role as a researcher than others. Third, the Guest House is a complex organization that is staffed by about 40 employees and shelters about 80 individuals at any given time. Frequent staff and guest turnover created an ever changing research environment, which made informing new arrivals of my research a complex endeavour.

Fourth, a particular dilemma was introduced by the emergence of email messages as important institutional documents. The bulk of email exchanges occurred during the week when I was not working at the shelter, and thus I often had no direct contact with the authors of such emails (i.e. other staff members). In addition, some emails concerned guests that I never met in person. I subsequently had to decide whether I could in good conscience draw on information obtained through email communication, when the author and the subject of such emails, at times, were not formally informed about my research and thus had not provided me with their consent.

While I do not, by any means, advocate covert research, particularly when it comes to vulnerable populations, any overt research has covert moments as it continually shifts back and forth on a continuum of openness and reticence (Murphy and Dingwall 2001; Spicker 2011). Spicker (2011, 119) points out "that disclosure is not a dichotomous concept, something that is done or not done, but a spectrum of activity," and my research certainly was no exception. Similarly, researchers agree that it is not feasible to expect that ethnographers "tell *all* people they are studying *everything* about the research" (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995, 265, emphasis in the original).

It is important to keep in mind that the goal of my participant observations was to understand the contextually embedded practices of service provision at a homeless shelter and not to collect detailed information on individual families or staff members. That said, the observational data my research generated is sensitive and, when published, could have negative repercussions for some members in the setting. I thus decided to anonymize all my data by refraining from providing information about interview time and/or location, descriptions of members' physical appearance or other identifying characteristics and by referring to specific staff positions only when absolutely essential for my argument. With regard to shelter guests, I slightly changed non-relevant details, such as demographic characteristics of individuals involved, to make them less identifiable.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process I followed, which consisted of reading, reflecting, interpreting, and re-reading the data my fieldwork had generated, was rather intuitive and marked by following "hunches" which were subsequently abandoned or developed in my writing. In order to analyze my data, I did not use a specific *method*, such as thematic coding, but drew heavily on analytic approaches outlined above. As noted earlier, I was interested in the local realities of service provision and the contextual organization of such work; I combined these interests analytically by alternately approaching reality as accomplished through individuals' interactive and discursive practices and as a resource that reality-constituting practices draw on (Holstein and Gubrium 2008). To that end, I employed analytic bracketing that allows "the analyst to momentarily focus on the *hows* and *whats* of the construction process" (Holstein and Gubrium 2008, 390, emphasis in the original).

Since discursive practices are conceptualized as the fundamental basis of social construction processes, my analysis focused on individuals' language use and recurring patterns therein. Moreover, I explored how individuals and social groups accomplish, maintain, and reproduce meanings as well as versions of reality in and through talk and texts (Nikander 2008). While I analytically focused on discursive practices found in talk and texts, discourses are conceptualized as occasioned, situated, and indexical. Discourses are always situated in a particular moment, environment, institutional context, and rhetorical frameworks (Potter and Hepburn 2008).

I printed off copies of all my research material, such as interview transcripts and observation fieldnotes and used the printed material for the analytic processing of the data. I engaged in a thorough reading of the material my different data generation methods had produced and took some preliminary notes pertaining to issues I saw emerging from the data. My reading of the material was guided by, but not confined to, the preliminary notes I had taken while in the field.

I then re-read my material, identifying some broad issues that started to emerge from the data, such as organizational debates and practices pertaining to conditions of service provision to homeless families, emerging issues characterizing client-staff interactions, as well as interactions among staff members and their effect on service delivery. The second read also helped me to refine the preliminary notes I had taken during my first read. I then started working on an outline to sort the wealth of material into broad subject areas, each representing a possible chapter in my write-up.

Once I had crudely organized my data, I used the software HyperResearch to store, organize, and manage my data, which greatly aided the analysis of the large amount of data my

fieldwork had generated. I chose to follow the advice of critics of software-generated analyses of qualitative data (see, for example, Hammersley and Atkinson 1995) and refrained from any mechanical analysis of my data. Using HyperResearch merely allowed me to link each topic of interest with pertinent excerpts from the written material and to print a collection of excerpts, organized by their respective subject areas.

I then organized initial subject areas into possible chapters and smaller sections within those chapters. While I had done a thorough review of the literature pertaining to poverty and homelessness, particularly homeless families, the focus of my research had changed considerably and much of what I had read now seemed irrelevant. I thus returned to the literature to theoretically anchor the core areas of interest I had identified throughout my analysis.

Matters of Representation

My ethnographic research generated knowledge of complex social processes that organize the day-to-day delivery of services to homeless families. My ethnography, as text, represents and transmits insights about this "diverse experiential world" (Blasco and Wardle 2007, 1). Following the constructivist paradigm, I make no claim that this text constitutes a factual representation of reality. The reflexive turn in ethnography in particular moved to the forefront of methodological debates the constitutive role of the researcher in the ethnography-producing process (Atkinson et al. 2001; Hammersley and Atkinson 1995; Jones 2010; Pollner and Emerson 2001). The question then is who can represent whom, how and for what purpose (Jones 2010; Van Maanen 1988), which inevitably raises questions of "power and knowledge" as "the representation of 'the researched' by the ethnographer may not necessarily be the way that

they would choose to represent themselves" (Light 2010, 183). It is thus key that I briefly address representational choices I made in writing this ethnography.

The Use of Interviews and Texts

While I conceptualize interviews as occasions for collaborative meaning-making and knowledge production (Fontana 2002; Holstein and Gubrium 2002, 2003b), the representation of interview data is arguably less collaborative, but shaped predominantly by the researcher's analytic and representational choices. Chapter IV, for example, provides an account of how families who participated in my research became homeless in the first place and how they ended up at the Guest House. The account I provide is based on data generated through in-depth interviews, in which research participants constructed a personal narrative of their experiences.

Consistent with the logic of ethnographic interviewing, I treat research participants' accounts as a representation of an experience that I cannot directly access (Riessman 1993). The telling of research participants' experiences was occasioned and contextual. Their accounts were constructed in the interview situation, for the purpose of helping me understand how families end up homeless. Research participants chose what to tell me and how, pursuing their own purposes in telling their story. Consequently I make no claims that these personal narratives are factual representations of reality, an account of what "really happened." Instead, these narratives are "talk organized around consequential events" (Riessman 1993, 3) through which individuals "claim identities and construct lives" (Riessman 1993, 2).

In constructing the narratives provided in Chapter IV, I drew on the representations of individual experiences provided by research participants in the interviews. I organized research participants' narratives temporally and imposed a chronological order of events leading up to the

families' current spell of homelessness. Furthermore, I condensed research participants' accounts. Rather than including the entire narrative as provided by research participants, I paraphrased much of their account, staying as true to the original in content and language as possible, only leaving out details I considered to be peripheral to the task at hand, which itself constitutes an interpretive choice. Key points in the narrative are illustrated by excerpts from the interviews to provide the reader with direct access to research participants' representational accounts of their experiences. I edited all interview excerpts to improve readability, deleting word repetitions and fillers, but I made no changes to the substantive content of the account. Thus, while I edited research participants' accounts to construct the narratives provided in Chapter IV, I engaged in little interpretive work nor do I make any interpretive claims.

Throughout my ethnography, I use interview material in a similar fashion. For example, in Chapters V and VI, I draw on staff's and board members' accounts to show how they understood the transition of the Guest House from a small, grassroots service provider to a sizable homeless shelter. Furthermore, I draw on institutional and media texts to illustrate various interpretations of key controversies that accompanied this transformation. Similarly, in Chapter VII I draw on shelter guests' and staff's interviews to show experiences with and differential interpretations of shelter rules and their implementation.

The Use of the Ethnographic Present

My ethnography centers on an institution that has a complex history. The institution itself, the people who occupy it, and the social, political, and economic context in which it operates continually change. When I began my research, the Guest House was in the midst of an important transformation, evolving from a small, grassroots organization providing housing to

homeless families on a nightly basis to a sizeable permanent shelter. My ethnography thus represents the experiential world of the Guest House at a particular moment in time (Miller 1997). For example, in Chapter V I describe a typical afternoon at the Guest House prior to its transition into a permanent family shelter. In Chapter VI, I describe the Guest House as it existed at the time of my fieldwork, an account which consequently could have been written in the past tense. While I fully acknowledge that my descriptions do not necessarily reflect the ways in which the Guest House presently operates, I employ the ethnographic present as a stylistic device in constructing my ethnographic representation.

It is important to keep in mind that the ethnographic present as I use it here is a narrative tool rather than a historical present which de-temporalizes the representation, assumes contextual stability, and silences the historicity of my research and subsequent account (De Pina-Cabral 2000). [52] Using the ethnographic present and an active style of writing preserves the dynamic, complex nature of the setting and keeps in focus the socially organized, reality-constituting practices in that setting. Moreover, insights gained during my fieldwork did not cease to exist the moment I exited the field (Hastrup 1990). Using the ethnographic present thus highlights the relevance and implications of past events for current events and social practices (Hirsch 2008).

Before I begin my discussion of the social organization of the Guest House's service delivery to homeless families, I would like to introduce some of the families I met over the course of my fieldwork. Some I only spent a few weeks with, others stayed at the Guest House for months and I became more familiar with them, learning about the intricacies of their lives, sharing with them sometimes joyous, sometimes devastating moments.

---

[52] For a detailed critique of the ethnographic present, see, for example, Sanjek (1991) or Brodkey (1987).

CHAPTER IV: "I'M THE CAPTAIN OF MY SHIP, NOT THE MASTER OF THE SEA."

– PATHWAYS INTO HOMELESSNESS –

Of all the preposterous assumptions of humanity over humanity, nothing exceeds most of the criticisms made on the habits of the poor by the well-housed, well-warmed, and well-fed.

—*Herman Melville*

It is safe to say that I had only a limited understanding of what was awaiting me when I started my fieldwork. Surely, I had volunteered at the Guest House on occasion in the past and had the odd conversation with some of their guests, but I was not prepared for the toll the interviews would take on everyone involved. As shelter guests recounted events of their lives that were funny, joyous, sad, troublesome, hurtful, and at times traumatizing, we laughed, cried and comforted each other. While it was difficult for some guests to relive painful moments of their lives, at the end of our conversation many expressed their gratitude for having had the opportunity to tell their story the way they wanted to tell it and without impending judgment. Moreover, to many it was important that their story was told in a meaningful way, to show what it is like to be homeless.

As is often the case in ethnographic research, my research questions changed as my fieldwork progressed and my focus shifted from the lived experience of homeless families to the complex social processes that shape that very experience. Despite the shift in focus, it remained important to integrate the stories of the families I interacted with for two years in this dissertation. In a sense, this chapter is the backbone of my dissertation, bringing it to life with personalized accounts. These are the people local policy makers discussed in Chapter I problematize because they make the downtown core look bad. These are the people academic research discussed in Chapter II has objectified, dissected, analyzed, diagnosed, and labeled.

The families whose accounts this chapter is based on came from a variety of backgrounds, and as diverse as their backgrounds were the circumstances that brought them to the Guest House. Most of the families experienced episodes of residential instability in the past and some had moved in and out of homelessness numerous times. Many of the families had utilized other housing options, such as living with family or friends, couch surfing or doubling up, before turning to the shelter, which was often the last resort after all other options had been exhausted.

Some guests discussed their stories in great detail, providing in-depth accounts of their childhoods, adolescence and adult years as well as the multifaceted circumstances that contributed to their current spell of homelessness. Through their accounts, I came to the realization that there are no simple or easy answers to the question why people wind up without a home. Their stories greatly helped me understand the intricacies of becoming and being homeless as well as the pathways into and barriers to re-housing. I did see certain commonalities in individuals' accounts, and yet none of the stories was identical. Using excerpts from my interviews, I will show that becoming homeless is an individualized experience, brought on by a multitude of convoluted and often entwined reasons.

Elaine: "Coming to the City Was Like Being Dropped in a Bath of Cold Water."

A considerable share of the families sheltered through the Guest House is of Aboriginal descent. While working at the shelter, I met many Aboriginal families who left their reserves and moved to Calgary in search of a better life for their children. Many of them wind up in one of Calgary's shelters upon their arrival in the city, because they have no resources, no money, and

no social networks. Elaine's account powerfully illustrates the many challenges families face after moving off the reserve.

Elaine, now 25 years old, grew up on a reserve in Southern Alberta, in what she called a "very dysfunctional family." She and her three siblings were raised, for the most part by one of their aunts, as her alcoholic parents were deemed unsuitable to care for their children by the child welfare system. At 19, Elaine's parents died and she immediately assumed full caretaker responsibilities for her younger siblings to escape an aunt by whom she felt treated like a "slave." Pregnant with her first child, deeply distraught by her parents' death, and feeling mistreated by her siblings she soon found herself overwhelmed by her caretaker responsibilities. She cited her state of despair at the time as the main reason why she herself started drinking shortly after the birth of her son:

> A year after my mom passed, I became alcoholic. I drank straight for nine months and then at the ninth month my aunt had my son and she told me 'I'm gonna call children services on you if you don't smarten up.' and that was enough to snap me out of it because I myself grew up in the child welfare system and didn't like the way I was treated…and I didn't want that for my son at all.

Weary of the misery of reserve life and to escape an abusive relationship Elaine decided to head to Calgary with her son and one of her sisters. She felt leaving the reserve was the only way to make a better life for herself and her son:

> It's just this vicious cycle that keeps going and it's not being stopped and I didn't wanna raise my son around that because I was raised by two alcoholic parents. I didn't want that for my son. So I left because I don't want this for my kids. I don't want this at all.

Upon arrival in Calgary, Elaine went straight to a women's shelter, which had a 28-day maximum stay policy. Part of Elaine's service plan was to find housing within that time frame, which proved to be difficult, taking into account the short supply of affordable housing options

for low-income families.[53;54] In addition, the transition from reserve to city life proved to be more difficult than Elaine had ever anticipated. Her unfamiliarity with the city proved to be another substantial barrier to obtaining housing:

> I would drive around the city and get lost because I didn't know where I was going or I didn't know the communication skills to talk to people and say 'Excuse me, I don't know where I'm going' you know? Or you're afraid to get the door slammed on you because of the discrimination…I hate the stereotypes, you know. They think one Native is a stupid drunk and then we all are stupid drunks because of that one person, you know? And then I was afraid for them to look down on me and to think that of me. So I didn't ask anybody, I didn't say anything. So I got lost for maybe three weeks when I first got here because I didn't know where I was going…That's why I couldn't find housing. I was too embarrassed to say 'Well, that's why I can't find housing,' because I didn't want them to think I was stupid.

After the initial four weeks had passed, Elaine was granted a two-week extension to continue her housing search. However, those two weeks passed as well without her having found an apartment and so she transitioned into an Aboriginal women's shelter across the city. In addition to the frustrating housing search, the strain of shelter life proved to be too much for Elaine's sister: "It was so hard in the shelters that my sister gave up and she nearly died. She committed, she tried to commit suicide." At the emergency room of the hospital where her sister was brought, Elaine learned about Sunshine Cabins, a transitional housing facility for Aboriginal families, but chose to keep searching for market housing. Elaine found an apartment for the three of them, but maintaining housing was challenging on her limited income. Elaine recalled:

---

[53] Some shelters require their clients to develop service plans with their case workers. Service plans lay out the client's short term and long term goals, such as applying for social assistance, searching for housing, entering employment training, etc. Service plans are seen by many service providers as crucial for overcoming homelessness by providing clients with a concerted approach to make "necessary life changes."

[54] In 2009, the average two-bedroom apartment in Calgary rented for $1,099 per month (CMHC 2010b). Elaine's Income Support core shelter allowance amounted to $546 (single parent with one child). Even in combination with her sister's $100 core shelter allowance, finding an affordable apartment was an almost hopeless endeavour, particularly because vacancy rates of low-price apartments ranged around 3% (CMHC 2010b) .

> It was hard because we didn't have any income yet and the money I was getting was going straight to rent. Uhm for maybe two weeks, me and my younger sister and my son, who was three at the time, lived on a soup can a day because I had no bus fare and we were way out in the southwest and I didn't know anything at all.

She further recalled among the challenge she faced was the fact that on the reserve, the band office had paid her rent and utilities and so her living allowance and Canada Child Tax Benefit were hers to spend. In the city, however, she was responsible for paying her own bills but had never learned how to budget a fixed income. Consequently, she occasionally missed bill or rent payments and soon learned that her landlord was not particularly lenient in that matter. In addition, Elaine had only limited knowledge of resources available to low-income families, but was too self-conscious to ask for help.

On a particularly challenging day, Elaine overcame her qualms and called Aspen, an agency providing services to homeless families or those at risk of becoming homeless. Elaine signed up for a program called "The Other Twelve Hours," part of Aspen's "Families in Transition" program. Every day, they would come and pick her up, provide child care for her son while she attended workshops at the Aspen facility and supply the family with a lunch. At Aspen, Elaine was told that if she attended the life skills program for three months, she would qualify for a subsidized apartment run by one of Aspen's partnering agencies. Elaine enrolled in the life skills program, which, according to her, improved her communication skills and knowledge of available resources, and three months later she moved into an apartment at Sunshine Cabins with her sister and son.

During that time, Elaine's life stabilized. Due to her subsidized rent at Sunshine Cabins and resources available to her there, she was able to make ends meet. She gave birth to another son and participated in the employment training program through Alberta Job Corps, which also

increased her income as she was now paid minimum wage for full-time work. However, the stability was short lived and her life was turned upside down when the family was evicted from Sunshine Cabins after an altercation with another resident had gotten out of hand, through no fault of her own as she maintained.

After her eviction from Sunshine Cabins, Elaine briefly stayed at the Guest House and, after two weeks, moved into market housing with her two sons and the father of her second child. However, the cold and damp basement suite aggravated her son's asthma, and he was consequently constantly sick. When her son got too sick to go to daycare, Elaine was forced to stay home with him and subsequently missed work for days on end without paid sick leave, which Alberta Job Corps participants are not entitled to receive. Eventually she was dismissed from the Alberta Job Corps program for poor attendance, which forced her to reapply for Income Support, but the monthly benefits were too low and they could not keep their apartment. Elaine realized that they would not be able to pay their rent that month and summarized: "...we were just screwed. Pardon my French, but we were just screwed…we couldn't go anywhere. We were done."

Elaine and her sons, now three and six years old, moved into a relative's house and her partner chose to stay with friends for the time being. However, after two weeks Elaine decided that her relative's house was not safe for her children and returned to the Guest House, where she had previously stayed. Elaine's partner did not join the family at the Guest House because his work hours conflicted with the strict curfew the shelter enforced. Moreover, shelter rules that restricted families to two nights away from the shelter per month and the strict curfew were a considerable hindrance to maintaining a relationship with her partner, and they broke up.

After her negative experience with market housing, Elaine decided that on her limited income, she could maintain housing only if it was subsidized. She filled out an application for the CHC and then the waiting began. When I interviewed Elaine, she had been at the shelter for five months, a time that was very difficult for her, and at times she seemed to have given up hope of ever getting out. As much as Elaine appreciated the Guest House for providing her with shelter and food, she struggled with the many rules and felt often unfairly treated by staff. Almost whispering, Elaine confessed:

> That's my life now until I find housing. And that's sad and overwhelming, but what could you do? I just have to stay here, wait it out, praying, call if I got housing through Calgary Housing…It almost seems like the end of your life…It came to a time in my life where I was so alone and everything seemed so dark and there was no light at the end of the tunnel and I was just so tired of this lifestyle, you know? I'm tired. My soul's tired, my mind's tired, I'm just completely drained. I thought of committing suicide. That was the only way that was out of here for me, you know? I felt like taking my kids out and taking myself out because I just couldn't deal with this life any more because it's so sad …Then I'm starting to get down on myself, like I'm incompetent and I can't do this, you know. Why? Why? Why can't I do this, you know, and start thinking low on myself. I even thought about going back to the reserve 'cause I'm so tired of it here. If I can't do it here then, you know, I have that same shit to deal with down there where at least I have a home, you know? It may not be my home, but it will be a home.

After the interview, Elaine spent another four months at the Guest House before an apartment through the CHC became available. She continued to stopped by the Guest House every so often, to socialize, use the in-house food bank or participate in programming offered at the shelter. In my capacity as residential staff I had my fair share of run-ins with her, but I could never help but respect her resilience and determination. For some reason she had managed to struggle through the tough times she had faced throughout her life and, as of yet, has not surrendered.

Mona and Randy: "We Met on the Street One Day."

Mona and Randy, both 20 years old, had been in Calgary for only nine months at the time of the interview. Both were born and raised in Ontario and, by their own accounts, had difficult childhoods. Mona's mother left the family when Mona was three years old and left the children behind with their abusive father. When Mona was eight, she and her brother were apprehended by child protective services and returned to their mother, which, according to Mona, made life "a lot better" and "a lot happier."

Mona explained that her youth was "pretty much normal" as she attended a renowned Catholic high school in Ontario, earning excellent grades. The high school's website is a testament to its long history and sports a series of alternating inspirational quotes, such as: "The most important thing in life is not to capitalize on your successes - any fool can do that. The really important thing is to profit from your mistakes," by William Bolitho, or "I have learned that success is to be measured not so much by the position that one has reached in life as by the obstacles overcome while trying to succeed," by Booker T. Washington. At 16, Mona found out that she was pregnant. Despite being an honor roll student, she was immediately expelled from her school. Mona remembered:

> Uhm, unfortunately I got kicked out because I got pregnant with my son. Uhm, my aunt was uh or is the Board director of the Catholic school, so uhm I was considered an embarrassment (laughs) so I ended up getting kicked out.

After the birth of her son, Mona started hanging out "in the streets a lot" where she frequently consumed copious amounts of drugs and alcohol. Trying to remember why she started using drugs in the first place, Mona recounted that she just "didn't wanna feel the pain anymore, so drugs covered it."

As Randy told me, he grew up with an alcoholic mother and an absent father. Being picked on in school a lot, he dropped out at age 14 after finishing the seventh grade at a special education school. At 15, Randy left home and started using drugs and alcohol heavily, sleeping in various shelters, abandoned buildings, and on the street. He stated that his alcohol and drug consumption was so out of control at the time that he was hospitalized several times after overdosing on various substances. It was on the street that Mona and Randy ran into each other after the birth of Mona's son. When I asked how he and Mona met, Randy responded:

> We met on the street one day. I was drunk, she was drunk. And she's like 'Hey, you're cute.' (laughs) Pretty much and ever since we just been around each other. I don't remember the whole night, so...(laughs).

On account of her substance use, Mona lost custody of her son, who was given into the care of her father.[55] Mona's mother suggested the couple leave the province to avoid the apprehension of Mona's son,[56] but pending assault charges for beating her mother's ex-boyfriend prevented Mona from leaving town.

After losing custody of her son, Mona began living on the streets with Randy, staying at various shelters and working casually at one of the local drop-in centres for homeless youth. At age 17, Randy got into a bar fight one night, which ended with one person being hospitalized for several stab wounds. Randy was charged with assault causing bodily harm, spent eight months in jail, and was then released on condition of a three year probation term.

---

[55] Mona did not go into details, nor did she explain why custody was not given to her mother but to her father, who had lost custody of his own children a few years earlier. The other point to note is that Mona used the term "father" rather liberally, referring to her biological father but also to other men her mother had been in a relationship with. Similarly, she used the term "parents" whenever she talked about her mother and her mother's significant other(s), which led to some confusion on my part throughout the interview as I was trying to delineate the different parental units Mona was referring to.

[56] Child welfare cases are not enforced across provinces unless the same family enters the child welfare system again in another province.

Meanwhile, Mona continued to work at the youth drop-in centre but quit her job after miscarrying twins at the age of 18. A month and a half after her miscarriage, Mona found out that she was pregnant again. Due to her previous involvement with the child welfare system, Mona and Randy decided to leave Ontario to avoid the apprehension of their child after her birth. Mona's parents bought the couple one-way plane tickets to Calgary and set them up with $1,000 in cash. Upon arrival, they stayed at a local hostel and the Salvation Army until they ran out of money. As Mona was about to give birth, they turned to the Guest House for help, which an acquaintance had recommended because they would be able stay together as a family.

The first time, they stayed at the Guest House for only about three weeks before moving into an apartment they acquired through Rapid Exit.[57] However, "things with the roommate did not work out" and after a major fight, Mona left Randy and returned to the Guest House, where she stayed for two weeks before moving into her own apartment. Mona filed for Income Support as a single mother and stated in her application that she would live at her new apartment with her daughter. Although not together anymore, Randy visited Mona and his daughter on a regular basis, sometimes staying overnight, so the landlord reported the couple to Alberta Works.

Alberta Works subsequently initiated an investigation of the couple for filing a fraudulent social assistance application under the pretence that Mona was a single mother when, in fact, she was still living with the father of her child. As Randy explained the situation:

---

[57] Rapid Exit is a housing program run by the Calgary Urban Project Society (CUPS). Following the "housing first" re-housing model, CUPS caseworkers help homeless families and individuals locate housing. Caseworkers develop "sustainability plans" with their clients, identifying the factors that led to their client's homelessness and plans to overcome those factors or "barriers." Once housed, caseworkers continue to work with their clients to ensure they remain housed.

> ...see I wasn't living with her. They thought I was living with her when I wasn't and I would just stay there every second night because I had my own place, right?...It's just we broke up, we weren't together. I was just staying there for my kid, right? I wasn't living there, I was just staying for the kid like every second day and that's how that happened. We weren't together. So they tried to say that we were together and they were charging us for fraud but I didn't live there, I wasn't even dating her.

Irrespective of how Randy and Mona defined the nature of their relationship, Mona did not receive her social assistance cheque from Alberta Works that month due to the pending fraud charges. Subsequently she was unable to pay the rent, which led to her eviction, after which she returned to the Guest House, this time with Randy in tow.

At the time of the interview, they had stayed at the Guest House for about three months, as a couple, and with their now seven-month old daughter. Mona and Randy had reapplied for Income Support as a family but since Alberta Works considered all their basic needs met by the Guest House, the approval of their application was contingent upon finding housing. Thus, their only source of income at the time was their monthly Child Tax Credits, their quarterly GST credits, sporadic support from Mona's parents, and whatever cash Randy could accumulate "picking bottles" downtown.

While at the Guest House, Mona was also looking into educational opportunities, wanting to obtain her GED and subsequently attend a local college to become a hairdresser and aesthetician.[58] Her long-term plan was to raise her daughter well to prove that she is, in fact, a good mother and on those grounds regain custody of her son. Randy had filed for Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH), as he was struggling with several disabilities, such as ADHD, short term memory loss and being "slow in the head," which severely limited his employment opportunities. He was also scheduled to attend a 28-day in-residence treatment

[58] That program at that particular college had been discontinued the year prior.

program to work on his alcohol addiction and anger management problems as part of his probation requirements. After staying at the Guest House for another couple of months, Mona and Randy moved into their own apartment but continued to hang out at the Guest House, dropping in for the food bank program on a regular basis.[59]

Natalie and Simon: "We're Not Repeat Offenders."

One day I received a phone call from a woman named Natalie. Another family she had met while staying at the Guest House had told her about my research and she indicated that she was very interested in giving me an interview about her experience. I told her that I only interviewed families currently living at the Guest House but she kept insisting that she had been staying there not too long ago and could answer any questions I had. She also mentioned that she could really use the extra money, referring to the compensation I paid all my research participants. She was so persistent that I finally agreed to meet her. She invited me over to her scarcely furnished apartment, where her husband Simon joined us for the interview. They were the only research participants interviewed outside the Guest House and the only couple I interviewed jointly.

Natalie and Simon, 33 and 34 years old respectively, had been married for 15 years with three children – 13, 10 and eight years old. The family's first and, at the time, only spell of homelessness lasted for only 10 days. As they explained, it had been brought on by low income, high rents, health problems, the lack of a support system and bad luck.

---

[59] Several months after moving out of the Guest House, Randy was arrested along with a friend for allegedly beating a stranger to death while under the influence of alcohol. During the trial, Randy pleaded guilty to second degree murder and was sentenced to life imprisonment with no chance of parole for 10 years. A few months after Randy's arrest, Mona came to the Guest House one day, excitedly sharing that she and her new partner were expecting twins. The twins, however, were born prematurely and continue to struggle with subsequent health complications.

Natalie grew up on a farm in Nova Scotia and described her family as privileged. The family moved to Calgary when she was 12 and Natalie recounted that they struggled financially for a year or two, but were fairly stable once they "got back on their feet." When she was 18, her mother died and her father sent her younger sisters back to Nova Scotia to live with their aunt. Natalie stayed in Calgary, married Simon and severed all ties to her father, who, in her eyes, was "just an idiot" and "not a positive influence." She emphasized that the death of her mother made the family fall apart and that if her mother had still been alive, her family would never have become homeless as her mother never would have let that happen.

While Natalie's lack of contact with her family was deliberate, Simon said he was abandoned by his family as a child. He became a permanent ward of the court at age nine and grew up in various foster and group homes. After spending some time in a juvenile detention centre, he "cleaned up his act" when he turned 16 and married Natalie at age 18, after six months of courtship. To support his family, Simon held various jobs, most of which he described as "upper labor," such as forklift operator and warehouse manager. Two years prior to becoming homeless, he suffered a heart attack and went on a six-month medical leave without pay. Around the same time as Simon suffered his heart attack, Natalie got accepted into a local college's social work program. Since she received funding to obtain her degree, they decided that Simon would stay at home, get better, and take care of their children while Natalie went to school.

However, life on only one income was precarious and a soaring real estate market triggered by a booming economy drove rents up drastically. Simon recounted that their rent was incrementally increased, nearly doubling over the course of a year. When their rent kept being raised by their landlord, they started facing serious financial difficulties. Simon explained:

> Her funding was $1,952, our rent was $1,500, then utilities, then cable, then bus pass. We usually got paid on the first and for the second half of the month there was no money. And then we had to live on the food banks and bumming from, you know, agencies for the rest of the month until the twentieth, until Child Tax. So for three weeks every month we had no food.

Natalie added:

> I mean I, we had a few breaks where I won an academic excellence award which they gave me a cheque for a thousand dollars, but I mean it didn't go very far 'cause (laughs) I was so far in debt with bills that, you know, three quarters of it went to paying off, you know, my outstanding cable and phone. We had a few breaks where taxes gave us a chance to stock up for three weeks and pay off all of our debt.

Since their increased rent was well beyond their financial means, Natalie turned to the Calgary Housing Company and applied for a rent subsidy. However, after 18 months on the waiting list, they still had not heard from the CHC.

Then, one month into the last semester of her program, Natalie got sick and subsequently started falling behind in her classes. She learned that she needed surgery urgently and consequently turned to her advisor at school to explain why she had fallen behind in class, why her grades had been suffering, and that she would miss even more time due to her upcoming surgery. In response, the college recommended that she withdrew from the program for medical reasons. She was assured that she would be able to return to finish her program and her funding would be reinstated as soon as she was healthy enough to attend classes regularly again. Natalie remembered the fit of panic she felt when the college's decision was relayed to her:

> I said: 'There's no way. I can do it.', you know. Like 'It's solely me supporting the family, I can't.' You know, 'It's my last semester, just let me plug through it.' I put off my surgery at first, and then there was just no option, I had to do the surgery and they said 'Ok, now, you're medically withdrawing.'…they literally told me on the 28th 'You have no choice, you're medically withdrawing. And that means you're not going to have a cheque tomorrow.' (laughs) And I'm like noooo, no, no, you know. No, this can't happen but yeah…

Since Natalie lost her funding towards the end of the month, there was no cheque coming at the beginning of the next month and, already living pay cheque to pay cheque, they were not

able to pay their rent due the first day of the month. As part of her college program, she volunteered at CUPS downtown and was familiar with their resources. She turned to them for help and received a cheque for $1,000, which covered only part of the rent but pacified the landlord for a while. Now both unable to work for medical reasons, Natalie and Simon had no income whatsoever, yet, at that point, refused to "go on welfare." Within 30 days they accrued over $4,000 in rent and utility arrears and eventually received an eviction notice from their landlord. Simon remembered that at that point they were "behind way too much to possibly ever get out of it." Natalie was very upset recounting the events that led to their eviction and felt very unfairly treated by her college:

> I was pissed (laughs)…you're not even allowed to fire somebody and give them a day and no pay, you know. Like I have three children, you know? I thought it was just wrong, you know? Like a day's notice? Common. But it's the government, they do what they want, so we just dealt with it. Heartbroken. I mean I was almost at the end, you know. I just, it, it just felt like a big kick in the teeth to me. But (exhales) (in a mocking voice) what doesn't kill us makes us stronger (laughs).

Once they were evicted, a shelter was the only place for them to go. Natalie phoned both family shelters in the city and wound up at the Guest House because the other one was at capacity already. Out of options, they applied for Income Support through Alberta Works and within two days had found a new apartment, hoping that Alberta Works would cover the damage deposit, but the apartment was rejected by their Alberta Works caseworker on grounds that it was too expensive. A few days later, Natalie and Simon found a new, cheaper apartment, had the landlord fill out a rent report,[60] brought it back to the Guest House and asked their outreach

[60] A rent report is filled out by the landlord and contains the address, the specifics of the apartment, whether or not utilities are included in the rent and the monthly rent for the unit. The rent report can then be taken back to social service providers to a) prove that an apartment was looked at and b) serves as the basis for cost estimation, deposit allowance, etc.

worker to fax it to Alberta Works immediately. Later that day their outreach worker phoned them, telling them to go to the Alberta Works office to pick up their cheque that afternoon.

However, their initial joy over the quick response by Alberta Works subsided when they picked up the cheque for their damage deposit. Simon recalled:

> They were a little bit bad 'cause they said it was a $1,000 for damage deposit and they only gave us $600 but I guess it could be the time of the month…I don't really know how that works out.

Being familiar with the resources available through CUPS, Natalie yet again turned to them for help:

> And for the rest in my damage deposit, I just went to CUPS because I know the resources at CUPS and so I just went in and said like 'Hey, you know, we really need this place but they've only given us this much, you know. I could pay for it out of Child Tax, but that leaves me with a hundred dollars for a month.'

The family moved into their new apartment without delay, sleeping on the floor for the first few weeks since they had left all their furniture at their old apartment.[61] They received furniture referrals from their outreach worker, but it would take several weeks for various charitable organizations to supply the family with used furniture for their apartment. Still on Income Support and in the "expected to work" category, Natalie was now required to apply for 25 jobs per week, a requirement Simon was exempt from due to his poor health.

Natalie was actually looking forward to going back to work because the $1,200 in Income Support benefits was no match for their $900 monthly rent and left the family in dire financial straits. She excitedly told me that she recently had had an interview for a job in the fast food industry and for one in sales at Mark's Work Wearhouse. She was hoping to secure the latter

---

[61] Families often lose all their personal belongings and furniture when becoming homeless and usually only hold on to what they can carry or transport in a car. Often they do not have the resources to move their furniture nor do they have sufficient funds to rent a storage unit to accommodate their belongings while at a shelter. Storage space at the shelter itself is limited, limiting the amount of things that can be stored there.

because they paid $10 an hour instead of $9.50 and it was what she considered the "better job." Natalie emphasized that she would do what it takes to stabilize the family's financial situation and that it was a short-term arrangement until she was able to return to school with funding.

Having missed the registration deadline at her college, Natalie had to wait one full semester to return to school. She was also looking into continuing on to a local university to obtain a degree in social work. At the time of the interview, Simon was waiting for his admission letter from a local technical college, where he wanted to take "something with computers." They figured if they both received funding while in college, they should be able to make ends meet until Natalie could start her professional career as a social worker. Natalie's familiarity with resources available through the social service sector certainly contributed to her family's unusually short stay at the shelter and thus her family's trajectory into and out of the shelter differed fundamentally from Elaine's experience, for example. Natalie and Simon's story is a good illustration of how adverse circumstances can offset the fragile equilibrium of a low-income family and bring about spells of homelessness.[62]

---

[62] Almost two years after the interview, Natalie and Simon returned to the Guest House. They had been evicted from their apartment due to mounting rent arrears. Natalie told me that Simon had been diagnosed with cancer and was unable to work yet again. Her income had been insufficient to meet the family's financial needs and they had thus returned to the shelter in hopes of finding a cheaper apartment. I asked Natalie whether she had finished her social work program in the meantime. She indicated that, despite earlier promises, the college had refused to reinstate her funding. Moreover, since she withdrew from the program, she was now required to pay back the funding she had already received - $7500 in total. The second time, Natalie and Simon stayed at the Guest House for about four weeks. Once they found a suitable place, another charitable organization furnished their empty apartment. However, they returned to the Guest House only two short weeks later due to a bed bug infestation. They found a new apartment a few weeks later, but in many ways Natalie felt defeated because they had lost not only their brand-new furniture, but also their already meager personal belongings to the bed bug infestation and thus had even less than before coming to the shelter.

Kathy: "I Feel Really, Really, Really Bad Because I Let My Kids Down."

42-year old Kathy, a native to Calgary and mother of three, stayed at the Guest House for almost a year, interrupted only by a three-month stay at an apartment which she gave up again because she did not feel ready to live on her own. The only insight Kathy provided into her childhood was that she was adopted as an infant but never felt a part of her adoptive family. Once her parents died, she lost touch with the rest of the family altogether.

Kathy had worked in the health field for over 10 years, first as a nursing attendant at a local hospital and, after having received her Licensed Practical Nurse diploma, in a local nursing home. She emphasized how much she enjoyed working in the field, particularly the nursing home. However, she was suffering from frequent bouts of depression at the time and thus often struggled to keep her work obligations, showing up late or missing shifts altogether, which ultimately led to her dismissal.

According to Kathy, she had not been able to work for the past couple of years because of her depression, for which she received external counselling and medication while staying at the Guest House. In addition, her Licensed Practical Nurse license had been suspended (she did not specify why) and she was required to take several classes in order to get it reinstated. Her only work experience was in the health field and that was the occupational realm she very much wanted to return to. However, Kathy had difficulties finding a job that suited her interests, qualifications and parenting responsibilities. After losing her job at the nursing home, Kathy filed for Income Support and, having gone from a decent monthly income to inadequate benefit payments, found it difficult to make ends meet.

One night, one of her friends took her to a casino, just to have some fun. Kathy enjoyed the adult entertainment, being out of the house and away from the kids for a while as well as not

having to deal with her teenage son and his live-in girlfriend for a couple of hours. She remembered that one night vividly: "I just went there one night and, I think it was within a week or something, I won like $6000 one night and so I was just like hooked from then on, you know?" Winning that much money exhilarated Kathy immensely and she began frequenting the casino on a regular basis, just to relax, escape the boredom of her home environment and the stress of being a single parent. However, what started as a fun pastime soon turned into a serious gambling addiction:

> At the time I felt fine, I felt good about it…it was almost like it's all I could think of doing was going, you know, gambling and stuff and then my kids, you know, they would start to complain 'cause I was going out so much. It still didn't really faze me. I almost thought I was doing something good, because, you know, I was getting money for them and I would buy them things and still give them money and whatnot…

In the beginning, she was hoping to win just enough to supplement her Income Support cheques in order to be able to fulfill her children's and her own needs and wishes. However, driven by the next big win that never came, Kathy soon started gambling away her rent allowance, sold her car and pawned all her valuables for cash she could take to the casino. Since Kathy regularly took the rent money to the casino, the family started moving from one apartment to the next and, on occasion, stayed with friends, to evade evictions and disgruntled landlords asking for their long overdue rent. However, the rent arrears accrued at her last apartment proved consequential in many ways:

> …we had an eviction notice. They wanted to come and change the locks…I was just trying to take my son to school and stuff and I was extremely stressed, just didn't know what I was gonna do and didn't know where to go…And then one night the Sheriff's department showed up and kicked us out, changed the locks and that was it. And so that's when we ended up downtown.

After the last and final eviction, Kathy decided that she needed help and rather than moving to yet another apartment, she decided to turn to a shelter instead. She and two of her

sons,[63] six and 17 years old, spent a night at The Mission and the next day registered with the Guest House, where they stayed for the next seven months. The decision to go to a shelter was not easy for Kathy and she struggled with feelings of regret and guilt because of it:

> I felt really, really, really bad because of my kids. I let my kids down and that's because of my gambling. It's, you know, all my fault why we're here…every once in a while my kids remind me 'Well this is your fault.' and stuff but I guess they have that right to say that because I did mess up.

As with Elaine, shelter life had been a mixed blessing for Kathy and she soon found herself caught between a rock and a hard place. She liked being at the shelter because stringent rules and curfews made trips to the casino next to impossible. She also received a lot of support, both from staff and other parents, with disciplining her youngest son, who had been diagnosed with ADHD and could be difficult at times. She enjoyed spending more time with her children and meeting other adults who found themselves in similar circumstances and were thus empathetic to her struggles. Finally, the shelter provided her with many basic needs such as clothing, which she greatly appreciated because, due to her gambling, she had not been able to clothe herself or her children.

On the other hand, Kathy struggled with strict shelter rules and frequently got into verbal altercations with staff and other families in the community, particularly Elaine. A number of staff members were exasperated by Kathy's constant violation of the shelter rules, which they perceived as disrespectful and rude behaviour. The staff's punitive responses that followed in turn left Kathy feeling ill-treated and singled out. As much as she was scared to leave the Guest House, she could not wait to go and frequently voiced disgruntlement with her outreach worker, who, according to Kathy, was not finding her an apartment quickly enough.

---

[63] Her oldest son decided to move into his own apartment with his girlfriend instead.

As all basic needs were met by the Guest House, Kathy soon stopped receiving Income Support payments, her only source of income at the time, which made moving into an apartment all the more difficult. The absence of any savings and the limited core shelter allowance she would be receiving from Alberta Works severely limited the housing options available to her. Of her last Income Support payment, she had put $700 towards a car so she could drive her sons to school. Kathy insisted that her sons stayed remained in their respective schools rather than transferring them to the Guest House's partnering schools to which transportation was provided for free. Justifying spending that much money on a car, she also emphasized that it provided her with a great deal of independence as well as a place of her own she could retreat to when she felt overwhelmed by shelter life.

Since she no longer received Income Support payments, the only sources of income were her quarterly GST credit cheques and the monthly Canada Child Tax Benefit payments. Kathy actually had to arrange for cheques to be sent to the shelter directly as her bank account had been garnisheed as a result of her outstanding rent debt. The garnishment of her account in turn led to a great deal of frustration and later agony. When she left her last apartment, Kathy had moved as many of her personal belongings as she could to a self-storage facility. When her account was garnisheed, she was no longer able to keep up with the modest monthly payments for her storage unit. As she explained:

> Now I'm facing a problem…my stuff is in storage and I haven't been able to pay that, so now they've got a lien against all my contents and if I don't pay a certain amount of money by…Uh when is it? I can't remember the date but they're gonna auction it off March 10th. I do have money in the bank, I can't touch it because I have a garnishment of my bank account because I owe this landlord some money because of my gambling (laughs). So it's kinda've been almost like a vicious circle…Yeah, so if I had that money, then I could have used it to pay my storage and then I wouldn't have that problem.

Her Canada Child Tax Benefit payments already had to cover additional food for her boys, one of whom was a very picky eater and the other an ever hungry teenager, gas for her car to drive her sons to school, weekend entertainment and all other "luxuries" the shelter did not provide. When the time came to choose between paying the storage unit, about $300 including late fees and interest, or putting gas in her car to drive her kids to school the next day, she picked the latter. Subsequently, the locks on her storage unit were changed and its contents auctioned off, which was very difficult for Kathy to digest as she did not get the opportunity to salvage at least the most important items such as official documents or her children's baby pictures.

After seven months at the Guest House, Kathy secured an affordable apartment and while she constantly talked about her new place, almost every day she came up with a new reason why she could not move yet. First, the apartment had to be thoroughly cleaned, then painted, and then she decided not to move in because the apartment was not furnished, yet. After almost four weeks, Kathy's outreach worker lost her patience and strongly encouraged her to finally move, which Kathy perceived as "being kicked out." Before she left, she told me "I almost feel scared to leave because in case I end up going back gambling. They (the Guest House) are kinda like a, I don't know, I guess like a crutch or something, you know." She also told other staff members that she was apprehensive about having to deal with her youngest son on her own again and that she did not feel ready and strong enough to live on her own. On her way out she half jokingly said "I'll be back."

In light of her pre-departure disclosures it did not come as a huge surprise that, two and a half months later, she showed up again, her suitcases in hand. She asked to be readmitted to the shelter and, despite initial protest by her outreach worker, was accepted back. However, in order to be readmitted, she was required to sign a behavioural contract in which she committed to

seeking treatment for her gambling issues and staying out of conflict with staff and other community families. This time around Kathy was accompanied only by her youngest son as her teenage son, who had just come of age, decided to stay with his older brother instead.

Just as she did during her first stay at the shelter, Kathy had placed the family's cats in an animal shelter.[64] During her first stay, the cats were moved from the animal shelter to her oldest son's house after three weeks, the maximum time allowance for temporary care. Even though Kathy was not able to pay the accrued fees, the shelter released the pets nonetheless after Kathy's outreach worker had advocated on her behalf. This time, however, the shelter where Kathy had dropped off her pets had decided to put the cats down when Kathy did not return with the necessary funds to release them from the shelter's care after their maximum stay there had elapsed. This episode deeply distressed Kathy, who felt guilty for abandoning "part of the family" and she was worried about how her children would take the news that their beloved cats were gone.

A couple of months later, another severe backlash further strained Kathy's already low spirit. She had parked her car in the parking lot adjacent to the Guest House, but forgot to move it in the morning, so her car got towed. For the impound lot to release her car, she needed to bring proof of ownership, such as the registration, and proof of insurance, neither one of which she had. In order to get her car back, she would have had to register and insure the car first; she did not have the money to do so. To my knowledge, she has not been able to retrieve her car from the impound lot and charges continue to accrue that Kathy will not be able to cover.

---

[64] The Guest House has a strict "no pets" policy.

Over the past year, Kathy had to deal with numerous setbacks, which at times severely affected her state of mind, rendering her moody, at times withdrawn, and often irritable. Her second stay at the shelter lasted five months and some staff members were getting worried that she might, again, have become "too comfortable" and "institutionalized." Her outreach worker asserted increasing pressure, encouraging her to look for an apartment with more determination. Just as the first time around, Kathy was deeply conflicted between her desire to live in her own home and her apprehensions about leaving and having to "make it" on her own again.

Although there are officially no time limits imposed on families staying at the Guest House, families like Kathy's pose an interesting dilemma for the Guest House, which has to comply with provincial exigencies in return for funding. Since the Province adheres to a Housing First philosophy, prescribed in its *10-Year Plan to End Homelessness* that came into effect in 2009, clients like Kathy are to be moved swiftly through the shelter system and set up in housing, ready or not. How long Kathy would remain in housing now that she had moved into a new apartment was yet to be determined. Rumor had it that she had already made arrangements for new cats to join her and her son at their new apartment. Some staff members interpreted that as Kathy "deliberately defaulting" again as her apartment's lease included a "no pet" clause.[65]

Raheem: "Sometimes You Have Good Times, Sometimes You Have Bad Times."

Raheem, 51 years old and originally from Pakistan, stayed at the Guest House with his wife of 25 years and their 11-year-old son for only a brief period of time. He had immigrated to

[65] A couple of months later, Kathy returned to the Guest House. She told me that she had been gambling with another mother she had met while staying at the shelter and had decided to return to the Guest House to change her life for good this time. Kathy enrolled in a six-week addictions program at an in-patient treatment facility. Her youngest son was placed in temporary foster care for the duration of her program. After her return she stayed at the Guest House for another couple of months before being encouraged to leave. As far as I know, she is still living in the subsidized apartment her caseworker found for her.

Canada 10 years earlier as a skilled worker and had since become a Canadian citizen. He lived in Toronto for about six years where he worked as an electrical engineer and, in 2006, moved to Calgary where he had found a well-paid job in the oil and gas industry. In early 2008, he quit his job and returned to Pakistan, wife and son in tow, to take care of his family after his mother died. While in Pakistan, he suffered a stroke which left the left side of his body paralyzed. Having depleted all his savings and exhausted the capacity of the local medical system, Raheem decided to return to Canada in hope of fully recovering from his stroke with better medical care.

Raheem's brother-in-law lent him the money for the airfare and an old friend in Calgary provided the family with a free place to stay for the time being. However, after about three weeks, he was asked to leave his friend's house because the family's presence in the house was beginning to disturb the hosting family. While staying at his friend's house, Raheem had applied for an apartment with the Calgary Housing Company but was told that his case was not considered an emergency and thus placement in one of their apartments would likely take several months.[66] After having been asked to leave his friend's house, Raheem returned to the CHC with the eviction notice his friend had provided him, hoping that this would constitute enough of an emergency for him to move up on the wait list. It did not. Instead, he was given the phone numbers of different homeless shelters in the city.

The first family shelter he called was at capacity and thus could not take the family in. In a brochure, he found the contact information for the Guest House, called them and was told that they could accommodate his family if they checked in at the facility before 4:00 pm that day. Raheem called a friend to help him move his family's belongings to the shelter but instead that

[66] The CHC at the time had 3,000 applications in their system and apartments were filled according to a priority wait list rather than on a first-come-first-serve basis.

friend offered to house his family for a while, a proposition Raheem turned down. He explained that his decision was based on their previous negative experience staying at a friend's house and the burden it had imposed on their friendship:

> …he told me 'You are not doing good because you are with family and you are going to the shelter. Shelter is not good for the family life.' I told him that I don't have any choice. Even he offered me that 'If you like, you come with and live with me for this time.' But I think maybe I have the same experience and I will lose also this friend…They help us over here, they came with us inside and saw everything and even then he again he gave me opportunity 'If you like, even now, you can go with me.' but I said 'No, I will face all those things.'

Once at the shelter, Raheem turned to Alberta Works for Income Support, which by his own account, was not an easy step for him in light of his hitherto professional career. Yet, at that point in his life, he considered himself to be out of options:

> You see, I am sick. I'm not in a position to work. I have a lot of responsibilities, of my wife, of my kid, so I have to do something…You see, in this condition I have to cooperate with everything…

However, just like his exasperating experience with the CHC, applying for Income Support turned into another source of frustration for Raheem. He recalled his irritation with his caseworker during their first meeting:

> The lady over there she treated me in a very bad way like just that I'm a criminal and she's going to investigate from me that maybe I am a drug dealer or something like that but I am a Canadian citizen over here…She asked me 'If you were sick over there, why you come back in Canada? Why you didn't stay over there?'…Then she said 'How you come over here? Are you refugee?' and I said 'No, I am not refugee. I came on skilled basis, I am electrical engineer, I have university degree.' and this and that. I don't know why…even I am refugee, when I have a status of citizen, they should…they don't have any right to ask me this type of stupid questions.

Once it was established that, as a Canadian citizen, he was indeed entitled to Income Support benefits, his caseworker started exploring whether he might be eligible for other forms of assistance:

> And she also said 'Why you are not going for the EI.' I told her that, you see, that I quit my job at that time and when you quit your job, you cannot, you are not eligible for the EI. But she said that 'No, you should go apply online and tell me what they are saying.' And I said 'When I am not eligible, why I apply? I am ineligible for this thing.'

To appease his caseworker, Raheem applied for Employment Insurance (EI) benefits but his application was declined on grounds that he had quit his job.[67] Once it was determined that he was not eligible for EI benefits, he was told that he would not be eligible for Income Support until he had secured housing. He was sent back to the shelter with the stipulation to return to the Alberta Works office with a rent report once he had found an apartment.

Although his family's move into the Guest House secured them a spot on top of the CHC wait list,[68] there was no way of telling when an apartment would open up. With the Income Support core shelter allowance being $575 per month for a family like Raheem's,[69] obtaining market housing in Calgary's still overpriced housing market seemed next to impossible. Eventually, they found a small one-bedroom apartment for which rent was slightly higher than their core shelter allowance would be but they decided to take it anyway and cut back on other expenses to make up the difference.

At the end of July Raheem obtained a rent report, his outreach worker faxed it to Alberta Works and he was given an appointment for mid-August. The apartment, however, was available for the first of August and the landlord had indicated that he expected the rent to be paid within the first week of August. Despite the advocacy of Raheem's outreach worker, there was no way of expediting bureaucratic procedure but thanks to an unusually understanding landlord, the apartment was held for the family.

---

[67] Employment Insurance (EI) provides temporary financial assistance to unemployed Canadians who have lost their job *through no fault of their own*, while they look for work or upgrade their skills. (Emphasis added). http://www.servicecanada.gc.ca/eng/sc/ei/index.shtml (accessed December 3, 2010).

[68] Sheltered homeless families are considered an emergency and thus receive top priority in the allocation of apartments through the CHC.

[69] http://employment.alberta.ca/AWonline/IESA/4121.html (accessed December 3, 2010)

Shelter life itself was difficult for Raheem and his family because the set-up of the shelter, which is not designed to accommodate individuals with disabilities,[70] presented several challenges due to his impaired mobility. In addition, the family often went without a proper meal because of the dietary restrictions prescribed by their Muslim faith. For dinner, they would often only be able to have a salad or vegetables and in the absence of any spare cash, they were not able to purchase an alternate meal outside the shelter. Furthermore, his limited mobility made it difficult for Raheem to go to appointments with the various social service providers outside the Guest House. As he told me, Alberta Works particularly had a tendency to schedule numerous appointments and then to schedule even more appointments to obtain missing or additional documentation, which all had to be dropped off in person. Finally, the stress of shelter life and his frustration in dealing with social service agencies had a negative impact on his overall health. Raheem's blood pressure was so high that his doctor warned him that he would suffer another stroke if he did not get it under control. Raheem dryly commented: "...instead of going to house, I will go to graveyard."

After his case was transferred to a different office, thanks to the initiative of Raheem's outreach worker at the Guest House, it was determined that his poor health actually made him eligible for AISH benefits, which were slightly higher than Income Support. It was further determined that his wife, who according to their previous caseworker should contribute to the family's income by going to work, did not speak English well enough to work and was needed by her husband to provide crucial, full-time care in light of his current disability. Despite the

[70] It was not until late 2012, four years after the Guest House opened, that the front entrance was redesigned to allow easy access for individuals with disabilities and families with bulky strollers.

hard times his family had encountered, Raheem was optimistic that his family would get back on track soon:

> …sometimes you have good times, sometimes you have bad times. Even all those things, I have a hope that I will be again a productive person in this community...And I have faith. I hope that maybe there is something good for me and soon I will get back to my normal life. Because if you have hope, then only you can get better but if, you see, you lose your faith, you lose your hope then it's very difficult to come back to your track to become a normal person.

Dana and Brian: "I'm the Captain of My Ship, Not the Master of the Sea."

I met Dana, a 28-year-old mother of five who was pregnant with her sixth child, and her husband Brian on a warm day in June. Dana and Brian, by their own admission, had a long history of substance use and residential instability, including episodes of homelessness. Brian, 36 years old and the breadwinner of the family, earned an average of $4,000 per month as a drywall finisher while Dana stayed at home to care for their children. Brian's relatively high income was a mixed blessing for the couple as it allowed them to live in relative comfort, but also financed a drug habit they had nursed over the years.

As a couple, they went through periods of relative stability and sobriety, which, however, were frequently followed by brief but destructive episodes of relapse into excessive use of crack-cocaine that turn the family's life upside down. As Brian put it:

> We'd be good for a while and I'd be working hard and everything and then all of a sudden the pattern would happen again, right? And I'd sleep in or I'd miss a day's work and oh bs this bs that. It continued and then it'd stop and it'd continue.

A further consequence of their substance use was the repeated involvement with the British Columbia Ministry of Child and Family Development, which had already apprehended three of their children when Dana tested positive for drugs during her pregnancies.

After another episode of drug use, Dana and Brian decided to "finally turn around," became "clean as a whistle" and left British Columbia to avoid the apprehension of their son and

daughter. They moved to small town Alberta where Brian's sister took them in. After a couple of months, Brian found a job and the family was able to move into their own apartment. By their own description, life in rural Alberta was challenging but it helped them to stay on track as drugs were expensive and hard to come by in that area. Dana explained that they were doing really well for a while and that smoking a lot of marijuana helped her to stay away from harder drugs.

However, after a few months, their fragile stability was once again upset. Their latest spell of homelessness was triggered by a weeklong crack-cocaine binge that led to the loss of Brian's job, the family's only source of income. When I asked Dana how they ended up at the shelter, she explained:

> …we ended up with the shelter here because uhm I'm an ex-crack-addict, my husband is an ex-crack-addict and we met a freakin' bunch of idiots when we were living in Greatplains. And we started doing dope again, and my husband ditched work for a week to get high on crack and then he lost his job...I begged him for a week. I'm like 'Just get off your freakin' ass and go back to work. You need to go to work. You're gonna lose your job.' And he's like 'No, no. I won't lose my job, I won't lose my job.' And he lost his job.

When their landlord learned that Brian had lost his job, he immediately presented them with an eviction notice, leaving the family without a home. Dana recalled:

> …we got kicked out of our place and he got fired on the same day. My whole life came crashing to an end…And then I find out like a week later I'm pregnant. Like 'This is just...oh yeah this is freakin' lovely.' (laughs) I'm like 'Things are going wonderfully for me now. I'm pregnant and I...you don't have a job, we don't have anywhere to go.' I'm like 'I don't even know what I'm gonna do.' I was so screwed, so screwed.

Dana and Brian stayed with friends for about two months, but were asked to leave after endless disputes over their share of the rent and food contribution. They were given two days to vacate their friends' residence with no money left and nowhere to go. Due to the lack of resources in Greatplains, Dana called several shelters in Edmonton to find a place where she and her family could stay, to no avail. An agency in Edmonton redirected her to the Guest House in Calgary, pointing out that they might have space available for her family. With Brian still out of

work and their meager savings depleted, Dana went out to panhandle in order to raise the money for their bus fare to Calgary.

Both Dana and Brian reflected extensively on how they grew up and how their childhood experiences affected their choices in later life. Brian was born on a reserve to an Aboriginal woman but, at three weeks, was separated from his two sisters and adopted by a white family of British descent. He recollected being a "problem child" from the get-go, struggling with his father's cold, unaffectionate and authoritarian parenting style. In addition, he struggled with issues of identity his entire life, feeling disconnected from the white community he grew up in as well as the Aboriginal community he was removed from as an infant:

> I've always been outside of the crowd. I was really dark growing up, eh? I grew up in a white community of probably a thousand people and I used to get beat up almost every day 'cause I was coloured and I'd go home and my family, they're white (laughs). And so I grew a bitterness early in life towards people that way... I never felt good about myself.

Although bright, Brian had problems in school and was frequently expelled for fighting and truancy. At age 15, he started drinking and was asked to leave his parents' house at age 16, a decision that hit him particularly hard: "My parents will never talk to me again ever. And that hurts. Especially being adopted 'cause it's like, almost like double rejection, eh?" Having to fend for himself, Brian sustained himself through burglaries, which earned him a criminal record and he served time in juvenile detention centres on several occasions.

At 17, Brian moved to Victoria in British Columbia and eventually to Vancouver, where he experimented with various drugs and eventually became, what he, in his terms, called, an alcoholic and drug addict. He was convinced that he had "inherited" his addictions from his birth mother and explained that he used alcohol and drugs to deal with painful childhood memories. He further reasoned that the path of self-destruction he had chosen for himself reflected the low

value he placed on his life and his person. Drowning his feelings of worthlessness, alienation, bitterness and shame in drugs and alcohol, to him, seemed easier than facing and dealing with those sentiments. In all that, however, he emphasized that he always managed to maintain employment, a fact he was very proud of:

> I can say for myself because I always maintained work. So I've never gone the full nine with it...I love work, too, right? And like for me, like when I did use, I spent a lot of money on it, so I could never live that life style of thieving, you know, for it or, you know, hustling people every day out of money, I just can't do that, eh?...I was raised with morals and I'm not saying that these people who are don't have morals or whatnot but I was raised in a structural life that turned, right?

Brian got married to his first wife and they had children, which did not end his drug and alcohol consumption. Instead, frequent binges eventually led to the dissolution of his marriage. Soon after his marriage ended, one of Brian's adoptive sisters, the only person in his family he felt somewhat close to, died suddenly. Unable to deal with this crisis in his life, Brian began to use cocaine heavily: "I went crazy for like six months just lost in the dirt. Like no work, nothing, just a scumbag, right?" Out on Hastings Street in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside one night, he ran into Dana, who earned a living as a sex trade worker on East Hastings at the time.

Dana's account of her childhood was filled with recollections of dire poverty, neglect, abuse and violence. Dana's father earned a living as a "drug dealer and gun runner" and often his disgruntled business associates would knock on their home's front door to claim what they thought he owed them. One incident that occurred on Dana's sixth birthday was particularly frightening, as she recalled:

> On my sixth birthday, we've gone out for dinner, we came home and there was blood all over my front porch. My dad was selling coke and this guy from up the street wanted to buy a gram of coke off my dad and my dad's friends were home watching the house. They said 'Jim is not home, we can't do anything for you.' and they left and they came back with a shotgun and a two by four. They beat one of my uncles in the head with the two by four…These guys were like off the hook. I remember, I'll never forget, I get home and it's like my parents get out of the car and I get out of the car and then we can see all the blood coming down the front stairs and it was all over the snow.

Due to the occupational hazards of her father's livelihood, the family relocated frequently, often moving from one end of the country to the other. When Dana was nine, her mother left the family and left the children behind with their father: "My mom left when I was nine, my brother was seven…she told us she was going Christmas shoppin' and she didn't come home..." With her father incapable of caring for the children and her mother gone, she assumed full caring responsibility for her younger brother:

At the same time, when Dana's mother left, the family's residential instability worsened. Dana recounted overcrowded, unsafe and unsanitary motel rooms, apartments and houses where they stayed in the months following her mother's departure:

> ...when she left, we ended up staying at this person's house and that person's house and we didn't have anywhere to go. And then we got this one place and the bathroom broke and my dad wouldn't tell the landlord so we had to go across the street into the bushes at the park and go use the bathroom there.

Dana and her brother were also often sent to stay with her father's friends or relatives for days on end, which was hazardous in quite another way:

> …my dad started shipping us off to other people's places to live at. Well, the first person, I woke up, I was like nine or 10, I woke up and he was sitting across the room staring at me while I was sleeping, so I was all uncomfortable. So, I told my dad that I didn't wanna be there anymore. So, 'Ok we'll move you to Marilyn's place.' Well, freakin' Marilyn, we'd stay there and me and my brother went to sleep next to each other and I woke up and there was this grown man who had kids of his own, who my dad hung out with. He was in the bed with me taking my clothes off and I woke up and I just freaked…I don't know, I guess it's kinda trained into me to just to be quiet and don't say anything…And half the time nobody believes you when you're a kid anyways or at least that's how I felt about it.

Similarly, she described an encounter with the building manager of an apartment complex they had moved into a year later:

> And then we moved into an apartment where the apartment manager used to try to get me and my girlfriend to come downstairs and watch porn with him in his apartment. I was 11 and he'd get us to come downstairs and give us cigarettes and stuff and he'd be like putting on porn and it was all weird and I told my dad and my dad's like 'Oh, it's no big deal, he's not gonna do anything, just ignore him.' I bet you anything my dad had something to do with that 'cause he was probably getting something out of the deal.

The precarious living arrangements Dana and her brother were exposed to left her vulnerable to abuse. She described herself as very protective of her younger brother and thus often endured all forms of abuse in order to save him from harm. In addition to the precarious living conditions, Dana remembered the poverty and subsequent hunger she endured as a child. She told me:

> I grew up going days without food...We didn't know any better, that's how we lived. I never knew any different...We would have oatmeal everyday for breakfast and lunch one day it would be chicken noodle soup or the next day it would be mushroom soup and then every night it was Kraft dinner. If we were lucky, we actually got Kraft dinner with the cheese packages on it. If not, we just got plain noodles and then sometimes if we were really lucky, we actually got stewed tomatoes in it. That's what we ate, every day for two years. I don't eat Kraft dinner and I do not eat oatmeal. Like we didn't even get brown sugar or milk or anything. Like we had to drink powdered milk, that was like the best we've got. It was water or powdered milk. Powdered milk is repulsive.

Summarizing her childhood experience, Dana stated:

> It was horrible. It was horrible growing up, never having a stable home, never having anything, like barely having food to eat, never having clean clothes. Oh my god, I never had clean clothes. All my school pictures, I just look horrible in 'cause my hair...I freakin' wouldn't wash my hair 'cause we never had shampoo or conditioner, barely ever had running water wherever we lived.

Due to the family's frequent moves, Dana rarely attended school, which she did not regret as she was subject to constant bullying by other students on account of her appearance. In addition, school staff would regularly notify the authorities due to the children's neglected appearance, and subsequent involvement with the child welfare system would prompt yet another move to avoid the children's apprehension.

Despite her father's efforts, Dana became a permanent ward of the court when she was 12 and from there on moved back and forth between various foster families and group homes. At 14, Dana took matters in her own hands. She ran away and started living on the streets. She started taking drugs, mostly smoking crack-cocaine, and soon was unable to sustain her drug

habit through "hustling" and panhandling alone. Dana recalled her decision to become a sex worker as follows:

> I think I was about 14, 15 when I first started working in Vancouver 'cause I was a drug addict. I was a total drug addict....everybody took advantage of me when I was a kid and that's probably why I've gone into prostitution because it was easy enough to turn myself off. You go do the job and it's like, whatever, you're just not there. It's like, whatever, it's been happening my whole life, might as well get paid for it. If you gonna treat me like shit and abuse me, I might as well get money out of the deal.

However, Dana's income from the sex trade did not only support her ever increasing drug habit but also her younger brother, who had come out to Vancouver to live with his sister.

Dana worked in the sex trade on East Hastings in Vancouver for the next few years, trapped in a cycle where she could only stand selling her body when high on drugs and needing to sell her body to get high. While working in the sex trade, she was repeatedly assaulted and raped several times. In addition, she was brutalized by various pimp boyfriends who often left her with just enough of her night's earnings to buy drugs so she would be able to return to work the next night. Life on the streets got even more precarious when a number of sex trade workers began to disappear from the neighborhood where Dana worked. Dana mentioned that she knew several of the girls that were murdered by Robert "Willie" Pickton and claims to having been at Pickton's farm on occasion to take advantage of the free drugs he supplied.

Dana's life temporarily took a turn for the better when, at 21, she found out that she was pregnant:

> On my 21st birthday, I smoked $600 worth of crack and about $300 worth of heroin. I was about three months pregnant when I found out and I was a heavy duty drug addict before that. I quit everything. I smartened up, I got a place, I did everything I could...

However, her then-boyfriend was caught selling drugs out of their apartment and due to her existing child welfare record, albeit as a child in need of protection, her daughter was

apprehended at birth. After the apprehension, Dana returned to her corner on East Hastings hopeless and on drugs again. She described the despair she felt one night on her way to work:

> I was on my way down to work. I just followed my brother down the street, I didn't wanna go to work. I was having a really hard time, I was trying to decide whether I wanna go work or whether I wanna throw myself off the bridge and kill myself. I was like in between those. It was a really, really, difficult time for me…I lived by the book of hard knocks. That's my life. I lived through the school of hard knocks. I've never been loved in my entire life. I never ever felt loved my whole life... It's fucked my life up, it's fucked my head up. I freakin' hate myself. I think I'm absolutely the most worthless piece of shit that has ever walked the face of the earth. But that's all I ever had pumped in my head my whole life, is that I'm nothing, that I'm worthless and that I'll never be anything...I always wanted somebody that would just tell me that I was beautiful and actually mean it. Not some gross john that's like 60 years old...

That night, on East Hastings, she crossed paths with Brian, who she considered to be the best thing that ever happened in her life. Dana described Brian as her saving angel who showed her "how normal life could be." He convinced her within a week to quit her job as a sex worker and made a promise that he would take care of her, an offer which she immediately accepted:

> He's a drywaller. And he has a real job. Like, that was amazing to me. I didn't know that men could actually have real jobs, good looking men could really work. They weren't just drug dealers or pimps. It was amazing…My husband, in a week he said 'I don't want you to work anymore.' and I was like 'Ok.' 'Cause he was gonna take care of me. He is the first guy that ever wanted to take care of me. He's the first guy I ever dated that didn't have a criminal record and actually had a job, a real job.

Brian went to work every day, cooked Dana dinners at night and provided her with money. As he had promised, he took care of her, which was nothing short of amazing to Dana. One anecdote Dana told me is particularly telling of how much her life changed after she met Brian:

> You know Sidekick dishes?...[mmm hmmm]...You know the picture on the front?...[Yeah?]...I never ate a meal like that my entire life until I got together with my husband. And he made it. Yeah, I'll never forget, it was pasta and vegetables and pork. And I called my brother up and I'm like 'Oh my god Peter, you'll never gonna believe it.' I'm like 'You know those Sidekick packages?' and he's like 'Yeah?' 'I'm eating a dinner like the picture on the pack.' And he's like 'No way!' And I'm like 'Yeah, this is sooo cool.' And he's like 'I'm coming over for dinner tomorrow.' And that was like the first time we'd ever eaten like that in our entire life.

During their three months of courtship Dana and Brian both stayed away from hard drugs for the most part but on the night before their wedding, they went out to party and "did a lot of drugs." For the next three weeks they went on drug binges together, which severely strained their budget as Brian's income was not sufficient to supply enough drugs for both of them.

Three weeks after their wedding, on Christmas Day, Dana phoned her mother to tell her about the exciting news of her marriage and was scorned for not inviting her own mother to the festivities. The berating lecture that followed made Dana, once again, feel "worthless," like "absolutely nothing." After a fight with Brian that night, Dana attempted to commit suicide by hanging. Brian found her just in time, and brought her to a hospital, where they discovered that Dana was pregnant with twins. Due to her recent suicide attempt the hospital staff contacted child welfare and based on her past involvement with child welfare, Dana was required to undergo drug testing. She tested positive for various substances on account of the drugs she had been consuming the weeks after the wedding. She emphasized that she did not know she was pregnant when she took all those drugs, that she would never have taken drugs had she known she was pregnant. She also pointed out that, just as with her first child, she stopped taking drugs on the day she found out she was expecting. Her twins were nonetheless apprehended immediately after their birth.

Over the next couple of years, Dana and Brian moved from city to city "chasing work" and, after the birth of two more children, a son and daughter, to avoid child protection services. Dana insisted that they were good parents to their children, despite their on and off drug use, and that the child welfare system never gave her a fair chance to actually prove it. When I asked her how she thought her children's lives compared to her own childhood, she was adamant about being, unlike her own parents, loving and caring as she would go out of her way to protect her

children from any harm. According to Dana and Brian, good parents make sure their children are clean, well fed, loved and protected from any kind of abuse. Dana described what made a good mother in her eyes:

> I never had a childhood. I've been raped and molested as early as I can remember, neighbors, babysitters, you know, family friends, everybody. And I don't know why it happened to me but it happened to me and there's nothing I can do about it now. There's nothing I can do about it, I can just try and make it better now for me and my kids…I fucked up sometimes with my kids, which I feel really bad about and whatnot. But we'd never really put them into a situation, I guess, where we thought it was gonna be bad…My kids have clean clothes, they have food in the cupboards…Yeah, we screwed up for a little while there. But even when we were fucking up with drugs, my kids still had diapers, they still had food and I didn't fuck up around them, and I didn't fuck up when they were awake. They'd go to sleep and then we'd screw up. And I'll admit that I screwed up. I'm not perfect. Nobody's perfect.

Similarly, Brian pointed out that "we all make poor choices in life, just some are caught, others are more consequential." In defense of their parenting abilities, he stated:

> Like food was never an issue. The wife was…that was the one key thing she was fantastic with is with the kids. It's the kids must be fed, right? Always no dirty diapers and stuff like that, like the important essentials. And *love*. I tell my boy I love him like 10 times, 20 times a day, I think, 'cause I overcompensate on that 'cause my father never did…

Talking about his family's future, Brian was cautiously optimistic:

> I know in my heart that it's gotta be different because there's only two choices left now, you know? We're gonna be faced with two choices: do it right or lose everything, is basically it, you know? But when your arm is caught in the meat grinder (laughs) it's hard to pull it out and even if you do, you got a bloody stump to deal with, right? So, I see a hard long road ahead if I am honest with myself, because the struggles are great...

Dana and Brian stayed at the shelter for only a couple of weeks and moved into their own apartment once Brian found a job as a drywaller in the city. Dana returned to being a full-time caretaker for their two children, awaiting the arrival of her sixth child.[71]

---

[71] Dana and Brian lost custody of all three children after Dana gave birth and returned to British Columbia. In 2011 they had twins, who remained in their custody. They continue to struggle.

On Becoming Homeless

The accounts provided here represent only a small collection among many others I could have included in their stead and were selected because they illustrate the complex circumstances that bring about singular or repeated spells of homelessness. Furthermore, they were selected because they stand in stark contrast to the reductionist, deficiency-centered discourses offered by policy makers and academics discussed in earlier chapters. For some families, it was their first spell of homelessness and their first stay at a shelter. Others had been homeless before, but with the help of their personal support system previously had been able to avoid turning to a homeless shelter for housing. For yet other families, staying at a shelter had become but one of many housing alternatives they relied on when losing a home. Some families just temporarily needed a place to stay and were re-housed within several days while other families stayed at the Guest House for several months before moving into their own home or a transitional housing facility.

As my discussion of the academic literature in Chapter II suggests, the general discourse pertaining to the causes of homelessness focuses mainly, albeit not solely, on substance abuse and mental health problems or the combination thereof (the so-called dual diagnosis). The accounts presented in this chapter suggest that the picture is infinitely more complex than that.

In Chapter I, I discussed central economic, social and political processes that contributed to the steady increase in homelessness in Calgary. Many of the families I spoke to over the course of my fieldwork lived in dire poverty and their economic hardship was shaped by limited employment opportunities, irregular work hours, insufficient wages in the low-income segment of the employment market, lack of benefits, low social assistance benefit levels, lack of affordable childcare and high rents.

Natalie and Simon, for example, already lived under severe financial strain when Natalie lost her funding due to her health problems. With Simon unable to work due to his health condition, they relied on only one income, which was insufficient to provide for a family of five in a city marked by very high costs of living, a shortage of safe, affordable housing, the lack of rent control and long waiting lists for public housing, and the lack of income support for low-income families. It would be difficult to identify the one key reason for this family's homelessness and it is next to impossible to reconstruct a causal chain of events to determine at which point an intervention could have prevented the family from sliding into homelessness.

Moreover, it is next to impossible to identify with certainty who or what is to be held accountable for the calamities homeless families face. In public and academic discourses, blame is quickly placed on the homeless for their plight; addictions, mental health problems, and various individual deficiencies and dysfunction are the focus. To the uncritical observer, Dana and Brian's or Mona and Randy's story seem to affirm dominant discourses. However, their accounts also suggest that their substance use itself is a response to a life marked by poverty, violence, neglect, discrimination and exclusion. Certainly, as individuals we have agency and make choices. But what if the options to choose from are limited? What if you constantly face obstacles you cannot control and that threaten the fragile equilibrium of your family's finances? Brian succinctly summarized the limitations of life in poverty when he pointed out "I'm the captain of my ship, not the master of the sea." While he has control over his own decisions, the context in which those decisions have to be made and that shapes the decision-making process is beyond his control.

As I have outlined above, reasons for a family to become homeless are at times manifold. It appears the more complex the reasons for a family's homelessness, the more barriers that

family faces in terms of re-housing. In addition, based on my two-year experience working at the Guest House, the one thing all families I met had in common was their poverty. They had no resources left to fall back on which also made their transition back into housing difficult. Many families lost most of their possession in the process of becoming homeless and saved only what they could carry in a backpack or store with friends or relatives. When they moved into housing most relied on charitable organizations to furnish their empty apartments with used furniture.

Once housed, often their lives remained precarious, marked by continued poverty and the threat of impending crisis, from which their poverty often left them unprotected. Not surprisingly, I saw many families return to the Guest House over the two years I worked there, some multiple times. The *10 Year Plan* suggests that housing is the answer to the plight of the homeless. My observations suggest that providing housing to homeless families and individuals without addressing the complex factors contributing to their deep poverty seems to be a Sisyphean endeavour.

That said, the remainder of my dissertation focuses on what happens to homeless families between losing a home and being re-housed, namely their shelter stay. In the following chapters, I will present the results of my analysis of the social organization of service provision to homeless families at the Guest House. I will begin my discussion with a detailed account of the Guest House's history and the complex processes that shaped the ways in which its services are organized today.

CHAPTER V: GRASSROOTS GONE CORPORATE – THE EVOLUTION OF A NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION

If a man's destitute he isn't even driven out with a stick, he's swept out of human society with a broom, to make it as insulting as possible.

—Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Crime and Punishment

Since its inception in 1997, the Guest House has been providing shelter, services and programs to Calgary's homeless families and individuals. Inspired by a program for homeless families in Nashville, Tennessee called *Room in the Inn*, a number of Calgarians launched a program offering nightly shelter to homeless families. Since preventing family disruption in times of crisis was one of the core principles of the new family shelter, the Guest House program differed from existing family shelters in the city by extending their services to men and male adolescents. Thus, the program welcomed homeless two-parent families and families including teenage and adult children, thereby targeting a hitherto underserviced population.

Over the years, the Guest House developed from a small, faith-based grassroots organization providing nightly shelter in rotating partnering churches into a sizable non faith-based emergency shelter. As I will discuss in this chapter, the growth of the organization and subsequent institutional changes were as much a response to an ever increasing need for shelter beds for Calgary's homeless families as a desire to end the nomadic nature of accommodating families in rotating community shelters every night.

The Early Days

When the Guest House first opened its doors to Calgary's homeless families, it operated on a very small budget. One program manager, two full-time and one part-time staff member were in charge of intake, outreach and administrative tasks. Following the Nashville model, the

Guest House's founding members decided to capitalize on an existing infrastructure and volunteer base by providing shelter to homeless families year-round through participating local churches. As one long-term staff member remembered,

> The original intent was just to have a place for families to go, using the simplest means necessary, which was using existing structures which were church basements, because of the licensing, insurance, everything was already covered to house people in them so there was no, very little cost associated with it.

One of the founding churches provided the office space needed for the organization's administration and the intake process. At the time, the Guest House did not have sufficient space to provide a drop-in room where its guests could spend the day. However, their partnership with the Calgary Urban Project Society (CUPS), a non-profit organization that provides services and programs to poor and homeless individuals, gave families a place to stay during the day. Among other programs, CUPS runs a medical clinic, a family centre, a range of educational programs and workshops, and on-site counselling. Its range of free services and the close proximity to the Guest House's intake office made it a particularly suitable partner.

The Guest House's downtown office opened at 4:00 pm at which point families could register for the night. At 5:30 pm, the registration process was officially closed and registered guests were assigned to one of the designated community shelters to which transportation was provided. The bus generally was ready to leave around 6:00 pm and, depending on traffic and the location of the designated community shelter, families arrived at the designated church between 6:30 pm and 7:30 pm.

The churches, staffed by volunteers from their respective congregations, provided the families with a hot dinner, evening entertainment, a bed to sleep and overnight supervision on a rotating basis. As the number of participating churches grew, any one church would provide its

services about once a month. The amenities varied greatly from church to church, which meant not every night would families have access to hot showers or laundry facilities. Some nights the families would sleep on mats while other nights fold-out cots were available and roll-away dividers provided them with at least some privacy. In the morning, families were served breakfast, received a bagged lunch for the day, and then were dropped off downtown at CUPS around 7:00 am. At CUPS, a school bus was waiting to transport school-aged children to the partnering grade school (K-6) and junior high school (7-9) to ensure regular school attendance of children sheltered through the Guest House. For adults, the Guest House provided bus tickets to go to work, go to appointments, obtain employment training, or attend recovery programs (Guest House 2004).

Over the next 10 years, services were provided in pretty much the same fashion as in the early days. However, the organization itself grew substantially during that time as both the need for shelter beds, particularly for homeless families, the need for additional services beyond shelter, and the number of participating churches increased. In 2006, almost 10 years after its inception, the Guest House served 310 homeless families. That year, 3,800 volunteers in a network of 84 participating churches provided 17,760 beds for homeless families, almost half of which were occupied by children (Guest House 2006).

As the organization continued to grow, important administrative and financial changes were required to accommodate that growth. In 2004, the Guest House's Board of Directors appointed an executive director (ED) to take on managerial tasks and to run the day-to-day operations. The Board itself yielded its managerial responsibilities and focused more on the strategic development of the organization (Guest House 2004; Board member in personal communication). As stated in the 2004 newsletter, the change in the responsibilities of the Board

was necessary "to effectively deal with the complex issues facing an organization that cares about making a difference in the lives of the city's neediest families" (Guest House 2004, 2).

In addition, more full-time paid staff, particularly managerial and administrative staff as well as outreach workers,[72] were required to coordinate and facilitate service delivery. The churches continued to provide free shelter on a volunteer basis, donated the food they served as well as other essential items for the families, and made financial contributions. However, the continuous growth of the organization drastically changed its funding needs, which were increasingly met through donations, grants, third party events, and fund-raising events organized by the Guest House Board.

By 2004, The Guest House operated on a $430,00 annual budget, $260,000 of which was spent on wages and benefits, about $40,000 on administration, roughly $44,000 on transportation, and approximately $45,000 was paid to guests in direct assistance (Guest House 2005b). Within two years, the Guest House's annual budget almost doubled. In 2006, $870,000 was spent on wages ($490,000), administration ($148,000), transportation ($58,000), direct assistance ($62,000), and other items.

Taking on New Challenges – The Redwood Project

One of the key milestones in the organization's transition from providing shelter in church basements on a nightly basis to opening a permanent emergency shelter is, without a doubt, the Guest House's participation in the Redwood Project.[73] The Redwood Project was the brain child of a city alderman and the owner of the Redwood Hotel. They proposed that the

---

[72] For the first few years of the organization's operation, the official title was outreach worker and was later changed to case worker as case management became an essential component of the Guest House's service delivery approach.
[73] Name of the project was changed.

property could be used to shelter homeless families long-term over the winter of 2003/2004 before its scheduled demolition in the spring of 2004 to make room for new condominium development. The Alberta government agreed to fund the project (Wenger 2004).

The offer was brought forth in November 2003, the province agreed to cover the costs of the project, and the Calgary Planning Commission fast-tracked the proposal for approval. Initiators of the project were determined to move families into the Redwood Hotel by Christmas and serve them a turkey dinner at the facility, despite the concerns voiced by involved social service agencies that the ambitious planning would not give them enough time for thorough preparation and set-up (Derworiz 2003; McCormick 2003a). However, the facility required substantial renovations to make it habitable and logistic challenges pushed back the official opening well into January of 2004 (McCormick 2003b).

The City of Calgary, CUPS, Aspen (a Calgary based charitable family service agency), Community Kitchens and the Guest House were involved in the early planning stages of the project. It was soon decided that Aspen would act as the fiscal agent and the Guest House would be responsible for the frontline service delivery – that is, the screening and referral of suitable families, staffing, and program facilitation (Waegemakers Schiff 2004b). According to a Guest House staff member who was in charge of the project at the time, the City of Calgary agreed to provide families who participated in the Redwood Project with an apartment through the Calgary Housing Company's (CHC) Deep Subsidy Community Housing program.

The first seven families moved into Redwood in January 2004. According to the Guest House's program manager, families were handpicked for the project only if "they were ready to change their life, go into programs, not be active in addictions, and had no current violence or weapons charges" (City of Calgary 2004b, 1). Over the next weeks, the number of families

gradually rose to 21, with the last family moving in as late as March 2. Through inter-agency cooperation, a significant number of programs and support services were provided both on-site and at participating agencies and children living at Redwood were bused to the Guest House's two partnering schools to ensure school attendance (Waegemakers Schiff 2004b).

Families were housed in private single rooms; families with adolescent children were housed in the few available suites. The lobby and former banquet rooms were used as communal space and Community Kitchen provided Redwood residents with breakfast and hot dinners. Volunteers set up and served dinner, and took primary responsibility for the after-dinner clean-up. Families were in charge of preparing their own bagged lunches for the following day and were expected to maintain their private quarters, do their own laundry at the hotel's laundry facility, and participate in communal chores, such as cleaning the communal areas. Families housed at Redwood were required to vacate the facility between 9:00 am and 3:00 pm to participate in support programs at downtown agencies. Many families would spend their day at the CUPS Family Resource Centre along with families housed through the churches (Waegemakers Schiff 2004b).

After less than three months of operation, the Redwood closed its doors on March 31 and 19 of the 21 families moved on to CHC housing, while two returned to the Guest House program. The Redwood project received a lot of media attention before its doors opened and during its operation. The coverage was mostly positive, emphasizing the homelike character of the Redwood Hotel and thus improved living conditions for homeless families. In addition, many articles highlighted the stabilizing effect of Redwood, pointing to the fact that 19 of the 21 families were able to obtain permanent housing after leaving Redwood (see, for example, Derworiz 2004). However, people involved in the project suggested to me that several parties

involved had a vested interest in framing it as successful to ensure future government funding for similar projects.

Guest House staff involved in the project told me that the general consensus was that the Redwood was a successful pilot project and a positive model for similar projects. However, they emphasized that the project had its share of problems and cautioned against overemphasizing the success of the project. In a media interview, one Guest House Board member lamented that while Redwood was a good project for Guest House families, it only temporarily housed homeless families. The board member thus encouraged the province to collaborate on longer-term solutions (Derworiz 2004). Another Board member I interviewed questioned the success of Redwood in subsequently housing homeless families:

> [T]he [Redwood] was a good example of how some of that programming worked and how writing the cheque and putting them into housing too early did not work because over 50 percent of the families were back. I think it was greater than that.

Furthermore, as Waegemakers Schiff (2004b), who conducted an evaluation study of the Redwood project, pointed out, staffing was a considerable problem at Redwood. Initially, families were required to stay at the community shelters for three consecutive nights (72 hours) so that their suitability for the Redwood project could be assessed.[74] Because of staffing and volunteer shortages, however, the assessment proceeded slowly and some families had to wait a week or more to move into Redwood.

Secondly, according to Waegemakers Schiff (2004b), all personnel for Redwood were hired specifically for the Redwood project and none of the newly hired staff had any experience working with homeless families or in facilitating communal living. The facility was staffed only

[74] That requirement was later lowered to two nights (48 hours).

by a program supervisor doubling as facility manager, three evening and two overnight staff. The Guest House's outreach workers were on call in case of an emergency, but not on site. The situation was aggravated by the fact that the insufficient time to set up the Redwood project led to a lack of operational guidelines, which were being developed only after families had already moved into the facility.

Waegemakers Schiff (2004b) further recounts that two of the frontline staff members were let go shortly after Redwood opened, but their positions were never refilled. Aspen eventually deployed relief staff to the Redwood who, however, provided provisional assistance rather than regular support. Towards the end of the project, the project manager resigned. Remaining staff faced challenges created by a severe staff shortage, vague operational guidelines, staff's general lack of experience in facilitating communal living, insufficient staff training, lack of communication between partnering agencies, and unclear chains of command, which led to frustrations and low morale among staff and frequent conflict between staff and guests.

A Guest House staff member involved in the Redwood project told me that one major problem was the unequal distribution of responsibility among participating agencies.

> As outreach we were the ones who were called in the middle of the night for emergencies. Neither Aspen nor Calgary Housing or CUPS got involved in that process, they simply heard about it the next day. So the understanding of what occurred during Redwood is going be different from different agencies based on their involvement in it, right? It's different when you hear about an incident the next day, and when you're there at two in the morning dealing with the incident.

The same staff member touched upon additional challenges at Redwood never mentioned in the media reports or Waegemakers Schiff's (2004b) evaluation.

> We were the only ones there dealing with the drinking and the drugs, cleaning out the rooms, finding the needles, finding the crack pipes, and moving the families and then finding more of the same.

Guest House officials and staff perceived Redwood as a challenging, yet invaluable experience, which paved the way for developing a permanent facility in which homeless families could be housed. In their 2004 annual report, the Guest House announced,

> It has become clear that to continue to make a real and permanent difference in the lives of our guests we need to do more. We have learned that transitional housing is the key to bridging homelessness and hope, and we are going to work to make this possible.

To that end, the Guest House's Board developed a five-year strategic plan that entailed purchasing a building to set up a temporary "pre-transitional shelter," modeled after the Redwood project, to provide homeless families with more stability and to end their "nomadic lifestyle." In the 2005 annual report, the Guest House Board's president stated,

> Our vision is to purchase a permanent building that would provide pre-transitional shelter for families in conjunction with the existing (community shelters). Our past experience with the [Redwood] project shows that families, especially children, greatly benefit from routine, and sleeping in the same place each night would help them in their journey out of homelessness. (Guest House 2005a, 2)

The Board's decision to opt for a pre-transitional housing facility was interesting taking into account the political context in which that decision was made. In 2003, the Calgary Homeless Foundation (CHF) released their *Community Plan* to address the growing homeless population in Calgary. One key objective of the plan was to develop a "comprehensive continuum of housing options" (Community Action Committee 2003, 9). In that document, the CHF defined emergency shelters as providing "temporary accommodation for homeless individuals and families who would otherwise sleep in the streets, generally including supports such as food, clothing and counseling" (ibid., 9). Transitional housing, on the other hand, was defined as

> short or long-term accommodation while assistance is obtained to address problems such as unemployment, addictions, mental health issues, educational deficits, physical and cognitive disabilities, and domestic violence. Transitional housing units typically provide access to a mix of support services that enable an individual to move towards self-sufficiency. (ibid., 9)

The pre-transitional facility the Guest House Board had in mind was to provide temporary shelter in combination with supportive programs and services to prepare homeless families for their re-entry into housing. Their housing model thus fell somewhere between those two established models of shelter provision as defined by the CHF. As I will discuss later in this chapter, the Board's insistence on the pre-transitional housing model proved to be problematic in terms of obtaining funding and support from the CHF. Nonetheless, the capital campaign to raise funds for the pre-transitional shelter kicked off in 2006. However, it would take another two years paved with obstacles to realize the Board's vision of a permanent family shelter.

A New Home for the Guest House

In early March of 2006, the building in which the Guest House's office was located had to be vacated due to extensive renovations. Although they were given ample notice, the Guest House was hard pressed to find a new, suitable headquarter from which to operate in Calgary's soaring real estate market. The nature of the Guest House's services required a location in Calgary's downtown core to make both the organization's services and those of their partnering social service agencies, all located downtown, easily accessible to its guests, many of whom relied on public transportation.[75]

In addition, the Guest House required about 5,000 square feet of space to be able to facilitate the intake process for an ever-growing clientele (Guest House 2006). However, a space of that size that was financially feasible for the organization was impossible to come by in light of historically low vacancy rates and high rents, especially in the business-dominated downtown

[75] The downtown core of Calgary is a CTrain free fare zone. As soon as an agency is located outside the downtown core, transportation becomes an issue as many service users cannot afford to pay for transit fare.

core. Another obstacle mentioned by the Guest House's administration was the unwillingness of landlords to rent space to an agency that provided services to the homeless. As the ED told a local newspaper, "Unfortunately, our clientele didn't match with landlords' expectations…" (Guttormson 2006d).

As the deadline to vacate the premises drew closer, the organization was still no closer to having secured new office space, despite changing direction and looking into buying a building. After negotiations for the purchase of a building fell through and having exhausted all other options, the Guest House's Board decided to go public and asked for help in the matter through local media outlets. In addition, the Calgary Real Estate Board sent out an email to its 1,300 agents dealing with commercial property (Calgary Herald 2006b). Following the media campaign, the Guest House's Board received several offers, but not all suggestions met the particular needs of the organization. For the time being, the Guest House was forced set up their headquarters temporarily in the basement of one of the founding churches rather than their own facility.

Thanks to support following the media campaign, the Guest House was able to secure two suitable sites for their new office, both located in the East Village. While initially an unaccommodating real estate market delayed the Guest House's move into a new facility, it was now city council that stalled progress as zoning regulations did not allow for a social service agency to settle in either one of the two properties. Alderman Druh Farrell informed the Guest House Board that the city would not approve the required land use changes. As discussed in Chapter I, in 2001 city council had approved an extensive East Village area redevelopment plan to rejuvenate the neighborhood, integrate it with adjacent communities, and make the prime real estate location more attractive for potential investors (City of Calgary 2010b).

Part of the redevelopment plan was to limit the number of social service agencies in the neighborhood to "minimize their adverse impact on new residential development" (City of Calgary 2010b, 70). In the *Calgary Herald*, Farrell stated, "We have to start looking at is the downtown the best place for a lot of these services" (Guttormson and Wilton 2006). Farrell promised she would help the Guest House to find an alternate location, but all suggestions brought forward were located outside the downtown core, which was one of the organization's explicit requirements. This, however, was not a viable option for the Guest House's Board. As one Board member explained to me,

> You can't house homeless families in southeast Calgary a half an hour or 40 minute bus ride from the downtown core. How realistic is that? So, the reality is you need to provide a safe place with fantastic programming so that these people do get off the street and their kids stay off the street forever and they learn coping skills and strategies. You stick them out in far southeast Calgary, that isn't gonna happen. How are they even gonna get to and from the facility every day?

It was another charitable organization that came to the Guest House's aid. The Calgary Drop-In & Rehab Centre (DI) offered the Guest House to rent about 2,000 square feet of rental space in one of their downtown facilities. Commenting on a newly opened facility of the Calgary Humane Society, the DI's ED stated,

> You can put up $10 million for a dog pound and a shelter for animals, but not allow homeless people to move in some place…When you look at the need, it's not hard to prioritize, when you have kids homeless, moms and dads on the street. (Guttormson 2006c)

Although much smaller than required, the building was situated in an ideal location, close to the CTrain line and in close proximity to many social service agencies. Since the building was already used by a social service agency, the appropriate zoning and necessary permits were

already in place. The two agencies agreed on a two-year rental arrangement at $1,000,000 per year (Guttormson 2006c). [76]

In April 2006, the Guest House started operating out of their new office. I joined the Guest House later that year as a volunteer. In October of 2006, I had the opportunity to spend some time at the Guest House's downtown office to observe the intake process. The following is an account of the organization's daily work of sheltering homeless families. The account provides a glimpse of a typical afternoon at the Guest House and is composed based on my observations of the intake process at the office downtown. [77]

Sheltering Homeless Families – A Typical Afternoon at the Guest House

The Guest House's new headquarters is situated in Calgary's Beltline district, right behind the Calgary Tower, and just a stone's throw away from vibrant Stephen Avenue's fine dining restaurants and high-end retail shops. At the time, the Beltline, too, is under extensive redevelopment and thus cranes, construction sites, emerging residential towers, and commercial glass high-rises characterize its landscape. The office itself is located on a busy downtown street, flanked on one side by The Mission, a large homeless shelter for single individuals, and a gravel parking lot on the other. The occasional tree along the street provides some retreat on a sunny day but otherwise the building is exposed to the glistening sun, which unremittingly drives up the temperature in the building, even during the cold winter months.

Outside The Mission and the Guest House, a handful of people usually congregate in small groups, smoking, chatting, and waiting to be let in for the intake at either location. The

---

[76] A press release in 2007 stated that the space was offered by the DI free of charge.
[77] A typical night at one of the participating churches is not accounted for here due to my limited engagement with the churches.

Guest House's office is located in a three-storey brick building, which was built in 1909, and shares a wall with The Mission. A brownish white, tessellated tile façade characterizes the building's south face, which is lined with small windows. The base of the building's front, about two and a half metres high, is painted a bluish gray, which makes it easy to miss the Guest House's small glass-door entrance. The brownish red brick façade with its large beige-framed windows markedly sets the building's east face apart from the adjacent gravel parking lot and the gray concrete buildings to the north. The only visible clue to the Guest House's existence is a letter-sized piece of paper taped to the inside of the glass door, bearing the Guest House's name.

In order to get to the Guest House's intake area, I have to step on a narrow ledge, push open the resisting glass door and walk up the steep eight steps to the first floor in a dark and narrow stairway. The floor of the staircase is tiled with a dark red and gray marble imitation, which is reflected in the large mirror tiles that line the wall. A shaky, iron handrail runs up to the first floor, its beige paint flaking off here and there.

As I observed many times, manoeuvring a stroller and one's belongings up that first flight of stairs is a challenging endeavour that requires some skill and a lot of patience as the landing on the bottom of the staircase is only as wide as the door itself. Anyone holding open the defiant door for a parent with a stroller has no choice but to stand on the stairs, now obstructing the way up as the stairs are so narrow that two people can hardly pass each other. The combination of limited space and unaccommodating architecture is a source of daily frustration for many of the families as they try to enter the building.

Having reached the first floor, I enter a small one-by-one-metre hallway through another glass door. A security guard sits in front of the elevator leading to the building's upper floors. Since it is only 3:30 pm and intake does not start until 4:00 pm, the security guard asks me

inquisitively what I wanted. I tell him that I have an appointment and he instructs me to proceed through the door to my left. I push open yet another resisting glass door and find myself in a narrow, one-metre-wide and two-metre-long hallway which opens into the windowless, approximately 10-by-10-metre intake room.

Despite its size, the room appears much smaller than it is due to the clutter that takes up every bit of empty space.[78] Initially I found the level of seeming disorder highly irritating and overwhelming but soon came to understand the clutter as "organized chaos" as neither families or staff seemed to have any trouble finding exactly what they were looking for at any given moment. The intake room has a worn down wooden floor which used to have a pine finish but now, grayish brown patches indicate high traffic areas. There are about 40 chairs scattered around the room, mostly lined along the room's walls and wherever there is space.

Chatter among the outreach workers emerges from behind the half opened office door located on the left wall. A second door right next to the office door leads to the storage room which holds countless dark blue Rubbermaid storage boxes, stacked up along the walls. Visible for all, each box is labelled with yellow masking tape, bearing its owner's family name. There are several more storage boxes stacked up outside the storage room along with miscellaneous items, all bearing their owners' names.

In the far left corner of the intake room, a small children's play area holds a number of plastic containers with toys, books, stuffed animals and art supplies. A poster taped to the wall above the book shelf shows an Aboriginal man in traditional attire standing next to *The 10 Indian*

---

[78] As outlined above, the Guest House was only able to secure about 2,000 square feet of office space, which is less than half of the 5,000 square feet they estimated they would need. Consequently, there was a severe shortage of space, especially room for storage, which only worsened as the Guest House experienced a further influx of homeless families requiring their services.

Commandments.[79] Right below it, a handwritten sign reads, "Children, please put away toys. Thank you." Four large garbage cans are circled around a wooden pillar, which sits in the middle of the room and a handwritten sign instructs: "Don't litter. Please pick up garbage." Yet another poster features "Family Rules," such as "no pushing, kicking, hitting/punching," "listen to parents," "please use manners – thank you, excuse me, please," "you must clean up after yourself," "respect personal property," "no racism," "no swearing," "parents must supervise children," "no gossiping," "keep washroom clean," "respect staff and volunteers," "one lunch per family," and so on.

One of the staff members is sitting behind an L-shaped desk facing the intake room from the far right corner of the room. The two cornering walls and the desk form an enclosed space that physically separates the intake worker from the rest of the room. Next to the desk, shelves mounted to the wall hold brochures informing readers about child abuse, spousal abuse as well as various physical and mental illnesses. A number of photographs encased in handcrafted picture frames are decorating the wall and little cut out paper hands hanging from the ceiling are dancing in the draft of the two rotating fans.

Although intake officially begins at 4:00 pm, the room remains empty well past the hour as it is the staff's discretion when to let in families. At 4:10 pm, a woman enters the intake room and is met by the staff member's disapproving glance. The woman quickly apologizes, saying, "Sorry, I just have to pee." and proceeds to the washroom. Once done, she rushes back outside.

---

[79] The 10 Indian Commandments listed on the poster are: 1) Remain close to the Great Spirit. 2) Show great respect for your fellow beings. 3) Give assistance and kindness wherever needed. 4) Be truthful and honest at all times. 5) Do what you know to be right. 6) Look after the well being of mind and body. 7) Treat the earth and all that dwell there on with respect. 8) Take full responsibility for your actions. 9) Dedicate a share of your efforts to the greater good. 10) Work together for the benefit of all mankind.

About 10 minutes later, the staff member briefly disappears in the narrow hallway and upon return is followed by a couple of families who quickly scatter around the room claiming chairs.

People soon start walking up to the desk to register for the night. Returning families usually just state their name which is entered onto the registration list. On occasion an unfamiliar person wanders in and inquires whether there is room at the Guest House that night. Irrespective of the space available, staff first ask the inquirer whether he or she has children in their care and, in the case of single women, whether they are pregnant. Since the Guest House is a family shelter, adults with accompanying children and expecting women, single or not, are prioritized when allocating scarce beds. If they answer in the affirmative, staff ask how long it has been since they had their last drink or used drugs as the Guest House strictly adheres to a strict zero tolerance policy. Thus they require new arrivals to have been clean and sober for at least four days,[80] and categorically deny services to anyone walking in impaired.[81]

Space permitting, single women and men are generally considered for services if they are compliant with the sobriety requirement. A new family, however, is never turned away even if the shelter runs at capacity. A staff member takes the new family to one of the offices and provides them with information regarding the intake process, the mode of accommodation, the basic rules, and services available through the Guest House. If the family decides to stay, the staff member enters their basic information such as names of all family members, their

[80] The four-day rule had been around for so long that no-one could really remember where it had originated. One staff member told me that a retired police officer who had facilitated a drug and alcohol training session at the Guest House had suggested that it takes the body about four days to metabolize any substances, and for impairment to wear off.

[81] In making their decision, staff seldom utilize drug tests or breathalyzers, but solely relied on observable signs of intoxication, interpreting speech, motor control, eye movement patterns, etc.

relationship to each other, dates of birth, allergies, medical conditions and required medications on to a medical intake form. The family then joins the other families in the waiting room.

The first to walk in that afternoon is a couple, Mike and Cindy, both in their mid-twenties, pushing a stroller that not only holds their eight-month-old infant but two backpacks, several heavy duty garbage bags, some loose clothing and a couple of blankets. The stroller is so heavily laden that I fear it might tip over backwards if they let go of its handle or eventually give in under all the weight it's bearing. After occupying a group of chairs in the room's corner, Mike explores the food set out on a small table next to the entrance. He decides on some cake, starts eating hungrily and then returns to his seat with a face dusted with powdered sugar.

As he sits down, Cindy rolls her eyes and starts "Go wipe your mouth, you look like..." but then does not finish the sentence. Mike gets up and heads to the washroom where he looks in the mirror, emits an accepting grunt and starts washing his face in the sink. On his way back to his chair, he stops at the trashcan and starts digging out two sweaters. When Cindy sees Mike holding up the sweaters, she lets out a short shriek, rolls her eyes and yells with irritation, "Mike, they're in the garbage for a reason." Mike continues to inspect the sweaters and remarks that they are still okay, but when Cindy glares at him with annoyance he throws them back into the garbage can.

A few minutes later, Suzanne and her eight-year-old son Ben walk in. Suzanne shouts out "Hello people. How are you?" to which she receives no response, walks over to Mike and Cindy, greets their infant with a friendly pinch in the cheeks, and pulls up a chair to join the couple. Ben rids himself of his backpack and jacket and starts climbing on a stack of chairs from where he scopes out the situation using his toy camouflaged binoculars. He soon starts running around the

room, now a ninja of sorts, completely lost in his make-believe fight against invisible enemies. Suzanne, Mike and Cindy sit in a half circle around the infant's stroller, chatting and laughing.

Suzanne is followed by the Smith family. James and Pat are both in their early thirties but look much older than that. Their three daughters are 10, eight and seven years old and are the only children that afternoon dressed in seemingly ragged clothes. Pat darts to a row of empty chairs, throws down her backpack and immediately makes her way over to a table holding food. She picks up a banana, peels it impatiently and devours it in seconds while holding her stomach. She tosses the banana peel into the garbage can and picks up another banana, which disappears equally fast. Pat leans against the table and closes her eyes for a few seconds, then walks back to her family where she instructs the girls to organize their backpacks for school the next day.

She asks her daughters whether they have any homework, which they all answer in the affirmative. Pat sighs and asks them why they did not finish their homework at school to which she only receives shoulder shrugs as an answer. She commands that they start their homework at once upon which the two older girls settle on the floor, retrieve their assignments from their backpacks and make a half-hearted attempt to complete their homework, frequently complaining about being too hungry and tired. The seven-year-old, who seems just as tired as her mother, plunges herself to the floor and starts whining, which is commented by raised eyebrows and disapproving looks appearing on other parents' faces. One woman says loudly for everyone to hear, "Man, am I glad that my kids aren't that whiny." Ignoring the comment, Pat produces three pudding cups from her backpack, which only the seven-year old refuses. Pat shrugs her shoulders and proceeds to eating the rejected pudding herself.

The seven-year-old has given up whining and now curls up on an empty chair next to her father, where she promptly falls asleep, undisturbed by the commotion around her. Pat finishes

organizing the family's belongings for the night and then falls heavily into her chair. Her cheeks are flushed from the heat in the room and she looks agitated. She frequently yells at the girls, who still sit on the floor, now incessantly bickering and insulting each other by saying such things as "You are gross and retarded," instead of doing their homework. James, who until now has been sitting in his chair quietly with glazed-over eyes, his almost apathetic gaze fixed on some remote point in the room, jumps up and finds a new chair at the other end of the room.

Once finished with her pudding, the eight-year-old gets up to wash her face and upon exiting the washroom, forcefully collides with a 10-year-old boy who happened to run by at that very instant. She starts crying and her cry turns into a ear-piercing shriek once she realizes that her nose had started bleeding from the impact of the collision. She turns to Pat for comfort but only receives a shoulder shrug upon which she approaches James, who now stands leaning against the wall with his arms crossed, showing no reaction. Ultimately, a teenage girl takes her to the washroom to clean up her face, then locates the 10-year-old culprit, lectures him on running in the room and demands that he apologizes to the girl, which he reluctantly does.

Next to walk in are three dark-skinned women accompanied by 10 children varying in age from one to 16. The women settle into their chairs and the younger kids dart over to the play area immediately. The women sit next to each other and hardly speak aside from occasional instructions given to their children in French. One of their children retrieves a soccer ball from the storage room and the older kids start kicking the ball back and forth, a pastime that comes to a sudden end when the ball accidently hits one of the spectators, a toddler, in the face. The boy who kicked the ball earns a clout from the toddler's mother and the ball is confiscated.

A continuous flow of people now pours into the intake room and it is increasingly difficult to keep track of family relations as adults and children mingle and morph into one large

crowd. Many families, adults and children alike, carry with them large backpacks bearing their names and black heavy-duty garbage bags containing their most valued possessions and clothing. They register for the night, find a place to put down their belongings, and proceed to the storage room to retrieve their storage boxes. They start emptying their backpacks, select from their boxes whatever they will require for the night and the long day ahead of them, and place items not needed back into the boxes.

While most adults start prepping for the night upon arrival, go see one of the outreach workers in the back office or socialize with other people at the intake room, most kids immediately rush towards the play area, where a rowdy fight over a toy not shared erupts from time to time, usually followed by the ear-splitting shrieks of the losing party. Several sound-emitting toys add to the ever-increasing noise level coming from the play area. In addition, somebody is trying out different ring tones on a cell phone, letting each ring tone run for a while and then moving on to the next. At some point when the noise reaches an incredible crescendo, the staff member gets up from behind the desk and shouts, "People, this is an office, so could you turn it down please!" For a moment, all noise and commotion comes to a sudden halt and it feels like someone hit the pause button on a DVD player. However, the silence is short-lived as whispers and muffled exchanges turn back into lively conversation, and children resume their noisy play.

The more people arrive at the shelter, the more cluttered the intake room gets as families sort through their belongings, which are scattered all over the floor and the chairs they had claimed earlier. Steady commotion is caused by people carrying their boxes across the room not able to see where they are going, accidentally stepping on scattered toys, kids playing on the floor and other people's belonging. Three or four strollers stand around, constantly being in

somebody's way and incessantly being pushed aside, just to obstruct somebody else's pathway. By 4:45 pm nearly 40 people have congregated in the small room. Conversations are carried on in several languages such as English, French, Spanish and various Aboriginal languages. In addition to the ever rising noise level in the room, the air is getting unpleasantly hot and stifling; even the two fans running on maximum speed can provide no relief.

By 5:00 pm, about 60 people have gathered in the small intake room, many leaning against the walls or cabinets as there are no more chairs to sit on. Some are engaging in lively conversations, others are just staring blankly from exhaustion. In the distance, a baby is crying without pause and there appears to be no way to calm him or her down. Most of the families have arrived and now mainly men walk in, reuniting with their families after their day at work. One of the men walks in, greets his wife with a peck on the lips, walks over to the washroom to wash his hands but continues to communicate loudly with his wife who is sitting across the room. All of a sudden he starts chuckling and shouts out to his wife, "Hey Hannah, how about I'll take ya out for dinner tonight? And maybe a movie but we gotta see about that, eh?" which generates a hearty laughter rolling through the room.[82]

At 5:30 pm, the front door is locked, signifying the end of the intake period. Immediately the room begins to fill with tension and nervous shuffling. It is hot and loud, constant fights break out between the children which are often followed by arguments over proper child supervision between their respective parents. Some of the children have fallen asleep while others have fallen into a steady, fatigue-induced whimpering. The people who came too late to secure a chair and are thus leaning against the walls are restlessly shifting positions in

[82] I heard that joke several times, a play on the fact that volunteers serve the families a hot dinner and sometimes families get to watch a movie after dinner, if the hosting church has a TV/DVD player or VCR.

discomfort. Only a few adults are still engaging in lively conversations; most look agitated and restless, yet exhausted. The staff member starts calling out family names to confirm that families who have registered for the night are still in the room. Once attendance is confirmed, the staff member begins to distribute the families evenly among the three churches providing shelter for that night.

As so often these days, the number of registered families exceeds the number of available beds. The outreach workers, who have been mostly invisible throughout the afternoon, start running around, making several phone calls, contacting Emergency Social Services to secure hotel vouchers for families that cannot be accommodated in the churches. The Smiths are one of the lucky families that will spend the night at a local motel rather than a church basement. The girls are jumping around in excitement and even James's and Pat's spirits seem to have been lifted. One of the outreach workers provides them with some bus tickets to get to the motel and back downtown the next morning, and some groceries for a makeshift dinner. A staff member starts calling out family names and asks them to get on the first bus and proceeds in the same fashion for the remaining families, sending them to the second and third waiting buses.

The intake room is left behind in shambles. Toys are scattered all over the room and the floor is littered with food wrappers, empty chip bags and left behind clothing. When I leave the office, I notice that the security guard is gone. A blue toy truck now occupies his empty chair. I step outside and take a deep breath. Even though I am standing next to a busy road, I enjoy the sudden "silence" that washes over me. After three hours in the intake room, I feel overwhelmed, exhausted and empty. I start walking and soon find myself on posh Stephen Avenue with its fine dining restaurants and high-end retail shops. Within minutes I am in a different world that seems to have absolutely nothing in common with the world I just had left.

New Beginnings – The Venture into "Pre-transitional Housing"

As the above account suggests, sheltering homeless families in community churches was a stressful experience for all parties involved. While it made sense at the time to utilize existing infrastructures to meet the needs of Calgary's homeless families, the Guest House actively began pursuing alternative forms of accommodation as the organization, its services, and demand for their services grew. The Board had clearly set the direction for further development in their strategic plan in 2005 and kicked off their "Building Families" capital campaign in September 2006 to raise funding to purchase a building for a permanent pre-transitional housing facility.

The Guest House's transition from a small grassroots organization to a permanent family shelter did not come easy and was met with considerable resistance from within and outside the organization. The Board insisted that a permanent facility would greatly benefit homeless families, particularly their children, by ending their nomadic lives and thus introducing a certain level of stability, routine and structure, seen as crucial in their guests' "journey out of homelessness" (Guest House 2005a, 2). In addition, a change in political climate at the time warranted a reconsideration of how shelter services to homeless families were delivered. As a staff member recounted,

> The philosophy changed throughout the years, even within our organization. As the political climate changed, people hated seeing families in church basements. So, even though it worked for a long time, it was no longer considered I guess appropriate to shelter folks there.

Furthermore, for almost a decade now, overnight shelters were facilitated by volunteers who had no formal training in working with the homeless population. A Guest House staff member was on call in case of an overnight emergency but never on site and it was not until 2005, eight years after the inception of the Guest House, that a manual for group leaders at the churches was developed and training seminars on drug awareness, food safety, or risk

management were implemented (Guest House 2005a). A staff member described the challenges of a volunteer-run service delivery as follows:

> The churches were all volunteers and are all really well intentioned good, good people, right? Their enforcement of policy and guidelines was not only suspect, and is still not only suspect at times, but completely reliant on our intake process and our ability to go to a church and deal with all the issues, right?

However, some individuals within the organization were concerned about what a permanent building would mean for the faith-centered character of the shelter. According to one staff member, by 2006 the organization had undergone a noticeable secularization as new members were elected onto the Guest House's Board. That staff member explained,

> There was one or two lingering who had been a part of the beginning, but the majority of the Board were all different, all corporate and all a part of a different world than what it started out as…And I think three years ago the world was completely different, completely corporate, completely headed in a direction where the incoming Board chair actually said out loud 'We would like to have no church participation anymore.' And to this statement myself and another long time member…said 'What do you mean by that?' And he said 'Well, we want it completely secular, no more religious affiliation.'

In 2005, the Guest House removed the cross from its logo, reflecting the increasing secularization of the organization. In the 2005 newsletter, the Board's president announced,

> As an organization, we are very respectful and proud of our Christian roots and these values will continue to be a part of who we are and what we do. However, in order to become more inclusive and meet the needs of Calgary's homeless families, we need to expand our support base to include all faiths, as well as corporations. We also wanted to create an identity that immediately demonstrates our mission of providing shelter and hope. (Guest House 2005a, 2)

The removal of the cross from the organization's logo was seen by some as symbolic of the new direction the organization was headed. One staff member recalled,

> When they changed the logo…that was the kind of the second stage of the organization becoming more secular and less faith-based. And what they did was they removed the cross from the logo and it seems, probably seems a little childish, but it was an identifying mark of ours. And so when that changed, the people who were on the Board changed as well because there was a shift from grassroots faith-based to secular, which sure the cross is just a symbol, but that symbol means quite a bit to a lot of people in terms of why they do what they do. Uhm and so we lost a few churches when that happened.

According to one staff member, individuals who were concerned about the gradual loss of the organization's grassroots, faith-based, missionary character due to a secularization of the Board also realized that a permanent building would end the organization's need for direct services provided by the churches and thereby diminish the churches' influence in the organization.

Despite some internal resistance, the Board continued to raise funds for a permanent shelter through its "Building Families" campaign and the first opportunity to acquire a building presented itself in December of 2006, when the old Ronald McDonald House, a facility that provided housing to families whose children were treated at the local children's hospital, became available for purchase. The facility was ideal as it contained 15 private rooms with en-suite washrooms, communal space, a full kitchen and office space (Parker 2006). The Ronald McDonald House was looking to sell the house to a charitable organization to use the facility for a similar purpose as they had and the Guest House was one of nine bidders (Williamson 2006).

However, in February of 2007 it became clear that the Guest House, although shortlisted, was not the highest bidder on the building and thus did not succeed in their efforts to obtain the property (Myers 2007). In April 2007, the Ronald McDonald House was officially sold to the Brenda Strafford Foundation which then began to negotiate with various agencies to determine what the building could be used for. The Guest House took the defeat in stride and in the 2006 newsletter (2006, 4), the Guest House Board's president commented,

> While we were unsuccessful with our bid on the former Ronald McDonald House property, we continue to look for a building and/or property that will help us meet this important need [for a pre-transitional family shelter] in our community.

The Guest House thus continued its search for a suitable property, looking to buy or construct a building of about 10,000 square feet in size, ideally already containing 15-25 rooms and a

communal space (Guest House 2006). However, the Calgary real estate market continued to be less than hospitable to such endeavours.

In December of 2007, after two years of unsuccessfully searching a building for their permanent location, the Guest House received an offer from the Calgary Drop-In and Rehab Centre (DI) to purchase the very building in which the Guest House's office had been located for the past two years. The Guest House's Board accepted this offer without hesitation. A purchase agreement over $6,000,000 was signed, with the closing date set for May 30, 2008. The first payment of over $3,000,000 was due at the end of January of 2008 and the second payment of $3,000,000 was to be paid by the end of May of 2008. It was anticipated that the new family shelter would be operational by spring 2008, once all necessary renovations had been completed. There was only one problem: by the end of 2007, the "Building Family" capital campaign had raised "only" about $4,000,000, leaving the Guest House $2,000,000 short to fulfill the purchase agreement.

Meanwhile, the City of Calgary had released its *10 Year Plan to End Homelessness* (*10 Year Plan*), and the CHF, one of whose Board members is Alderman Druh Farrell, was chosen to oversee its implementation. One of the CHF's first action items was the release of a Request for Proposal pertaining to the creation of an emergency family shelter. Since it had been providing services to homeless families in the community for more than a decade, the Guest House submitted their proposal, asking for $500,000 to be used towards the purchase of the DI building and setting up a pre-transitional family shelter. While other agencies had submitted competing proposals to open a family emergency shelter, the Guest House was confident that their proposal would be accepted due to their experience in the field and the unique services they already offered in providing shelter to all types of families.

However, in May 2008 the CHF announced that it would not fund the Guest House's proposal because the $6,000,000 price tag was deemed excessive. The CHF president argued that the building was simply too expensive and the demand for shelter space for homeless families not high enough to justify such astronomical spending (Korn 2008).[83] Another point of objection was that the building lacked adequate bathroom and kitchen facilities for the families to use, as well as sufficient play areas for the children. Furthermore, the current location adjacent to a large homeless shelter for individuals was deemed a safety risk for the children.

Moreover, the CHF rejected the proposal on grounds that the pre-transitional housing model the Guest House had in mind was conflicting with the *10 Year Plan*'s central philosophy, the Housing First objective (Korn 2008). As I discussed earlier, the pre-transitional shelter the Guest House had been striving for since 2004, fit neither the emergency shelter nor the transitional housing categories officially established by the CHF (Community Action Committee 2003). The Guest House envisioned their shelter to be more than just an emergency shelter as they wanted to offer an array of services and programs that exceeded the mandate of conventional emergency shelters. At the same time, they did not want to provide transitional housing, which offers longer term housing in self-contained units in combination with extensive services addressing barriers to "independent living." More importantly, the building the Guest House had purchased could not easily be transformed into a transitional housing facility as its layout did not allow for the creation of self-contained units for each family.

---

[83] Incidentally, the number of homeless families had increased by almost 36% between 2006 and 2008 as the City's official Biennial Count of Homeless Persons in Calgary (2008), which was released in July 2008, revealed. In addition, the CHF noted that the Guest House was only servicing eight different families while the Guest Housed maintained that it had housed 45 to 60 people the winter prior (Korn 2008).

Since 2004 the CHF had focused much of its efforts to provide additional transitional housing options rather than additional emergency shelter beds (Calgary Homeless Foundation 2004). According to the *10 Year Plan*, many of the previously created transitional housing units were now to be "re-profiled" into permanent housing options in accordance with the Housing First philosophy set forth in the plan. Furthermore, in anticipation of a declining homeless population and subsequent diminished demand for emergency shelter beds, the CHF planned to "retire or re-purpose" existing emergency shelter space (Calgary Committee to End Homelessness 2008). In the political climate of the *10 Year Plan* and its Housing First philosophy, there was no room for a pre-transitional housing concept, as proposed by the Guest House, that built on the notion that homeless individuals and families have to become ready for housing first before they transition into permanent housing.

Based on the perceived shortcomings of the Guest House's proposal, the CHF accepted the proposal of another agency, which announced plans to operate a family shelter "using a Housing First philosophy, in which families are supported to secure new housing as quickly as possible" (The Children's Cottage Society 2009, 5). That led to the inception of a second family shelter in Calgary that targets the same clientele as the Guest House. The residential facility for the new family shelter, which opened in February 2009, was provided by the Brenda Strafford Foundation in the old Ronald McDonald House, which it had acquired in April 2007 (The Children's Cottage Society 2009).

The Guest House's Board interpreted the CHF's decision as a political one and raised concerns about the duplication of services (Korn 2008) and, as one Board member put it, the foreseeable competition for "homeless dollars" as both shelters were targeting the same clientele. In addition, competition between the two shelters was increased by both organizations partnering

with the same community agencies. One Guest House Board member, for example, argued that the other shelter's adherence to the Housing First model led to an unfair advantage as families housed there were given priority through CUPS's Rapid Exit housing program and thus were housed faster than Guest House families relying on the same program.

One Guest House staff member disclosed that the CHF had, at some point, suggested that the Guest House cooperate with the Brenda Strafford Foundation, which was willing to make available the old Ronald McDonald House. However, that suggestion was rejected by the ED and the Board as they had already signed a contractual agreement with the DI to purchase their building. In addition, at the time the Guest House's Board and management objected to the *10 Year Plan's* housing first philosophy, the adherence to which would have been a compulsory CHF requirement.

In addition to the Request for Proposal submitted to the CHF, the Guest House also had submitted a funding application for more than $2,000,000 to the Alberta government's Major Community Facilities Program, a program that supports "public-use facilities that enhance community life" in February of 2008 (CBC News 2008b). The grant was the Guest House's last chance to raise the remaining funds required to fulfill the purchase agreement with the DI on time, a deadline that was quickly approaching.

Initially having been told that the government would make its decision by the end of May 2008, the Guest House was still waiting for a response in late June, at which point the organization publicly inquired as to the status of its application. In response, Lindsay Blackett, Minister of Culture and Community Spirit told the *Calgary Herald*, "The first I've heard is today that there is this time sensitivity. If it was that important, you'd think they would have contacted me prior to now" (Guttormson 2008b).

The DI had already given the Guest House an extension to fulfill their contractual obligations, pushing back the initial May 31 deadline in early May. Due to the delays on the government's end, the deadline was extended once more until the end of June (Cryderman 2008b). On July 14, 2008, however, the Government of Alberta announced that it would not support the Guest House's request for funding due to their failure to demonstrate "strong community support." [84]

Furthermore, the "high risk" neighborhood in which the Guest House was situated was not deemed "a suitable location for families with children" (CBC News 2008b). As Lindsay Blackett argued, "That particular area was not the best location to have families with children. I mean, there's lots that has gone on there. We've all seen the stories" (Cryderman 2008a). He elaborated, "It's not a good location. There's crime, there's drugs. It isn't a good place for families with children" (Braid 2008). Blackett added that the CHF had informed him that they did not support the Guest House's application either. Blackett, however, emphasized that the Guest House could reapply for funding if it found a different location for their facility. He explained, "They've got a great idea, wrong location. If they change to a good location, we'll look at it again" (Braid 2008).

Tim Richter (2008), CHF president, supported the government's decision, arguing that the building

> …is not suitable for sheltering families. The curtained-off sleeping cubicles, the bathrooms, cooking facilities, security and storage are woefully insufficient. The lack of privacy, appropriate play space for children and downtown location were not acceptable.

[84] It is evident that a volunteer base of 4,000 members and the fact that the Guest House was able to raise $4,000,000 on its own through its capital campaign did not sway the government.

It is interesting that the government's decision was framed in terms of family need and the government's responsibility to protect them from the deplorable living conditions to which a downtown shelter would subject them. None of them, however, ever called into question the structural conditions that contributed to their homelessness, such as low social assistance benefits or the precarious housing market. Nor did they ever mention the strain currently put on homeless families by the lack of available services and accommodation in rotating community shelters.

In the same interview, Richter further pointed out that the Guest House's housing philosophy was diametrically opposite to the philosophy of the *10 Year Plan*. He stated,

> While emergency shelters are a critical component of our community's response to homelessness, establishing a new emergency shelter without a housing-first operation is akin to building a parking lot to address a traffic jam. The solution is permanent housing. There has to be a clear, rapid exit plan in place to move every family from shelter into housing within a defined period of time. This was not in the [Guest House's] proposal, nor has it been apparent in their operation…Our focus must be on ending homelessness. Rushing into a short-term, expensive and inadequate crisis response would have been a disservice to homeless families.

Similarly, Naheed Nenshi (2008), now Mayor of Calgary, commented,

> Minister of Culture and Community Spirit Lindsay Blackett was right to deny the $2 million request for [the Guest House's] proposed transitional shelter…In my mind, the real problem with the proposal was that it is not congruent with the recently published 10-year plan for ending homelessness. The entire plan, growing from solid research and a systemwide view, is based upon a philosophy called "housing first," which suggests, shockingly, that the best cure for homelessness is having a home.[85]

The government's decision was not well received by the Guest House's Board and management. One Board member suggested that the Guest House "should have been eligible for (the funding) and it was turned down because of politics in the homeless sector." The then ED

---

[85] Even though Nenshi fully supported the government's refusal to fund the Guest House proposal, he later provided testimonials for the Guest House's annual reports, avowing the utility of the program. In the 2009 annual report, for example, he was quoted saying, "Calgary is a great city because of organizations such as [the Guest House] that serve the needs of Calgary's most vulnerable citizens. Through the provision of shelter, help, and hope, [the Guest House] demonstrates that passion to make our city even better" (Guest House 2009). Similarly, a testimonial in the Guest House's 2011 Report to the Community read, "As a provider of emergency shelter services, programming, prevention efforts and community engagement, [the Guest House] is a model of the type of strategic, responsive and engaged social services offered in our wonderful city" (Guest House 2011).

pointed out that the government's request to simply find a new location was unrealistic in light of widespread neighborhood opposition to shelter programs (Cryderman 2008a). In addition, the lack of available commercial property in an overheated real estate market had imposed significant challenges on the organization in the past. As discussed above, finding a new office space had taken the Guest House close to two years, and the search for a suitable location for their permanent shelter remained fruitless until the DI came to their aid. There was nothing simple about simply finding a new location, particularly when considering the general lack of government support the Guest House had been struggling with over the years.

Secondly, the CHF's and provincial government's concerns about the location were deemed suspect at best. Staff members pointed out to me that the Guest House had been operating its family intake out of that location for close to two years without any reported harm ever being done to any of the children. In addition, staff argued that the close proximity to another homeless shelter did not automatically imply that this was a high-risk area. Furthermore, one Board member pointed out that residential development was under way in close proximity to the shelter, but apparently the area was not considered unsuitable for families able to pay $400,000 for a condominium down the street from the Guest House's location. The Guest House's ED similarly commented, "This is condo central right now. There's developers going crazy around here. The area is being cleaned up" (CBC News 2008a).

The fact that the area was under development and new residential high-rises started appearing in the vicinity of the Guest House's location was cited by many as the main reason for the government's opposition to the shelter. On one hand, developers were concerned that they would not be able to sell their high-end condominiums with two homeless shelters in the neighborhood (Braid 2008). A Guest House Board member voiced similar sentiments by saying,

"You had developers saying 'We don't want homeless families down here. We don't want any homeless people down here.'" On the other hand, the Guest House's facility was located on real estate wanted for further development (CBC News 2008a). As a Board member put it,

> There was also a real estate boom when we were buying the building and there were developers that wanted that building and the parking lot beside it to put up brand new condos…So, they were also part of the problem as far as obtaining funding. I think in the end there was a lot of pressure put on the province and the Homeless Foundation not to fund because they wanted to buy the building.[86]

Despite all opposition, the organization was nonetheless able to close the deal on the DI building. While waiting for the government to make its decisions, the Board began surveying alternate sources of funding. While the Board had hoped not to utilize Plan B, they secured the support of a landowner and mortgage lender who agreed to provide the Guest House with a $2 million loan from his personal line of credit the day after the government denied funding (Braid 2008; CBC News 2008a).[87] Some were highly critical of the loan and the fashion in which it was obtained. Nenshi (2008), for example commented, "I find it odd that a non-profit with a donor in the wings would rely on government as a funder of first rather than last resort." Since the loan had to be repaid within 18 months (CBC News 2008a), the Guest House embarked on another large-scale fundraising campaign to raise the required funds.

As the events outlined in this chapter suggest, the Guest House as an organization is embedded in a complex political, economic, and social context, which considerably shaped and continues to shape its operation. Neighborhood redevelopment plans, economic interests, policy developments such as the implementation of the *10 Year Plan*, political climate, the relationship

---

[86] Among others, the former president and CEO of Imperial Oil, two top executives of Boardwalk, a representative of the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, a member of Carma Developers LP, and the director of Imagine Energy Inc. can be found on the CHF's Board of Directors.

[87] Some reports stated the Guest House received a no-profit loan, while others reported that it was a standard commercial loan for which interest was to be charged.

between non-profit organizations and government, discourses related to the nature of homelessness and family, and internal institutional struggles over the trajectory of change form a complex web of socially conditioned processes that shape how services can be and are delivered to homeless families. Thus, service delivery as it is currently organized at the Guest House has a convoluted history without which its present from cannot be fully understood. The next chapter describes service delivery at the Guest House once it opened its doors to Calgary's homeless families in October 2008.

CHAPTER VI: THE GUEST HOUSE - "REBUILDING LIVES ONE STEP AT A TIME"

It's exactly like in prison up there. There is an office at the end and there's two guards sitting in it.

— Guest House resident in an interview

Since opening its permanent shelter in October 2008, the Guest House has undergone continual growth and development. The operational requirements of a permanent shelter differ drastically from those of a program housing families in churches staffed by volunteers. New personnel had to be hired and trained to staff the facility around the clock, year-round. In addition, program regulations, operational guidelines, and staff manuals had to be developed and implemented. Programs had to be devised and new community partnerships had to be developed, while old ones had to be maintained. What started out as a small, faith-based shelter, staffed mainly by volunteers and two paid employees, had, over the course of 11 years, turned into a sizable emergency shelter with a staff of 40 and a $5 million budget. Table 2 provides an overview of the Guest House's revenue and expenditure development between 2004 and 2011, the time frame for which public data is currently available.[88]

Consequently, the Guest House's funding sources, expenditure levels and expenditure distribution changed considerably. Prior to the acquisition of the building, funding for the shelter program was derived predominantly from donations and fundraisers. One staff member stated that in the beginning:

> …there was no government aid for us even though some of the churches wanted it. We declined it and turned it down because it complicated everything and we wanted to keep it simple and keep it about faith.

[88] Numbers provided here are based on the Guest House's annual financial statements. However, exact figures are difficult to provide since the classification and grouping of revenues and expenditures changed throughout the years.

In 2008, however, for the first time since its inception, the Guest House's accepted direct funding from the province, allocated through the Calgary Homeless Foundation.

The acceptance of government funding, according to one Board member, had become necessary, because the organization's funding needs had changed with the acquisition of a building that cost $6 million, $2 million of which had yet to be paid back. The Board member explained that running a permanent shelter requires:

> a whole different level of programming, and staff, and education. And you need night staff now, and you need cooks, and you need this and that going on that aren't part of the program when you put people on a bus and send them to a church.

The same Board member elaborated:

> We're now running a business, which we weren't before, right? We were running a volunteer organization with a very lean budget for staffing. That had to be beefed up when you start running a building.

However, not all members of the organization welcomed the changes and some were deeply concerned about the future direction of the Guest House and the sustainability of its grassroots nature. As one staff member explained:

> You can't have simple and complicated. You can't have grassroots and corporate, you have to have one or the other, right? Because being corporate is very different from being grassroots, faith-based.

Furthermore, according to some staff members, the change in the Guest House's organization of service delivery had problematic side effects. As one staff member put it:

> The organization has, over the last couple of years, suffered through a lot of strain based on a lack of understanding by the Board of Directors and by the people in a position to make decisions on the direction of the [Guest House]…At the same time as our Board of Directors changed their focus, our mission changed. What we do, how we deliver the service, is changing because of it, right? We never used to be concerned with numbers so long as we were able to help as many people as we could, whereas now the numbers drive and motivate all the programming based on dollars that are available. So, of course, that is going to inevitably change service delivery, without question…The more funding driven we become, the less connected and client-focused we are.

Table 2: Guest House Revenue and Expenses, 2004-2011

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Revenue								
Donations	232,281	317,678	793,642	877,553	981,486	2,235,409	2,779,262	2,587,701
Fundraisers/3rd party events	193,358	204,271	262,286	139,722	---	---	---	---
Grants	65,871	192,943	474,960	148,084	60,292	79,601	93,707	70,517
Programs	---	---	---	---	---	15,000	336,000	336,000
Government funding	---	---	---	---	232,039	832,906	1,463,836	1,729,367
Other	2,679	4,376	111,311	45,167	185,444	279,344	287,995	322,796
Total	**494,189**	**719,268**	**1,542,199**	**1,210,576**	**1,459,261**	**3,442,260**	**4,960,800**	**5,046,381**
Expenses								
Administration	39,817	81,183	147,930	189,424	289,775	277,436	288,627	300,472
Wages and benefits	260,082	421,031	491,762	550,029	887,655	1,421,664	1,620,119	1,915,130
Fundraising/advertizing &	10,387	32,014	62,341	32,812	64,471	179,704	255,409	213,686
Shelter operation		12,872	21,387	18,358	61,222	337,155	296,912	243,426
Transportation	44,444	44,056	58,406	57,595	54,934	55,793	52,995	50,833
Weekend activities	8,861	5,105	2,869	9,246	4,590	6,789		
Programming						93,129	150,198	108,578
Direct assistance/diversion efforts	45,384	37,922	62,440	86,930	88,966	58,736	185,658	451,681
Other	23,209	14,520	22,838	28,863	282,880	350,236	359,430	326,631
Total	**432,184**	**648,703**	**869,973**	**973,257**	**1,734,501**	**2,780,642**	**3,209,348**	**3,610,437**

In addition to its internal development, the Guest House, as an organization, was trying to find its place in the emerging political spirit of ending homelessness. *Calgary's 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness* (*10 Year Plan*) was published in January 2008. About a year later, the Province followed with its *Plan for Alberta*, a strategic plan to end homelessness in Alberta within 10 years. Initially conceptualized as a "temporary pre-transitional family shelter" (Guest House 2004, 2), since 2008 the Guest House understands itself as "Calgary's first emergency family shelter" (Guest House 2008a, 1), actively supporting the City's *10 Year Plan* while remaining committed to its original grassroots mission (Guest House 2009). Two key steps in adapting to the new political climate were the acceptance of direct government funding in 2008, discussed above, and a change in leadership in 2009.

In September 2009, the Executive Director (ED) was let go by the Board and subsequently replaced in December of the same year. One Board member explained the need for the change in leadership as follows: "…given the politics that have gone on, the collaboration with other agencies is a necessity and there has to be good relationships, right?" Overall, the Board was dissatisfied with the isolationist, anti-government stance of the former ED, which, they argued, had marginalized the Guest House in the community. Another Board member elaborated:

> …we were being portrayed, I think, as people who weren't in support of Housing First, which is completely inaccurate. (The Guest House) has always been very strongly in favor of the idea of Housing First as it is meant to be. And that is housing; supported housing for families. We are totally in agreement with putting a family in a house as soon as possible with the supports that are necessary to keep the family there.

The same Board member also explained that while the former ED was instrumental in making the Guest House what it was today, she was not qualified, in terms of her skill set, to run a project of that magnitude. The Board felt they needed an ED with more management and fund-

development experience, as well as someone who would represent the Guest House in the service-provider community and vis-à-vis the government in a more professional, cooperative manner. With the help of a search firm, the Guest House hired a new ED in December 2009, who had no experience working with homeless families, but, as one Board member explained "has directed community agencies before." In an interview a couple of years later, the ED admitted:

> It's really hard to wrap around (the idea that families can be homeless)…I know that prior to my coming into this, I didn't think about families as homeless. We did not let that happen – and unfortunately it does (happen) (Hunt 2011).[89]

In the remainder of this chapter, I will provide a description of the Guest House as it operated while I was in the field.[90] This includes an overview of the shelter's guests, the facility, staffing, central services, and programming offered. The material used to compose this snapshot of the Guest House is derived from interviews with staff and guests, extensive observations throughout my roles as volunteer and shelter staff member, and from various shelter documents.

The Guest House Program Structure

Since October 2008, the Guest House has provided emergency shelter to homeless families and individuals through two streams of programming: the capital intensive on-site shelter, and the continuation of their traditional, grassroots program which provides shelter off-site in rotating community shelters. According to one Board member, each stream is conceptualized as its own "operational line of business." On-site programming includes the Family Shelter and the Senior Shelter, a short-term, on-site shelter program for senior men.

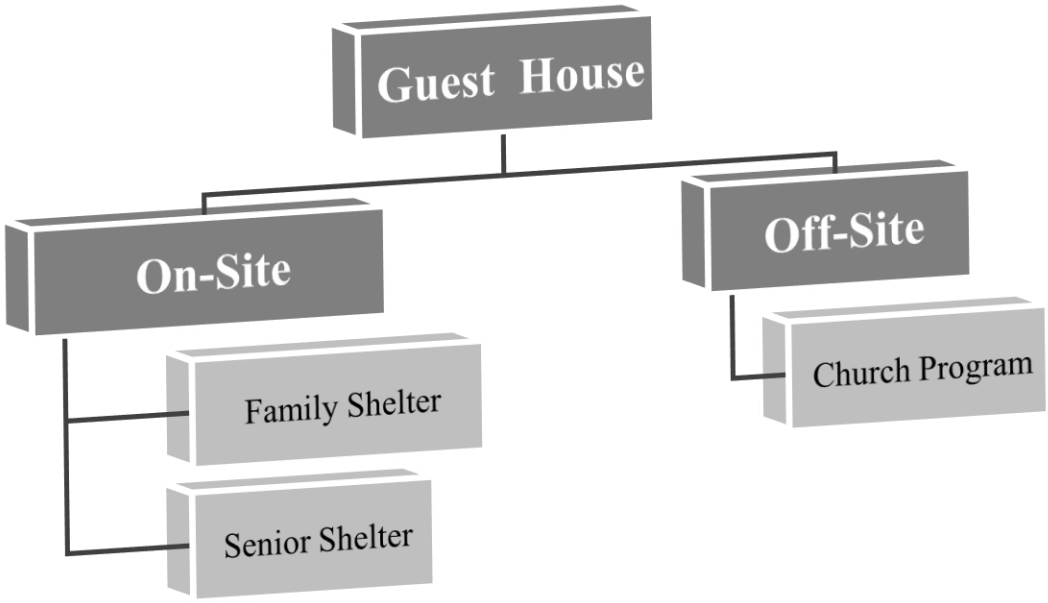
---

[89] The board let that ED go in 2012. I do not know what specifically led to the decision, but rumors indicated that financial mismanagement on part of the ED was the reason for the termination.

[90] It is important to note that such description is a snapshot of the organization as it operated during the time of my fieldwork. However, organizations are not static entities and continue to evolve. It is impossible to fully account for all the changes that have occurred since I left the field two years ago, but pertinent changes I am aware of will be documented in footnotes.

Rather than having abandoned the Church Program after they opened a permanent family shelter, the Guest House continues to operate the off-site program, now sheltering single individuals in rotating community shelters on a nightly basis. Figure 5 provides an illustration of the Guest House's current program structure.

Figure 5: Guest House Program Structure



The Church Program

According to one of the Board members, holding on to the Church Program was essential to preserve the Guest House's grassroots history and related values, which constitute the "heart of the organization." Through its Church Program, the Guest House continues to cooperate with local churches to provide temporary, mixed-sex, congregate emergency shelter to single individuals who are not accompanied by dependent children, "the singles," in rotating

community shelters on a nightly basis. [91] Furthermore, the Church Program is used as an overflow shelter when the on-site Family Shelter is at capacity.[92]

The Church Program continues to rely on Guest House staff to screen nightly guests and complete all administrative tasks, while the participating churches, staffed by volunteers from their respective congregations, provide the hospitality, facility, furniture, bedding, food, and other small donations for the guests. Notably, the churches also continue to be a major source of funding for the Guest House as a whole, as they generously provide regular cash and in-kind donations.[93]

Homeless individuals who want to participate in the Church Program must register each day, for that night, on the main floor of the Guest House between 4:00 pm and 5:30 pm. Beds at the community shelters are limited to about 30 per night.[94] Priority in the allocation of shelter beds is given to overflow families, if needed, and single women. In the case of couples not accompanied by dependent children, each woman must choose between registering as a single woman, which guarantees her, but not her partner, a bed for the night. If she prefers to be sheltered with her partner, both the couple's names are entered onto the men's registration sheet.

Once the registration process is closed, everyone on the priority list is assigned a bed at the community shelters and remaining beds are filled from the registration sheets containing the

---

[91] Note that the term "single" denotes a client category and does not necessarily refer to the relationship status of the individual seeking shelter. Unattached individuals as well as couples not accompanied by dependent children are lumped together in this category for the purpose of shelter bed assignment only.

[92] After the Guest House opened the Family Shelter, the use of the Church Program for overflow was a contested practice that government funders in particular challenged on numerous occasions.

[93] One staff member suggested that the need for funding from the churches was the sole reason the Guest House preserved the Church Program (personal communication, staff member, February 16, 2010).

[94] The number of beds depends on the number of participating churches. Typically, each night one or two churches provide 15-20 beds each. A small print-out calendar taped to the Guest House's front entrance glass door indicates how many beds are available for the night. I noticed that if the number is too small, many do not even bother coming in to register for the night because the chances of getting a bed a slim.

names of those without priority status. [95] If the demand exceeds the number of available beds, non-priority beds are allocated through a lottery system. Couples receive a bed only if the man's name is drawn in the lottery. Individuals who cannot be placed in the community shelter usually turn to other agencies for overnight shelter, such as The Mission, located next door. Just as in the early days, guests are bussed to the community shelters in the evening, where the volunteers take over for the night. The following morning they are bussed back to the Guest House.

Between October 2008 and April 2010, the Guest House's main floor served as a drop-in for individuals housed through the Church Program, where they could hang out during the day, watch TV, socialize, and warm up food. However, the Guest House management eventually closed the drop-in for good after a mother housed in the Family Shelter was sexually assaulted by a man sheltered through the Church Program. Now, the singles can access the main floor between 7:00 am and 8:30 am to get ready for the day and between 3:30 pm and 5:30 pm to register for the night. According to a poster outlining the operational changes taped to the entrance door, singles are encouraged to "pursue their own goals of housing and employment" between 8:30 am and 3:30 pm.

Singles are permitted to attend programs offered through the Guest House and can access the main floor 30 minutes prior to program start. Singles are still allowed to enter the building to use the washroom, to use the phone (albeit only for housing inquiries, employment purposes, to

---

[95] According to email communication, beds are assigned in the following order of priority: families with minor children, pregnant mothers in their third trimester and their partners who have no dependent children, families with adult dependent children, pregnant single mothers in their first and second trimester who have no dependent children, pregnant mothers and their partners in their first and second trimester who have no dependent children, individuals with family status, single women with senior status, single men with senior status, single priority status, senior women who do not have priority status, senior men who do not have priority status, single women. As this list indicates, limited shelter beds are allocated according to perceived needs, which creates a hierarchy among shelter seeking candidates. The development of this hierarchy would be an interesting topic to discuss, but is beyond the scope of this dissertation, which focuses primarily on the Guest House's Family Shelter.

access resources or make appointments), for general inquiries, and to request supplies such as toothpaste or shampoo. Singles have to be clean and sober for at least four days in order to receive services through the Church Program. Assistance is categorically refused to anyone not meeting the sobriety requirement and guests caught using drugs or alcohol on-site or at a community shelter will be barred from all Guest House programs.

On-Site Programming

On site, the Guest House runs two shelters. First, the Senior Shelter is a short-term program that was established in August 2009 in order to address the service gap for single men aged 55 to 64[96]. The Senior Shelter, located on the second floor of the Guest House, provides housing for up to 14 single senior men. A private donor provided funding for three years and the program provides little more than a steady place to stay and free food. Unlike the families, the senior men are not assigned a caseworker and are treated as "single" in terms of resource allocation, meaning they have no access to most services offered through the Guest House.[97] Furthermore, the Senior Shelter is minimally staffed due to the lack of funding. As an email from one of the managers indicated, the program was "not backed by funding which allows [the Guest House] to staff it for an entire shift." Thus, the staff in charge of the Family Shelter on the floor above would periodically check on the men, who were otherwise "pretty self-sufficient."

While conceptualized as a temporary emergency shelter, some of the senior men have been residing in the senior floor for over a year.

---

[96] The donor did not perceive there to be a similar service gap for senior women. The cut off for the program was 64 years of age, as the assumption was that individuals 65 and over qualify for Old Age Security pension and thus have other options.

[97] It was not until the fall of 2011 that a case worker was hired for the Senior Shelter program.

On the senior floor, two men share one cubicle, which is furnished with two beds and two dressers. The cubicles have no doors and the walls separating cubicles from one another do not extend all the way to the ceiling, rendering each cubicle visually and physically accessible to staff and other seniors housed on the floor. Seniors and guests on the family floor interact little on a daily basis, except during mealtimes and the scheduled smoke breaks. Senior men cannot leave their floor after the 5:30 pm curfew, but before that time they are free to come and go as they please and have unrestricted access to their floor.[98; 99]

Finally, the Guest House runs the on-site Family Shelter, the organization's core program. According to its website, the Guest House's mission is to "provide emergency shelter, support and programs to homeless children, their families and others in need, with the goal of building healthy, stable families and ending homelessness." Under the headline "Rebuilding Lives One Step at a Time," the website further elucidates:

> When families come to the [Guest House], they often have nothing but the clothes on their back. They are stressed, scared and in need of hope and help. Our first priority is to meet their basic needs of food, shelter and clothing. But we also do much more. Working with other agencies and resources in our community, we coordinate our support efforts and provide expert intervention that will help break the cycle of homelessness for good.

Unlike other family shelters in the city that do not provide services to families that include men or male children over a certain age, the Guest House preserved its mandate to house two-parent

---

[98] As mentioned earlier, the Guest House hired a caseworker for the senior men in 2011, shortly after I left the Guest House. After, the Senior Shelter program became more restrictive and the expectation became that they actively pursued employment, training and/or housing options during the day.

[99] Funding for the senior program was not renewed and the board decided that the space is better used to accommodate families. Gradually, the program was phased out and the senior men transitioned to other shelters or longer-term housing options. Some of the men felt they were rather unceremoniously kicked out without much concern for their future welfare. However, the now available cubicles remained vacant because the Guest House lacked the funds to staff the wing adequately and the province denied the necessary funding because adding new beds to the shelter system would undermine the efforts of the *10 Year Plan* to reduce overall shelter use (Howell 2013; van Rassel 2013).

families and adult children. Furthermore, unlike other shelters in the city, the Guest House does not have a maximum stay policy.

In my role as volunteer and part-time staff member I was affiliated predominantly with the Family Shelter program. Consequently, my fieldwork focused primarily on the Family Shelter as that was the program component I was most interested in and had the most access to. In the previous chapter, I provided a description of the geographic location of the Guest House and its outer appearance, neither of which has changed since the Guest House took possession of the premises in 2006. Below I add to that description by providing additional information about the facility as well as an outline of the staffing and programming, all of which pertain predominantly to the on-site Family Shelter.

The Facility

Today, the Guest House has about 26,000 square feet of space at its disposal, spread out over three storeys. The basement is used for storage, and contains a large room where guests housed on the family floor can temporarily store their belongings. The basement further holds a large stockroom filled with floor-to-ceiling shelves, where donations and supplies required for the shelter's daily operations are kept. On the main floor, the intake reception area, described in the previous chapter, now lies empty for most of the day, but becomes a bustling centre of activity during the daily Church Program intake.

From the intake room, various offices branch off. All of the case workers' desks as well as the ED's office are located on the main floor. The main floor also houses a small meeting room that is sectioned off the intake area by a sliding-glass door and furnished with couches. This meeting room offers some privacy for intake interviews, weekly meetings between case

workers and the families they service, and other confidential exchanges between guests and staff. In the back, a large open space furnished with heavy leather couches serves as the program room, where guests can participate in various daily workshops and programs.

Adjacent to the intake area lies the Kids' Zone, a room where families sheltered through the Family Shelter program can spend the day. In August 2010, volunteers from a local oil and gas company transformed the once uninviting and sterile room, bare of any stimulation, into a child-friendly hang-out. The walls are now painted in warm colours and decorated with lively murals. Colourful area rugs now hide the hard tile floor and provide some comfort for children playing on the floor. Various shelves are filled with books and toys and a table provides space for the children to paint and do crafts. The Kids' Zone also features four computers and a large flat-screen TV mounted to the wall. Often, several children and their parents all huddle together on the dark leather couch to watch a movie. For nursing mothers, a small room with two armchairs, a crib and a TV is sectioned off from the Kids' Zone to provide some quiet and privacy.

A narrow and steep set of stairs leads to the second floor. The stairs are lined with blue linoleum and the stairwell's walls are covered in large, beige marble tiles that give way to large mirror tiles as you reach the second floor. As you proceed to the third floor, the mirror tiles transition to reddish brown wall paper that is fixed here and there with gray tuct tape. Small, dirt-covered windows on each landing let in some light, exposing the derelict condition of the hundred-year-old building that even the fervent efforts of the ever-busy maintenance crew cannot keep up with. The paint is peeling off the handrail here and there, the walls are patched with makeshift solutions to cover up holes, and missing ceiling panels give view to old, rusty pipes criss-crossing overhead.

The second floor holds several administrative offices and a Board room for staff meetings and other gatherings. Past the offices, a narrow hallway opens to a spacious dining room, where senior men and families eat their breakfast and dinner. Beyond the dining room is a commercial kitchen with a walk in cooler. Every evening, rotating volunteer groups serve dinner to the guests, who are not allowed to cook their own food on the premises. In typical soup kitchen fashion, volunteer groups warm up the food the Guest House's staff cook prepared during the day and serve each guest a meal consisting of salad, a main dish and, on occasion, a dessert. After dinner, the volunteers clean up the dining room and wash the dishes, neither of which activities the guests are allowed to assist with.[100] When the facility first opened in October 2008, the idea was to have volunteer groups sponsor meals and prepare them on-site. However, until the commercial kitchen passes the fire inspection, the staff cook continues to cook all meals.[101]

Finally, the senior men's residences are also located on the second floor. The hallway running along the east side of the building is bright with light coming from the windows on one side. The hallway provides access to the seven cubicles that house the senior men, as well as to their washroom. On one end of the hallway, a communal lounge serves as TV room. From the other end of the hallway, staff members overlook the senior men's residence from their office.

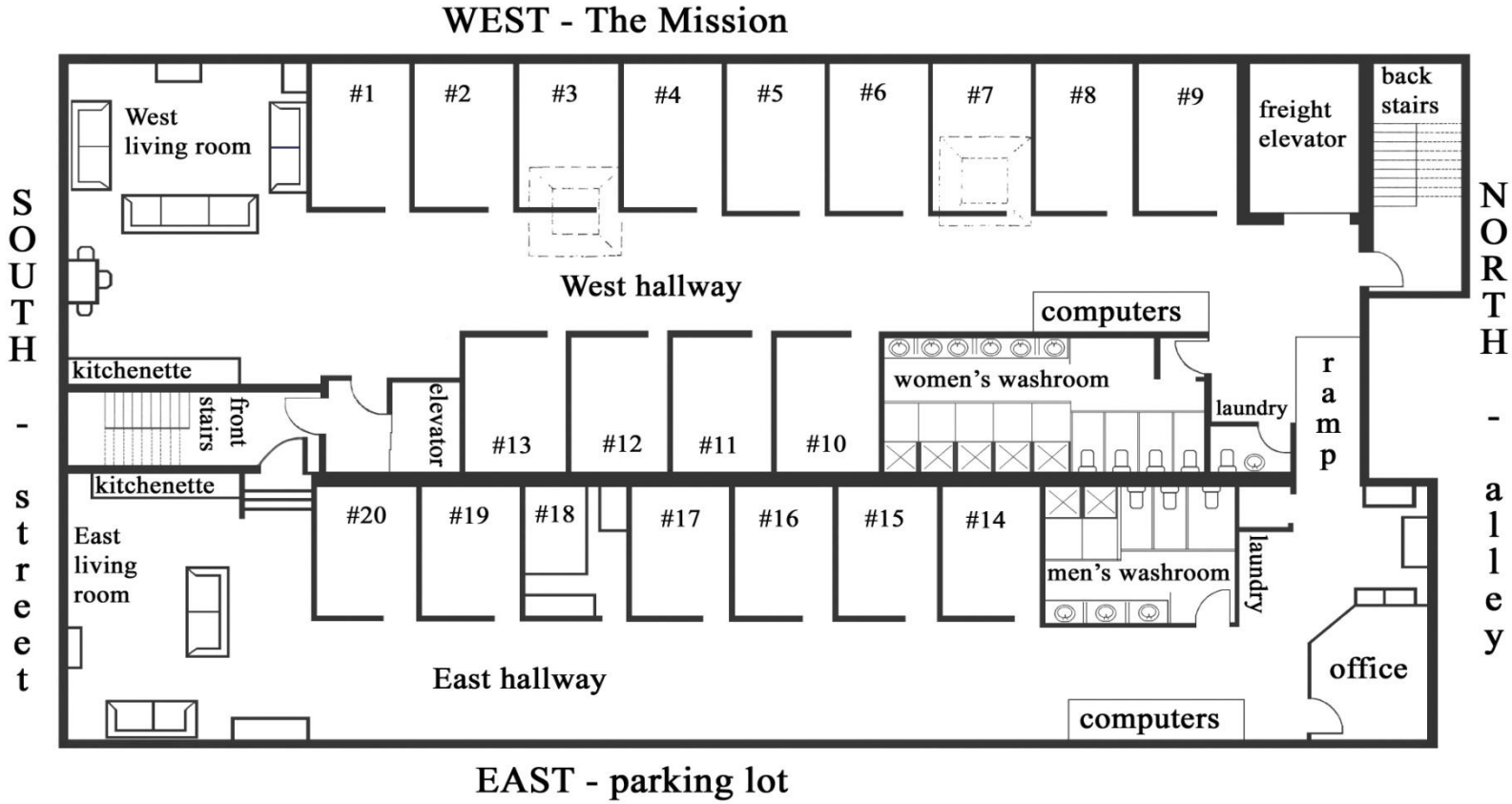
The third floor, also referred to as the "family floor" or simply "upstairs," can house up to 20 families. Figure 6 provides an overview of the family floor. The family floor has a U-shaped layout – separated into the west and east hallways, which are connected by a ramp on the floor's north side. As you arrive on the third floor through the front stairwell or the elevator, the family

---

[100] Nevertheless, some senior men, for a while, helped with the after-dinner clean up. However, a recent policy change prohibits all guests from entering the kitchen. The senior men now help tidy up the dining room after meals.

[101] Although the Guest House hired a company to install new vents over the stoves, the vents were deemed inappropriate for a commercial kitchen and thus did not pass the fire inspection. As a consequence, the use of the stove tops is limited and, theoretically, only the ovens may be used for cooking.

Figure 6: The Family Shelter Floor Plan



floor can be accessed through two doors, located at the tip of each arm of the U; one leads to the west side of the floor and the other to the east side. The door to the west side of the floor opens to the west side living room and kitchenette. Large windows on the south wall of the living room let in ample light but also the incessant traffic noise emerging from the busy street below.

The living room is furnished with three large leather recliner couches arranged in a U-shape around the TV set. The dilapidated couches have long given in to the wear and tear caused by children climbing on them. A big poster is taped to the wall and outlines "General Rules of Behaviour," that include:

The kitchenette is mostly ornamental as the only usable piece of equipment is a microwave. The kitchen's blue cupboards are empty, the dishwasher is disconnected and, because guests are not allowed to cook for themselves, the knobs of the stove have been removed to render it unusable.

The fridge, which is always in desperate need of a thorough cleaning, is locked at all times with a combination padlock that only staff members can unlock and can only be used to store milk and guests' medication. A sign on the fridge informs guests that:

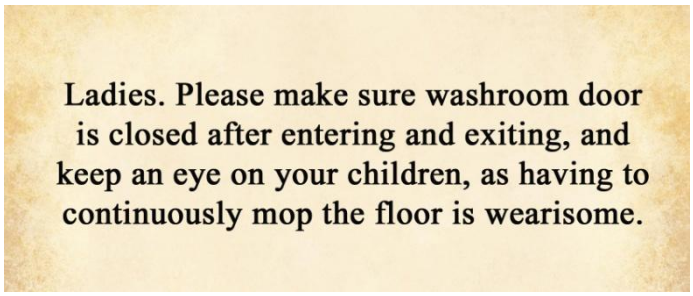

The milk in the fridge is for the infants and small children only.

Please respect these restrictions.

Thank you for your cooperation in helping making our program a success.

A dark hallway runs down the west side of the building, with 13 family rooms branching off to the left and right. Since the Guest House shares its west wall with The Mission, there are no windows on this side of the floor. Some of the rooms to the left of the hallway receive natural light through a couple of skylights that cannot be covered and are a constant source of complaint from guests housed in rooms directly beneath, particularly in the summer when the sun rises early. On the other hand, the four rooms to the right of the hallway are always dark, only dimly lit by a weak lamp mounted to the wall. Unlike their neighbours from across the hallway, guests assigned to those cubicles constantly bemoan the lack of light in their rooms. At the north end of the hallway, four computers sit on two tables lined up along the wall to the right.

The women's washroom with four stalls and five showers is also located on this side of the floor, at the end of the hallway. The women's washroom rules states:


Ladies. Please make sure washroom door is closed after entering and exiting, and keep an eye on your children, as having to continuously mop the floor is wearisome.

Note that no similar sign was found on the men's washroom door. Typically, mothers would take their younger children to the women's washroom. The women's washroom door further featured a handwritten sign reading:

> **Warning: Only one person at a time! Due to extremely HORRIBLE conditions of the bathroom these past few weeks, staff will be allowing one person in the bathroom at a time and will be checking the bathroom after each use :) Thanks.**

Constant supervision of the bathroom, however, was not feasible, so the sign soon disappeared and was replaced by one that was more toned down:

> **No kids in bathroom without parent!**

Just outside the washroom sits a washer and a dryer and an always-locked door leads to the staff washroom. In the northwest corner of the hallway, another door leads to the back stairwell, which connects all floors and leads down into the alley behind the building. Turning right at the north-west end of the hallway, a ramp connects the west with the east side of the floor, which sits a little higher. A number of cabinets sit in a small nook off the ramp to the left. The cabinets hold bedding and supplies, such as toothpaste, lotion and shampoo. A sign that is taped to the cabinet doors advises guests to "Please ask for assistance," rather than helping themselves.

The staff's office is located in the north-east corner of the floor, with its large windows overlooking another four computers sitting right outside the office in the east hallway. Outside the staff's office, a series of posters inform shelter guests of the do's and don'ts of child supervision. One poster taped to the wall informs parents that adequate supervision entails:

Knowing where your child is at all times.

Children are always within your sight.

Monitoring what your child eats.

Teaching your children about practicing safety with strangers.

Teaching your children about boundaries.

Acceptable ways of supervising a child include:

Present in body and watching children not being distracted by TV, computers, adult interaction.

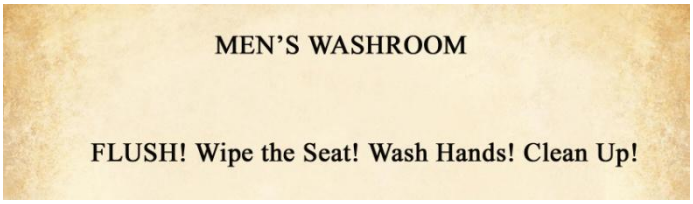
Engage children in an activity that is interactive such as a game, coloring or craft, or read a story.

Take your children to the park or free community event to engage them for the day.

Sit together and watch a child friendly movie.

The office remains locked when not occupied by a staff member and children are not allowed in at any time, a rule that is only sporadically enforced and only by some staff members. Adults always have to ask for permission before entering, to use the phone, for example.

The east side of the family floor features another washer and dryer, as well as the men's washroom. The men's washroom features a poster saying:

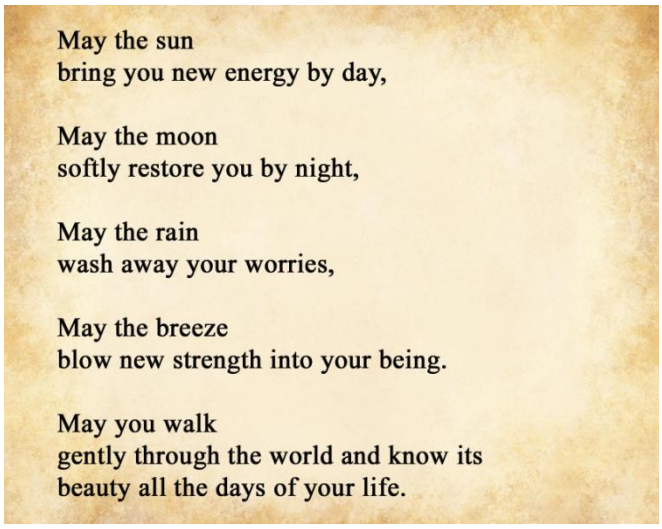


The exterior wall is lined with large windows overlooking the parking lot, so, unlike the west side of the floor, the east side is bright. Seven rooms branch off to the right of the hallway, all of which receive some natural light from the windows across the hall. After several months of operation, shades were installed on all of the windows, because exposure to the sun in combination with the building's poor insulation often resulted in unbearable temperatures on this side of the floor. The bright east-side living room is located at the south end of the hallway and is furnished with two couches and a chair arranged around a television set. Toys are usually scattered all over the colourful area rug. The purplish-pink kitchenette to the right is as useless as the one on the other side, equipped with a non-functioning dishwasher and stove as well as a locked fridge. Off the living room, a small set of steps leads down to the east-side entrance door leading back into the front hallway.

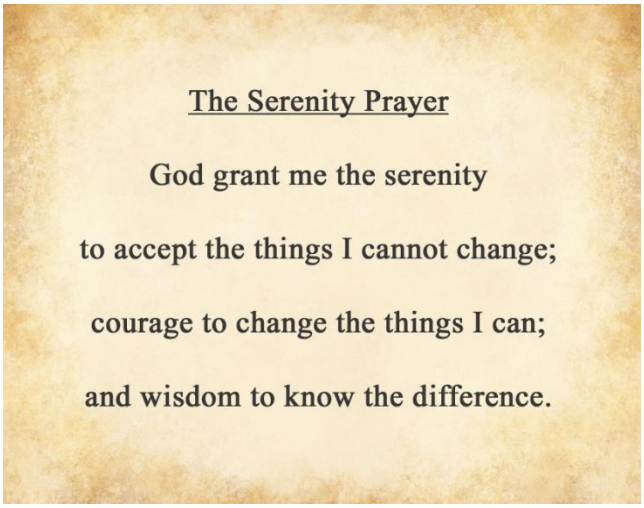
The entire third floor features the same grayish blue linoleum floor as the stairwell and the wooden floor underneath constantly creaks, making it next to impossible to quietly walk from one end of the hallway to the next. While the building itself is built of solid brick, all interior partitions are drywall constructions. The walls are painted white but have a yellowish tint and show crayon marks here and there.[102] A small number of paintings are mounted on the walls,

[102] After about two years, and after this chapter had been written, the walls were painted in a bright pink and green, which certainly looked friendlier than the previous décor, but required all blinds to be drawn on a sunny day as the bright paint tended to reflect the light, making it difficult to see.

many displaying Aboriginal motifs and/or inspirational quotes. One such painting displays the following Apache Blessing:



On the other side of the hallway, a wooden cross, bearing the Serenity Prayer, is mounted to the wall:



The family floor always has a strange odour to it: a peculiar mix of food from the second floor kitchen, sleep, dirty laundry, dirty diapers, disinfectant, and laundry detergent. Although guests are not allowed to eat on the family floor, all the furniture is constantly sticky and littered with crumbs of various kinds. The only windows that open on the floor are located in the living

rooms, but they are too small to effectively air out the floor. Due to its architecture, it is almost impossible to regulate the temperature on the family floor, which seems to be either too hot or too cold, but hardly ever comfortable.

Guests on the family floor are accommodated in 20 semi-private rooms: small cubicles that measure approximately 100 square feet each. The cubicles have no doors and the walls separating them do not extend all the way to the ceiling, but leave a foot-wide gap. The setup provides families with little privacy from their neighbors and renders each family's domicile visually and physically accessible to staff and other families housed on the floor. Each cubicle can accommodate up to five family members and is furnished with a squeaky, dark wood-framed bunk bed with a twin-size upper bunk and a double-size bunk underneath, a futon that folds out into a double bed, and a dark wood dresser. Many families use the futon to block the entrance to their cubicle, either to keep their children in or unwanted visitors out when they are not "home." Staff members also use the futons to block off the entrance of unoccupied cubicles, to prevent children from playing in them. For infants, travel cribs are available.

All cubicles are numbered and some bear the occupying family's name on a piece of masking tape on the exterior wall. Some cubicles also feature a plaque identifying a donor's name next to their entrance. As each family remains in their assigned cubicle for the duration of their stay, many families turn their cubicles into temporary homes and fill them with personal belongings, posters, framed pictures, children's drawings or family photos. Due to the lack of storage space, it is almost impossible to keep the cubicle organized, particularly for larger families. Cubicle cleanliness is a constant source of conflict between guests and staff, particularly when management requests staff to oversee the tidying of rooms before one of the frequently occurring funder tours of the facility.

As I will discuss in more detail in Chapter VII, many families I interviewed often felt uncomfortable with the lack of privacy and struggled with being constantly exposed to staff and other families looking into their cubicles. A number of families attempt to secure some privacy by hanging blankets over their empty door frames or towels and clothes from the frames of their bunk beds. However, such practices violate shelter rules and the staff must constantly instruct families to remove any items that obstruct a clear view inside their cubicle. The lack of privacy, however, is not the only concern that emerges from the open concept of the family floor. A number of families also express concerns that the set-up leaves their personal belongings susceptible to theft. On numerous occasions I found unsupervised children wandering through another family's cubicle looking for toys or candy, and personal belongings, especially electronic items and clothing, disappear on a regular basis.

All three doors to the family floor remain locked at all times to prevent unauthorized individuals from accessing the floor. Staff members let families in and out, using a key fob to open the doors from the inside and the outside. The doors are equipped with an alarm system and the alarm automatically sounds as soon as someone attempts to open the door without the fob.[103] In addition, the floor is equipped with a video surveillance system that, in the name of safety, allows staff members to oversee every corner of the family floor without leaving their office. The live images produced by a dozen cameras all come together on a screen sitting on one of the desks in the office. Different functions allow staff to either look at images from all cameras at the same time or select a specific camera to zoom in on an image for more detail. In addition, the

[103] In case of an emergency, the door automatically unlocks after being pushed for 15 seconds consecutively. At that point the fire alarm will sound off throughout the entire building and an automatic emergency call is placed to the fire department.

video footage is occasionally used to reconstruct altercations on the family floor or to investigate the disappearance of personal items from a family's cubicle. With the staff office overlooking the east hallway, the locked doors and the 24/7 video surveillance, the family floor bears a striking resemblance to Bentham's Panopticon (Bentham 1995). This sentiment is reflected in a comment Simon made during his interview. He stated: "It's exactly like in prison up there. There is an office at the end and there's two guards sitting in it. But even prisoners have doors."

Staffing

As a non-profit, charitable organization, the Guest House is governed by a volunteer Board of Directors and managed by an executive director who is selected by the Board. During the time of my fieldwork, the Guest House was staffed by about 40 paid employees, who fell into two broad categories: administration/management and frontline services. The 15 staff members responsible for administrative or managerial tasks have little to no interaction with shelter guests, are salaried, and work regular day shifts from 8:00 am to 5:00 pm on weekdays. Depending on the position they hold, they are in charge of operations, fundraising, resource development, stewardship, the volunteer base, management of the facility and repairs, or human resources.

Frontline staff members on the other hand are responsible for service delivery and interact directly with shelter guests on a daily basis. Frontline staff is further differentiated into nine case workers, who are accountable to the frontline manager and three supervisors, and 17 residential staff who are under the direction of the residential staff team lead and shift supervisor. [104]

[104] Numbers are subject to constant change due to frequent staff turnover and continuing organizational growth.

The Case Workers

Case workers work standard day shifts, usually weekdays from 8:00 am until 5:00 pm, and receive a fixed salary, including benefits. One case worker is on site for a few hours on weekends, usually Saturdays. Furthermore, typically either one of the case workers or the frontline manager is on call for emergencies arising in the evenings, at night, or on weekends.

The Guest House's case workers come from a variety of educational backgrounds and only a few of them are credentialed social workers, which is why they are referred to as case rather than social workers. Case workers' main responsibility is to assist families sheltered through the Guest House transition from homelessness to housing.

The case workers' offices are located on the main floor, where they regularly meet with their clients to discuss needs, progress or behavioural problems. Case workers are responsible for the intake and assessment of new arrivals to identify a family's immediate and long-term needs; developing a service plan; connecting families with available resources in the community; providing the necessary referrals for various services; supporting families in filling out housing, social assistance and/or employment applications; recommending various skill-building programs and providing emotional support. Furthermore, case workers act as a liaison between their families and social service agencies, such as Child and Family Services or Alberta Works.

Responsible for the case management of their caseload, case workers monitor their families' progress through regular follow-up meetings. Furthermore, case workers address any issues that emerge during a family's stay at the shelter and facilitate crisis intervention, if necessary. Once a family transitions into housing, they can opt for ongoing support through their case worker, who may provide assistance to them through regular in-home visits for up to two years.

Case workers understand themselves as "enablers" and "teachers," guiding guests through the social service landscape and "modeling effective behaviour" (Guest House 2008b, 14). As one case worker put it:

> I'm here to help families succeed…My job is to understand the services that are in the city that I can refer my clients to so they can gain that skill to be successful…My main task is to fill their toolbox with as much education and information as possible through resources, referrals, and the relationship we have with each other to help them to be successful in the community, so they don't, I don't wanna say reoffend, but so the situation does not keep reoccurring for some people.

In a personal communication on September 22, 2010, another case worker described the role of the case worker team as follows. "I feel that we're here to support the families…We're kind of like their advocate. My job is to line them up with the appropriate people and appropriate resources."

The Residential Staff

The residential staff work in three shifts around the clock. Two workers cover the front desk on the main floor between 7:00 am and 6:00 pm. Four salaried overnight staff, also called the "overnights," cover the family floor between 11:00 pm and 9:00 am during the week and from 11:00 pm to 11:00 am on weekends. They work in two teams of two and work four consecutive nights and then have four nights off. The remainder of the residential staff are paid by the hour and cover the evening shift from 3:00 pm to 11:00 pm, as well as various shorter day shifts.

The residential staff run the family floor between 3:00 pm and 7:30 am week-round and spend the majority of their shift interacting with shelter guests. The residential staff are in charge of supervising the family floor when occupied and enforcing the shelter rules and guidelines. In addition, the residential staff coordinate and help facilitate evening programs and activities,

supervises the volunteers who on a rotating basis serve dinner in the second floor dining room, and facilitates hourly smoke breaks. Residential staff further stock up supplies and provide shelter guests with needed supplies, such as clothing, hygiene products, medication, or milk from the locked fridge. Residential staff members also handle any crises that might emerge throughout the evening and night and engage with guests who stop by for a chat. In addition, residential staff do the "facility laundry," such as washing cleaning rags and mops, bath mats as well as all towels and bedding of guests who have moved out.

Finally, residential staff, especially overnights, spend a considerable share of their shift cleaning. Vacated cubicles have to be cleaned and sanitized before a new family can move in. The second floor dining room has to be cleaned after dinner and breakfast, and the garbage in the entire building has to be taken out on a daily basis. Although guests are assigned cleaning chores every night, the proper completion of which is supervised by the residential staff, the guests' participation in the cleaning process is somewhat symbolic. As a memo to the residential staff detailed, residential staff "are actively participating in the active role modeling, teaching and skill development of the [families] in regards to the cleaning and upkeep of the 3rd floor." However, "the thing to remember is that the guests are made to do these chores primarily to ensure they are contributing and taking responsibility for their environment." Since "guests probably don't clean up to standard when doing their chores," it is the responsibility of the residential staff to ensure that the facility is clean, safe, sanitary and healthy as required by standard health codes, which entails redoing the guests' chores.

"There is no I in Team"

As outlined above, frontline service delivery is facilitated by two teams, the case workers and the residential staff. The two teams occupy markedly different roles that come with distinct rights, responsibilities and accountability structures, thus constituting "essentially two bodies of frontline service providers" (supervisor in an email to all staff). Moreover, the two frontline teams are separated spatially, as they work on different floors of the building, and temporally as both teams work on different shift schedules. Consequently, members of the two teams rarely interact with each other directly. Yet, they are required to cooperate in their daily work of service delivery.

In an email to all staff members, a supervisor, for example, emphasized that "it is through this mutual collaboration and the ability to work together as a team that we continue to effectively serve our folks." Similarly, at an organization-wide staff meeting in early 2010, an administrator pointed out that "there is no I in team," that "all team members are equal," and that everyone should "leave [their] rank at the door" as "synergy does not recognize rank." Administration envisioned all staff working together as a highly functioning, cooperative team, in which each team member is valued for his or her expertise. The goal was to provide a "safe environment where people are comfortable speaking freely about their opinions, ideas and feelings" in order to create "a culture of commitment."

In 2010, a supervisor, in an email to all staff, pointed out that due to the nature of their respective responsibilities, case workers and residential staff "have different relationships with the families" and consequently "different observations will occur with behaviour and day to day challenges and success." The supervisor acknowledged that residential staff spend the most time with shelter guests and thus build relationships with the families in ways that the case workers

cannot. The case workers thus greatly relied on residential staff for detailed information about their clients. As a supervisor phrased it in an email to all staff: "the [case workers team] relies on the direct observations/feedback/contact notes and reporting of the [residential staff team]." The residential staff in turn relied on the case workers and the supervisors for direction when handling problematic situations.

The same supervisor further noted that since the inception of the Family Shelter in 2008, the two frontline teams have been "moving closer and closer to working more and more as one team and away from being separate ones." That said,

> it's necessary for us all to keep committed to our goals of moving with our objective of being ONE collective team as we continue to strengthen our services and support at [the Guest House] through mutual workshops, training and team building activities.

The supervisor emphasized that both teams rely on each other, because the case worker team "simply can't do their job without the [residential staff team] and [residential staff] couldn't do there [*sic*] job without the [case workers team]." Not only that, but according to a supervisor, "it's critical that the clients see us working together," because "the reality is that our families, seniors and singles sense when staff are relaying mixed messages to them – they almost prey on it" (in emails to all staff). Similarly, during a staff meeting, the shelter staff supervisors made clear that all communication between the two teams must be "active and solution based," because

> if there is a communication breakdown within our own teams, then we are not helping the resident families of our shelter to move forward and learn the much needed skills to be sustainable and independent in the community.

However, based on my experience as a residential staff member, coming together as a highly functioning, cooperative team remains a challenge for Guest House staff, which ultimately affects their day-to-day work of service delivery. High staff turnover, frequent

changes in supervisors and leadership, irregular staff meetings, personal antagonisms between and within the two frontline teams, and a high-stress work environment frequently lead to miscommunication and communication barriers, which fundamentally shapes service delivery at the Guest House.

The residential staff's shift responsibilities are just as voluminous as the directives specifying the limitations of their role. One persistent challenge for residential staff is their restricted authority pertaining to rule enforcement and their limited power when dealing with problems. While residential staff are encouraged to engage with the families, they are not allowed to supervise children. Although residential staff are encouraged to build rapport with the guests and have conversations with them, lending an attentive ear, they are not allowed to provide any form of advice or opinion. Whenever a guest needs advice, resources, or supplies that exceed the free shampoo samples the residential staff can hand out, residential staff have to redirect the guest to his or her case worker. Whenever problems arise, residential staff have only limited options in dealing with the problem themselves. For example, if a guest refuses to do the assigned chore, transgresses certain rules, or is verbally abusive towards staff or other guests, all residential staff can do is to remind that guest of existing rules and communicate the transgression to the guest's designated case worker, who will address the issue as soon as his or her schedule will allow.

While residential staff are expected to ensure safe and smooth operations on the family floor, they are given very few tools to actually enforce the rules they are entrusted to safeguard. The lack of authority to handle emerging issues is problematic insofar as quandaries often arise in the evenings and on weekends when no case worker is on site to handle them immediately and face to face. Management justifies the limited authority granted to residential staff by referring to

their lack of education, training, expertise and familiarity with guests' case files, despite the fact that residential staff members invariably spend more time with the guests than the case workers.

Communication Between Staff

Despite the spatial and temporal segregated of residential staff and case workers, communication between the two teams was repeatedly emphasized by the organization as an essential part of efficient and successful service delivery. In lieu of face-to-face communication, the majority of information transfer between case workers and residential staff transpires over email.[105] Email communication between the different frontline teams not only served as a means of information transfer,[106] it simultaneously served a very important documentation function. Management referred to the latter colloquially as the CYA ("cover your ass") rule. Like any other social service agency, the Guest House is required to document meticulously its day-to-day work. In addition to clients' case files, emails are an important element of the documentation process, as they can be accessed at a later point and used as evidence if necessary. Based on email reports indicating child abuse or neglect, a case worker might, for example, report a family to child welfare authorities, whose decision on whether or not to open a case file might, in part, depend on existing documentation of a parent's abuse or neglectful behaviour. Emails thus

[105] The residential staff use a log book located in the staff's office on the family floor to exchange important information with each other. However, the log book was used rather irregularly by different staff members. It was used mostly to alert residential staff to illnesses, medical conditions, allergies, or the occasional breakout of head lice that required special attention; medication given out, so that other staff members could monitor and follow indicated use; cleaning updates on vacated cubicles; items requiring stocking; missing supplies; a family's missing personal belongings; and, in rare instances, reports of guest misconduct or emotional breakdowns.

[106] Many of the residential staff complained frequently that information transfer between staff was unidirectional as residential staff regularly provided case workers with information, but receive very little information in return, for example how a complaint about a resident had been handled by the case worker.

become texts that document the organization's due diligence and provide evidence based on which a case can be made.

In order to make email communication efficient and render email messages re-usable documentation, the residential staff team lead put up a note in the residential staff's office which detailed how emails were to be written. First, emails sent out should always use professional language and be accurate, meaning emails should be worded carefully so that they "were not implying something that didn't happen." Secondly, emails should "state facts, not thoughts or feelings." Thus, staff are asked to only report tangible, observed events rather than personal suspicions. For example, a staff member should send an email if he or she observed a concrete incident of child abuse or substance use, but not if he or she "has a feeling" that certain guests are abusive to their children or are using substances. Third, emails should "avoid personal interpretation, judgment, labeling, etc." Thus, residential staff are asked to report only observed facts, but not their interpretation thereof. For example, residential staff should report if and when parents leave their children unattended, but should refrain from labeling such behaviour as child neglect. Finally, the author of an email should "take responsibility for and own [his or her] message." Thus, residential staff members should report only incidents they personally witnessed, but cannot relay information they obtained from another residential staff member, nor should they speak on behalf of the entire team. In other words, the author of an email has to be clearly identifiable and it is the author who is accountable for his or her observations.

The guidelines outlined above rest on problematic assumptions, however. First, they assume that an objective world of observable facts exists independent of individual actors. Based on my observations, staff members interpreted various incidents quite differently. A mother grabbing her child by the arm, for example, was interpreted as disciplining by one staff member,

but as child abuse by another. Thus, all observations are subject to individual interpretation, which in turn shapes *whether* an incident is recorded in the first place, and if it is, *how* the incident is written up by the individual staff member. Secondly, the guidelines require staff to describe events in an objective way, using professional and unambiguous language. Such a requirement rests on the assumption that there is not only an objective way of describing an event, but also an objective way of reading such descriptions.

The Admission Process

When a family arrives at the shelter, a case worker[107] determines whether they are eligible to receive services through the Guest House and outlines the basic tenets of the program. Should the family decide to stay, a case worker completes a medical intake with the family, documenting family members' names, dates of birth, the family composition, allergies, dietary restrictions, medical conditions, medication needed and, in the case of pregnant women, how far along they are in their pregnancy. If a family is Aboriginal, it is also noted whether family members have band status and which band and reserve they are from.

A short narrative drafted by the case worker after the medical intake interview provides some background information on the family, such as where the family came from, how they lost their home and other details the case worker deems noteworthy. The case worker then goes over the main shelter rules with the family, photocopies any ID family members have on them, assigns them a cubicle on the third floor and sends the information collected during the initial

[107] If no case worker is on-site, after hours or on weekends, for example, shelter-seeking families meet with a shift supervisor or residential staff member instead.

medical intake to all staff members via email. [108] The family is further added to "the sheets," an Excel spread sheet listing the names of the residents of each occupied cubicle, the relationship of family members, age of the children, family members' allergies, medication, or medical conditions and other pertinent comments. When no case worker is on site, such as after hours or on weekends, the medical intake is completed by the shelter supervisor or a shelter staff member in the same fashion.

The initial medical intake is kept relatively short so not to overwhelm families who are often stressed, confused, scared, and nervous when coming to the shelter. Albeit short, the medical intake serves several important purposes. First, staff need to be aware of any medical conditions or food allergies any of the family members might have. Secondly, staff need to be aware of any medication any of the family members night be taking. Some guests who take prescriptions drugs might appear to be under the influence of alcohol or drugs. Knowledge of a guest's medication history will prevent staff from mistakenly interpreting a medication's side effects as symptoms of intoxication.

Furthermore, each morning the Guest House sends an email to the CHF, the Government of Alberta, and other service providers in the city. That email contains the shelter's bed availability, daily statistics pertaining to families housed on the family floor as well as a short description of the previous day's discharges and new admissions. The new arrivals' family composition and a short narrative outlining the family's reasons for becoming homeless and previous involvement with the shelter system are provided.

---

[108] If the shelter is at capacity, the family is sheltered through the Church Program until a cubicle becomes available.

Finally, based on the collected information, the frontline manager assigns the new arrivals a primary and a secondary case worker, who then jointly complete an intake interview with the new family, usually within 48 hours of their arrival. During the intake interview, the case worker elicits more detailed information pertaining to the family's history, family composition and reasons for becoming homeless to identify "the most pressing issues and problems" of the family (Guest House 2008b, 14). In addition to pertinent information gathering, the intake also serves the case worker as a needs assessment to determine how to "assist the family through the times that they are experiencing homelessness" (Guest House 2008c, 16).

Based on the provided information, the case worker in collaboration with the family develops a service plan outlining short- and long-term goals that the family wants to accomplish in order to regain housing. Then the case worker identifies available resources that could assist the family in their efforts to accomplish the goals laid out in the service plan. During the intake interview, the case worker further assists families in filling out housing applications for public, subsidized or transitional housing programs and, if applicable, filing for social assistance. Furthermore, the case worker suggests free programs the family could attend, such as parenting, budgeting and/or life-skills workshops. Finally, case workers provide referrals, if requested, for addiction treatment programs, counselling, immigration services, the Food Bank, furniture donations, or educational programs. At the end of the interview, guests are asked to sign a Release of Information Form authorizing the organization to enter their guests' demographic information in the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) and their case worker to share information with other pertinent service providers. Guests are further required to sign a "Consent to Receive Services" form, indicating that they are committed to "following through" with their service plan. Finally, the case worker goes over the shelter rules with the family again

and provides them with a handbook outlining general expectation placed on the family for the duration of their stay.

Programs and Services

Although the Guest House defines itself as an emergency shelter, it provides much more than "three hots and a cot" (Feins and Fosburg 1998). Rather than just providing temporary housing, the Guest House offers an array of services and programs to the families it houses. According to shelter's website, those "wrap-around services" intend to "teach new skills, educate and offer holistic help to build healthy families." Most of these services are not only available to current residents of the Family Shelter but also to so-called "community families," families who have been sheltered through the Guest House at some point and continue to work with their case worker once they transitioned into housing. However, management and staff on numerous occasions emphasized that those services are "a privilege, not a right." Thus access to services must be earned and is contingent on a family's compliance with shelter staff and rules. Certain rule violations or non-compliance with staff might lead to a family's loss of that "privilege," and thus curtail the programs and services the family can access.

Families are provided basic needs support such as three meals a day, clothing, diapers, baby formula, toiletries, laundry detergent, over-the-counter medication, bus passes, etc. Smaller items such as toiletries or diapers can be provided by the residential staff but larger items such as clothing, strollers, car seats, etc. can only be made available by a case worker. Furthermore, the Guest House provides small presents for family members who celebrate their birthday while at the Family Shelter and Christmas gifts for families staying at the shelter over the holidays. The Guest House also runs the Adopt-A-Family program, through which donors provide Christmas

presents to past and present shelter families. Finally, the Guest House maintains a food pantry that guests who have been housed through the Family Shelter in the past can access once a week to pick up non-perishable food items.

Children are bussed from the shelter to the partnering grade school and junior high school in order to assure regular school attendance. The Guest House also provides lunch-room supervision fees[109] for children attending the partner schools for up to six months. For students not attending the partnering schools and high school students, monthly transit passes are provided.[110] Guests also receive bus tickets from their case worker for weekend activities, to view housing, seek or maintain employment, visit the doctor, or to go to social service appointments. [111] If deemed necessary, the case worker can ask for proof of appointment to ensure bus tickets were not "misused." [112]

Additionally, the Guest House offers families housed on the family floor free recreational activities on weekends. While recreational activities are intended to provide fun and entertainment for children and their families as well as some escape from the stress of shelter life, they also seek to teach parents "new life skills" and "practice those skills in a fun, social setting," to "enhance parenting skills" (Guest House 2008b, 15).

Finally, the Guest House offers a variety of free, on-site programs in cooperation with their community partners, such as health service providers, groups providing education and

---

[109] This fee covers adult supervision of elementary school students who stay at their school through the lunch break.
[110] However, students "who misuse their monthly transit pass will have their transit pass removed and transportation support will be discontinued." (Guest House 2008c, 10) Skipping school and taking the bus to the mall instead, for example, would constitute misuse of the transit pass.
[111] In order to access bus tickets for employment, a guest has to provide an official job confirmation. That guest will receive bus tickets only until the first week after his or her first pay period. To receive bus tickets for appointments, guests have to deliver proof of their appointment.
[112] Revoking a guest's "privilege" of receiving free bus tickets is one of the most frequently used disciplinary measures for rule transgressions and non-compliance with staff.

employment resources, Aboriginal resources groups and various advocacy groups. Through their community partners, the Guest House offers programs that range from information sessions and workshops to one-on-one counselling. Programs include:

- parenting, literacy, and computer classes,
- budgeting and credit workshops,
- employment and career counselling,
- Aboriginal youth outreach,
- drumming classes,
- sexual health workshops and birth control information,
- tenant rights information session, as well as
- crafts, drama or music therapy.

Programs aim at improving parents' life skills to overcome their barriers to housing and thereby increase their chances of maintaining housing once they move out of the Family Shelter.

In light of always-insufficient funding, the Guest House has to allocate its resources carefully and selectively. The Guest House provides shelter for a diverse population, ranging from unattached individuals to family units. However, the Guest House identifies itself primarily as an emergency family shelter. Its core program remains the Family Shelter and, consequently, most of the Guest House's scarce resources are allotted predominantly to the Family Shelter program. Consequently, on-site programming, services and supports target predominantly Family Shelter guests and community families. Which types of services guests can access is determined by their "intake status." Those classified as "single" receive only limited services and are accommodated through the Church Program. Singles do not have access to a support worker, on-site storage, or bus tickets, for example. They thus are provided with little more than a bed for the night and three meals a day. "Family" status on the other hand provides access to a hub of different services, programs and supports outlined above.

The General Guidelines simply state “staff will screen guests to determine their status (i.e. single or family)” (2008d, 1). However, as I will describe in detail in Chapter VIII, “determining” the status of a new arrival is by no means a straightforward matter. Instead, receiving or being denied family status rests solely on the definitional work of the Guest House staff, particularly the management and case workers.

However, before discussing how access to the shelter is socially organized, I will briefly discuss central rules that regulate the day-to-day interaction between management, staff, and residents. As I will show, shelter rules are constantly created, modified and enforced by social actors in a specific context. More specifically, my discussion will focus on the socially organized processes that produce shelter rules and their enforcement.

CHAPTER VII: "DISCOMFORT CREATES THE FOUNDATION FOR CHANGE"

I can't be a real person staying here. I'm a shadow person, because I have no life. They've taken my life. They've taken my life because they don't allow me the leeway of being a person. I'm a homeless person to them, who needs to be told what to do, so that I can become productive like them.

— *Guest House resident in an interview*

This chapter explores the social organization of the staff's work of delivering services to families staying at the Guest House. I will begin with a discussion of institutionally generated understandings of the underlying causes of family homelessness and the characteristics of homeless families. These understandings become visible in institutionally generated, publicly available texts such as the Guest House's annual reports, Facebook page, and media releases and appearances. Arguably, such understandings shape the Guest House's approach to service delivery and underlying problem definitions that inform program design. Secondly, I will briefly discuss the Guest House's understanding of its role as a service provider which becomes visible in institutionally generated texts directed at Guest House staff.

I will continue my discussion by describing the regulation of everyday life at the Guest House. I will focus on practices pertaining to shelter rules, not only because it was one of the most contested issues at the Guest House. Shelter rules are also frequently debated in the academic literature, with the vast majority of studies focusing on the repressive nature of shelter rules. The purpose of this chapter is not to dispute the repressive, paternalistic nature of shelter rules, but to examine their inherently social character. As I will show, shelter rules are created, modified and enforced by social actors in a specific context. However, the socially organized processes that produce shelter rules and their enforcement are often glossed over in the academic literature.

Institutionally Generated Discourses of Family Homelessness

Organizations, such as the Guest House, are "institutional settings…that deal with social problems," and through their day-to-day work "make public, control, perpetuate, channel, or reproduce" social conditions and categories of people (Maynard 1989, 127). As Williams notes, homeless shelters are an important site of academic inquiry pertaining to homelessness as "ideas about homelessness are both created and reflected in the shelter system" (2003, 2). Institutional discourses pertaining to family homelessness can be traced, for example, through institutionally generated, publicly available texts such as the Guest House's annual reports, website, Facebook page, and media releases and appearances.

Institutionally generated discourses frame family homelessness as a social problem of a particular kind that affects a specific kind of people and requires a certain kind of service intervention. In doing so, institutional discourses draw on existing interpretive resources. However, such discourses not only reflect institutional understandings of the nature of family homelessness. To the extent that they circulate those understandings publicly, they shape public understandings of family homelessness as a particular kind of problem, which render them at the same time representational and producing elements of reality (Carabine 2001). However, given the situated character of institutional discourses, an analysis of them has to take into account the wider political, social, and cultural context in which institutional texts are generated and the specific purposes for which such texts were produced in the first place.

The Context of Fundraising

As my discussions in Chapters V and VI suggest, the maintenance of Guest House services requires a multi-million dollar operating budget, only part of which is provided through

government funding. Since cash and in-kind donations remain the Guest House's largest source of revenue, raising awareness and soliciting public support for its services, preferably through donations, has been a routine component of the Guest House's advocacy effort. Soliciting the public's support is reliant on establishing family homelessness as a worthy cause for contribution, which is promoted by a sympathetic portrayal of the homeless family.

A way of generating empathy for the plight of Calgary's homeless families to solicit public support is to shift responsibility away from the individual family and depict them as innocent victims of circumstances beyond their control. To that end, the Guest House frequently refers to a number of structural factors that contribute to family homelessness: poverty, domestic violence, a rental market which fails to provide affordable, safe, and suitable housing for low-income families and which is marked by low vacancy rates, a capricious economy leading to employment insecurities in the low-income segment of the labor market, insufficient wages of entry level jobs, and cultural and political persecution forcing families to immigrate to Canada without having secured employment or housing prior to arrival.

In addition, in the context of fundraising, texts often emphasize that "homelessness can happen to anyone." The Guest House's website, for example, encourages the reader to:

> [i]magine having nowhere to go after a long day at work, nowhere for your children to go after school, nowhere for your family to be when it is freezing outside or when darkness falls. Family homelessness is a harsh reality in Calgary, and given the right circumstances, it can happen to anyone. It may be the person next door, the child sitting next to your child at school, or your colleague at work.

Such depictions normalize family homelessness, framing it as a common life experience. Rather than affecting certain types of families, family homelessness is portrayed as a misfortune that can hit families "from all walks of life," thereby creating a sense of urgency to do something about it as homelessness can strike any time and at anyone, including the reader. As Loseke

(2003) points out, framing family homelessness as a condition that can affect potentially anyone is an effective claims-making strategy that fosters audience sympathy and moral outrage, which in turn is conducive to generating public support (financial or otherwise) – in this case for the Guest House's services.

The Context of Institutional Accountability

Calgary's 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness discussed in Chapter I was implemented in January 2008 and the housing first philosophy it mandated as well as key targets it instituted changed the context in which shelters such as the Guest House delivered their services. Key milestones proposed in the *10 Year Plan* include, for example, the elimination of family homelessness within two years of the plan's implementation. While the *10 Year Plan* is publicly celebrated as a success story, it has done little so far to diminish family homelessness and some shelters, such as the Guest House, have reported an increase in the utilization of their services (see, for example, Myers 2011; Wilson 2011).

As Hoffman and Coffey note, publicly funded organizations (such as the Guest House) operate in a "climate of 'accountability'" (Hoffman and Coffey 2008, 210) and are required to provide outcome measurements, "progress reports" and the development of "best practices" (ibid. 2008, 208) based on which the organization's use of financial contributions is evaluated (see also, Nichols 2008b). Since the Guest House receives government funding contingent on its compliance with the goals set out in the *10 Year Plan*, its day-to-day work ought to contribute to ending family homelessness in Calgary.

Moreover, as indicated earlier, the Guest House depends on monetary donations to continue its operation. It is thus not only accountable to the government, but also to "donors who

care about performance and helping the homeless" (Guest House 2010). Being an organization dedicated to helping the homeless and ending homelessness in Calgary, an increase in its service utilization constitutes an explanatory predicament and the organization now has to account for why it has been off target on its mandated goals.

In its public texts, the Guest House deflects institutional responsibility for the lack of progress and shifts liability to an ambivalent mix of structural and individual-level factors when explaining the persistence of family homelessness. For example, in a media interview the Guest House's ED identified a key structural factor, Calgary's problematic rental market, as a significant barrier to re-housing homeless families: "With a budget of $900 or less, including utilities, options are few. Suitable and safe two-to three-bedroom rentals remain the biggest gap in Calgary's affordable housing market" (Wilson 2011).

Secondly, the Guest House, in its public texts, argues its service utilization has been increasing due to an influx of immigrants[113] and Aboriginal families moving off their reserves. According to the Guest House (2008a) immigrant families "face many unique challenges – and require specific support – as they attempt to create a new life in Canada." Similarly, Aboriginal families are said to face "particular challenges [when] transitioning from a rural to urban lifestyle" (Guest House 2010). However, overcoming those challenges takes time and resources and consequently their shelter stay is typically longer than that of the average homeless family.

Finally, the Guest House explains its lack of progress by referring to individual-level factors that might impede some families' quick transition into housing. The organization argues

[113] Although media texts explicitly refer to immigrant families, my observations at the Guest House suggest that families discussed in this context are refugee claimants, refugees, and illegal immigrants rather than immigrant families as formally understood by government schema. In my discussion, I follow the terminology used in the Guest House's public texts.

that some of the families it houses face complex individual challenges, which, surely, are self-induced, but those families nonetheless are in need and deserving of a second chance and support. Those families are frequently described as determined and driven by a strong desire to change their lives for the better, their efforts "inspiring" (Wilson 2011), and their resiliency "touching" (Hunt 2011). The Guest House is pegged as just the organization to support them in their efforts to "turn their life around."

The Context of Service Delivery

Even though the discussion above illustrates that structural causes were brought to the forefront in the Guest House's public discussions of family homelessness in the context of fundraising, and to some extent in the context of institutional accountability, the Guest House is not in the business of addressing the structural factors that contributed to their clients' circumstances. Instead, they are in the "homeless serving business," as one Guest House staff member put it, meaning they provide service intervention to help families "break the cycle of homelessness" (Renne 2008).

The Guest House understands itself as "providing safe havens for families during times of extreme crisis and stress" (Guest House 2007), being "a beacon of hope" for homeless families (Toneguzzi 2011), "a cosy and cheerful" place, which "provides homeless families with food and a comfortable bed" in "private rooms" that "offer dignity to families in crisis" (Gignac 2008). Homeless families "who have hit rock bottom," "know that when they come to the [Guest House], they will find a place of respect, acceptance and compassion" (Guest House 2004), which shelter guests "need to believe there are brighter days ahead" (Guest House 2004) and to

"begin to rebuild their lives" (Guest House 2007). A family's shelter stay is thus framed as the starting point for a new life.

In delivering its services, the Guest House takes a "continuum of care approach," [114] which is based on the notion that homeless families need more than just shelter to obtain and maintain housing (Rossi 1994). The 2004 annual report, for example, states:

> Before many guests are ready for housing, they need to learn basic skills such as resume-building, budgeting, parenting or just being a family unit where individuals function with respect, personal boundaries, friendship and anger control (Guest House 2004).

To ensure families are ready to be rehoused, the Guest House provides access to "programs and resources to become equipped with the skills and networks [homeless families] need to build an independent and successful future" (Toneguzzi 2010).

Despite the many structural factors for their clients' homelessness invoked in the context of fundraising and institutional accountability, the host of programs offered to Guest House clients seeks to address exclusively perceived deficiencies at the individual level, such as mental health problems and addictions, as well as lack of life, budgeting, and parenting skills. In addition, despite assertions that "homelessness can happen to anyone" made in the context of fundraising, the Guest House typically identifies a specific set of circumstances, typically located at the individual level, that contribute to their clients' homelessness, which suggests that homelessness cannot happen to just anyone. The Guest House's website, for example, indicates:

---

[114] Although the Guest House states, "we call that our Continuum of Care," it is by no means a unique or novel service approach, but has been used in other fields such as health care, correctional services, addictions recovery, and elder care, just to name a few.

> Over the years, we've helped thousands of guests and no two stories are the same. Given certain circumstances, homelessness can happen to anyone. Here are some of the reasons:
>
> - Addictions
> - Illness
> - Mental health issues
> - Change in family circumstances (i.e. divorce)
> - Job loss
> - Generational (a family history of homelessness)
> - Domestic violence
> - Cultural/political persecution (immigrants)

Reminiscent of Loseke's (2003) analysis, the Guest House's public discourse not only makes assertions about family homelessness as a social problem, but also provides descriptions about what homeless families are like, what kind of people they are.

When publicly discussing the services it provides, the Guest House invokes predominantly individual deficiencies that purportedly prevent homeless families from securing and maintaining housing. It is those individual deficiencies that have to be addressed in the course of service intervention for families to transition successfully back into housing. To help families overcome their homelessness, they need professional support. Shelter staff must first diagnose the problem and identify the causes of their clients' homelessness, as if their clients' current predicament was the logical consequence of an identifiable, simple cause-and-effect relationship. Once the problem is correctly diagnosed, clients are encouraged to engage in various programs that seek to address the identified underlying issues that purportedly cause their homelessness.

Discursive Constructions of Family Homelessness as a Social Problem

The Guest House's *raison d'être* is service delivery to homeless families. The program's continuation is contingent on the existence of an identifiable population in need of service intervention. The Guest House's publicly available texts frame family homelessness as a social

problem of a particular kind that requires a particular kind of intervention. My analysis of various texts generated within the organization point to the complexity of institutional understandings of the nature of family homelessness. Rather than framing family homelessness solely as a structural or individual problem, the organization equally draws on both, sometimes simultaneously, to explain what brought families to the Guest House and how best to help them.

Although the Guest House's practice to draw on conflicting explanatory frameworks in its public texts might appear counterproductive, it is important to keep in mind that any form of documentation is produced under specific conditions, for particular purposes, and for an identifiable audience (Best 2001; Garfinkel 1984; Kitsuse and Cicourel 1963; Linders 2008). As my analysis above indicates, which explanatory framework is invoked in the Guest House's public texts depends largely on the purpose the text pursues. Structural factors, those seen as beyond the control of the individual, are invoked predominantly in the context of fundraising efforts or institutional accounting for the lack of progress in ending family homelessness. On the other hand, descriptions of the Guest House's services highlight individual-level factors contributing to their clients' homelessness. The central message irrespective of the context, however, remains: a) family homelessness continues to exist in Calgary, b) homeless families need support to overcome homelessness and are deserving of such support, and c) the Guest House provides the very services and support homeless families need to escape homelessness.

"We Cannot and Should Not Try to Force Others to Do What We Want Them to Do"

As discussed above, in its public texts the Guest House aspires to offer its guests compassionate, accepting, respectful, and non-judgmental services. This aspiration re-emerges in

numerous institutional discourses and texts directed at an audience internal to the organization, namely Guest House staff. For example, in an email sent to all staff, an administrator stated:

> Offering people the promise of a brighter future, a smile when they are down, a moment when we feel to [*sic*] busy – these are the simple things that we do between all of the really hectic tasks that sometimes threaten to overwhelm our days. It is not only the monumental things we do but the small stuff that brings dignity, hope and the promise of a future for those who need a hand up not a hand out. I am so proud and privileged to work with an incredible team who truly understands the difference a moment, a smile and a conversation brings to warming the soul of those who are so vulnerable and chilled.

In another email, the same administrator expanded:

> Without the efforts of the frontline workers that meet the needs of the families while they are at the [Guest House] and in the community, we would not end the cycle of homelessness or effect [*sic*] sustainable change in the lives of those we serve…Countless times we hear that we should take a moment to walk a mile in the shoes of another and I truly believe that there is incredible truth in this suggestion – judge not what you do not know for my heart may bear the scars of silent atrocities sheltered well from the eyes of man. I know not where you have been or how your life has been shaped I only know that in my world we are all equals with the inherent right to live a healthy, joyous and hopeful life in the loving embrace of families and friends.

These excerpts illustrate several interesting points, some of which I discussed earlier in the context of institutional representations of family homelessness. First, in her emails, the administrator frames shelter guests as poor, helpless, vulnerable, and the Guest House as the institution that provides the down and out with hope and the possibility of a brighter future. That said, help provided is to be understood as a "hand up, not a handout," a slogan reminiscent of the empowerment rhetoric that was used to first sell the War on Poverty and later to justify the neo-liberal welfare retrenchments of the mid 1990s in the U.S. and Canada (Kleinman 2000). Secondly, according to these email excerpts, Guest House staff approach service delivery from a place of compassion, understanding and dignity, and understand that as human beings "are all equals" and are blessed with inherent and inalienable rights.

In 2010, management conducted a guest survey to collect shelter guests' feedback on the quality of the Guest House's service delivery and get "an idea what to improve on." The survey

indicated that not all shelter guests felt treated with due respect and fairness. The results were circulated to all staff, who were asked "to adjust [their] behaviours as necessary," so that they could help the organization "to continue to support our families in the best manner possible."

During a staff meeting days after the survey, the residential staff team lead and shift supervisor relayed that some families felt disempowered by not being able to supervise their children without staff intervention. The supervisory team urged residential staff members to support families "with the difficult job of parenting while in crisis" and to empower families "to do so in a manner that they choose as long as it is a safe and appropriate one." The supervisory team further pointed out:

> Quite simply, our families must learn these skills. We can't expect our clients to be at the same level of understanding as ourselves, and ultimately it is our job to not bring judgment on a family that is struggling, hopeless, shameful, and generally not able to articulate such emotions in the first place.

Thus it is the task of staff to "role model constructive behaviours for the guests, so that they can possibly learn from and implement such attitudes and reactions into their own behaviours." This quote is particularly interesting, because it highlights the ambivalence of institutional understandings of family homelessness that I discussed earlier. On one hand, the goal is to empower shelter guests. On the other hand, shelter guests are perceived through the deficiency lens that permeates academic and public discourses of the homeless family. Contrary to the assertions the administrator made in the email, the supervisory team's recommendations suggest that guests and staff are not equal. Unlike the staff, shelter guests are framed as lacking in crucial understanding, skills, and emotional intelligence and it falls to the staff to model and thus teach them to shelter guests.

The supervisory team did not provide any further specification of what would be considered unsafe or inappropriate parenting, in which case staff intervention would be deemed justified. Furthermore, they pointed out that guests often lack important parenting skills and are not "at the same level of understanding" when it comes to parenting, so it falls to the staff to teach parents those skills through positive role modeling and validating parents' efforts to discipline their children. I never received a conclusive answer to my question about what positive role modeling actually looks like in practice, nor did I ever fully understood what would qualify residential staff members to model positive parenting behaviour as many of them were younger than the shelter guests and had no children of their own.

Furthermore, the supervisory team asked staff to keep in mind that families arrive at the Guest House in "a state of crisis." In a memo to all residential staff they emphasized the importance of realizing that:

> there is no cookie cutter approach to working with families who are in a high state of emotion and who are dealing with a multitude of barriers and issues in their life already…We run a shelter that needs to have flexibility yet consistent structure and an awareness of each family's unique circumstances. Being impulsive in our assessment of a family's situation, mood, or general disposition is not appropriate, nor is it a practice of the [Guest House] frontline services. There could be a variety of reasons for a family struggling with basic skills that we may take for granted as simple. Such tasks as getting up in the morning, preparing children for breakfast or school, completing chores in a timely manner, asking for direction on a particular responsibility on the floor, forgetting to follow through with basic hygiene tasks, or generally not following through with any of their housing goals due to how hopeless they may feel at the time.

The supervisory team made clear that staff "are not here to be [the families'] friend, but as supportive people in their lives who are all working towards a common goal of helping them move forward." That said, they emphasized that the Guest House is "not running a militant facility where there are clear 'black and white' solutions to every problem." The staff are "not the boss" or "security guards" and do "not hold power or authority over guests." In fact, "power

should not ever be an issue between a guest and a shelter staff member. We cannot and should not try to force others to do what we want them to do."

Instead, residential staff should, at all times, meet shelter guests with understanding, compassion, fairness, and non-judgmental support to make guests feel comfortable and provide them with a break from their otherwise very stressful lives.

The Regulation of Everyday Life

Despite the clear mandate that "power should not ever be an issue between a guest and a shelter staff member" and that staff cannot and should not force their will on guests, the existence of numerous shelter rules that micro-manage every aspect of shelter life, from bed times to the correct disposal of used diapers, suggests otherwise. When the family floor first opened in October 2008 the rules were rather rudimentary and mostly an adaptation of the policies and procedures the Guest House management had previously established for the community shelters. Now, after several years of operation, communal life on the family floor is heavily regulated by a plethora of rules.

The core rules that underwent relatively little change during the two years of my fieldwork pertain to the shelter's zero tolerance for drugs and alcohol; wake up, bed and meal times; curfews; nights away from the shelter; child supervision; family chores, and the consumption of food on the family floor. They are formally captured in writing in the Guest House's *Family Expectations* handbook which each new arrival receives during intake. In addition, the walls on the family floor are adorned with an endless array of ever-changing handwritten posters informing families what to refrain from and what to do when and how. Other

rules are more elusive as they are not captured in writing at all. Such rules are communicated verbally by staff members and become visible only in the shelter staff's day-to-day service work.

Maintaining an Alcohol- and Drug-free Environment

The *Family Expectation* handbook (Guest House 2008c) states that the Guest House "has adopted a zero tolerance on the possession, selling and use of illegal drugs and alcohol." Thus, any guest sheltered through the Guest House, irrespective of the program they are housed through (Family Shelter, Senior Shelter, or Church Program), has to be clean and sober for at least four days and must not bring any drugs, drug paraphernalia or alcohol on the premises. The handbook indicates that the Guest House "reserves the right to ask guests to undergo random drug tests and bag search."

While the zero-tolerance policy is clearly communicated in the handbook, the four-day sobriety requirement is not. Instead, the four-day sobriety rule was one of the unwritten, yet strictly enforced rules shelter guests had to adhere to. One of the first questions staff would ask shelter-seeking candidates during the intake interview was how long it had been since they last consumed any drugs or alcohol, irrespective of the program to which candidates sought admission. If shelter-seeking candidates indicated that they had consumed alcohol or drugs within the four days prior to the intake interview, staff would ask them to return once they met the four-day sobriety requirement.[115]

---

[115] In the case of families, if a shelter-seeking single parent came to the shelter intoxicated, Child Welfare is contacted immediately to assure the children are accommodated for the night and the parent turned away. However, whether or not Child Welfare was contacted depended on the staff's assessment of the parent's level of intoxication. In some cases, shelter-seeking parents admitting to having consumed drugs or alcohol were given the option to leave and return once they met the four-day sobriety requirement. The same procedure applies to shelter-seeking dual-parent families when both parents are intoxicated. If only one parent in a dual-parent family does not meet the

I asked several long-term staff members, but only one could recall where the four-day sobriety rule had originated. She explained:

> Uhm, actually [it was] drug and alcohol training. It was a retired detective that suggested that we do four days. They said that that's probably the timeline that would get...uh have the system clear and provide some clarity to the person that was under the influence, so it was recommend.

When I asked staff members why the Guest House had implemented a zero-tolerance policy, one pointed out that the Guest House runs "a family shelter, so our biggest priority would be [to protect] the children." Another indicated that

> …having drugs and alcohol creates a lot of problems, so we're gonna be zero-tolerant on it 'cause we're families, right? So, that doesn't mean we're not gonna help people get into treatment, that just means we're zero tolerant on our property.

Similarly, the Family Expectations handbook explains that the zero-tolerance policy was implemented to "ensure the program remains safe for families" (Guest House 2008c).

The consequence for violating the zero-tolerance policy was either refusal of admission, or, in the case of shelter guests, immediate discharge. As the *Family Expectations* handbook specified:

> If illegal drugs, alcohol or associated paraphernalia are discovered on a person or in their belongings, that person will be subjected to an immediate bar from the programs and services of the [Guest House].[116]

The length of the ensuing bar is determined by the responsible case worker in collaboration with shelter management. Bars could range from four days, at which point the barred client would meet the sobriety requirement again if she or he refrained from consuming drugs or alcohol, to

---

sobriety requirement, only that parent is asked to leave, while the rest of the family is provided a room on the family floor.

[116] In the case of Family Shelter residents, if a single parent returns to the shelter under the influence of drugs or alcohol, Child Welfare is contacted immediately to assure the children are accommodated for the night and the parent is barred. The same procedure applies to dual-parent families when both parents return to the shelter intoxicated. If only one parent in a dual-parent family is under the influence of drugs or alcohol, the intoxicated parent is asked to leave, while the sober parent is given the option to remain on the family floor.

permanent bars. The length of the bar depended on the severity of the intoxication, the guest's behaviour while intoxicated,[117] and whether the violation of the zero-tolerance policy had occurred for the first time or repeatedly.

The enforcement of the zero-tolerance policy in general and the four-day sobriety requirement in particular was, however, problematic for staff. As one staff member put it:

> They know what to say and they say what they have to in order to get what they need. Who knows what the real story is about anything, right? Like if somebody comes up to the desk to register and I say 'When's the last time you used alcohol or drugs?' they're gonna say 'Oh about four days ago' 'cause they know it's a four-day rule, right?

Another staff member affirmed:

> I mean when a client says 'I haven't been drinking in two days,' uhm chances are they haven't drank for a day, right? (laughs) Or, you know, if they say four days, it's only been 24 hours…I mean obviously we just say it and the clients will tell us, you know, something else.

Since the staff operate on the assumption that the information pertaining to drug or alcohol consumption provided by shelter-seeking candidates and shelter guests is incorrect, the shelter heavily relies on its staff's screening work. As the frontline manager phrased it:

> We have a breathalyzer here, we have the ability to do drug tests, behaviour is gonna be indicative as to whether they're gonna be appropriate, too. So, it's people that are, you know, obviously having some experience that are making these calls at that point.

However, one residential staff member objected:

> If I suspect one of the guys upstairs have been drinking, what can I do? I can ask him. He'll say no. And I can say, 'well I think I smell it.' Can I give him the breathalyzer? I don't even know if I'm allowed. I don't even know exactly where it is. And apparently that thing doesn't work anyway because somebody cleaned it out wrong.

However, in order to drug test or breathalyze shelter guests, a staff member has to undergo prior training in drug testing. Only a very few Guest House staff members had

---

[117] Again, the objective of the rule is to keep shelter guests safe. Guests who are deemed a threat the safety of staff and guests while under the influence of drugs or alcohol typically face longer bars.

undergone such training, predominantly case workers, and when they were not on site, after hours or on weekends, for example, residential staff had no authority to formally administer drug or alcohol testing. Management also pointed out frequently that breathalyzer supplies were expensive and thus should be used sparingly.

Code of Conduct

The Guest House generally expects certain behaviour from their guests for the duration of their stay. The *Family Expectations* handbook itself does not provide a detailed definition of what specifically constitutes "inappropriate behaviour" but lists the following examples: "foul language," "sex of any kind" and "abuse of volunteers and staff" (Guest House 2008c, 15). Volunteer and staff abuse in turn is defined in a different section of the handbook as "swearing, arguing, making demands, yelling, threats, property damage, disrespect, disobeying rules, physical abuse, and mental abuse" (Guest House 2008c, 11). Additional rules pertaining to conduct of behaviour are outlined on the numerous posters I described in the previous chapter.

Storage

Upon arrival, guests are informed that, due to limited space, they should only take what they need for one week upstairs and leave the rest of their belongings in the family storage room. Each family receives one storage bin per family member and it is the family's responsibility to purge or store anything exceeding their limit elsewhere. [118] A staff member also advises families not to leave anything of value in storage as the area is not secured and the Guest House cannot be held accountable for the damage or theft of personal items. Guests' belongings are screened for

[118] The case worker may allow a family to store more than their limit in the family storage room, contingent on space availability.

lice and bed-bug infestation and anything placed in storage can also be searched for alcohol, drugs or other illegal items. [119]

Community Etiquette

On the family floor, a set of rules regulates communal living. "General Rules of Behaviour" demand that shelter guests refrain from using verbal or physical violence against members of their family or other members of the community and staff, respect people's privacy, and stay away from the staff's offices. According to the posters outlining "Community Etiquette," guests are expected to keep their cubicles clean and tidy. Keeping such a small space organized was challenging for most families, so as an "extra incentive to get them off their butts" and clean their rooms, staff would regularly organize "cubicle cleaning contests." The winners of those contests would typically receive a gift card for a local grocery store or coffee chain. Cubicle cleaning contests, however, were held only before government site inspections, media visits, open house events, and building tours with (potential) funders "to help motivate the families in ensuring that their cubicles are looking clean, safe and livable" (supervisor in an email to all residential staff). Notably, the assumption here was that families lacked the motivation to keep their quarters clean. However, I would argue it is next to impossible to keep 100 square feet occupied by two or more people and equipped with limited storage opportunities organized and tidy at all times.

Guests are further expected to change and wash their bedding and towels weekly. The latter, however, is challenging, especially when the Family Shelter is at capacity, as families are

---

[119] However, screenings of guests' belongings are sporadic at best, with, at times, dire consequences. In early 2013, for example, the entire family floor was overcome by a bed bug infestation, which severely strained the shelter's resources.

provided with only one set of towels and sheets and are allowed to wash only one load of laundry a day. In addition to keeping their cubicles clean, guests are asked to pick up after themselves and their children when using the communal areas and to "keep the washrooms clean."

Other rules specify that guests are not allowed to cook any food themselves, nor are they allowed to eat on the family floor to "ensure that the shelter environment does not attract bugs, mice or other unhygienic situations." In addition, shelter rules outline that neither food nor drink is allowed around the computers. Guests are asked to use the computers mainly to look for housing and employment and must not access any pornographic material. Some residential staff members would quite frequently make note of what they considered inappropriate computer use. For example, the residential staff team sent an email to all case workers noting that "staff is becoming aware of clients viewing material of a sexually explicit nature" and being met with resistance when they ask guests to leave the website. In the email they further requested to "restrict internet access to only approved websites, (Kijiji, Rentfaster etc.)." [120]

Guests are further requested to limit their time on the computer to 20 minutes at a time, to keep an eye on their children while using the computer and to monitor their own children's computer use. Over time, a new rule was put into effect stating that families can no longer use the computers on weekday mornings because it prevents them from getting ready for the day. Furthermore, the rules outlined in the handbook specify that the TV must not be used as a babysitter and that, until the children go to bed, any TV "programming playing is to be child appropriate." The rule further specifies that the failure to comply with the stated TV rules will lead to the removal of the television sets from the living rooms.

---

[120] They essentially asked that only employment and housing related websites be accessible.

In order to do laundry, guests have to enter their names on a sign-up sheet and are allowed to wash one load per family per night, using the rapid wash cycle only. In the mornings, however, laundry is not done according to the laundry list but on a first-come-first-serve basis. Guests cannot ask a staff member to do their laundry. They also are not allowed to remove other guests' laundry from the washers or dryers but have to ask a staff member to take it out. Washers and dryers are shut off at 11:00 pm. Guest also have to ask a staff member for any supplies they need, such as shampoo, laundry detergent, bedding, milk from the fridge or medication from the medicine cabinet, rather than helping themselves to these items.

The Regulation of the Daily Schedule

Another set of rules pertains to the family floor schedule. On weekdays, a staff member wakes families up at 6:00 am by turning on all the lights on the floor and stopping at each cubicle to inform its occupants that it is now time to rise. Guests are expected to get ready for the day without delay. Breakfast, consisting of cereal or toast, is available between 6:30 am and 7:00 am. School-aged children have to be downstairs by 7:15 am, where they are picked up by the school bus at 7:30 am. If a child misses the bus, it is the parents' responsibility to bring their child(ren) to school. Irrespective of the age of their children, all families are required to leave the family floor by 7:30 am.

Shelter policies requiring at least one staff member on the floor with the families at all times, combined with staffing shortages, do not permit constant supervision of the family floor. Families must therefore vacate the floor during the day. Although all families have to leave the third floor in the morning, they do not have to leave the shelter and can spend the day in the "Kid's Zone" located on the main floor of the Guest House. If a child or a parent is sick, they are

allowed to remain "upstairs" and a staff member will regularly check on them throughout the day. Families with children under the age of four are allowed to return to the family floor between the hours of 11:00 am and 1:00 pm for a staff-supervised nap.

At 3:30 pm the school bus drops off children returning from school and staff serve a snack to all children attending the snack-time program in the dining room. Families can return to the family floor between 3:30 pm and 5:30 pm after checking in with the registration worker downstairs. The time until dinner, served at around 6:00 pm, can be spent however the guests see fit. After dinner, families return upstairs and the adults are required to complete their "chore" such as tidying up one of the living rooms, mopping the hallways or stairwells and cleaning the bathrooms. Staff members assign the daily cleaning tasks to each family on a rotating basis and later check to see that the chores were completed satisfactorily. Whoever does not complete their assigned chore, or does not complete it to the staff's satisfaction is assigned the same chore again the next day.

Chores are to be completed by 8:00 pm, at which point quiet time begins and children are expected to be in bed. However, at times, the completion of the chores can turn into a contest of wills between staff and guests. As Kathy, one of the shelter guests, put it:

> We have to do chores and [the staff] like them to get done by a certain time. Some of us, depending on what we have to clean, we like to wait till kids are in bed because, you know, the kids go and, you know, make a mess so why clean it up and then have them make a mess of it, then have them go to bed and have to do it again? So, you just listen to some of the workers complain. Like one of them, 'You have to have your chore done by 8:00' you know, and that's what annoys me the most, is just him coming around and he'll constantly repeat it to you, over and over 'It needs to get done, it needs to get done' and, you know, you're like 'I know, I know.' I even told him one time, I said 'I'm a grown ass woman, you don't need to tell me, it's gonna get done.

Adults are free to use the computers until 11:00 pm or watch TV until midnight. During quiet time, shelter staff members monitor the living rooms and computers to ensure that noise is kept to a minimum so not to disturb those sleeping.

Families are allowed to sleep in until 8:00 am on both Saturday and Sunday. On some weekend days, volunteer groups prepare a hot breakfast, which is served between 9:00 am and 10:00 am; otherwise, a cold breakfast is available between 8:00 am and 9:00 am. Families can stay on the floor until 1:00 pm and typically the Guest House offers a free "activity" in the afternoons, such as going to the movies, a visit to the zoo, or pizza and play at Chuck E. Cheese's. The afternoon and dinner routine does not change on weekends, except that children can stay up until 9:00 pm on Friday and Saturday nights.

Late Arrivals and Nights Away From the Shelter

Families housed on the family floor are referred to as "guests" to reflect the organization's "standard practice of treating clients as if they were guests in our own homes" (Guest House 2008e, 6). Yet, families are not free to come and go as they please. During one of my shifts I noticed that one of the women housed on the family floor was visibly upset. When I asked her what was wrong, she responded that her husband, who wanted to join her and the children on the family floor, was told to seek shelter elsewhere, because he could not meet the nightly curfew due to his work hours. Similarly, during her interview, Elaine, whom I introduced in Chapter IV, explained why she stayed at the shelter without her partner:

> I was gonna come here with my partner, but they couldn't accommodate his hours that he was working 'cause he would sometimes work till three in the morning and we'd still have to get up at six o'clock in the morning… He's staying with a friend close to his work.

I asked a staff member what happens if shelter-seeking candidates or residents work nonstandard (non-day, rotating, irregular) shifts, common among employees with lower levels of education filling low-income jobs in certain segments of the economy (Presser and Cox 1997). She responded:

> On occasion we run into that. And usually it's just one partner that has that overnight shifts, so they're trying to change their shifts to day shifts. If that's not possible, they might ultimately end up sleeping elsewhere and the rest of the family can stay here...If they're working nights, we're flexible to a degree where they could return as late as 11 or 12 midnight with a job confirmation indicating that these are the hours of the family member's work time shifts but the overnights are tough.

When I asked the same staff member why the Guest House could not accommodate adults working evening or night shifts, the staff member explained: "We don't have the ability to provide day sleep at this point…there's nowhere to sleep and how is that person supposed to function, right?"

In addition to the shelter's incapacity to facilitate day sleep for family members working nights, the same staff member explained the shelter's hesitation to house individuals working evening and overnight shifts in the following terms: "…a lot of the behaviour of individuals and their addiction occurs in the evening, right? When you have access to the community and if you're feeling unhealthy it could just be a gateway."

Thus, not only operational stipulations are drawn on in order to justify the exclusion of family members working evenings or nights. The strict curfew is partly based on the presupposition that many shelter guests struggle with past or present addictions. Limiting guests' access to the community during the evening and night is justified as a preventative measure to avert guests' relapse and other "unproductive behaviours."

While staff generally deemed such practices to be in the best interest of shelter guests, those practices systematically disadvantage those working evening and night shifts by limiting their access to the Family Shelter. Unless those working irregular, evening or night hours are able to change their shift schedule, which often they are not, they have to seek shelter elsewhere. Thus, even though the prevention of family disruption is one of the Guest House's declared mandates, family disruption does occur when the employment responsibilities of a family member are in conflict with shelter policies. In those cases, the family is given the option either to seek shelter elsewhere or to separate, with the working parent seeking shelter elsewhere.

If a family or one of its members cannot meet the 5:30 pm check-in deadline, they have to obtain their case worker's approval in advance. Residential staff are not allowed to grant families permission for late arrivals. Based on my experience, obtaining permission to return to the shelter past the curfew can be especially difficult on weekends when case workers are not on site and do not answer their phones. Late arrival permissions are usually granted for "valid reasons" [121] only, such as employment, viewing an apartment and medical appointments. Arriving late at the shelter without prior authorization can lead to the exclusion of the family from weekend activities. If a family consistently arrives late without permission, other "privileges" might be revoked, such as free bus tickets.

Just as with late arrivals, families intending to spend the night away from the shelter need prior approval from their case worker. However, families are not allowed to spend more than two nights per month away from the shelter.[122] If a family spends the night away from the shelter

---

[121] It is the discretion of the case worker to decide what constitutes a valid reason.

[122] Stays outside the shelter are limited to two nights per month because the Guest House feels that if a family can find a place to stay away for the night more often than twice a month, it has the necessary networks not to be reliant on the Guest House for shelter and thus the space should be made available to a family that "really needs it."

without prior approval, a staff member will "bag and tag" their room, meaning they will put the family's belongings in garbage bags and label the bags with the family's name. If the family spends a second night away without permission, the family is discharged and its belongings moved to the storage room. If the family returns, they are accommodated through the Church Program until another cubicle becomes available.

Once families register for the night and proceed to the third floor, they cannot leave the floor without being accompanied by a staff member. During meal times, a staff member brings all families to the second floor dining room and back up after they finish their meal. In the mornings and evenings, a staff member facilitates hourly smoke breaks at 6:00 am and between 3:30 and 11:00 pm on weekdays, until midnight on weekends. After 5:30 pm, the building's entrance door remains locked and late-arriving families have to call the third floor emergency cell phone to be let in by a staff member.

Child Supervision

The set of rules most stringently enforced by staff pertains to child supervision. Since the Guest House is not an accredited child care provider, staff are not allowed to supervise guests' children for any length of time. According to shelter rules it is "HEALTHY for staff to have supportive relationships with both parents and children, but at no time are children to be left with staff while parents are not present." While it is "ok for staff to play/interact/engage/hold children," parents must always be nearby. Parents are encouraged not to leave their children out of their sight and are required to be in the same area of the shelter as their children at all times "for safety reasons."

Parents also have to actively supervise their children to ensure that they play safely. While it is "ok for parents to support each other if they are overwhelmed with their children," parents cannot leave their children with another family for extended periods of time. If single parents want to go on the smoke break, take a shower, or complete their chore, they have to ask another "community family" on the floor to watch their child(ren), even if the children are asleep. However, community families are not allowed to watch more than two children at a time and for no more than 10 to 15 minutes. In the case of dual parent families, one parent is expected to stay with the children while the other parent takes a shower or goes on the smoke break. If both parents smoke, they are asked to take turns but they cannot go on the smoke break together, no matter how old their children are.

While the parents are expected to actively supervise their children, staff members monitor parents to ensure they fulfill their supervisory obligations. Staff members continuously redirect "lost" children back to their parents, reminding both child and parent that they have to be able to see each other at all times. Staff will also intervene when child play gets too rowdy, reminding parents that they have to actively supervise their children to ensure that they play safely. Finally, physical abuse is not tolerated at the Guest House and staff will intervene immediately when they observe a parent hitting their child.

Consequences of Rule Violations

Shelter rules are not static, but continuously evolve as previously unaccounted for incidents emerge. Taking into account the multitude of written and unwritten policies regulating guests' behaviour while at the Family Shelter, rule violations occur on a daily basis, which in turn are subject to disciplinary intervention. Disciplinary measures range from verbal

reprimands, delivered by staff, to a permanent bar from all Guest House services and programs, imposed by the management. Specific courses of action and subsequent consequences of rule violation depend on which rule was broken, the gravity of the transgression, whether it was the first or a repeated infringement of a rule and whether the guest has a history of disobeying the rules. Thus, rule implementation, enforcement and punitive actions are by no means straightforward matters. Instead they are brought into existence through the incessant definitional work of the sheltered families, staff and management.

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to illustrate in detail how such definitional work unfolds, so a brief example will suffice. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the core responsibility of residential staff is to supervise families while on the family floor. While they are entrusted with monitoring and enforcing the rules, they are given few means of action in case of a rule violation. Furthermore, they are not given the authority to provide shelter guests with needed resources, such as bus tickets and permission to return late or spend the night away. As one of the shelter staff members put it: "Somebody can ask for something and need something and it's in a glass box right here, but I just can't get it for them because I'm not a case worker."

If decisions need to be made that are beyond the authority of the residential staff and no other authorized staff are on site, they can contact the designated on-call staff member. However, after a number of discouraging encounters, most residential staff were uncomfortable to do so. As one residential staff member explained:

> You really stress out whether you're gonna get killed if you call somebody at three in the morning. And then you get feedback like 'Oh, couldn't you have dealt with that yourself or was it necessary to call the on-call person?' yada yada yada. Now they gonna think me incompetent because I couldn't deal [with the situation] and then just email them, you know. They need to be unresentful [*sic*] when you do phone and not make you feel like you've asked them to donate a kidney when you ask for their opinion at 3:30 in the morning. You know, that's what on call is about.

As indicated earlier, conflict arises particularly in the evenings and on weekends when the case workers, who are authorized to provide resources and grant requests, are not on site. For example, families needing bus tickets to view an apartment on the weekends need approval from their case worker before obtaining them. Families needing an extension of the curfew to look at an apartment, attend one of their children's school functions, or meet with family or friends for dinner, need prior approval by their case worker. However, if their caseworker is not on site and does not answer the phone in the evening and on weekends, the curfew holds.

Often families try and obtain approval from residential staff. Some will grant it, others insist that the family wait until they hear back from their case worker. In one instance, a residential staff member provided a family permission to spend the night at a family member's house after they unsuccessfully tried to get hold of their caseworker. However, the next day the family's case manager order residential staff to "bag and tag" the family's cubicle because they stayed away for the night without proper permission. In response, one of the residential staff members wrote the following note in the residential staff's log book: "I pity the fool that needs to explain this to them."

When a family arrives back late, it is up to the residential staff to decide how to proceed. If the family returns close to the curfew,[123] they can ignore the violation of the curfew and let the family in without further comment or with a stern warning to the family and let it pass. Staff might quiz the late arrivals for the reasons for their lateness and based on the plausibility of the explanation either provide a warning or send an email to the family's case worker, who will then

[123] Since families rely on public transportation and buses do not run very frequently in the evenings and on weekends, a missed or delayed bus can contribute to a family's late arrival.

decide how to follow up on the infringement.[124] Before dinner, residential staff typically send an email to all case workers, supervisors and the frontline manager documenting late arrivals or families who have yet to return to the shelter. The frontline manager and/or the on-call person will then typically provide directives on how to proceed. For example, they can instruct residential staff to check for signs of alcohol or drug consumption before admitting a family that returns late. If a family fails to return to the shelter without prior permission, they might instruct residential staff to "bag and tag" the family's cubicle.

Based on my observations, how the situation unfolds varies depending on the family and staff members involved and their respective interpretations of the situation. Such interpretations are shaped by the staff member's reading of the shelter rules and his or her understanding of the role of residential staff in processes of rule enforcement. They further take into account the specific circumstances, the gravity of the violation, the explanation provided by the family, whether the infringement was a first time or repeat occurrence, and whether the family were generally considered "trouble makers" or not. Finally, whether the shelter is at capacity or not affects the decision-making process. For example, during a time of high occupancy, an email from a supervisor reminded all staff: "We need to be absolutely 110% on the ball in regards to our policies of absences right now. We're at our absolute capacity and we need to hold strong to our procedures surrounding cubicle occupancy."

On occasion, families listed as late or absent without permission did in fact obtain permission from their case worker who failed to communicate his or her decision to the rest of the team. In some instances, such miscommunication led to family's cubicles wrongfully being

[124] As indicated earlier, punitive measures can range from a warning, to the revoking of privileges such as bus tickets or participation in weekend activities, to a temporary or permanent bar from Guest House services.

"bagged and tagged" and declared vacant. In other instances, case workers failed to communicate the reinstatement of temporarily barred individuals. For example, one of the fathers on the family floor was barred from the Family Shelter after admitting to having had "a beer after work," a violation of the sobriety rule. After a meeting with his case worker, the bar was lifted, but the decision never communicated to the residential staff, who in turn got into an altercation with him over refusing to admitting him to the family shelter that night. The altercation resulted in another bar, this time for making threats against staff. At least to my knowledge, none of the staff were held accountable for their role in the altercation.

The Social Organization of Rule Creation

Above, I outlined some of the Guest House's core rules that regulate day-to-day shelter life. As my discussion indicates, shelter rules are not clear cut and their enforcement in a complex matter. Moreover, shelter rules are not static but continuously evolve. Existing rules are modified and new ones created as incidents emerge that fall outside the regulatory reach of established rules. While they are in charge of enforcing shelter rules, most staff members I talked to knew very little about the genesis or rationale of the rules they were entrusted to enforce. One senior staff member, who had been with the organization for several years, told me that most rules governing life on the family floor were developed in the context of the Church Program. The zero-tolerance policies pertaining to alcohol and drug use and volunteer and staff abuse as well as child supervision regulations, for example, were adapted from the Church Program without modification. Other rules, such as those regulating families' daily schedules were developed prior to the opening of the Family Shelter and reflect the organization's need to "keep

the foundation in place." One staff member who had been with the organization since the Family Shelter opened explained:

> When I first started they really took the rules, like took the church rules and moved them over here, and the church rules were basically designed around the security, safety and the availability of people at the churches. [The guests] were there to eat and sleep. You have a very set number of volunteers whose job there is to look after you, to feed you, to be there and kind of chat with you at night. But it isn't an all night party. They're there to sleep. Now that we've gone into a facility, when I first started there I said well, you know, these are not the best rules. I had the feeling that they've taken them from the churches and I said they don't really fit with the facility. Now that we've been there for a while, we've adapted them.

Another long-term staff member elaborated:

> Well, they did the *Family Expectations* manual when they first opened the shelter, so it was probably [the frontline manager] and [the executive director] and whoever the [case workers] were at that time. Some of the posters are things that [the residential staff] kind of all chipped in on as far as changing a few of the expectations.

The frontline manager affirmed:

> Well, those rules were developed pretty concrete when we opened the door [of the Family Shelter] and then we learned along the way that we had to be flexible in some circumstances....Uhm, who developed it? It would probably be, you know, experiences of a lot of the frontline workers, feedback. Uhm ultimately the managers develop something expectation-wise for the families, but the [case workers] are ultimately who guide that in regards to what information they give to us.

However, none of the frontline workers I spoke to over the course of my research, case workers and residential staff alike, recalled ever having had any input on rule development or refinement. To illustrate the genesis and complex history of shelter rules, consider, for example, the Guest House's decision to accommodate shelter guests in "semi-private" rooms that offer little privacy to their occupants.

"Until I Prove That I'm not Trustworthy, I Think I Deserve That Dignity"

The lack of privacy afforded in the family floor was a reoccurring complaint I heard from shelter guests. Ryan, for example, argued that the cubicles do not offer much protection from

staff's and fellow guests' intrusion into his private affairs. He felt that the open concept of the family floor made him and his family available for constant surveillance and undermined maintaining an intimate relationship with his girlfriend. Ryan explained:

> That's one of the rules I hate, is that we don't have doors...And the walls, they only go up and there's like this much space (about 50 cm) between the roof, so you can hear your next door neighbour talking, you know, and shit like that. You should have your own privacy, you know…I live in a shelter full of people and I can't have my own privacy and, you know, everybody is always looking over your shoulder: 'What are you doing? What are you doing?,' you know? I can't hug my girl, I can't do nothing like that because of the fact that there's kids around and I have no privacy in my own room, right?...You should have your own privacy, you know.

Dana, in her interview, described how the lack of doors impacted her parenting. She argued:

> I have to have my kids in the room by eight o'clock. There's no door on the room, it's just a room with no door, but I can't let my kids out of the room and I'm not allowed to block off the door to keep them in the room. So, it's like well frick, how do you guys expect parents to do this? We said screw it, we got the playpen and we shoved in our door. I'm like 'Dude, I'm sorry but you can't expect my child to stay in a room, he's two and a half he's not gonna stay in here.' And they're like 'Well, that's too bad.'

Natalie and Simon were very vocal about the negative impact the lack of privacy had on their shelter stay. Natalie described, for example, the discomfort the absence of a door to the family's room created for her and her children:

> It was scary. I mean like, you know, you've got all these strangers, you have no privacy, you know…The walls don't go up to the roof in those cubicles so they can tell what's going on…I'd have to hold up a blanket for the kids to get changed into their pajamas, you know…You can't close your door when you're sleeping, so the kids were kinda like sleeping with one eye open like feeling really weird…I'm not comfortable with people walking by going to the bathroom and looking in the cubicle, I'm sleeping, you know, it's uncomfortable. It's creepy, you know…When you walk down the hall, people can look right into your cubicle while you are sleeping, you know? Like I slept in sweats and a sweat shirt every night, because I have a tendency to kick the blankets around, right? Like, who knows who's looking at me when I'm sleeping, right? Like, so it made me even more uncomfortable 'cause then I was like dying of heat because I'm sleeping in, you know, fleece.

Natalie further argued that the absence of a door to the family's room left their belongings susceptible to theft:

> I would move my futon to cover the door because things would go missing every day….Anything personal was in my backpack and it left with me, you know, anything of any value or any importance, even if it was just to go for a smoke, it came with me because you turn your back for two seconds and it's gone.

Simon added:

> It's like prison, but even prisoners have doors, right? Families need their privacy, you know? Like, not even so much a door, you weren't allowed to hang a blanket in the doorway, you know, like I just want something to barricade us between other people, you know?...Maybe like some curtains with drawstrings or whatever and then if you break the rules you lose your curtain or something… There should be some kind of…You're still family, right? You deserve some kind of dignity.

Natalie jumped in:

> Until I prove that I'm not trustworthy, I think I deserve that dignity…And a blanket doesn't hide everything, you know. It takes two seconds for them to open it up, you know. It doesn't filter out noise, you know. Like if somebody is drinking, you can hear. If somebody is, you know, smoking something, you can smell the smoke through a blanket, you know? It's just that, that barrier, you know?

Kathy shared many of Natalie and Simon's concerns, stating that:

> Upstairs where we stay, it's like you don't get your privacy that you should be getting, you know. Like you're in a cubicle, but you don't have your own door, so every time people walk past it's like they look in your room, or they look at you, or kids run in and out of your room, stuff like that. I've had a few things stolen already.

In February 2009, just a few months after the Guest House opened its Family Shelter, I attended the *Growing Home: Housing and Homelessness in Canada* (henceforth: *Growing Home*) conference at the University of Calgary. One of the Guest House Board members spoke at the conference, addressing the role of shelters in ending homelessness in the city. One of the session's attendees who was familiar with the layout of the Family Shelter and had been involved in a Canada-wide evaluation of family shelters noted that she was appalled by the Family Shelter's cubicle concept, which offered families with little or no privacy. She further noted that the lack of privacy was one of families' key concerns the Canada-wide shelter

evaluation brought to light and that other shelter models could have been, but were not, used to inform the design of the Guest House's Family Shelter.

Despite the open criticism of the Guest House's no-doors policy and numerous complaints from shelter guests, the families' abodes remain without protection from outside intrusion to this day and the issue continues to be a constant source of struggle between families and staff. Families who obstruct the view into their cubicle or sections of it by draping blankets, towels or clothes over their bunk bed's frame or the empty door frame are immediately instructed by staff to remove such items at once. Since the interdiction to obstruct the view into one's cubicle was one of many unwritten rules on the family floor and family turnover was high, staff's efforts to maintain a clear view into each cubicle was a rather Sisyphean undertaking.

New arrivals, in an attempt to secure at least a minimal amount of privacy, would often devise intricate contraptions to block the view into their domicile, which often had a domino effect as other families immediately followed suit. In one case, a newly arrived family regularly covered their doorframe with a bed sheet. When instructed to refrain from doing so by a residential staff member, they defended the practice, arguing that they had obtained permission from their case worker so that the mother could breastfeed her infant in privacy. The residential staff member immediately emailed the case worker, asking whether permission was indeed given. The case worker clarified that the family was given permission to hold up a blanket while the mother was breastfeeding, but not to cover their doorway. In the interim, however, several families, too, had begun to hang blankets over their empty door frames.

Subsequently, a residential staff member sent an email to all staff stating:

> Please, please, please can someone talk to this family? They continue to hang blankets in their doorway despite being asked not to do so. This creates such a huge problem for us because if one does it then slowly but surely they all do it. There is still a chronic problem with people hanging blankets across their cubicle doorways at night which is against fire and [Guest House] regulations. Every night we are taking 3-4 blankets down and speaking to the families and every night they're back up again. New families see this and follow suit. Any suggestions for dealing with this? It hasn't been a major problem until fairly recent but it happens every night now. Maybe another announcement and across the Board consistent enforcement will help.

Eventually, residential staff members produced handwritten signs stating: "Please – do not hang blankets in or around your cubicle. Thank you, Guest House staff" and taped them to the family floor's walls in generous quantities. The signs did not put an end to guests obstructing the view into their cubicles. However, they considerably shortened arguments that followed instructions to take blankets down as questions as to why hanging blankets was not permissible were answered with a finger point toward the signs and a brief "because it's against the rules" explanation. That said, one of the residential staff members, in charge of enforcing rules against the obstruction of a clear view into a family's cubicle, expressed empathy with guests. The staff member noted:

> If I was a person there, I would promptly break one of the rules, I would put a blanket up across my doorway. I would promptly hang a blanket from my bed because that is human nature. I'm a private person and I would absolutely have a cover on the side of my bed.

Many researchers have pointed to the arbitrary, paternalistic, authoritarian, dehumanizing and disempowering nature of shelter rules (see, for example, DeVerteuil 2004; Friedman 2000; Liebow 1993). Certainly, as the interview excerpts above indicate, the lack of doors on the Guest House's family floor infringes considerably on families' privacy and dignity and it is not surprising that controversy over the Guest House's no-door policy erupts on a regular basis. While it would be easy to cast the Guest House's no-door policy as a misguided effort to control, survey and thus regulate the poor (Friedman 2000; Hartnett and Postmus 2010), my observations at the Guest House suggest that the issue is infinitely more complex than that. An examination of the genesis of shelter rules has to take into account institutional stipulations

as well as contextual constraints that are beyond the institution's control and yet shape its day-to-day operation.

Rule Creation in Context

In the context of the Guest House's no-door policy, I will discuss three core explanations provided by Guest House staff and administrators as to why the family floor is not equipped with doors or other methods to ensure at least a minimal level of privacy, such as hanging blankets. The three core explanations pertain to the Guest House's infrastructure, lessons learned from the Redwood project and subsequent safety regulations governing the family floor, and socializing effects of depriving shelter guests of their privacy. While these three strands of arguments became clearly visible in staff and administrators' justification of the Guest House's no-door policy, they did not emerge in isolation of each other, but rather are intertwined.

Making Use of Existing Infrastructure

In an interview, a residential staff supervisor noted:

> I kinda understand why they picked [the building], because it was here and the space was available. But at the same time it doesn't even seem suitable for a family shelter, because there's no way to make that into independent apartments.

In order to understand the Family Shelter's current set up, the complex history of the building's acquisition has to be taken into account. In Chapter V, I discussed in detail the Guest House's transition from single-night to "pre-transitional" shelter in a permanent location. In brief summary, in 2005 the Guest House Board announced its decision to make the transition in its strategic plan and kicked off its capital campaign in 2006. In late 2006, the Guest House had its sight set on the old Ronald McDonald House, which was ideally suited to house a permanent family shelter as all 15 units were self-contained and featured private washrooms. However, the

Guest House's bid for the property was unsuccessful and thus a two-year long search for a suitable location began. The search was considerably hampered by a tight real estate market, which kept vacancy rates low and property prices high, especially in the business-dominated downtown core. The Guest House, however, identified the downtown area as the desired location for its permanent shelter to facilitate its guests' access to public transit and social service providers, many of which are located downtown.

The tight real estate market coincided with the City's efforts to rejuvenate areas adjacent to the downtown core to make them more attractive to investors. Part of the rejuvenation effort was to limit the number of social service agencies downtown. Thus, establishing a new social-service-providing agency downtown became difficult if not impossible as the City made clear that the necessary zoning changes would not be approved. After a long, frustrating, and unsuccessful search, the Calgary Drop-In and Rehab Centre (DI), which at the time rented the first floor of one of their downtown facilities to the Guest House, came forward and offered the Guest House the facility itself for purchase. Since all necessary zoning and permits were already in place, the Guest House accepted, despite the $6 million price tag, which exceeded the $4 million raised through the Guest House's capital campaign. Since the DI had used the facility in the past to house single individuals, the second and third floors were already set up with individual cubicles for sleeping, communal space, and washrooms. The setup was not necessarily considered ideal for housing families, but under the circumstances it was the only viable option the Guest House had.

As I further discussed in Chapter V, the $2 million funding shortage prompted the Guest House to apply for provincial support, which was ultimately denied. The purchase went ahead with the help of a private philanthropist, who provided the Guest House with a $2 million short-

term loan. Taking into account the hefty price tag for the facility and the shortage of funding, renovations of the building were limited to what was deemed essential to make it operational: an industrial kitchen and a second bathroom on the family floor. The communal living concept with its "semi-private" cubicles thus remained virtually unchanged, because creating enclosed, private rooms would have required extensive reconstruction, for which the Guest House, in the interim, had neither the time nor the necessary financial resources. As one Board member jokingly noted: "Nothing will last longer than a provisional arrangement that works."

In summary, the Guest House identified an unsuccessful bid, a tight real estate market marked by low vacancies and high property prices, unaccommodating municipal policies, and an unsupportive provincial government as contributing factors that ultimately led to the acquisition of the DI building. Since the shortage of funding did not allow for extensive renovations of the building's infrastructure, the cubicle concept was adopted without much alteration and is in use to this day. Guest House officials justified the often criticized "semi-private" set up of the family floor by invoking the complex and convoluted history of the Family Shelter's foundation, which makes plausible the existing infrastructure and the need to make it work. However, it does not illuminate the Guest House's rule that the view into cubicles may not be obstructed in any way by guests. As a residential staff supervisor put it:

> I don't know why they chose to set it up the way they did. I mean I understand they're working with the building they had, but at the same time…I've done big donor tours [of the Family Shelter] now, and they always ask [why we don't have doors on the cubicles]. At first I was taken aback, because to me it's a non-issue, it's just how we do it. So you have to say, you have to sugar coat it and say like something about safety, so we know what they're doing because it is a…Like I just say it's a really small space, we need to know what they're doing and I talk about things like rotten food, or like…I don't know, it's hard to come up with a legitimate reason for not having doors.

"We Learned That Doors Are not Necessarily the Best Thing"

Seasoned Guest House staff members and administrators explained the absence of doors to guest rooms on the family floor in terms of the building's infrastructural stipulations. However, they would then de-problematize the issue by arguing that past experience had taught them that providing shelter guests with too much privacy was actually detrimental. As discussed in Chapter V, the Guest House was entrusted with providing frontline services for the Redwood Project, through which 21 homeless families were housed in private single rooms in a closed hotel slated for demolition in the winter of 2003/2004.

Pointing to the experience gained from the Redwood Project, a Guest House Board member argued during the *Growing Home* conference that cubicles on the family floor do not have doors for safety reasons. The Board member commented that during the Redwood Project, which offered shelter guests the privacy of enclosed rooms, Guest House staff struggled with "paramount problems with drugs and alcohol." The Board member pointed out that closed doors allowed shelter guests to hide and use drugs and alcohol, which violates the shelter's zero tolerance policy. The Board member further argued that some women were running sex trade operations from their rooms, in the presence of their children. Thus, the Board member concluded, providing shelter guests the privilege of privacy behind closed doors only encouraged undesirable behaviours which ultimately hinder the families' transition into permanent housing.

When I asked a senior staff member, who had been with the organization during the Redwood Project and the transition into the permanent facility, what they had learned from the Redwood Project, the staff member answered:

> Oh, not having doors, for one, on the cubicles. We did not put doors on because of [Redwood], right?...Uhm, we learned that doors are not necessarily the best thing...As outreach we were the ones who were called in the middle of the night for emergencies, we were the ones dealing with the drinking and the drugs, cleaning out the rooms finding the needles, finding the crack pipes, moving the families and then finding more of the same...Uhm, there was lots of drinking, drugs, that were going on inside the building, inside the rooms.

Echoing the Board member's reasoning, the staff member argued that doors provided Redwood guests with the privacy to use drugs and alcohol and thus the decision was made not to repeat past mistakes and refrain from providing families with a private room in the Guest House's Family Shelter.[125]

During the *Growing Home* conference the Guest House Board member admitted that the unfortunate incidents that had occurred at the Redwood involved only a few families. However, based on the experience it was decided that no chances would be taken at the Family Shelter. While Natalie argued that she deserves some dignity until she has proven to be not trustworthy, the Board member maintained that not all shelter guests can be trusted and subsequently "everybody gets punished for the behaviour of a few bad apples."

In de-problematizing and justifying the absence of doors on the family's cubicles, staff did not only invoke the Guest House's past experience with the Redwood Project. Another staff member cited challenges encountered by the other family shelter in the city, which provides private rooms to its families:

---

[125] It is important to note, however, that the Redwood Project did not implement a zero-tolerance policy towards drug and alcohol use because one of the participating community partners objected to asserting that level of control over the sheltered families.

> The other night at another homeless shelter for families, I will not mention the name, police responded to a domestic at the shelter…One of the family members from upstairs called the police after yelling for staff for 20 minutes. The domestic escalated from name calling and shouting to yelling and screaming to threats getting closer to violence. Staff never knew it went on...A couple months ago a spouse stabbed her partner in the face with a pair of scissors behind their closed door, because they were arguing over drugs. That doesn't happen here. That's the kind of shit that happened at the [Redwood].

In light of past experience and current problems faced by the other family shelter, staff framed the absence of doors in the family floor as a safety issue. An open cubicle discourages guests "from doing whatever they're not supposed be doing as far as the rules are concerned." The no-door policy thus becomes a measure to keep the community safe, an enterprise that is challenging enough in the absence of doors. As a residential staff member said:

> We had some families in the beginning and we found drug paraphernalia up [on the family floor] like you wouldn't believe. Like we're lucky we don't get that now, but I found needles, found pills, found crack pipes upstairs, you know? And that's like with like no doors.

During the *Growing Home* conference the Guest House Board member explained that limited funding for the Family Shelter only allowed for the maintenance of a skeleton staff. The absence of doors, in addition to discouraging undesired behaviours, such as substance use, first and foremost facilitates staff's guest surveillance and rule enforcement seen as essential to maintain a safe and problem-free shelter environment. Moreover, the Board member argued, the no-door policy is actually beneficial to shelter guests, because staff can continually assess families' needs and thus families at all times receive the help and support they need without having to ask for it.

"Discomfort Creates the Foundation for Change"

Thus far, I have shown that shelter staff and administrators frequently invoked infrastructural stipulations and safety concerns, which had arisen in past and present closed-door shelters, to justify the Guest House's no-door policy. A final strand of reasoning frames the

absence of doors on shelter guests' cubicles as beneficial for families' transition into permanent housing, because the lack of privacy motivates them to move on. During the *Growing Home* conference, the Guest House Board member waved off criticism of the shelter's no-door policy by pointing out that it is important to keep in mind that the Guest House is an emergency shelter, not a home and as such it is not meant to be comfortable.

A residential staff member argued: "The point is not wanting to survive in a place like that very long. That's part of the aim of this [shelter] is [for families] not to become institutionalized." Consequently, as a residential staff supervisor reasoned, the shelter's no-door policy is a measure that "motivates families to get out because they want their own space." Likewise, a case worker argued:

> This isn't a residence. That was never the intention. And that's why we don't have doors on our cubicles. We do not want them to feel that this is too comfortable, that this is their home. This is a temporary measure and we'll do everything we can to get them into proper housing and get them the supports and resources they need. But we…they should not look at this as a residence and feel too comfortable about that.

Especially the last comment reflects a long standing concern of service providers that making services too easily and comfortably accessible only encourages dependency on these services. Or as Liebow put it, the notion is that "we mustn't make things too easy for them" as this would "just encourage their dependency" (Liebow 1993, 141). Liebow further points out that there is no empirical basis to the argument that easy access encourages dependency, but it "gives respectability to meanness in public policy and legitimizes harshness on the front lines" and all for the good of the poor (Liebow 1993, 142).

The Social Organization of Service Delivery

Liebow (1993) and Friedman (2000) note that shelter rules exist to guarantee safety for the residents and a minimal amount of order, regularity, and predictability. Many researchers, including myself, noted that shelter guests themselves seem to welcome shelter rules as

necessary and often called for strict enforcement of them. Lyon-Callo (2000) suggests that such calls are best understood as forms of self-regulation that are the product of internalized deficiency frameworks explaining homelessness. However, my interviews and observations suggest that they are better understood as demands for fairness, equality, and consistency.

Most shelter guests I interacted with were frustrated with what they perceived to be differential treatment of families and favoritism towards some. Thus the call for rules and rule enforcement can be understood as shelter residents' demands that all residents be treated equally, endowed with the same rights and obligations. Natalie, for example, explained: "I think there has to be rules to avoid total anarchy but if there's gonna be rules, I think they should be enforced for everybody." Similarly, Elaine pointed out:

> I see [some families] get special treatment here. Maybe it's because of what they're dealing with, but we are all dealing with the same thing, we are all homeless, we are all stressed out, you know, we all have to live in this place together, we're all going through the same thing, you know? It's not fair for you to take one family aside and give this family special treatment.

While shelter rules are deemed necessary and inevitable, their very nature often undermines any effort to deliver services in a dignified manner. As Martinbault (2009) points out, organizations like the Guest House tend to view their clients through a specific lens, which ultimately shapes how service are delivered. My discussion indicates that many shelter rules rest on assumptions about the problems of the shelter's guests. As I discussed in more detail in earlier in this chapter, the Guest House draws on both structural and individual explanatory frameworks when accounting for the persistence of family homelessness. I noted that in the context of service delivery, the Guest House emphasizes individual-level causes of family homelessness, pointing to particular individual deficiencies that cause family homelessness and if not addressed will prevent families from successfully re-entering housing. For example, curfews and the Guest

House's no-door policies were established in part to control shelter guests who otherwise might engage in "unproductive behaviours" such as substance use or family violence. These observations are consistent with those made at other shelters (see, for example, Friedman 2000; Liebow 1993).

That said, as I discussed in this chapter, shelter rules are developed in a specific context and often have a long history of generation, implementation, modification, and, at times, abandonment. I have argued that the implementation of seemingly arbitrary, unfair, or dehumanizing rules is not necessarily rooted in individual ill-will. In fact, almost everybody I interacted with from residential staff to Board members avowed that they deeply care and had nothing but the best of intentions to make the life of Calgary's homeless families a little better and a bit more bearable. However, as one shelter guest so candidly pointed out, "The road to hell is paved with good intentions."

Operational realities are, in part, shaped by stipulations external to the organization and individual rule-makers and rule-enforcers. Funding realities, for example, fundamentally shape service delivery (Liebow 1993). In case of the Guest House, government funding or the lack thereof limits the physical layout of the family floor. Furthermore, with the acceptance of government funding, service delivery at the Guest House is shaped by government mandates, rules, regulations and accountability requirements. Finally, it is important to keep in mind that organizations such as the Guest House do not operate in an ideological vacuum and dominant explanatory frameworks in accounting for homelessness shape organizational understandings of the problem at hand. Illustrating all three points, in an email to all staff, a supervisor announced:

> [The Guest House's] grassroots methodology is at times challenged because of what we're forced to participate in and/or receive because operationally, that's what's necessary to keep us afloat and open to the clients that need us the most…I guess one thing I want to make sure everybody

> knows here is that it's important we remember the clientele we serve through all these changes. That through the politics of the "homeless serving business," which often is what it can feel like when government funding takes a forefront, that it's essential we all remember that what makes [the Guest House] unique is that we're on the frontlines, and that we meet our families/seniors for the first time when they have reached their rock bottoms; when they have lost everything around them due to choices that have contributed to their situation…We're all realists and know that family homelessness is not going away, contradictory to the "10 year plan to end homelessness."

Thus, the genealogy of such rules has to be taken into account to fully understand them; the Guest House's no-door policy is one example. At the same time it is important to keep in mind that irrespective of their origin, existing shelter rules fundamentally shape how staff go about their daily work of service delivery. They define the universe of possible and impossible practices and despite assertions to the contrary, create power differentials between service providers and service users, which in turn shape the day-to-day experiences of sheltered homeless families. That said, shelter rules, institutional policies and procedures, operational stipulations, and ideological lenses never fully determine the day-to-day practices of shelter staff. Instead they become interpretive resources that staff strategically draw on when going about their work of service delivery. The next chapter will illustrate in more detail the complex processes through which shelter rules are enacted, using as an example the admission process.

CHAPTER VIII: THE MAKING AND UNMAKING OF "THE HOMELESS FAMILY"

It is our belief that many of the answers to the problems surrounding homelessness can be found in the data that is being collected.

—Russ Cormier & Mathew D. Simmonds, HUD New England Regional HMIS Conference

Chapter IV provides an account of how families from various backgrounds lost their homes and the specific circumstances that brought them to the Guest House. This chapter focuses on the social processes that transform homeless families seeking shelter into shelter residents. My account is based on various shelter documents, interviews with staff members and guests, and my observations throughout my role as residential staff member. I begin my discussion with a perplexing observation at the onset of my fieldwork. Contrary to the prevalence of single mothers among family shelter residents discussed in the existing literature, I encountered an unexpectedly large share of dual-parent families at the Guest House.

Due to the discrepancy between expected and observed characteristics of sheltered homeless families I came across early on in my research, I became increasingly interested in the social processes that shape who we find in family shelters in the first place. First, I will discuss institutional processes, such as formal admission criteria and semi-formal amendments of those criteria. Secondly, I will outline organizational stipulations, such as operational policies and funding provisions that shape the Guest House's client selection process. Next, I will turn to a discussion of Guest House staff's institutionally conditioned definitional practices that make visible the various institutional processes at work in the shelter's admission practices. I will then turn to a discussion of institutional record-keeping practices. I will conclude this chapter with a discussion of the implications of socially organized client-selection mechanisms at work at the Guest House. I argue that our current state of knowledge pertaining to family homelessness is fundamentally shaped by the practices discussed in this chapter. Such practices thus have to be

taken into account in the generation and interpretation of shelter-based information about homeless families.

A Perplexing Observation

Before going into the field I spent months reviewing the existing literature on family homelessness. Research in the area is predominantly quantitative in nature and preoccupied with examining the characteristics of homeless families. The research community almost unanimously agrees that the vast majority of homeless families are headed by lone mothers, who are typically in their early twenties and accompanied by two or three children under the age of five (Bassuk et al. 1996; Kraus and Dowling 2003; McChesney 1995; Novac, Brown, and Bourbonnais 1996; Nuñez and Fox 1999).

In a paper reviewing the literature on children in homeless families, Haber and Toro, for example, state: "Families that are homeless *tend to* be headed by women, and the active presence of an adult male in the family appears to be uncommon" (2004, 126, emphasis added). Similarly, in a review of the literature on parenting and homelessness, Paquette and Bassuk affirm that "the *overwhelming majority* of homeless families are headed by a single mother" (2009, 294, emphasis added). Reviewing the literature on women and homelessness, Novac, Brown and Bourbonnais note that there "is almost no Canadian research on families or homeless women with dependent children,"[126] but that findings on "homeless families from the Unites States show that *almost all* homeless families are headed by women" (1996, 17, emphasis added). Similarly, a recent report on the state of homelessness in Canada states: "Homeless families are diverse in

[126] For a similar assessment, see Kraus and Dowling (2003).

structure, with some including two parents, and many headed by a single parent (usually female)" (Gaetz et al. 2013, 27).

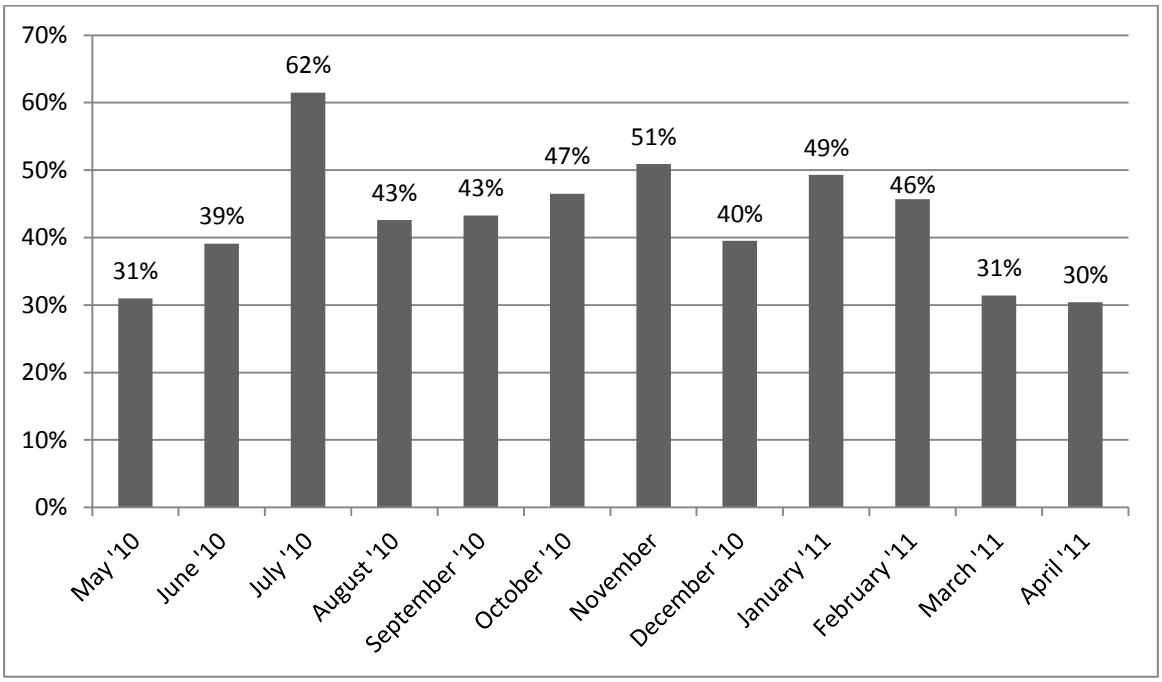
The exact share of lone mothers among homeless parents varies from study to study and typically ranges around the 80% mark. Nuñez and Fox (1999), for example, found that of the 777 homeless families they had sampled nationally, not less than 95% were headed by a mother. The authors point out that about a third of the shelters from which participants were recruited did not serve men. However, the authors quickly assert, "eligibility requirements did not have a significant impact on the survey sample" as the share of male heads of household increased only marginally when women-only shelters were excluded (ibid., 290).

While little is known about family homelessness in the Canadian context, the few existing studies report results similar to those observed in the U.S. (Kraus and Dowling 2003; Waegemakers Schiff 2007). The framing of family homelessness as a single-mother phenomenon has become what Fleck (1979) called the dominant "thought style" of the "thought collective" that is the scientific community, policy makers, and service providers. Consequently, most research in the area now focuses on homeless mothers and their children.

Based on what I had learned from the literature, I expected to find predominantly single mothers with infants and toddlers in their care living at the Guest House's Family Shelter. That, however, was not the case. A few days into my fieldwork I requested the Guest House's daily statistics, which provide key information about its residents, including family composition. The so-called "stats" confirmed my observation, namely that the Family Shelter housed a considerably higher share of dual-parent families than the existing literature would suggest (Kraus and Dowling 2003; Waegemakers Schiff 2007).

I calculated the share of dual-parent families over a 12-month period of time, from May 2010 to April 2011.[127] In May 2010, an average of one third (31%) of families housed through the Family Shelter was headed by two parents. The following month, the share of dual-parent families rose to 39%. The subsequent month, something rather astounding happened. In July 2010, on average, nearly two thirds (62%) of families staying at the Family Shelter were dual-parent families. In August, the share of dual-parent families dropped to an average of 43%. Of the families staying at the Guest House's Family Shelter between May 2010 and April 2011, an average of 43% was headed by two parents. Figure 7 provides an overview of the share of dual-parent families at the Guest House between May 2010 and April 2011.

Figure 7: Share of Dual-Parent Families at the Guest House, May 2010-April 2011



[127] The share of dual parent families for each month was calculated by computing monthly averages based on daily statistics.

It is worth noting that the share of dual-parent families fluctuates quite considerably from month to month, and at times from day to day.[128] This fluctuation indicates that the observed characteristics of sheltered homeless families are not static, but vary over time, which undermines the suitability of cross-sectional research designs that take a demographic snapshot of the shelter population at a certain point in time. Research conducted at the Guest House over the month of May 2010 would lead to different conclusions about the characteristics of homeless families than research conducted in July of the same year.

The comparatively high share of dual-parent families housed at the Family Shelter is nothing short of astounding in light of the research community's almost unanimous portrayal of "family homelessness as primarily a single parent phenomenon" (Jacobs 1994, 400). Due to the discrepancy between expected and observed characteristics of sheltered homeless families I came across early on in my research, I became increasingly interested in the social processes that shape who we find in family shelters in the first place. Such considerations are important for several reasons.

First, family homelessness is considered a mostly invisible phenomenon, as many homeless families turn to shelters only after they have exhausted all other options, such as staying with family and friends, doubling up, or sleeping in abandoned buildings and their cars (Choi and Snyder 1999a; Eberle et al. 2001; Kraus and Dowling 2003; Meadows-Oliver 2003; Seltser and Miller 1993). The vast majority of studies on homeless families, including my own, are grounded in a literal understanding of homelessness, focusing on families that are absolutely

[128] I can only speculate as to why the share of dual-parent families fluctuated so drastically over the course of the year, and since it is not of central concern in this chapter, I will leave it at that.

homeless (Haber and Toro 2004).[129] Homeless shelters constitute a logical research site selection, because homeless families become visible often only in their interaction with service providers. Consequently, the vast majority of research on homeless families is conducted at emergency shelters and transitional housing facilities (Haber and Toro 2004; McChesney 1995; Paquette and Bassuk 2009; Waegemakers Schiff 2007; Weinreb and Rossi 1995). However, only a few researchers have examined the social processes that shape who we find in shelters in the first place (for a notable exception, see, for example, Jacobs 1994; Loseke 1992; Marvasti 2003; Rossi 1994; Spencer and McKinney 1997; Susser 1993; Weinreb and Rossi 1995).

Secondly, in Canada, the recent emergence of municipal and provincial plans to reduce and prevent homelessness sparked interest in shelter-based data, as "research points to shelter data as an important source of information on homelessness" (Pye nd, 1). However, a number of researchers have problematized the precarious nature of such data (see, for example, Garfinkel 1984; Marvasti 2003; Snow, Baker, and Leon 1988). Marvasti, for example, points to the shortcomings of institutionally grounded data as they often "fail to capture the nuances" of the phenomenon under investigation (2003, 84). Shelters are "organizations that have people-processing functions" and subsequent shelter statistics are social products that "translate events into recordings of events which can be filed, stored, and manipulated (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995, 172). Like other statistics, shelter statistics "help create understandings about types of peoples and put people into populations to be managed, governed, and normalized" (Lyon-Callo 2004, 73).

---

[129] Absolute homelessness is frequently defined as "Individuals living in the street with no physical shelter of their own, including those who spend their nights in emergency shelters" (Gardiner and Cairns 2002). For a similar definition, see, for example, McChesney and Young (1995).

Consequently, institutionally generated data cannot necessarily be read as a representation of reality, but are better understood as artifacts that are produced by socially organized practices, which have to be taken into account when interpreting such data (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995). In addition, institutionally generated data produce particular knowledges, types of people, and social hierarchies by highlighting "differences between people" (Lyon-Callo 2004, 73). Using the Guest House as an example, I will now turn to a discussion of the complex, interrelated institutional and social processes that transform shelter-seeking candidates into shelter residents. Such processes inadvertently shape the characteristics of the shelter's population, and subsequently the information generated through as well as the conclusions drawn from shelter-based research.

Institutional Processes

Homeless shelters not only provide programs and services to the homeless population. By way of their admission criteria, they also define who is and who is not granted access to their services. Shelter admission criteria thus constitute an (arguably arbitrary) institutional selection mechanism which actively shapes, to some degree, the characteristics of a shelter's residents (Jacobs 1994; Rossi 1994; Susser 1993; Weinreb and Rossi 1995).

Access to the Guest House's Family Shelter program and all related services and resources is granted only to shelter-seeking candidates to whom shelter staff has assigned "family status." As described in more detail in Chapter VI, upon arrival, shelter-seeking candidates are met by a Guest House staff member who "will screen guests to determine their status (i.e. single or family)" (Guest House 2008d, 1), and thereby establish whether shelter-seeking candidates are eligible for the Family Shelter program. The screening process is guided

by the Guest House's institutional definition of the family, found in its guest handbooks and operational manuals. For "operational purposes," the Guest House defines "family" as follows:

> An adult(s) with legal custody and/or is the legal guardian of a child(ren) under the age of 18 and has that child currently living with him/her. The number of children under the age of 18 is unlimited however there cannot be more than 2 adults who fill the role of parents. Any person who is 18 years or older and does not have legal custody of a child currently living with him/her will be classified as a single individual regardless of previous family status (Guest House 2008d, 1).

According to the definition above, in order to be eligible for services through the Guest House's Family Shelter, adults have to be accompanied by at least one dependent child under the age of 18 legally in their care. Parents are typically required to produce some form of identification (such as birth certificates) to prove that the children in their care are their offspring. Adult caretakers accompanied by children that biologically are not their own have to provide proof of legal guardianship or a custody agreement (Guest House 2008d).

As Gubrium (1987) points out, understandings of what constitutes a family are typically embedded in organizational contexts. Such contexts, however, are subject to change over time. The Guest House's operational definition of what constitutes a family has evolved considerably since the Family Shelter first opened its doors in October 2008. Modifications occurred mostly in response to an increasing number of families who did not neatly fit initial admission criteria. One such modification pertains to the age of children.

Initially, families that included children over the age of 18 were not accommodated at the Family Shelter as a family unit, but had to separate. As specified in the Guest House's operational definition of the family provided above, "Any person who is 18 years or older and does not have legal custody of a child currently living with him/her will be classified as a single individual regardless of previous family status" (Guest House 2008d, 1). Children over the age of

18 were therefore classified as "single" and, consequently, the adult child was sheltered through the Church Program while the rest of the family was assigned a cubicle at the Family Shelter. If the family preferred not to be separated, they had to seek shelter elsewhere. The following excerpt from an interview I conducted with a staff member shortly after the Guest House launched its on-site Family Shelter program in fall 2008 illustrates how the organization's operational definition of the family initially shaped the definitional work of the staff during the intake.

> If a new family arrives, usually my first question is 'How old is your oldest child?', because I know that's a big problem here. So, if they're under 18, I'm like ok thank god, we can move past that part, the whole family does qualify to go upstairs…Some families have kids who are 19 years old and even though in that family that's still a kid to them, but to the rules that's not a child anymore.

As an increasing number of families accompanied by adult children, that is, children over the age of 18, turned to the Guest House for help, management decided to abandon its practice of sheltering adult children through the Church Program. As a senior staff member recalled,

> Prior to a couple months ago (the definition of family) didn't really involve adult children. So now, we're serving some adult kids upstairs with their family units and prior to that we were putting them in the churches and then we thought: Who are we to do that really, and tell a family they need to be separated? If this is an adult child of your family unit, then we're gonna consider it a family upstairs, you know.

A second modification of the Family Shelter's admission criteria pertains to family structure. The Guest House's operational definition of the family is essentially geared towards nuclear family units as "there cannot be more than 2 adults who fill the role of parents" (Guest House 2008d, 1). However, a considerable share of the Guest House's residents are Aboriginal and, as a senior staff member pointed out, the family structure of Aboriginal families is unique in the sense that it does not correspond with mainstream understandings of the family as a nuclear unit headed by two adults (Sweeney 2010). Aboriginal family forms, have long been

characterized by greater diversity than commonly found in Canadian society (Gardiner and Cairns 2002). Although nuclear family units are on the rise in Aboriginal communities, many families are organized around extended kinship networks as well as "families of the heart," voluntary communities based on norms of "sharing and caring" (Castellano 2002, 23). Based on the Guest House's operational definition of the family, shelter-seeking Aboriginal families deviating from the nuclear family model were initially not accommodated. However, as an increasing number of such families sought shelter at the Guest House, the organization began to reconsider its understanding of who constitutes family. As one staff member explained:

> We definitely had to take a look at grandmothers, and aunts, and uncles, because a lot of our Aboriginal families will come to us with like 13 people in them, right? This is my brother in law, this is my aunt. We can't do that obviously, but we can bend and be flexible according to experience and uhm along the way really it's learning for us, too.[130]

Based on my observations, the admission of so-called "unique families" was not restricted to Aboriginal families. Instead, the challenges Aboriginal family structures presented for Guest House staff's admission decisions broadened the Guest House's understanding of what constitutes a family. Consequently, I encountered a wide range of family forms at the Guest House, including multigenerational families, extended families, grandparent caregivers, and adult caretakers raising their relatives' or friends' children with or without formal custody agreements. To my knowledge, such family forms, however, have not been paid any attention in research pertaining to homeless families.

Both modifications discussed above, albeit common practice after three years of operation, are not (yet) reflected in a written amendment of the Guest House's official

---

[130] In 2009, the year after the *de facto* broadening of the operational definition of the family, the share of Aboriginal families among Guest House residents rose to 60% (Guest House 2009). Whether the increase in Aboriginal families housed at the Family Shelter was facilitated by a broadened understanding of what constitutes family is a matter of speculation, however.

operational definition of the family, which is still found in its original form in all operational manuals. Instead, modifications become visible solely in the staff's practical day-to-day application of that definition.

The Guest House's inclusive admission policies explain, in part, why the demographic profile of Family Shelter residents markedly deviates from that described in the existing literature. According to Waegemakers Schiff (2004a), less than 10% of emergency family shelters in Canada and the northern U.S. provide services to families that include male partners and male adolescents (see also, Kraus and Dowling 2003). In a review of the U.S. family shelter system, Weinreb and Rossi (1995) found that many family shelters categorically exclude men, who are then forced to seek shelter at single-adult facilities. Other shelters require proof of marriage or paternity in order for accompanying male partners to be admitted to a family shelter. Furthermore, boys (less often girls) over a certain age are often not welcome at family shelters, forcing shelter-seeking parents to leave their teenage children with relatives or temporarily place them in foster care. In addition, most family shelters impose strict visitation rules, limiting the amount of time separated family members get to spend with each other, which can further strain already fragile relationships, and thereby contribute to family dissolution (Kraus and Dowling 2003). Consequently, when families become homeless, family dissolution often follows (Shinn and Weitzman 1996; Susser 1993).

In short, the vast majority of family shelters are geared towards women and their children, often excluding male partners and (male) adolescents over a certain age, thereby imposing the female-headed family model (Susser 1993). Thus, the observed absence of male

partners in the majority of homeless families is likely an artifact produced by shelter admission criteria that have systematically "defined fathers out of the picture" (Susser 1993, 279)[131].

To my knowledge, no research has systematically explored the relationship between shelter admission criteria and shelter residents' characteristics. Since the vast majority of research on homeless families is shelter-based, researchers are likely to generate a particular kind of knowledge about "the homeless family" and such knowledge "is strongly conditioned by how shelters select their clients" (Weinreb and Rossi 1995, 87). Results of my fieldwork presented thus far suggest that shelters' admission policies help shape the population they serve. That said formal admission criteria are merely one piece of the puzzle, as I will discuss below.

I will turn to the discussion of the staff's day-to-day definitional work later in this chapter. For now, I will continue with my discussion of institutional client-selection mechanisms that extend beyond formal admission criteria and reflect organizational stipulations, such as operational policies and realities, and funding provisions.

Organizational and Funding Stipulations

The Guest House's operational definition of the family informs admission decisions as it outlines the formal criteria shelter-seeking candidates have to meet in order to be granted family status. The latter in turn is the *sine qua non* for admission to the Family Shelter. However, an agency's clientele selection is further informed by operational policies that might systematically restrict shelter access for certain shelter-seeking candidates. In a review of the U.S. family shelter system, Weinreb and Rossi (1995) found that nearly half of all programs did not provide

[131] Other researchers have argued that the formative character of shelter policies on family characteristics is purely speculative (see, for example, Jacobs 1994).

services to individuals who use alcohol or drugs, for example. Other shelters categorically excluded individuals with mental or physical health problems, large families, and parents accompanied by male adolescents. Furthermore, once admitted to the shelter, clients are subject to a host of rules and regulations, the violation of which might result in a discharge from services (Burt 2006; Jacobs, Little, and Almeida 1993; Weinreb and Rossi 1995).

Despite the changing nature of the Guest House's operational definition of the family in an effort to accommodate diverse shelter-seeking candidates, modifications find their limits in the organization's operational realities. Moreover, there continue to be certain families and/or family members who meet the formal admission criteria and yet are systematically excluded from accessing the shelter.

As discussed in the previous chapter, due to the Guest House's strict zero-tolerance policy when it comes to the use of alcohol or drugs shelter-seeking candidates under the influence of drugs or alcohol are systematically excluded from receiving services. Secondly, the Guest House 5:30 pm curfew, excludes shelter-seeking candidates regularly working non-standard hours from accessing the Family Shelter, even if they meet the shelter's formal admission criteria. Finally, families housed through the Family Shelter are required to comply with an institutionally defined code of conduct in order to receive services. For example:

> [The Guest House] will not accept any abuse to staff or volunteers. This includes (but does not stop at): swearing, disrespect, lying, yelling, manipulation, physical, emotional or verbal abuse, making forceful or unreasonable demands, property damage, breaking rules, arguing, threats. Abuse in any form will have consequences and may result in either a temporary or permanent bar from [the Guest House] (Guest House 2008d, 3)

Those not willing or able to comply with the institutionally imposed code of conduct are subject to a temporary or permanent bar from services, despite fitting formal institutional admission requirements.

In addition to operational stipulations, funding provisions shape the admission process and thus the demographic profile of shelter guests. Weinreb and Rossi (1995) point out that the vast majority of family shelters und the United States are non-profit organizations that rely heavily on a patchwork of funding from various sources. Most of the shelters' direct funding is provided by private funders, religious groups, and, to a much lesser extent, government agencies (see also Burt et al. 1999).

As discussed in Chapters V and VI, prior to the acceptance of government funding, the Guest House's budget depended predominantly on its fund-raising efforts, and its always scarce resources had to be allocated highly selectively. The operational definition of the family in this context served as a rather stringent guideline for the admission of new families, and shelter-seeking candidates who did not neatly fit that definition were generally not granted "family status." Such practice mirrors the observations of other researchers, who have posited that the scarcer an organization's resources, the more stringent the selection criteria applied in the client-selection process (see, for example, Jacobs 1994; Spencer and McKinney 1997).

The organization's continual growth and the acquisition of a permanent facility in 2008 dramatically changed the Guest House's funding needs, which ultimately led to the acceptance of government funding in 2008. Since then, the organization's financial resources are shaped, in part, by the utilization of its services, as government funding is allocated on a per-capita-per-diem basis. Now, the Guest House's administration has a vested interest in keeping the shelter at capacity, as only full shelter beds generate funding for the organization. Consequently, Guests House staff strategically broaden the operational definition of who constitutes family at times the shelter is not running at capacity. The strategic broadening of who is considered a "family" for operational purposes renders a larger pool of shelter-seeking candidates eligible for services, thus

filling shelter beds and generating funding for the Guest House. Once the Family Shelter is at capacity, however, staff will often interpret the operational definition of the family narrowly to restrict shelter-seeking candidates' access to the Family Shelter. The broadening and contraction of the operational definition of the family, however, become visible solely in the definitional work of the Guest House staff, a description of which I will now turn to.

Institutionally Conditioned Definitional Practices

The socially organized institutional processes outlined thus far in and of themselves do not transform shelter-seeking candidates into shelter residents; staff members do. The selective, client-producing processes at work cannot be traced back solely to formally established admission criteria, operational policies and funding stipulations. While they suggest organizationally preferred interpretations and practices that structure the staff's work, they never fully determine it (Miller 1997). Thus, the Guest House's operational definition of the family and pertinent contextual contingencies are best understood as broad guidelines that inform staff's decision-making processes as to which shelter-seeking candidates to admit to the Guest House's Family Shelter program at any given time.

As Spencer and McKinney (1997) demonstrate, in light of scarce organizational resources and ever-increasing caseloads, social workers strategically use intake interviews to selectively allocate resources to service-seeking candidates. Likewise, Marvasti (2002) explores the interpretive practices that produce "service-worthy" and "service-unworthy" categories of shelter-seeking candidates during intake interviews. Marvasti further illustrates how shelter policies "help construct various types of clients not solely based on their needs, but also in relation to organizational contingencies and necessities" (2003, 61). Similarly, Loseke (1992)

explores how “the battered woman” is socially constructed in a shelter for women fleeing domestic abuse. For the institutional purpose of client selection, social workers’ interpretive practices bring about classifications of women turning to the shelter as “battered” and “not battered,” the former being appropriate and latter inappropriate for resource allocation.

Definitional Authority

Nearly every day, various shelter-seeking groups defining themselves as family arrive at the Guest House. One central aspect of the admission process is to determine which of those groups constitute a family in the institutional sense, as only those are deemed eligible to receive services through the Family Shelter. However, such practices cannot be reduced to *ad hoc* decisions on part of the shelter staff. Instead, definitional flexibility is embedded in a specific institutional context. The shelter thus becomes an “organized context in which matters of membership become topical” and assigning family status to shelter-seeking groups of individuals is organized vis-à-vis the practical stipulations relevant in the institutional context in which such assignments occur (Gubrium 1987, 30).

Determining service eligibility is a complex process during which “organizationally conditioned” interpretations of the family prevail (Gubrium and Holstein 1990, 117). Whether a group of individuals seeking shelter defines itself as a family is secondary in determining their family status. While definitional authority lies solely with the shelter staff, whether a group of individuals constitute a family or not is often a fluid and contested matter among staff. The following two examples illustrate the definitional authority and (in)flexibility on the part of the Guest House staff in determining the family status of shelter-seeking candidates.

Each morning, before the beginning of my shift, I would review the guest list, also called "the sheets" – an Excel spread sheet listing the names of each cubicle's residents, the relationship of family members, age of the children, family members' allergies, medication, or medical conditions and other pertinent comments – to check whether any new families had arrived since my last shift. If I had some spare time, I would quickly read over new arrivals' intake summaries, dispersed via email to all staff members, and introduce myself to the new families. One particularly busy Saturday morning on which I had no time to review the latest emails, I introduced myself to a family of four that had been admitted the day before.

The family consisted of a married couple, their six-year old daughter and a woman in her late sixties, who I assumed to be the grandmother. I had encountered other multigenerational families at the shelter before, so the family's composition was by no means unusual. When I returned the next day, however, the older woman had disappeared from the family floor and "the sheets." I asked another staff member what had happened to the woman and was told that it had turned out that the older woman was not a family member after all, but a friend of the family, and was thus asked to leave.

I reviewed the emails and learned that a case worker, who had just started working at the Guest House, had admitted the family, but listed the older woman as a "friend" in her description of the family's composition. The next day, a supervisor questioned why the worker had admitted the family along with a family friend to the family floor. The case worker responded via email, pointing out that the four of them had lived together prior to coming to Calgary and had plans to share an apartment in the future, so she thought it would be permissible to treat them as a family unit and house them together on the family floor.

Although the group described themselves to be "like family" and the case worker in charge of the intake had initially accepted their self-definition as a family, the supervisor pointed out that the older woman would not be able to stay on the family floor, because she is not an "actual" member of that family as she is not related by blood. Despite the group's plea to make an exception, the supervisor asked that the "friend" be transitioned from the family floor to the Church Program. The woman, in the process, lost her family status and was re-classified as "single," which now limited her access to resources provided by the Guest House.

Around the same time, a family of six arrived at the shelter. That family included a divorced couple and their three teenage children, as well as the mother's new partner. Although the official definition states that "there cannot be more than 2 adults who fill the role of parents," (Guest House 2008c, 1) this "unique family" [132] received family status and was admitted to the Family Shelter. However, the supervisor advised that the family's composition would make it "highly inappropriate" to accommodate the entire family in a single cubicle.

As the first examples aptly demonstrate, individual and institutional definitions of the family at times conflict. Moreover, the first example further illustrates that institutional definitions are subject to interpretation by various staff members. While the case worker conducting the initial intake accepted the group's self-definition as a family, the supervisor subsequently overturned the case worker's decision, drawing on kinship as a constituting element of a family, even though that criterion is not captured in the shelter's operational definition of the family.

---

[132] The category "unique family" is a purely statistical entity, which denotes families that do not neatly fit the formal operational definition of the family, such as multigenerational families or parents accompanied by adult children only. I will come back to the "unique family" as an operational category later in this chapter, where I discuss the Guest House's record keeping practices.

In the second example, however, neither the case worker nor the supervisor challenged the group's claim to be a family, even though the group's composition did not neatly fit the organization's operational definition of the family. While the first group was accompanied by a fictive grandmother, the second group included an additional parent, a social father in addition to two biological parents. The family was framed as a "trio-parent family" with all three adults "parenting together three teenagers."

Over the last few decades, fundamental shifts in parenthood and partnership patterns have contributed to the formation of new family forms, such as step- or blended families, which are increasingly commonplace (Stewart 2007; Sweeney 2010). Based on my observations, the Guest House has considerably broadened its understanding of the family over the last couple of years. However, kinship and romantic relationship continue to be core decisive factors in admission decisions pertaining to families that do not neatly fall within the confines of the organization's operational definition of the family.

Defining Homeless Families Into Being and the Family Shelter Into Capacity

Staff members have considerable discretion in determining whether shelter-seeking candidates are eligible for admission to the Family Shelter. In fact, the *Family Expectations* handbooks explicitly states that "staff will use their discretion to broadening [the operational definition of the family] as needed" (Guest House 2008c, 1). As discussed above, with changes in funding provision, the shelter administration now has a vested interest in keeping the shelter at capacity. The *de facto* broadening of the Guest House's operational definition of the family to include adult children and "non-traditional" family forms discussed above contributed to an increase in shelter-seeking candidates eligible for admission to the Family Shelter. Another key

strategy was the broadening of the operational definition of the family to include "families to be," namely pregnant women and their accompanying partners.

When the Family Shelter opened in 2008, pregnant women not accompanied by dependent children had to be at least eight months along in their pregnancy in order to be considered for family status.[133] However, a few months into my fieldwork, I noticed a sudden increase in the number of pregnant women without dependent children in their care (and, if present, their partners) being admitted to the family floor prior to the eight-month cut-off. In March 2010, the shelter management sent an email to all shelter staff members, pointing out that the Guest House had become increasingly lenient in their admission criteria, evident by the increased admission of pregnant women prior to the eight-month cut-off, which was considered a rather unusual practice. Pointing out that the Guest House received government funding on a per-capita-per-diem basis, management explained that admitting "families to be" constituted a strategic move to avoid empty cubicles. Thus, in an attempt to keep shelter beds filled, the eight-month requirement was suspended and pregnant women at any stage of their pregnancy could now be assigned a cubicle on the family floor.[134]

However, shelter management emphasized that pregnant women and their partners were to be considered for accommodation on the family floor only if sufficient space was available as families accompanied by dependent (minor) children had to remain a priority in the allocation of shelter beds. Furthermore, management emphasized that pregnant women were required to

---

[133] A written justification for the practice of admitting pregnant women only after the eight-month mark was nowhere to be found and Guest House staff would just nonchalantly point out that the policy had been adopted from the old program when families were still housed through the Church Program.

[134] A few months later, at a time when the Family Shelter was at capacity, shelter administration decided that two pregnant women with no dependent children or accompanying partners could reasonably be expected to share a cubicle to maximize the utilization of the shelter's space.

vacate their cubicle and temporarily transition to the Church Program when the Family Shelter was at capacity and a family with dependent children arrived. The transition to the Church Program, however, would not affect their family status, merely the mode of their accommodation.

In addition to the criterion of cubicle availability, pregnant women have to provide a valid pregnancy confirmation in order to be granted family status. What constitutes a valid pregnancy confirmation remains a contested issue at the Guest House. Typically staff members request a written, current doctor's note bearing the name of the expecting mother and the due date. If such confirmation cannot be provided at the time of the intake, the pregnant woman, and, if applicable, her partner will be assigned a cubicle on the family floor nonetheless. However, the pregnant woman's family status is contingent upon producing a valid pregnancy confirmation and can be revoked if such confirmation is not provided in a timely manner.[135]

When the *de facto* policy change regarding pregnant women was announced, the Guest House management indicated that it would work on a written policy outlining the exact procedures to be followed if a pregnant woman had to be transitioned from the family floor to the Church Program for capacity reasons. Management pointed out that such a document would be necessary to protect the organization in case of objections to their practices. A written policy would also institute a formal eligibility order in the context of resource allocation, prioritizing shelter-seeking families accompanied by dependent children over pregnant women. However, to date, neither the practice of granting family status to pregnant women and, if present, their

[135] Initially, women claiming to be pregnant, but who could not provide valid pregnancy confirmation, were routinely housed on the family floor. However, when a number of them suddenly disappeared from the shelter when pressed for written confirmation of their pregnancy, the Guest House modified its practices. The Guest House now routinely requires a valid pregnancy confirmation *before* admitting expecting mothers to the Family Shelter, irrespective of "how pregnant they look."

accompanying partners, or the guidelines specifying transition procedures for pregnant women in time of over-capacity are captured in writing in any of the organization's written manuals.

Defining Families Off the Floor

As Guest House staff strategically expand the definition of "the family" to fill vacant cubicles, they also deliberately invoke a narrow understanding of who constitutes family at times the Family Shelter is near or at capacity. A contracted interpretation of what constitutes family is utilized to limit access to Guest House services and to define shelter guests off the family floor, making an already occupied cubicle available to a new family considered in greater need of shelter space than the current resident(s) of a certain cubicle.[136] Just as with the strategic expansion of the operational definition of the family, its contraction cannot be reduced to *ad hoc* decisions on part of the shelter staff either, but has to be viewed in the context of the shelter's operational stipulations.

At times the shelter is at capacity, families admitted to the Family Shelter under a broadened definition of what constitutes family are frequently transitioned off the family floor when a family with dependent, minor children arrives. The following example illustrates the complex definitional processes involved assigning family status to families who do not neatly fit the Guest House's formal operational definition of the family. They further demonstrate how that definition can be strategically contracted when shelter beds are needed for other shelter-seeking

[136] It is important to keep in mind, however, that shelter guests required to leave the family floor to make room for a family considered in higher need of a cubicle often are offered a priority bed in the Guest House's Church Program. Furthermore, they do not necessarily lose their family status at this point and thus still have access to all resources available to those with family status, except a bed on the family floor. In shelter statistics they continue to appear as a family unless they choose to leave the Guest House altogether after being transitioned off the family floor. Finally, should they decide to stay at the Guest House, they might be transitioned from the Church Program back to the Family Shelter as soon as a cubicle becomes available.

candidates considered in greater need by shelter staff, parents accompanied by dependent children, for example.

During one of my shifts, a Saturday, Martha and her partner Mike arrived at the Guest House. I had seen the couple a few times during the Church Program intake, which they had been utilizing for about a year. Even though they always signed up as a couple for the Church Program and defined themselves as a family when prompted, they were not eligible for a cubicle on the family floor as they had no dependent children in their care and were thus classified as "single." That particular day, however, Martha came with a referral from the Calgary Pregnancy Centre in hand, stating that she was four months pregnant. Proudly, Martha shared the ultrasound pictures she had obtained earlier that week. Since no case worker was on-site that day, I conducted the medical intake with the couple, following routine procedures.

First, at the time of the couple's arrival, the admission of pregnant women at any stage in the pregnancy was generally permissible as long as there was sufficient space. Secondly, by checking the previous night's guest list, I confirmed that a cubicle was available on the family floor, so I knew I could assign the couple a cubicle on the family floor. Martha's pregnancy thus changed the couple's organizational status from "single" to "family," which provided them with immediate access to the Family Shelter and all pertinent resources. It is important to note, however, that the discovery of Martha's pregnancy would not have made a difference prior to the Guest House's *de facto* policy changes pertaining to pregnant women, as Martha and Mike would only have received family status had Martha been eight months along in her pregnancy.

I filled out the medical forms, which document family members' names, dates of birth, medical conditions and required medications, as well as allergies. I photocopied the couple's IDs and Martha's Calgary Pregnancy Centre referral, put them in a folder along with the medical

forms, and left the folder on the desk of the frontline manager, who would assign them a primary and a secondary case worker on Monday. Two days later, Martha and Mike met their assigned case workers who conducted a formal intake, during which they asked Martha to obtain a "valid," that is, doctor-issued pregnancy confirmation, immediately in order to remain on the family floor. Martha produced the referral from the Calgary Pregnancy Centre and presented her ultrasound pictures, which specified the name of the expecting mother, and the date of the examination. However, the case worker deemed the provided documentation as insufficient confirmation of her pregnancy. Within days Martha returned with the requested document, a written doctor's note stating that she was expecting a child.

One night, Martha asked a residential staff member to call an ambulance as she believed she was having a miscarriage. The residential staff observed her to be "quiet," "upset" and "disengaged" upon her return from the hospital. The next morning, Martha was summoned to speak to her primary case worker, who indicated that she would no longer be able to stay on the family floor now that she had had a miscarriage. Martha, in response, stated that she was still pregnant, which confused the case worker, who then requested another up-to-date pregnancy confirmation. Martha pointed out that she was working during the day and thus would obtain a pregnancy confirmation as soon as she "got around to it."

A couple of days later she was confronted by her case worker who requested that she obtain a doctor-issued validation of her pregnancy without further delay. Martha pointed out that it was already late in the afternoon and if she went to the clinic at this point, she would miss the Guest House's 5:30 pm curfew. She suggested that she would go to the clinic the very next morning instead. However, the case worker advised her to go to the clinic immediately as she would not be allowed to return to the family floor that night without a valid pregnancy

confirmation in hand. The case worker provided the on-duty staff with the date of Martha's previous doctor's note to ensure she would not recycle the old document, instructed staff to check the pregnancy confirmation before letting Martha in, and emphasized that Martha was not to be let in should she show up empty-handed.

When Martha returned, she provided a doctor's note stating that she was previously carrying twins, but had miscarried one of them. The note further stated that she was currently pregnant with one child. The residential staff member let Martha into the shelter and instructed her to drop the pregnancy confirmation off with her case worker the next morning. However, the next day Martha failed to seek out her case worker, which raised further suspicions. Once Martha managed to drop off the requested document, the case worker deemed it "questionable" and determined that the case required "further investigation." [137]

At the same time, Martha's work schedule created some concerns. While her work hours did not raise eyebrows when cubicles sat empty, the moment the shelter was at capacity, management pointed out that, "now that the dynamics [had] changed" it was increasingly difficult to rationalize keeping Martha's cubicle available when she was out working in the evenings. The changed attitude towards Martha's work schedule, however, was not brought about by a change in behaviour on Martha's part, but can be traced back to a shift in organizational stipulations.

---

[137] The issue of what constitutes a valid pregnancy confirmation remains contested terrain, and frequently case workers would question the provided documents. In some cases they would phone the doctor's office to confirm that the expecting mother in question had indeed obtained that document from that particular office. In one case, a case worker sent an expecting mother back to the doctor's office three times. The first pregnancy confirmation stated only hormonal levels indicating pregnancy and thus was deemed invalid. The second pregnancy confirmation the expecting mother produced was "in technical jargon" and subsequently she was asked to obtain another doctor's note stating in plain language that she was expecting.

When a dual-parent family with two small children arrived in the early afternoon, the frontline manager decided that Martha and Mike were to be discharged immediately because the cubicle was needed for the new family. The choice was based on Martha's questionable pregnancy documentation, her employment status, and the fact that, as woman without accompanying children, Martha could be easily transitioned to a different shelter, even if it meant a separation from her partner. When the couple failed to return to the shelter by the 5:30 pm curfew, a residential staff member inspected their cubicle and found it empty. The case worker assumed that they had left the Guest House on their own account, suggesting that perhaps "things were heating up too much for them," and released the empty cubicle to the new family.

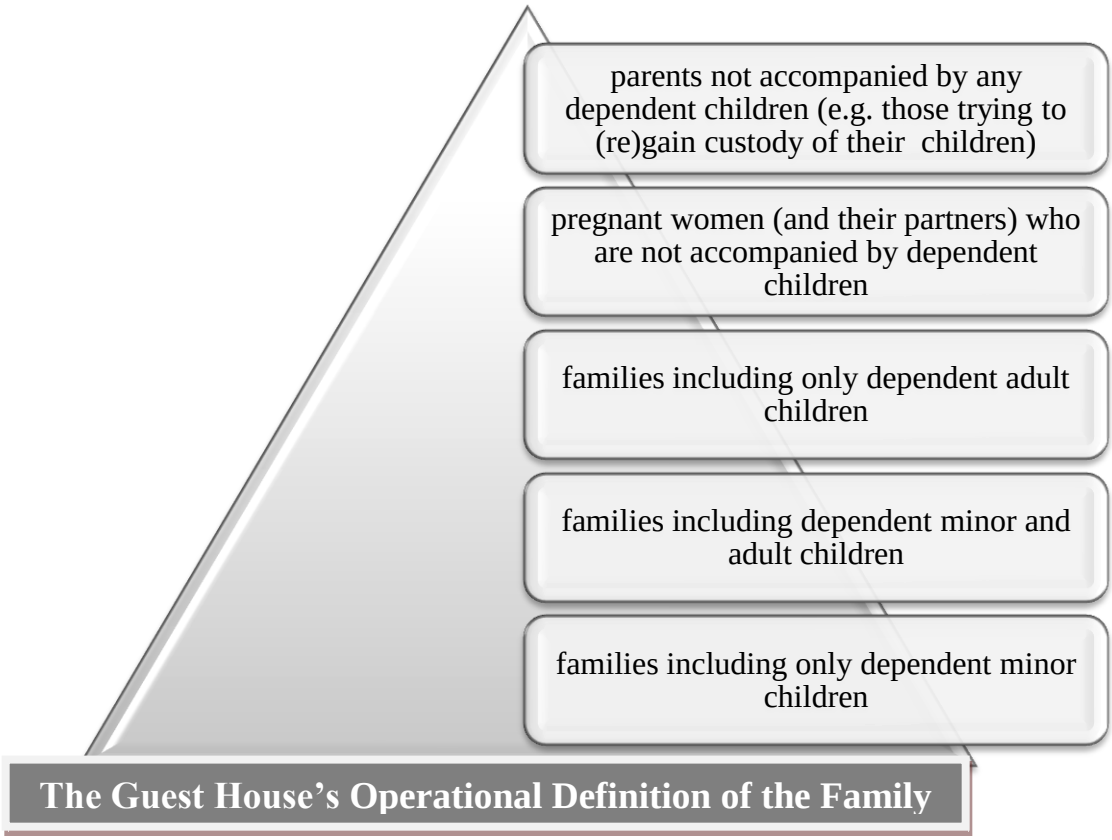
Institutionally Grounded Eligibility Categories

Based on the organization's operational definition of the family and discretionary leeway of the staff, a wide variety of different family forms can be housed at the Family Shelter. However, within this pool of potentially eligible families, certain family forms are prioritized over others in terms of shelter admission. Figure 8 provides an overview of what I call the Guest House's institutionally grounded eligibility categories, which I generated based on my observations of the types of families admitted to and transitioned off the family floor and related staff communication.

In the figure below, the position of each eligibility category reflects its institutional priority status. Families that include minor children always take precedence over all other family forms. Pregnant women or parents currently not accompanied by dependent children will be housed, but only as long as space on the family floor is available. Those two categories will also be the first selected for discharge when the family floor reaches capacity. The position of each

eligibility category further reflects the frequency of occurrence. Far fewer pregnant women or parents not accompanied by dependent children seek access to the Family Shelter than families that include dependent (minor) children. Finally, the position of each eligibility category in the figure above symbolizes its distance from the operational definition of the family instituted by the Guest House. Visualizing the Guest House's operational definition of the family as the base of the pyramid, family categories on the bottom most neatly fit that definition. Categories on the top, on the other hand, constitute discretionary categories.

Figure 8: The Guest House's Institutionally Grounded Eligibility Categories



Based on my observations, each of the five categories of families has been accommodated at the Family Shelter as long as sufficient space was available. When the Family

Shelter is at capacity and a prioritized family arrives, typically families in the discretionary categories are transitioned off the family floor to make room for the new arrival. The categorization I propose here is not captured in any of the organization's official documentation. However, as I have shown above, the eligibility categories guide staff's admission and transition decision-making processes, which in turn maintain and modify existing eligibility categories.

Institutional Record-Keeping

The Guest House not only provides various services to homeless families, it also compiles detailed data, describing their guests' family composition, age of the children, reasons for coming to the shelter, previous episodes of homelessness and shelter stays, immigrant status, band and reserve affiliation of Aboriginal families, and the circumstances of discharges. The so-called "stats" are collected for the purpose of information management and shared daily with other service providers in the city, the Calgary Homeless Foundation, and the provincial government. The Guest House's statistical data are further fed into the Homeless Information Management System (HMIS), which intends to collect "accurate, real-time data" on the demographic characteristics of homeless families, for example (CHF 2011b, 1).

Just like other "organizations that have people-processing functions," the Guest House's statistics "translate events into recordings of events which can be filed, stored, and manipulated" (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995, 172). Thus, institutionally generated statistics are essentially a social product that is shaped by individual practices accomplished within institutional contexts (Best 2001). Institutionally generated data therefore cannot necessarily be read as a representation of reality, but are better understood as an artifact that is produced by socially

organized practices, which have to be taken into account when interpreting such data (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995).

The Messiness of Institutional Record-Keeping

The dynamic, social, and messy nature of institutionally generated data becomes apparent in the following example. The "trio-parent family" mentioned at the beginning of this chapter posed a considerable conundrum for the Guest House's record-keepers. Thus far, the Guest House knew four family categories: "single-parent families," "dual-parent families," "pregnant mother with no dependants," and "pregnant mother with spouse and no dependants." Since the "trio-parent family" did not neatly fit in any of the existing categories, the staff member overseeing the Guest House's statistical record-keeping added an additional category to the daily statistics: "unique family units."

From there on, families not neatly falling into any of the four existing family categories, such as multigenerational families or families accompanied by adult children only, were captured in the "unique family units" category and a short narrative provided insight into such families' composition. When I compiled data on the share of dual-parent families from the Guest House's statistics, I encountered an interesting problem.

Since "unique family units" are included only in the total count of families, but not the single parent or dual parent counts, I had to determine from the narrative whether such families included one or two parents and then manually add their numbers to the respective categories. I noticed that soon after the introduction of the "unique family units" category, the number of "unique family units" steadily increased, while narratives illuminating such family units' composition as well as descriptions of the families discharged from the shelter grew increasingly

scarce. Eventually, it became impossible for me to "track" such families, namely to determine when an admitted "unique family unit" left the shelter again. It was further increasingly difficult to ascertain whether a "unique family unit" included one or two parents. The lack of information prompted me to declare those cases as "missing values" because they were of no use for my specific purpose at hand, namely to compile information on the share of single- and dual-parent families staying at the Guest House.

As it turned out, I was not the only one struggling with the "unique family units" category. At the Guest House, different case workers were involved in the compilation of the daily statistics, which were produced based on the previous night's guest list. Most of the case workers never received any formal instruction as to how to go about the work of record-keeping and a uniform approach did not exist. The situation was complicated by the fact that case workers engaged in record-keeping work on a rotating basis, often continuing where someone else had left off.

During one of my shifts, a case worker who had not compiled "stats" for about a week called me into her office, asking me a series of questions about guests currently staying at the Family Shelter: "When did this family arrive?," "Do you remember when that family left?," "Do you know how many members this family has?," "It says here this mom is married, but her husband is not on the sheets for last night. Do you know if he is staying here with his family?" and so on. The case worker remarked that compiling the "stats" was too time-consuming, and often required digging through several days' worth of guest lists and email communication in order to reconstruct who was staying at the shelter at any given time. She further commented that "too many people" were involved in the record-keeping process, and that there were no formal guidelines as to how to go about the process, which made the stats "too messy" and often flawed.

The case worker used the category of "unique family units" as a particular example, arguing that there was no agreement between record-keepers as to what kind of families fell into that category. Consequently, she continued, it has become a "kitchen sink" category in which families get "randomly dumped" by record-keeping staff without sufficient information pertaining to families' composition. Such practices, she pointed out, are problematic for two reasons. The lack of information makes it difficult to keep track admissions and discharges, which in turn renders it impossible to maintain "accurate numbers." Secondly, the case worker raised concerns that an ever-swelling count of "unique family units," and the lack of information about who those families are, will alarm funders, because it might give off the impression that the Guest House "just accepts anyone looking for shelter."

The Messiness of Life

The messy work of compiling statistical information about shelter residents is not the only source of distortion in institutionally generated data. Record-keeping processes, specifically the compilation of statistical data pertaining to shelter guests, often render invisible the specific processes that might have led to a family being classified as "single-parent" or "dual-parent." Thus, institutionally generated data have to be interpreted with great caution as they often "fail to capture the nuances" of shelter residents' intricate circumstances (Marvasti 2003, 84). Moreover, as Paquette and Bassuk point out, "homeless families are narrowly defined based on the family members who are present at shelters" (2009, 292). Shelter statistics thus do not take into account family members who are located outside shelter walls and thereby remain invisible. Consequently, observed characteristics of "the homeless family" are brought into existence in part through what Marvasti (2003) called "constructive demography."

Not all shelter-seeking families are aware of the Guest House's unique mandate to house two-parent families. Often women would turn to the Guest House with their children, unaware that their male partner could, in fact, be accommodated on the family floor as well. Consider, for example, the following excerpt from my interview with Dana, whom I introduced in Chapter IV:

> I called [the Guest House] and told them the situation and they're like: 'Yeah, you can stay here.' And I'm like: 'Perfect.' I'm like: 'I just need a place for me and my kids. My husband can stay at another place.' And they're like: 'No, your husband can come with you.' And I'm like: 'Oh, crap, that's even better.'

Similarly, in an email detailing the daily admissions and discharges a staff member noted:

> Admission: One father joined his family at [the Guest House]. Mom arrived originally with their child with the assumption that men were not welcome in a shelter. After determining that this was in fact not the case, he has since joined his family.

That mothers seeking shelter sometimes are not accompanied by their male partners is not surprising taking into account that only about 10% of family shelters in Canada actually provide services to families headed by two adults (Waegemakers Schiff 2007).

Sometimes, guests' relationship statuses changed while they were at the Guest House, either temporarily or permanently. Furthermore, as discussed earlier, in some cases family members could not be accommodated by the Guest House for operational reasons. In addition, several women I met entered the Family Shelter with their male partners, who then left temporarily to undergo addiction treatment in a residential facility. For the time of their absence, the men were taken off "the sheets" and their families captured as being headed by a single mother in shelter statistics. In other cases, one parent got barred from the Guest House for behavioural infringements while the other was encouraged to stay. In such instances one parent, more often than not the mother, stayed at the shelter with the children while the other parent left. The moment a parent got barred from the shelter, he or she was taken off "the sheets" and the family redefined as headed by a single-parent.

In conclusion, for record-keeping purposes, the factual relationship status of a sheltered parent is irrelevant as only family members physically present enter the shelter's statistics. Thus, on a number of occasions *de facto* two-parent families staying at the Guest House were captured as single-parent families in shelter statistics. The latter, however, typically do not provide insight into the complex familial and institutional processes that underlie such categorization.

Social Constructions of "The Homeless Family" in the Context of Service Delivery

The purpose of this chapter is not primarily to debunk the myth of the homeless family as a single-parent phenomenon, although data generated through my fieldwork suggests that this generally accepted "scientific fact" needs to be re-evaluated. Rather, my goal has been to illustrate the intricate social processes that transform shelter-seeking candidates into shelter residents and how such processes are silenced in the Guest House's statistics. Since the vast majority of research pertaining to homeless families is shelter-based, those processes are an integral constituent in the generation of knowledge about homeless families.

The Guest House, like other social service organizations, has to selectively allocate its limited resources. Only shelter-seeking candidates to whom a staff member has assigned "family status" are granted access to the Family Shelter and the hub of related services. In their decision-making process, staff utilize institutional selection mechanisms, such as formal admission criteria. However, as I have shown, such selection mechanisms are not static, but ever-evolving vis-à-vis internal contingencies, such as bed availability and external stipulations, such as funding provisions.

Furthermore, while admission criteria and operational policies formally guide the client-selection process, shelter staff have considerable discretion in interpreting such guidelines when

determining the eligibility of shelter-seeking candidates. I have argued that Guest House staff strategically broaden and contract the operational definition of the family, for example, to manage the shelter's capacity. I have further argued that shelter-generated statistics are essentially a social product that is shaped by decisions about who gets captured in such statistics. Shelter statistics are produced for a certain audience, such as funders and government organizations, which shapes what kind of information gets recorded. However, institutionally generated data frequently silence the intricate social processes discussed in this chapter that shape who we find in shelters in the first place. Thus, "document meanings are disengaged from the actual procedures whereby documents were assembled" (Garfinkel 1984, 203).

Social processes that transform shelter-seeking candidates into shelter residents are consequential in two important ways. First, in light of omnipresent funding constraints, the Guest House's resources are scarce and have to be selectively distributed among shelter-seeking families and individuals. Following its operational mandate, most of the Guest House's resources – staff, programming, money, time, effort, etc. – are allocated to the Family Shelter program. However, only shelter-seeking candidates identified as "family" through institutionally guided eligibility assessment procedures will receive "family status." Only those who have been assigned "family status" will have access to a cubicle on the family floor, the hub of supportive services offered by the Guest House, and other pertinent community resources. Especially in the political context of the *10 Year Plan*, entering a shelter often provides homeless families with the resources necessary to regain housing, as the *10 Year Plan*'s primary objective is to move homeless individuals and families from shelters into housing as quickly as possible.

Secondly, our knowledge of "the homeless family" is fundamentally shaped by the social processes discussed in this chapter. When homeless families turn to social service providers,

such as the Guest House, for support they become subject to a series of organizationally embedded definitional processes (Gubrium 1987). The Guest House specifies what constitutes a family for the institutional purpose of client selection in its operational definition of the family. This definition outlines the meaning of "the family" for the specific, organizational purpose at hand and is continually shaped by institutional mandates, agendas, funder stipulations, and practical demands. As Rossi put it:

> shelters literally determine who shall be called homeless families by the policies they pursue about whom they will admit from among those who either apply or are referred to them (1994, 357).

However, I have shown in this chapter that constructive moments pertaining to homeless families extend beyond formally established shelter admission criteria. While admission criteria guide the decision-making processes of shelter staff, they are subject to interpretation and considerable discretion. During the intake interview, shelter staff creatively utilize the social order imposed by "organizationally conditioned" understandings of the family to assign or deny family status to shelter-seeking groups of individuals (Gubrium and Holstein 1990, 117). Thus, shelter admission is an interactional accomplishment as it is negotiated between service seekers and service providers on a daily basis (Marvasti 2002, 2003). Drawing on and expanding the work of Marvasti, I have shown that constructions of service-worthy clients continue beyond the intake interview and are an essential part of day-to-day institutional processes. To the extent that homeless families are embedded in organizational procedures and specific family contingencies, the homeless family is created, maintained, and re-configured on a daily basis in the shelter environment.

In institutional settings, homeless families become not only an object of service intervention. To the extent that they leave traces in institutional records they are transformed into

administrative objects that can be enumerated, described, and studied (Garfinkel 1984). Shelter statistics, such as those produced daily by the Guest House and then fed into large data bases such as HMIS, make "the homeless family" "knowable and actionable" beyond shelter walls (Hoffman and Coffey 2008, 210). HMIS, referred to as the "information technology backbone of the homeless-serving system (CHF 2011b, 27), is an administrative tool that collects

> accurate, real-time data regarding the total number of homeless, length and causes of homelessness, *demographic characteristics* and needs, in order to understand the basic dynamics of homelessness (CHF 2011b, 1, emphasis added).

HMIS-based knowledge in turn will be used to measure program outcomes and effectiveness, improve service co-ordination among homeless service agencies, streamline funding, and inform program and policy development (CHF 2011a).

Shelter-generated statistics thus are not merely collected for information-gathering purposes, but such statistics have an inherently political character. As one Guest House staff member pointed out to me:

> the Homeless Foundation has been collecting information and data from all the shelters and agencies that serve homeless populations in every capacity, collecting the information and then turning it out as though it was their own. And also turning it out to point in a certain direction, which is what all statistics do when they are geared towards funding.

In the process, shelter practices, such as "statistical record keeping" then "contribute to reproducing dominant conceptions of 'the homeless'" (Lyon-Callo 2004, 73).

Thus, it is through "practical organizational accomplishments" (Garfinkel 1984, 9), namely formal shelter admission criteria, the shelter staff's interpretive work in employing those criteria, organizational stipulations, and institutional record-keeping that "the homeless family" emerges as a visible, recognizable entity. I want to emphasize that when I speak of the social construction of the homeless family in the context of service delivery, I do not intend to say that homeless families *per se* are brought about only through the interpretive processes occurring in

an institutional setting. Such an assumption would negate the lived experience of families who, for various reasons, find themselves without a roof over their heads. Instead, I argue that what is socially constructed in the institutional setting is "the homeless family" as a knowable entity; a particular category of people (Hacking 1999).

Going back to the statement that opened this chapter, my discussion raises doubts that "many of the answers to the problems surrounding homelessness can be found in the data that is being collected" (Cormier and Simmonds 2006). Unfortunately, knowledge about family homelessness generated through shelter-based research and institutional record-keeping tends to be reified when such knowledge is treated as factual representations of reality rather than social products. Such reifications are problematic insofar as they inform future research programs, policy decisions, funding realities, and service delivery (see also, Lyon-Callo 2004).

CHAPTER IX: CAPTAIN OF THEIR SHIPS, NOT MASTERS OF THE SEA

Do not deplore, do not laugh, do not hate – understand.

—*Spinoza*

Despite the shortcomings described in this dissertation, the Guest House, without question, provides crucial services to Calgary's homeless families. To the best of my knowledge, only two family shelters in the province of Alberta are currently accommodating families that are headed by more than one adult. However, shelters housing all types of families are an important resource for homeless families who otherwise would have to separate and seek accommodation through different institutions, requiring the separation of parents and their teenage and adult children. As Dana, one of the shelter guests put it:

> If it wasn't for this place, I would have lost my kids by now and I probably would be a drug addict and a prostitute and without my husband again. Like literally, I can guarantee you that's what would have happened 'cause there's nowhere else to go. Nowhere else to go. Nobody wants to help. They wanna help single women and it's like 'Why don't you wanna help families?' Do you think that families just don't run into these problems? Do you think just because I got a husband that it's miraculously gonna be ok?' No, it's not miraculously ok. Things don't just work out miraculously over night. It's not like because I have a husband and he's not beating me that my life is gonna be perfect. I wish it was like that…but it's not, it's not even close.

That said, like many of the guests I interacted with over the course of my fieldwork I grappled with the way services were delivered at the Guest House. I too am glad that the facility exists, so families who have nowhere else to go have a safe place to stay. At the same time, I was often appalled by many facets of its operation. In the course of my employment at the Guest House, more than once I got frustrated with guests who seemed to reaffirm every stereotype of the homeless I seek to refute in my teaching. I was shocked by the blatant racism some staff members displayed and the fervor with which some staff constantly tried to put shelter guests "in their place." I was surprised how some staff members could hold on so blindly to dominant discourses pertaining to homelessness when they interacted with individuals challenging these

discourses on a daily basis. In addition, conflict among staff members often made day-to-day work routines work more challenging than they needed to be. At the same time, I met incredibly compassionate, warm hearted, caring and attentive staff members, who bent over backwards to ensure that shelter guests were comfortable. Unfortunately, they often did not last very long, either because they burned themselves out quickly or were poached by other agencies. In any case, throughout my fieldwork I had to constantly remind myself that I was there to learn, to understand the organization, not to judge.

As appalled as I initially was by specific practices I observed, some started to make sense as I became more familiar with the organization and its work. Service delivery is a complex endeavour that is shaped by equally complex processes. The lack of funding contributed to a constant shortage of resources which strained the patience of guests and staff alike. The Family Shelter was notoriously understaffed and as utilization increased so did the stress levels on the floor. The staff, underpaid, insufficiently trained, and overworked, often did what they could with the limited resources available to them. I often felt that the treatment of staff at the Guest House was highly exploitative and in essence illustrates a fundamental dilemma. Given the limited resources available, what are the alternatives?

Initially, it was easy to judge the practices I encountered at the Guest House in the context of day-to-day service delivery. However, the more I immersed myself in the organization itself, the more I began to experience it from the inside, the more I began noticing organizing principles of social practices within the Guest House that originated outside the organization itself. While I am not trying to make excuses for the at times dehumanizing, disrespectful, paternalistic and even discriminatory treatment of shelter guests, I realized that it was not solely rooted in individual ill-will. As I have shown throughout my analysis, these choices are, in part,

shaped by realities that are beyond the control of the individual actors or the organization as a whole. In other words, to once again utilize Brian's more than fitting metaphor, we are the captains of our ships, but we are not the master of the sea. That logic applies to the lives of each shelter guest as much as it applies to the day-to-day work of shelter staff and administrators and the organization of service delivery at the Guest House.

The overarching goal of my research was to explore the social organization of service delivery of sheltered homeless families, taking into account the intricate, intertwined contextual factors that shape day-to-day practices unfolding at a Calgary family shelter. My research complements existing research on homelessness by shifting the focus away from homeless families, their characteristics, and their day-to-day experience to providing a detailed, rich and complex analysis of the social processes that organize their experiences, both in the process of becoming homeless and during their shelter stay.

Moreover, while much of the research on service delivery examines how staff attitudes and shelter regulations shape the lived experiences of homeless individuals and families, most research does not place the shelter itself in the broader societal and policy context. Thus, the researchers' analysis remains at the level of individual attitudes and practices of staff and clients, and recommendations for change exclusively target attitudes and practices of shelter administrators and staff. I argue that the Guest House does not operate independently of the economic, political, ideological, and social context in which it is embedded. It is that context that my analysis unpacks by demonstrating the various socially organized processes that shape those staff attitudes and practices in the first place.

In addition to its academic contribution, my research is relevant to social service providers. The Guest House's Board of Directors, the organization's decision-making body, is

staffed by volunteer members who are dedicated to the cause, but not necessarily intimately familiar with the homeless population. My interviews with different Board members indicate that their understanding of family homelessness is, in part, shaped by existing public and political discourses, which shapes their decision-making processes. The decisions the Board makes in turn provide the foundation for the day-to-day service delivery work done by the Guest House's staff. My analysis highlights the political nature of the Board's work and provides a framework for understanding decision-making processes in non-profit organizations.

Furthermore, my analysis can sensitize frontline workers who provide various social services to the larger, socially organized processes that bring about the problem their work seeks to address and that organize their day-to-day work of service delivery. As "employees working for agencies and organizations," Guest House administrators and staff "are bound to carry out the legislative mandates, policies, and directions of their organizations" (de Montigny 1995, 47). In addition, frontline workers, whether professionally trained or not, are exposed to academic and public discourses pertaining to family homelessness which continue to frame the issue predominantly as an individual deficiency problem. That said, while political and institutional discourses and mandates certainly direct staff's day-to-day work of service delivery, they never fully determine it. Instead, "the power of these written directives hinges on their being accepted as necessary by individual workers, who then 'activate' them consistently" (Brown 2006, 356).

At the same time, the current climate of accountability leaves little room for organizations like the Guest House to deliver services as they see fit. As discussed in Chapter I, *Calgary's Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness*, implemented in January 2008, mandates that family homelessness be ended by 2010 and homelessness in general by 2018. Note that ending homelessness in the context of the plan means reducing emergency shelter stays to seven days, at

which point shelter residents should have been transitioned into housing. The powers that be were so convinced of the effectiveness of the *10 Year Plan* that one of its directives mandates that by 2018, 85% of shelter beds in the city be eliminated (CHF 2011b).

Shortly after the implementation of the *10 Year Plan*, various shelters began reducing the number of spaces available at their facilities and some, such as the Salvation Army's Booth Centre, were closed altogether, supposedly due to lack of demand. However, my informal conversations with various shelter administrators indicate that demand was not down at all, but that the reduction in shelter beds had become necessary to accommodate reductions in governmental funding. Shelter-based counts of the homeless population conducted on behalf of the Calgary Homeless Foundation (CHF) in 2012, four years after implementation of the *10 Year Plan* and the last official, City-led count, indicated that the homeless population in Calgary is on the decline. Consequently, the *10 Year Plan* was publicly celebrated as a success.

However, taking into account the continual reduction in shelter beds over the last four years, the measured decline is likely in part an artifact produced by reduced capacity, which inevitably reduces the population served and thus enumerated during a shelter-based count. Indeed, one Guest House staff member pointed out to me that the *10 Year Plan to End Homelessness* should be called instead the 10 year plan to *hide* homelessness. Such sentiment reflects concerns of other organizations that the mandates of the *10 Year Plan* "are designed to address the needs of those offended by homelessness, not those affected" (McLean 2008, 5) and "undermine and negate some of the most significant and central supports that currently meet the needs of the homeless without provision of viable alternatives" (ibid., 2).

Despite the *10 Year Plan*'s mandate to end family homelessness within two years of its implementation, family shelters such as the Guest House have been reporting increasing numbers

since the onset of the economic downturn in 2008. Although the local economy has recovered since, the Guest House remains busy, operating at or over capacity since 2010. In fall 2012, the Guest House closed the Senior Shelter, located on the second floor of the building. The vacant cubicles could have increased the Guest House's Family Shelter capacity from 20 to 27 families. However, the organization lacked the resources to staff the additional wing and thus turned to the government for additional funding.

In March 2013, the government announced that it would not grant the Guest House's request for additional funding, because the goal of the *10 Year Plan* is to reduce, not increase, the number of available shelter beds (van Rassel 2013). Government representatives were further quoted stating that, while operating at or over capacity, the Guest House had not been effectively utilizing other available resources. For example, reports suggest that the Guest House had not been fully using its funding for outreach programs to prevent homelessness in the first place. In addition, according to the CHF, "the pattern over time at the [Guest House] has been to lean more towards emergency sheltering rather than preventing families becoming homeless or moving families into available Housing First programs" (Marketwire 2013). Instead of providing funding for additional shelter space, the CHF recommended that the Guest House make more referrals to other agencies with available space (Howell 2013). Ultimately, the Guest House raised the necessary funds to open the second floor to families, at least for a year, through a fundraising campaign.

Whether the "record demand for [Guest House] services" reflects a genuine increase in need for shelter space or is the result of a broadened definition of who constitutes "family" cannot be answered here. In addition, whether the Guest House misappropriates and fails to utilize available resources, as the government alleges, and thus wilfully interferes with the

successful implementation of the *10 Year Plan* is a question I cannot answer based on the information available to me. However, what becomes visible in the continued clashes between the Guest House and the provincial government and the Calgary Homeless Foundation, between David and Goliath, is a considerable conflict of interest and matters of unequal power distribution.

As I have shown in Chapter V, the Guest House's practice of housing homeless families in rotating community shelters was stressful for all parties involved and led to the establishment of a permanent family shelter. That, however, drastically changed the organization's funding needs, which could no longer be met through donations and fundraisers. Thus the Guest House accepted, for the first time in its history, government funding, which shaped the Guest House's service approach and practices. At this point, the Guest House has few alternatives. Given its operating budget, relying on donations and its fundraising efforts alone is not sustainable; this became particularly clear in the wake of the 2008 economy downturn during which the Guest House experienced a notable decline in donations, which put considerable strain on the organization's resources (Berenyi 2009; Derworiz 2008b; Myers 2010). As long as the Guest House relies on government funding, however, it is bound to the mandates of the *10 Year Plan*.

Recently, homelessness in Canada has re-entered the public agenda as a national crisis. Local and national efforts to solve "the homeless problem" indicate that homelessness currently undergoes a moment of problematization, which is typically followed by policy action, and subsequent silencing (Cronley 2010; Daly 1996; Hopper 2003). How successful various policy initiatives, such as Calgary's *10 Year Plan*, are going to be remains to be seen. While local and national strategies typically acknowledge the role of structural factors in the emergence of "the homeless crisis," little progress has been made in addressing them. As I have shown in Chapter I,

finding affordable housing continues to be challenging in Calgary, especially for low-income earners, despite recent efforts to increase the number of rental units in the city. In addition, the minimum wage and social assistance benefit levels remain unchanged and insufficient. In other words, some of the socially organized processes that contribute to individuals' homelessness in the first place remain largely untouched.

How long the issue will remain of public interest is also uncertain. Several Guest House staff members told me that the *10 Year Plan* is bound to fail and homelessness will quietly disappear from the public's mind. Indeed, one of the Guest House Board members told me that,

> homelessness has been in the consciousness for a while and I hope it stays there for a while but the reality is it's probably gonna lose its flavor of the month appeal and battered women or something else will become the new talked about issue.

Ethnographic work is often dismissed as having little policy relevance due to the time- and cost-intensive fieldwork it entails. Furthermore, critics argue that the social context which the ethnographer explored has changed, at times substantially, by the time the ethnography is publicly available. In addition, the subjective nature of the ethnographic endeavour frequently leads critics to question the "validity" and "reliability" of ethnographically produced findings. However, with their focus on understanding and subsequent representation, ethnographies provide the reader with rich, detailed and important insights into aspects of the social world (Jones 2010).

Policy makers shun the complexity of ethnographic data and seem to have a clear preference for statistical data that can be neatly and comprehensibly represented in tables and graphs. Despite the important insights I think my research has to offer, the Calgary Homeless Foundation, for example, showed no interest in it. I was told that my research certainly is

"interesting," but that policy makers are looking for projects that "collect large-scale, quantitative data that can inform policy decision-making processes."

In fall 2013, the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness is hosting the National Conference on Ending Homelessness. The goal of the conference is to bring together policy makers, researchers, funders, community leaders and advocates and "arm [them] with the inspiration, information, tools and training [they] need to begin ending homelessness in [their] community." [138] I submitted two paper proposals, one which critically examines the body of knowledge pertaining to homelessness produced through academic research, and one that problematizes the framing of family homelessness as a single mother phenomenon. Arguably, both papers provide insights that could make an important contribution to contemporary efforts to end homelessness. However, neither paper was accepted.

Ethnography, as I have learned, is a time-intensive mode of inquiry. Like other ethnographers have noted, it took time to get access to the Guest House and to establish a good working relationship with shelter staff and guests. As difficult as it was to gain access to the organization, it was even more difficult to leave it. I struggled to find the "right time" to leave the field. Eventually I realized that I had to start writing, and still being in the field was not conducive to the writing process as each day of (field)work just kept generating additional data. I had to accept that it is the nature of organizations that they continually evolve and something interesting that was worth observing was happening constantly at the Guest House. In addition, I realized that the context in which the Guest House operated continually changed and will

[138] CAEH website. Retrieved on June 28, 2013. http://www.caeh.ca/conference/

continue to change. Consequently, the ethnography presented here is best understood as a snapshot of the organization and the context in which it operated at a given moment in time.

Moreover, ethnographic research such as mine typically generates volumes of data, captured in close to a thousand pages of transcripts, fieldnotes, institutional texts, and policy documents. Despite the time I spent in the field and the wealth of data my fieldwork had generated, it is impossible to provide an exhaustive account of the organization under study. My focus on the analysis of specific events and practices as they unfolded in the context of day-to-day service delivery, the ways in which they were shaped by local and extra-local processes, and how they in turn shaped the lived experience of homeless families ultimately narrowed the scope of my analysis. In my write-up, I had to make difficult choices, omitting data that I feel is interesting and highly relevant, yet peripheral to the analysis presented here. Such data is not, however, redundant, but best saved for future analysis and writing.

Despite the long time I spent in the field, my exploration of the organization's operation was somewhat constrained by several factors. First, my particular position in the staff hierarchy and the fact that I worked mainly on weekends confined what was visible to me as an observer and what remained hidden. While the lack of access to certain staff could be interpreted as a significant limitation of my research, I would argue that the limited amount of face-to-face contact between different levels of staff is a characteristic feature of the Guest House's organization of service delivery. That said, my position within the organization certainly framed my research, as my perspective is unique to that of the residential staff. I learned little about the work of case workers or management beyond what was captured in emails. It is also important to note that I only had access to email communication in which residential staff were included, i.e. all frontline-service-related matters.

Secondly, as indicated in chapter III, I had found it very difficult to recruit case workers for my research. My knowledge of their day-to-day practices is thus limited to what I learned from the few interviews I conducted and email communication. I also did not have access to institutional processes that solely involved case workers. While I had access to the typed-up intake notes, I never sat in during an intake interview, nor was I able to observe the meetings between case workers and the families they serviced.

Third, the Guest House had undergone important changes prior to and during my fieldwork, such as a change in leadership. I sent both the outgoing and the incoming executive director several emails with an invitation to participate in an interview to learn more about the managerial decision-making processes; none of my emails was answered. The change in leadership was accompanied by a number of organizational changes, which I was never able to fully illuminate due to the lack of access to the key decision-makers, namely the EDs.

Fourth, as fundamental as my staff position was in facilitating my observations and recruiting staff members, it had a couple of crucial drawbacks. As indicated earlier, my role as staff member hampered the recruitment of shelter guests, who were concerned that the information they relayed to me as a researcher would, somehow, get back to the Guest House staff and thus affect the services they received. In addition, my role as staff member prevented me from observing the wide range of programming the Guest House offered in collaboration with community partners, such as parenting, employment and budgeting workshops. The frontline manager felt that my dual role as researcher and staff member created a conflict of interest, and that shelter residents might not feel comfortable to fully engage with workshop facilitators when a staff member was present. Finally, as an actively participating member in the setting, I myself was subject to processes of institutional socialization. That might have shaped

not only how I conducted myself in the setting, but also how I interpreted what I observed. As a staff member, my work was constantly monitored by others and I was held accountable by shelter guests, other staff members and my supervisors, which constantly shaped my practices as a staff member. Those practices in turn actively shaped the social processes I was there to examine as a researcher. The longer I worked at the shelter, the more I started thinking as a staff member, no matter how often I reminded myself that I was there primarily as a researcher. It became clear at that point that leaving the field was the only way for me to resolve that conflict.

A final limitation is worth mentioning here. As indicated in the introduction, *Calgary's 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness* significantly shaped the service landscape in Calgary. As the previous chapter suggests, contextualizing the Guest House's local reality was a declared goal of my ethnographic endeavour. Exploring how exactly *Calgary's 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness* shaped the organization of service delivery was one important aspect of such contextualization. I contacted the Calgary Homeless Foundation, the organization in charge of administering the *10 Year Plan*, and a couple of their staff members agreed to meet for an interview. However, already stretched thin between my fieldwork, teaching and multiple work responsibilities, and running out of time, I had to abandon the idea of exploring the impact of the *10 Year Plan* on the organization of service delivery at the Guest House in-depth. However, I would consider the limitations discussed here less as shortcomings of my dissertation research than a point of departure for future research.

REFERENCES

Akyeampong, Ernest B. 2007. Canada's Unemployment Mosaic, 2000 to 2006. *Perspectives on Labour and Income* 8 (1):5-12.

Alcock, Pete. 2006. *Understanding Poverty*. 3rd ed. Basingstoke: Macmillan.

Allen, Janet K. 1994. The Discourse of Homeless Families. *Journal of Social Distress and the Homeless* 3 (2):175-184.

Anderson, Elaine A., and Sally A. Koblinsky. 1995. Homeless Policy: The Need to Speak to Families. *Family Relations* 44 (1):13-18.

Armaline, William T. 2005. "Kids Need Structure": Negotiating Rules, Power, and Social Control in an Emergency Youth Shelter. *American Behavioral Scientist* 48 (8):1124-1148.

Atkinson, Paul, and Amanda Coffey. 2008. Revisiting the Relationship between Participant Observation and Interviewing. In *Handbook of Constructionist Research*, edited by James A. Holstein and Jaber F. Gubrium, 801-814. New York: The Guilford Press.

Atkinson, Paul, Amanda Coffey, Sara Delamont, John Lofland, and Lyn Lofland. 2001. Editorial Introduction. In *Handbook of Ethnography*, edited by Paul Atkinson, Amanda Coffey, Sara Delamont, John Lofland and Lyn Lofland, 1-7. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Averitt, Sandra S. 2003. "Homelessness Is Not a Choice!" The Plight of Homeless Women with Preschool Children Living in Temporary Shelters. *Journal of Family Nursing* 9 (1):79-100.

Banyard, Victoria L. 1995. “Taking Another Route”: Daily Survival Narratives from Mothers Who Are Homeless. *American Journal of Community Psychology* 23 (6):871-891.

Banyard, Victoria L., and Sandra A. Graham-Bermann. 1995. Building an Empowerment Policy Paradigm: Self-Reported Strengths of Homeless Mothers. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 65 (4):479-491.

———. 1998. Surviving Poverty: Stress and Coping in the Lives of Housed and Homeless Mothers. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 68 (3):479-489.

Barge, Frances C., and Kathleen F. Norr. 1991. Homeless Shelter Policies for Women in an Urban Environment. *Journal of Nursing Scholarship* 23 (3):145-150.

Barrow, Susan, and Nicole Laborde. 2008. Invisible Mothers: Parenting by Homeless Women Separated from Their Children. *Gender Issues* 25 (3):157-172.

Barrow, Susan, and Terese Lawinski. 2009. Contexts of Mother-Child Separations in Homeless Families. *Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy* 9 (1):1-20.

Barrow, Susan, and Rita Zimmer. 1998. Transitional Housing and Services: A Synthesis. In *Practical Lessons: The 1998 National Symposium on Homelessness Research*, edited by Linda B. Fosburg and Deborah L. Dennis. Arlington, VA: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Bassuk, Ellen L. 1986a. Homeless Families: Single Mothers and Their Children in Boston Shelters. In *The Mental Health Needs of Homeless Persons*, edited by Ellen L. Bassuk, 45-53. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

———. 1986b. Homeless Families: Single Mothers and Their Children in Boston Shelters. *New Directions for Mental Health Services* 1986 (30):45-53.

———. 1990. Who Are the Homeless Families? Characteristics of Sheltered Mothers and Children. *Community Mental Health Journal* 26 (5):425-434.

———. 1991. *Homeless Families with Children: Research Perspectives*. Rockville, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

———. 1993. Homeless Women: Economic and Social Issues: Introduction. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 63 (3):337-339.

Bassuk, Ellen L., and John C. Buckner. 1994. Troubling Families: A Commentary. (Commentary on Peter H. Rossi, American Behavioral Scientist, Vol. 37, P. 342). *American Behavioral Scientist* 37 (3):412-421.

Bassuk, Ellen L., John C. Buckner, Jennifer N. Perloff, and Shari S. Bassuk. 1998. Prevalence of Mental Health and Substance Use Disorders among Homeless and Low-Income Housed Mothers. *The American Journal of Psychiatry* 155 (11):1561-4.

Bassuk, Ellen L., John C. Buckner, Linda F. Weinreb, Angela Browne, Shari S. Bassuk, Ree Dawson, and Jennifer N. Perloff. 1997. Homelessness in Female-Headed Families: Childhood and Adult Risk and Protective Factors. *American Journal of Public Health* 87 (2):241-248.

Bassuk, Ellen L., and Stephanie Geller. 2006. The Role of Housing and Services in Ending Family Homelessness. *Housing Policy Debate* 17 (4):781-806.

Bassuk, Ellen L., Jennifer N. Perloff, and Ree Dawson. 2001. Multiply Homeless Families: The Insidious Impact of Violence. *Housing Policy Debate* 12 (2):299-320.

Bassuk, Ellen L., and Lynn Rosenberg. 1988. Why Does Family Homelessness Occur? A Case-Control Study. *American Journal of Public Health* 78 (7):783-788.

Bassuk, Ellen L., Leonore Rubin, and Alison S. Lauriat. 1986. Characteristics of Sheltered Homeless Families. *American Journal of Public Health* 76 (9):1097-1101.

Bassuk, Ellen L., Linda F. Weinreb, John C. Buckner, Angela Browne, Amy Salomon, and Shari S. Bassuk. 1996. The Characteristics and Needs of Sheltered Homeless and Low-Income Housed Mothers. *The Journal of the American Medical Association* 276 (8):640-646.

Bauman, Steven L. 1993. The Meaning of Being Homeless. *Scholarly Inquiry for Nursing Practice* 7 (1):59-70.

Bavier, Richard. 1999. The National Research Council's Report, Measuring Poverty: A New Approach, Will Inspire Vigorous Debate over the Best Way to Measure Poverty. Washington, DC: The U.S. Bureau of the Census.

Bechtel, Gregory A. 1997. Shelter Services and the Health of Homeless Families. *Journal of Nursing Science* 2 (1-2):1-8.

Becker, Howard S., and Blanche Geer. 1957. Participant Observation and Interviewing: A Comparison. *Human Organization* 16 (3):28-32.

Bégin, Hélène. 2013. *Desjardins Affordability Index*: Desjardins Economic Studies.

Belcher, John R., Bruce R. DeForge, and David A. Zanis. 2005. Why Has the Social Work Profession Lost Sight of How to End Homelessness? *Journal of Progressive Human Services* 16 (2):5-23.

Bentham, Jeremy. 1995. Panopticon. In *The Panopticon Writings*, edited by Miran Bozovic. London: Verso.

Berenyi, Valerie. 2009. "'Hard-Hitting' Ad Campaign Aims to Spotlight Recession's Effect on Poor; Social Agencies Feeling Crunch as Donations Drop." *Calgary Herald*, May 23, B.1.

Berger, Peter L., and Thomas Luckmann. 1966. *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. New York: Anchor Books.

Best, Joel. 2001. *Damned Lies and Statistics: Understanding Numbers from the Media, Politicians, and Activists*. Berkley: University of California Press.

———. 2003. But Seriously Folks: The Limitations of the Strict Constructionist Interpretation of Social Problems. In *Challenges and Choices: Constructionist Perspectives on Social Problems*, edited by James A. Holstein and Gale Miller, 51-69. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.

———. 2008. Historical Development and Defining Issues of Constructionist Inquiry. In *Handbook of Constructionist Research*, edited by James A. Holstein and Jaber F. Gubrium, 41-64. New York: The Guilford Press.

Blasco, Paloma Gay y, and Huon Wardle. 2007. *How to Read Ethnography*. London: Routledge.

Blasi, Gary L. 1994. And We Are Not Seen: Ideological and Political Barriers to Understanding Homelessness. *American Behavioral Scientist* 37 (4):563-586.

Blau, Joel. 1992. *The Visible Poor: Homelessness in the United States*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Blumer, Herbert. 1971. Social Problems as Collective Behavior. *Social Problems* 18 (3):298-306.

Boessenkool, Kenneth J. 1997. *Back to Work: Learning from the Alberta Welfare Experiment*. Toronto: C.D. Howe Institute.

Bogard, Cynthia J. 1998. The Rhetoric of Domination and Its Strategic Use by Homeless Mothers. *Sociological Spectrum* 18 (3):229-262.

———. 2001. Claimsmakers and Contexts in Early Constructions of Homelessness: A Comparison of New York City and Washington, D.C. *Symbolic Interaction* 24 (4):425-454.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1977. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

———. 1989. Social Space and Symbolic Power. *Sociological Theory* 7 (1):14-25.

———. 1990. *The Logic of Practice*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

———. 1991. *Language and Symbolic Power*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

———. 1996. Understanding. *Theory, Culture & Society* 13 (2):17-37.

———. 1999. The Abdication of the State. In *The Weight of the World: Social Suffering in Contemporary Society*, edited by Pierre Bourdieu, Alain Accardo, Gabrielle Balazs, Stéphane Beaud, Francois Bonvin, Emmanuel Bourdieu and Phillippe Bourgois, 181-188. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

———. 2000. *Pascalian Meditations*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

———. 2001. *Masculine Domination*. Translated by Richard Nice. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Bourdieu, Pierre, Jean-Claude Chamboredon, and Jean-Claude Passeron. 1991. *The Craft of Sociology: Epistemological Preliminaries*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.

Boxill, Nancy A., and Anita L. Beaty. 1990. Mother/Child Interaction among Homeless Women and Their Children in a Public Night Shelter in Atlanta, Georgia. In *Homeless Children: The Watchers and the Waiters*, edited by Nancy A. Boxill, 49-64. New York: The Haworth Press.

Boydell, Katherine M., Paula Goering, and Tammy L. Morrell-Bellai. 2000. Narratives of Identity: Re-Presentation of Self in People Who Are Homeless. *Qualitative Health Research* 10 (1):26-38.

Braid, Don. 2004. "Heart Needed in East Village." *Calgary Herald*, December 14, B1.

———. 2006. "Edgy Campaign Forces Reality Check." *Calgary Herald*, May 5, B.1.

———. 2008. "Action of Quiet Philanthropist Brings Tangled Tale to an End." *Calgary Herald*, July 15, A.4.

Bridgman, Rae. 2001. I Helped Build That: A Demonstration Employment Training Program for Homeless Youth in Toronto, Canada. *American Anthropologist* 103 (3):779-795.

———. 2003. *Safe Haven: The Story of a Shelter for Homeless Women*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

———. 2006. *Streetcities: Rehousing the Homeless*. Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press.

Brodkey, Linda. 1987. Writing Critical Ethnographic Narratives. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* 18 (2):67-76.

Brown, Debra J. 2006. Working the System: Re-Thinking the Institutionally Organized Role of Mothers and the Reduction Of "Risk" In Child Protection Work. *Social Problems* 53 (3):352-370.

Bruckner, John C. 2008. Understanding the Impact of Homelessness on Children: Challenges and Future Research Directions. *American Behavioral Scientist* 51 (6):721-736.

Buck, Philip O., Paul A. Toro, and Melanie A. Ramos. 2004. Media and Professional Interest in Homelessness over 30 Years (1974–2003). *Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy* 4 (1):151-171.

Burt, Martha R. 2006. *Characteristics of Transitional Housing for Homeless Families*. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute.

Burt, Martha R., and Barbara E. Cohen. 1989. Differences among Homeless Single Women, Women with Children, and Single Men. *Social Problems* 36 (5):508-524.

Burt, Martha R:, Laudan Y. Aron, Toby Douglas, Jesse Valente, Edgar Lee, and Britta Iwen. 1999. *Homelessness: Programs and the People They Serve*. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute.

Calgary Committee to End Homelessness. 2008. *Calgary's 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness*. Calgary: Calgary Committee to End Homelessness.

Calgary Drop-In & Rehab Centre. 2010. Meet Debbie Newman. *Connection* 27:8-9.

Calgary Herald. 2004. "No Buffers Needed in Village." December 15, 2004, A20.

———. 2006a. "Keeping Calgary's Homeless Warm: Planning for Winter Shelters Should Have Started Sooner." October 21, A28.

———. 2006b. "Offer's a 'Positive Start' for Inn from the Cold." March 3, B3.

———. 2010. "Honouring the East Village." November 14, D6.

Calgary Homeless Foundation. 2004. *Addressing the Needs of Calgary's Homeless*. Calgary: Calgary Homeless Foundation.

———. 2010. *Ending Homelessness: Calgary Homeless Foundation Report to the Community 2010*. Calgary: Calgary Homeless Foundation.

Canadian Press NewsWire. 2006. "Alberta Premier Says Enough Has Been Done for Homeless." November 3, B1.

Carabine, Jean. 2001. Unmarried Motherhood 1830-1990: A Genealogical Analysis. In *Discourse as Data: A Guide for Analysis*, edited by Margaret Wetherell, Stephanie Taylor and Simeon J. Yates, 267-307. London: Sage.

Castellano, Marlene Brant. 2002. *Aboriginal Family Trends: Extended Families, Nuclear Families, Families of the Heart*. Ottawa: The Vanier Institute of the Family.

CBC News. 2006. "The Bar Where Klein Launched His Political Career Also Retires." September 21.

———. 2008a. "Businessman's Loan Saves Homeless Family Shelter." July 15.

———. 2008b. "Province Rejects Funding for Homeless Family Shelter." July 14.

———. 2009. "Revitalization Plan for East Village Unveiled." September 16.

CCEH. 2008. *Calgary's 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness*. Calgary: Calgary Committee to End Homelessness.

Cheek, Julianne. 2004. At the Margins? Discourse Analysis and Qualitative Research. *Qualitative Health Research* 14 (8):1140-1150.

Chega, John. 2011. "Booth Centre Closure a Sign of Success on Homelessness." *Calgary Herald*, May 6, A15.

CHF. 2003. *Societal Cost of Homelessness*. Calgary: Edmonton Joint Planning Committee on Housing, Calgary Homeless Foundation.

———. 2008. *Report on the Cost of Homelessness in the City of Calgary*. Calgary: Calgary Homeless Foundation.

———. 2009a. *The Homeless among Us: Calgary Homeless Foundation Report to the Community 2009*. Calgary: Homeless Research Workshop.

———. 2009b. *Making Research Matter: Calgary's 3 Year Research Agenda to End Homelessness*. Calgary: Calgary Homeless Foundation.

———. 2010. *Ending Homelessness: Calgary Homeless Foundation Report to the Community 2010*. Calgary: Homeless Research Workshop.

———. 2011a. *About the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS)*. Calgary: Calgary Homeless Foundation.

———. 2011b. *Calgary's 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness 2008-2018*. Calgary: Calgary Homeless Foundation.

———. 2011c. *Don't Ignore Me: Calgary Homeless Foundation Report to the Community 2011*. Calgary: Homeless Research Workshop.

———. 2012. *The State of Homelessness in Calgary in 2012*. Calgary: Homeless Research Workshop.

Choi, Namkee G., and Lidia J. Snyder. 1999a. *Homeless Families with Children: A Subjective Experience of Homelessness*. New York: Springer Publishing Company.

———. 1999b. Homeless Families with Children: Barriers to Finding Decent Housing. *Journal of Poverty* 3 (2):43 - 66.

———. 1999c. Voices of Homeless Parents: The Pain of Homelessness and Shelter Life. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment* 2 (3):55 - 77.

City of Calgary. 2002. *Corporate Affordable Housing Strategy*. Calgary: The City of Calgary.

———. 2004a. Feature Article #04: The Westgate: Helping Families in from the Cold. Calgary: The City of Calgary, Affordable Housing Calgary.

———. 2004b. Feature Article #9: Helping Families in from the Cold. Calgary: The City of Calgary, Affordable Housing Calgary.

———. 2004c. *Homelessness Strategy*. Calgary: City of Calgary.

———. 2005a. *Affordable Housing Options: Rent and Income Supplements*. Calgary: The City of Calgary, Community and Neighbourhood Services.

———. 2005b. *Issues and Opportunities in the Centre City: Research Synthesis 1999-2005*. Calgary: The City of Calgary: Community and Neighborhood Services.

———. 2006. *City Emergency Winter Response Plan Ramps Up*. Calgary: The City of Calgary Newsroom.

———. 2007a. *Ending Homelessness in Calgary*. Calgary: The City of Calgary, Community & Neighbourhood Services.

———. 2007b. *Fast Facts #08: Trends in the Calgary Housing Market*. Calgary: The City of Calgary, Affordable Housing Calgary.

———. 2007c. *The Revitalization of the Rivers District in Calgary*. Calgary: The City of Calgary, Land Use Planning and Policy.

———. 2008. *Biennial Count of Homeless Persons in Calgary: 2008 May 14*. Calgary: The City of Calgary, Community & Neighbourhood Services, Social Research Unit.

———. 2009a. *Best Practices and Lessons Learned in Conducting Counts of Homeless Persons in Calgary, 1992-2008*. Calgary: The City of Calgary, Community & Neighbourhood Services, Social Research Unit.

———. 2009b. *Research Summary #01: Affordable Rent and Home Ownership Limits for Calgary, 2008*. Calgary: The City of Calgary, Community & Neighbourhood Services, Social Research Unit.

———. 2010a. *Community Social Statistics: Downtown East Village*. Calgary: The City of Calgary: Community and Neighborhood Services.

———. 2010b. *East Village Areas Redevelopment Plan*. Calgary: The City of Calgary, Land Use Planning and Policy.

———. 2011a. *The Cost of Market Rental Housing at a Glance, 2010*. Calgary: The City of Calgary, Community & Neighbourhood Services, Social Research Unit.

———. 2011b. *Fast Facts #04: Affordable Housing and Homelessness in Calgary*. Calgary: The City of Calgary, Community & Neighbourhood Services, Social Research Unit.

City of Edmonton. 2001. *Executive Summary of Background Reports #1, #2 and #3: City of Edmonton Low-Income and Special Needs Housing Strategy 2001-2011*. Edmonton: Community Services, City of Edmonton.

Cloke, Paul, Paul Milbourne, and Rebekah Widdowfield. 2001. Making the Homeless Count? Enumerating Rough Sleepers and the Distortion of Homelessness. *Policy & Politics* 29 (3):259-279.

CMHC. 2009. *Rental Market Report: Calgary CMA*. Ottawa: Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation.

———. 2010a. *Canadian Housing Observer*. Ottawa: Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation.

———. 2010b. *Rental Market Report - Calgary CMA*. Ottawa: Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation.

———. 2012. *Rental Market Report: Calgary CMA*. Ottawa: Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation.

Community Action Committee. 2003. *The Calgary Community Plan 2004-2008: Building Paths out of Homelessness*. Calgary: Calgary Homeless Foundation.

Cook, Kay, and Karl Nunkoosing. 2008. Maintaining Dignity and Managing Stigma in the Interview Encounter: The Challenge of Paid-for Participation. *Qualitative Health Research* 18 (3):418-427.

Cooper, Merrill. 2001. *Housing Affordability: A Children's Issue*. Ottawa: Canadian Policy Research Networks.

Cormier, Russ, and Mathew D. Simmonds. 2006. Using HMIS for Reporting. In *HUD New England Regional HMIS Conference*. Boston, MA.

Cosgrove, Lisa. 2006. The Unwarranted Pathologizing of Homeless Mothers. In *Handbook for Social Justice in Counseling Psychology: Leadership, Vision, and Action*, edited by Rebecca L. Toporek, Lawrence H. Gerstein, Nadya A. Fouad, Gargi Roysircar and Tania Israel, 200-214. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Cosgrove, Lisa, and Cheryl Flynn. 2005. Marginalized Mothers: Parenting without a Home. *Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy* 5 (1):127-143.

Cowal, Kirsten, Marybeth Shinn, Beth C. Weitzman, Daniela Stojanovic, and Larissa Labay. 2002. Mother-Child Separations among Homeless and Housed Families Receiving Public Assistance in New York City. *American Journal of Community Psychology* 30 (5):711-730.

Craig, Gary. 1998. The Privatization of Human Misery. *Critical Social Policy* 18 (54):51-76.

Cronley, Courtney. 2010. Unraveling the Social Construction of Homelessness. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment* 20 (2):319-333.

Cross, Philip. 2011. How Did the 2008-2010 Recession and Recovery Compare with Previous Cycles? *Canadian Economic Observer* 24 (1): Section 3.

Cross, Philip, and Geoff Bowlby. 2006. The Alberta Economic Juggernaut: The Boom on the Rose. *Canadian Economic Observer* 19 (9):3.1-3.12.

Cryderman, Kelly. 2006. "Homeless Czar' Offers Inspiration: Calgary Urged to Develop 10-Year Plan." *Calgary Herald*, September 27, B1.

———. 2008a. "Donor Rescues Family Shelter: Inn from the Cold Gets $2.5m Loan after Tory Snub." *Calgary Herald*, July 15, A1.

———. 2008b. "Family Shelter Plan Needs More Money." *Calgary Herald*, June 2, B1.

Cryderman, Kelly, and Tony Seskus. 2006. "Old Brick Store May Shelter Calgary's Homeless." *Edmonton Journal*, October 19, B1.

CTV News. 2012a. "Calgary Housing Prices above Average." October 29.

———. 2012b. "Homeless Count Shows Decrease." February 6.

Culhane, Dennis P., Stephen Metraux, Jung Min Park, Maryanne Schretzman, and Jesse Valente. 2007. Testing a Typology of Family Homelessness Based on Patterns of Public Shelter Utilization in Four U.S. Jurisdictions: Implications for Policy and Program Planning. *Housing Policy Debate* 18 (1):1-28.

Daly, Gerald. 1996. *Homeless: Policies, Strategies, and Lives on the Street*. London: Routledge.

Danseco, Evangeline R., and E. Wayne Holden. 1998. Are There Different Types of Homeless Families? A Typology of Homeless Families Based on Cluster Analysis. *Family Relations* 47 (2):159-165.

Davey, Timothy L., and Melissa L. Abell. 2004. Community-Based Multiple Family Group Intervention for Sheltered Families. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment* 9 (1):129-146.

Davidson, Barbara Parmer, and Pamela L. Jenkins. 1989. Class Diversity in Shelter Life. *Social Work* 34 (6):491-495.

de Montigny, Gerald A.J. 1995. *Social Working: An Ethnography of Front-Line Practice*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

De Pina-Cabral, João. 2000. The Ethnographic Present Revisited. *Social Anthropology* 8 (3):341-348.

DeAngelis, Tori. 1994. Homeless Families: Stark Reality of the 90s. *APA Monitor* 25 (5):1.

Decter, Ann. 2007. *Lost in the Shuffle: The Impact of Homelessness on Children's Education in Toronto*. Toronto: Community Social Planning Council of Toronto.

Denzin, Norman K. 1997. *Interpretive Ethnography: Ethnographic Practices for the 21st Century*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

DeOllos, Ione Y. 1997. *On Becoming Homeless: The Shelterization Process for Homeless Families*. New York: University Press of America.

Derworiz, Colette. 2003. "Westgate Approved as Stop-Gap Shelter: City Ok's Using Former Hotel for Housing." *Calgary Herald*, December 12, B4.

———. 2004. "Westgate Provides Timely Shelter." *Calgary Herald*, April 1, B5.

———. 2006. "Can the East End Shine? Mostly Vacant Area Has Potential to Become Vibrant." *Calgary Herald*, October 22, B4.

———. 2008a. "As Oil Falls, So Does Fortunes of the Needy." *Calgary Herald*, November 19, B1.

———. 2008b. "Deep Freeze Tests City Shelters." *Calgary Herald*, December 16, B1.

———. 2009a. "Homeless Shelter to Close for LRT." *Calgary Herald*, May 7, B8.

———. 2009b. "Homeless Shelters Get More Funding." *Calgary Herald*, January 23, A11.

———. 2009c. "Shelters Get 485 Extra Beds; Province Commits $2.5m to Homeless." *Calgary Herald*, October 6, B1.

DeVault, Marjorie L., and Liza McCoy. 2006. Institutional Ethnography: Using Interviews to Investigate Ruling Relations. In *Institutional Ethnography as Practice*, edited by Dorothy E. Smith, 15-44. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

DeVerteuil, Geoffrey. 2004. Systematic Inquiry into Barriers to Researcher Access: Evidence from a Homeless Shelter. *The Professional Geographer* 56 (3):372-380.

DeWard, Sarah L., and Angela M. Moe. 2010. "Like a Prison!": Homeless Women's Narratives of Surviving Shelter. *Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare* 37 (1):115-135.

DiBlasio, Frederick A., and John R. Belcher. 1992. Keeping Homeless Families Together: Examining Their Needs. *Children and Youth Services Review* 14 (5):427-438.

Dolbeare, Cushing N. 1992. Homelessness and the Low Income Housing Crisis. *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare* 19 (4):151-175.

Dunlap, Katherine M., and Sondra J. Fogel. 1998. A Preliminary Analysis of Research on Recovery from Homelessness. *Journal of Social Distress and the Homeless* 7 (3):175-188.

Eberle, Margaret, Deborah Kraus, Steve Pomeroy, and David Hulchalski. 2001. *Homelessness - Causes & Effects. Volume 2. A Profile, Policy Review and Analysis of Homelessness in British Columbia*. Victoria: Ministry of Social Development and Economic Security.

Edmonton Journal. 2006. "Homeless Plan for Calgary." November 30, B1.

Ellis, Carolyn, and Leigh Berger. 2002. Their Story/My Story/Our Story: Including the Researcher's Experience in Interview Research. In *Handbook of Interview Research: Context and Method*, edited by Jaber F. Gubrium and James A. Holstein, 849-875. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Fallis, George. 2010. Progressive Housing Policy in the 21st Century: A Contrarian View. *Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare* 37 (4):173-199.

Feins, Judith D., and Linda B. Fosburg. 1998. Emergency Shelter and Services: Opening a Front Door to the Continuum of Care. In *Practical Lessons: The 1998 National Symposium on Homelessness Research*. Arlington, VA: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Fellegi, Ivan P. 2004. *Low Income Cutoffs from 1994-2003 and Low Income Measures from 1992-2001*. Ottawa: Statistics Canada.

Ferguson, Eva. 2006. "10-Year Strategy Targets Shelter Crisis: Affordable Housing Key to Homeless Plan." *Calgary Herald*, November 30, B2.

———. 2012a. "Housing Crunch Linked to Rise in Homelessness." *Calgary Herald*, October 26, B1.

———. 2012b. "Shelters Struggle to House Migrants - Calgary Attracts Job Seekers." *Calgary Herald*, August 20, B1.

Fetterman, David M. 2010. *Ethnography: Step by Step*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Fleck, Ludwik. 1979. *Genesis and Development of a Scientific Fact*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Fogel, Sondra J. 1997. Moving Along: An Exploratory Study of Homeless Women with Children Using a Transitional Housing Program. *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare* 24 (3):113-134.

Fogel, Sondra J., and Katherine M. Dunlap. 1998. Communal Living and Family Life in Transitional Shelters *Journal of Applied Social Sciences* 23 (1):3-11.

Fontana, Andrea. 2002. Postmodern Trends in Interviewing. In *Handbook of Interview Research: Context and Method*, edited by Jaber F. Gubrium and James A. Holstein, 161-175. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Forte, James A. 2002. Not in My Social World: A Cultural Analysis of Media Representations, Contested Spaces, and Sympathy for the Homeless. *Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare* 29 (4):131-157.

Fox, Elaine R., and Lisa Roth. 1989. Homeless Children: Philadelphia as a Case Study. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 506:141-151.

Francis, Marion B. 1992. Eight Homeless Mothers' Tales. *Journal of Nursing Scholarship* 24 (2):111-114.

Friedman, Donna Haig. 2000. *Parenting in Public: Family Shelter and Public Assistance*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Fry, Craig L., Wayne Hall, Alison Ritter, and Rebecca Jenkinson. 2006. The Ethics of Paying Drug Users Who Participate in Research: A Review and Practical Recommendations. *Journal of Empirical Research on Human Research Ethics* 1 (4):21-36.

Gaetz, Stephen. 2010. The Struggle to End Homelessness in Canada: How We Created the Crisis, and How We Can End It. *The Open Health Services and Policy Journal* 3:21-26.

———. 2012. *The Real Cost of Homelessness. Can We Save Money by Doing the Right Thing?* Toronto: Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press.

Gaetz, Stephen, Jesse Donaldson, Tim Richter, and Tanya Gulliver. 2013. *The State of Homelessness in Canada 2013*. Toronto: Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press.

Gallagher, Louise. 2007. "Homelessness Is Just One Part of the Bigger Picture." *Calgary Herald*, May 5, B1.

Gardiner, Helen, and Kathleen Cairns. 2002. *2002 Calgary Homelessness Study*. Calgary: Calgary Homeless Foundation.

———. 2003. *2002 Calgary Homelessness Study Secondary Data Analysis: Family Sector*. Calgary: Calgary Homeless Foundation.

Garfinkel, Harold. 1984. *Studies in Ethnomethodology*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Gartner, Brett. 2006. *Leading the Way: The BC-Alberta Economy*. Vancouver: Canada West Foundation.

Gerson, Jen. 2005a. "Anti-Panhandling Campaign Begins." *Calgary Herald*, October 4, B6.

———. 2005b. "Homeless Panhandling Crackdown." *Calgary Herald*, September 28, B1.

———. 2012. "Cecil's Sordid Secrets; Former Calgary Hotel Still 'Brimming with Darkness'." *National Post*, October 26, A3.

Gerstel, Naomi, Cynthia J. Bogard, J. Jeff McConnell, and Michael Schwartz. 1996. The Therapeutic Incarceration of Homeless Families. *The Social Service Review* 70 (4):543-572.

Gewirtz, Abigail, Ellen Hart-Shegos, and Amanuel Medhanie. 2008. Psychosocial Status of Homeless Children and Youth in Family Supportive Housing. *American Behavioral Scientist* 51 (6):810-823.

Gibson, Diana. 2007. *The Spoils of the Boom: Incomes, Profits, and Poverty in Alberta*. Edmonton: The Parkland Institute, University of Alberta.

Gignac, Tamara. 2008. "Inn from the Cold Gives Dad Hope of Better Life for Daughter." *Calgary Herald*, December 20, A1.

Giles, Philip. 2004. *Low Income Measurement in Canada*. Ottawa: Statistics Canada.

Gilmore, Jason, and Sébastien LaRochelle-Côté. 2011. Inside the Labour Market Downturn. *Perspectives on Labour and Income* 23 (1):3-14.

Glick, Jennifer E. 1996. Mothers with Children and Mothers Alone: A Comparison of Homeless Families. *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare* 23 (2):85-94.

Glisson, George M., Bruce A. Thyer, and Robert L. Fischer. 2001. Serving the Homeless: Evaluating the Effectiveness of Homeless Shelter Services. *Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare* 28 (4):89-97.

Goffman, Erving. 1963. *Stigma: Notes on the Management of a Spoiled Identity*. Englewoof Cliffs, NJ: Spectrum.

Gold, Raymond L. 1958. Roles in Sociological Field Observations. *Social Forces* 36 (3):217-223.

Golden, Stephanie. 1992. *The Women Outside: Meanings and Myth of Homelessness*. Berkley, CA: University of California Press.

Goode, Judith, and Jeff Maskovsky. 2001. Introduction. In *The New Poverty Studies: The Ethnography of Power, Politics, and Impoverished People in the United States*, edited by Judith Goode and Jeff Maskovsky, 1-34. New York: New York University Press.

Goodman, Lisa A. 1991a. The Prevalence of Abuse among Homeless and Housed Poor Mothers: A Comparison Study. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 61 (4):489-500.

———. 1991b. The Relationship between Social Support and Family Homelessness: A Comparison Study of Homeless and Housed Mothers. *Journal of Community Psychology* 19 (4):321-332.

Gorlick, Carolyne, and Guy Brethour. 1998. *Welfare-to-Work Programs in Canada: A Discussion Paper*. Ottawa: The Canadian Council on Social Development.

Gorzka, Patricia A. 1999a. Homeless Parents' Perceptions of Parenting Stress. *Journal of Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Nursing* 12 (1):7-16.

———. 1999b. Homeless Parents: Parenting Education to Prevent Abusive Behaviors. *Journal of Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Nursing* 12 (3):101-109.

Gould, Thomas E., and Arthur R. Williams. 2010. Family Homelessness: An Investigation of Structural Effects. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment* 20 (2):170-192.

Government of Alberta. 1993a. *Hearing*. Edmonton AB: Alberta Hansard, Family and Social Services Subcommittee.

———. 1993b. *Speech from the Throne*. Edmonton AB: Alberta Hansard.

———. 2008. *A Plan for Alberta: Ending Homelessness in 10 Years*. Edmonton: Government of Alberta, Housing and Urban Affairs, The Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness.

———. 2011. *2010 Annual Alberta Labour Market Review* Edmonton: Government of Alberta.

———. 2012. *Alberta Minimum Wage Profile: April 2011 - March 2012*. Edmonton: The Government of Alberta, Employment and Immigration.

———. 2013. *2012 Annual Alberta Regional Labour Market Review* Edmonton: Government of Alberta.

Grady, Christine. 2001. Money for Research Participation: Does It Jeopardize Informed Consent? *The American Journal of Bioethics* 1 (2):40 - 44.

Grahame, Peter R. 1998. Ethnography, Institutions, and the Problematic of the Everyday World. *Human Studies* 21 (4):347-360.

Griffith, Alison I., and Dorothy E. Smith. 2005. *Mothering for Schooling*. New York: Routledge.

Grunberg, Jeffrey, and Paula F. Eagle. 1990. Shelterization: How the Homeless Adapt to Shelter Living. *Hospital and Community Psychiatry* 41 (5):521-525.

Gubrium, Jaber F. 1987. Organizational Embeddedness and Family Life. In *Aging, Health and Family: Long-Term Care*, edited by Timothy Brubaker, 23-41. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Gubrium, Jaber F., and James A. Holstein. 1990. *What Is Family?* Mountain View, CA: Mayfield.

———. 1997. *The New Language of Qualitative Method*. New York: Oxford University Press.

———. 2000. Analyzing Interpretive Practices. In *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, edited by Norman Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, 487-508. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

———. 2008. The Constructionist Mosaic. In *Handbook of Constructionist Research*, edited by James A. Holstein and Jaber F. Gubrium, 3-10. New York: The Guilford Press.

Guest House. 2004. *2004 Annual Report*. Calgary: Guest House.

———. 2005a. *2005 Annual Report*. Calgary: Guest House.

———. 2005b. *Financial Statements*. Calgary: Guest House.

———. 2006. *2006 Annual Report*. Calgary: Guest House.

———. 2007. *2007 Annual Report*. Calgary: Guest House.

———. 2008a. *2008 Annual Report*. Calgary: Guest House.

———. 2008b. *Employee Manual*. Calgary: Guest House.

———. 2008c. *Guest House Family Expectations*. Calgary: Guest House.

———. 2008d. *Guest House General Guidelines*. Calgary: Guest House.

———. 2008e. *Volunteer Handbook for the Emergency Family Shelter*. Calgary: Guest House.

———. 2009. *2009 Annual Report*. Calgary: Guest House.

———. 2010. *2010: Report to the Community*. Calgary: Guest House.

———. 2011. *2011 Report to the Community*. Calgary: Guest House.

———. 2012. *News from the Guest House*. Calgary: Guest House.

Gulati, P. 1992. Ideology, Public Policy, and Homeless Families. *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare Volume* 19 (4):113-128.

Guttormson, Kim. 2006a. "Calgary Homeless Spikes 33%: Province, Federal Government Need to Help out, Mayor Says." *Edmonton Journal*, July 20, B1.

———. 2006b. "Criticism Grows over Anti-Panhandling Posters." *Calgary Herald*, May 5, B1.

———. 2006c. "Drop-In Centre Offers Inn from the Cold Haven." *Calgary Herald*, March 24, B4.

———. 2006d. "Inn from the Cold out of a Home: Group Can't Find New Site to Relocate." *Calgary Herald*, March 2, B3.

———. 2008a. "Critics Challenge Timing of Hotel's Bar License Review; Hearing Coincides with Takeover Talks." *Calgary Herald*, September 27, B1.

———. 2008b. "Funding Delay Puts Shelter at Risk." *Calgary Herald*, June 28, B1.

———. 2008c. "U.S. Advocate for Homeless Raves About Calgary Plan." *Calgary Herald*, January 29, B3.

Guttormson, Kim, and Suzanne Wilton. 2006. "Shelter Agency Sites Rejected: East Village Off Limits: City." *Calgary Herald*, March 11, B1.

Haber, Mason G., and Paul A. Toro. 2004. Homelessness among Families, Children, and Adolescents: An Ecological-Developmental Perspective. *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review* 7 (3):123-164.

Hacking, Ian. 1999. *The Social Construction of What?* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Halter, Anthony. 1992. Homeless in Philadelphia: A Qualitative Study of the Impact of State Welfare Reform on Individuals. *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare* 19 (4):7-20.

Hammersley, Martyn. 2003. Conversation Analysis and Discourse Analysis: Methods or Paradigms? *Discourse & Society* 14 (6):751-781.

Hammersley, Martyn, and Paul Atkinson. 1995. *Ethnography: Principles in Practice*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge.

Harman, Lesley D. 1989. *When a Hostel Becomes a Home: Experiences of Women*. Toronto: Garamond Press.

Harris, Scott R. 2003. Studying Equality/Inequality: Naturalist and Constructionist Approaches to Equality in Marriage. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 32 (2):200-232.

———. 2008. Constructionism in Sociology. In *Handbook of Constructionist Research*, edited by James A. Holstein and Jaber F. Gubrium, 231-247. New York: The Guilford Press.

Hartnett, Helen P., and Judy L. Postmus. 2010. The Function of Shelters for Women: Assistance or Social Control? *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment* 20 (2):289-302.

Hastrup, Kirsten. 1990. The Ethnographic Present: A Reinvention. *Cultural Anthropology* 5 (1):45-61.

Hausman, Bonnie, and Constance Hammen. 1993. Parenting in Homeless Families: The Double Crisis. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 63 (3):358-369.

Head, Emma. 2009. The Ethics and Implications of Paying Participants in Qualitative Research. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 12 (4):335-344.

Hirsch, Eric. 2008. Knowing, Not Knowing, Knowing Anew. In *Knowing How to Know: Fieldwork and the Ethnographic Present*, edited by Narmala Halstead, Eric Hirsch and Judith Okley, 21-37. New York: Berghahn Books.

Hoch, Charles, and Robert A. Slayton. 1989. *New Homeless and Old: Community and the Skid Row Hotel*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Hodnicki, Donna R., and Sharon D. Horner. 1993. Homeless Mothers' Caring for Children in a Shelter. *Issues in Mental Health Nursing* 14 (4):349 - 356.

Hoffman, Lisa, and Brian Coffey. 2008. Dignity and Indignation: How People Experiencing Homelessness View Services and Providers. *The Social Science Journal* 45 (2):207-222.

Holden, Daphne. 1997. "On Equal Ground": Sustaining Virtue among Volunteers in a Homeless Shelter. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 26 (2):117-145.

Holstein, James A., and Jaber F. Gubrium. 1995. *The Active Interview*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

———. 2002. Active Interviewing. In *Qualitative Research Methods*, edited by Darin Weinberg, 112-126. Oxford, UK: Blackwell.

———. 2003a. A Constructionist Analytics for Social Problems. In *Challenges and Choices: Constructionist Perspectives on Social Problems*, edited by James A. Holstein and Gale Miller, 187-208. New York: Aldine De Gruyter.

———. 2003b. Inside Interviewing: New Lenses, New Concerns. In *Inside Interviewing: New Lenses, New Concerns*, edited by James A. Holstein and Jaber F. Gubrium, 3-30. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

———. 2008. Constructionist Impulses in Ethnographic Fieldwork. In *Handbook of Constructionist Research*, edited by James A. Holstein and Jaber F. Gubrium, 373-395. New York: The Guilford Press.

Hope, Marty. 2007. "Homeless 'Crisis' Hurting Revitalization." *Calgary Herald*, September 29, B1.

Hopper, Kim. 2003. *Reckoning with Homelessness*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Howell, Trevor. 2013. "Shelter's Funding Is Denied - Inn from the Cold Has $750k Deficit." *Calgary Herald*, April 12, B4.

Huckin, Thomas. 2002. Textual Silence and the Discourse of Homelessness. *Discourse and Society* 13 (3):347-372.

Hulchanski, J. David, Philippa Campsie, Shirley B.Y. Chau, Stephen W. Hwang, and Emily Paradis. 2009. Homelessness: What's in a Word. In *Finding Home: Policy Options for Addressing Homelessness in Canada*, edited by J. David Hulchanski, 1-16. Toronto: Cities Centre Press.

Hunt, Stephen. 2011. "Guest House Helps Families Stay Together." *Calgary Herald*, December 11, A2.

Huntington, Nicholas, John C. Buckner, and Ellen L. Bassuk. 2008. Adaptation in Homeless Children: An Empirical Examination Using Cluster Analysis. *American Behavioral Scientist* 51 (6):737-755.

Jablonski, Bob, Naheed Nenshi, and John Rock. 2012. "You Can Help Every Calgarian Find a Home." *Calgary Herald*, November 22, A15.

Jacobs, Francine H. 1994. Defining a Social Problem: The Case of Family Homelessness. *American Behavioral Scientist* 37 (3):396-403.

Jacobs, Francine, Priscilla M. D. Little, and Cheryl Almeida. 1993. Supporting Family Life - a Survey of Homeless Shelters. *Journal of Social Distress and the Homeless* 2 (4):269-288.

Johnson, Alice K. 1989. Female-Headed Homeless Families: A Comparative Profile. *Affilia* 4 (4):23-39.

———. 1999. Working and Nonworking Women: Onset of Homelessness within the Context of Their Lives. *Affilia* 14 (1):42-77.

Johnson, Alice K., Kay Young McChesney, Cynthia J. Rocha, and William H. Butterfield. 1995. Demographic Differences between Sheltered Homeless Families and Housed Poor Families: Implications for Policy and Practice. *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare* 22 (4):5-22.

Jones, Julie Scott. 2010. Origins and Ancestors: A Brief History of Ethnography. In *Ethnography in Social Science Practice*, edited by Julie Scott Jones and Sal Watt, 13-27. New York: Routledge.

Joniak, Elizabeth A. 2005. Exclusionary Practices and the Delegitimization of Client Voice: How Staff Create, Sustain, and Escalate Conflict in a Drop-In Center for Street Kids. *American Behavioral Scientist* 48 (8):961-988.

Karabanow, Jeffrey. 1999. When Caring Is Not Enough: Emotional Labor and Youth Shelter Workers. *Social Service Review* 73 (3):340-357.

Karim, Khalid, Victoria Tischler, Peter Gregory, and Panos Vostanis. 2006. Homeless Children and Parents: Short-Term Mental Health Outcomes *International Journal of Social Psychiatry* 52 (5):447-458.

Kauppi, Carol, and Susan Braedley. 2003. *Structural Factors Associated with Homelessness: A Review of the Literature*. Sudbury: Social Planning Council of Sudbury.

Khanna, Mukti, Nirbhay N. Singh, Mary Nemil, Al Best, and Cynthia R. Ellis. 1992. Homeless Women and Their Families: Characteristics, Life Circumstances, and Needs. *Journal of Child and Family Studies* 1 (2):155-165.

Kingfisher, Catherine. 2007. Discursive Constructions of Homelessness in a Small City in the Canadian Prairies: Notes on Deconstruction, Individualization, and the Production of (Raced and Gendered) Unmarked Categories. *American Ethnologist* 34 (1):91-107.

Kissman, Kris. 1999. Respite from Stress and Other Service Needs of Homeless Families. *Community Mental Health Journal* 35 (3):241-249.

Kitsuse, John I., and Aaron V. Cicourel. 1963. A Note on the Uses of Official Statistics. *Social Problems* 11 (2):131-139.

Kleinman, Mark. 2000. Include Me Out? The New Politics of Place and Poverty. *Policy Studies* 21 (1):49-61.

Komarnicki, Jamie. 2006. "Shelter Proposal Divides Residents: Petition Started to Stop Project." *Calgary Herald*, October 29, B1.

———. 2007. "City Shuffles Homeless to Latest Shelter; Cots for 100 Set up in Ems Garage." *Calgary Herald*, April 7, B3.

———. 2010. "Hidden Homeless Overwhelm Aid Agency." *Calgary Herald*, January 31, B3.

———. 2011. "Salvation Army to Close Shelter." *Calgary Herald*, April 19, B1.

———. 2012. "Volunteers Ready for Calgary's First Homeless Count since 2008." *Calgary Herald*, January 11.

Korn, Joel. 2008. "Inn from the Cold Denied Homeless Foundation Cash; Inn to Push Ahead with Emergency Shelter for Families." *Calgary Herald*, May 14, B6.

———. 2009. "End of an Era as City Takes over Cecil Hotel; It Began as Inn for Labourers in 1912, Ending with Sullied Reputation." *Calgary Herald*, February 28, B1.

Korn, Joel, and Kim Guttormson. 2008. "City to Pay $10.9m for Cecil; Land Could Be Used for Parkade." *Calgary Herald*, December 16, B1.

Koro-Ljungberg, Mirka. 2002. A Social Constructionist Framing of the Research Interview. In *Handbook of Interview Research: Context and Method*, edited by Jaber F. Gubrium and James A. Holstein, 429-444. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Kosny, Agnieszka A., and Joan M. Eakin. 2008. The Hazards of Helping: Work, Mission and Risk in Non-Profit Social Service Organizations. *Health, Risk & Society* 10 (2):149-166.

Kraus, Deborah, and Paul Dowling. 2003. *Family Homelessness: Causes and Solutions*. Ottawa: Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation.

Kyle, Ken. 2005. *Contextualizing Homelessness: Critical Theory, Homelessness, and Federal Policy Addressing the Homeless* New York: Routledge.

Laird, Gordon. 2007. *Shelter - Homelessness in a Growth Economy: Canada's 21st Century Paradox*. Calgary: Sheldon Chumir Foundation for Ethics in Leadership.

LaRochelle-Côté, Sébastien, and Jason Gilmore. 2009. Canada's Employment Downturn. *Perspectives on Labour and Income* 10 (12):5-12.

Latour, Bruno. 2005. *Reassembling the Social*. New York: Oxford University Press.

LaVesser, Patricia D., Elizabeth M. Smith, and Susan Bradford. 1997. Characteristics of Homeless Women with Dependent Children: A Controlled Study. *Journal of Prevention & Intervention in the Community* 15 (2):37-52.

Lee, Barret A., Townsand Price-Spratlen, and James W. Kanan. 2003. Determinants of Homelessness in Metropolitan Areas. *Journal of Urban Affairs* 25 (3):335-355.

Lee, Barrett A., Kimberly A. Tyler, and James D. Wright. 2010. The New Homelessness Revisited. *Annual Review of Sociology* 36:501-521.

Letiecq, Bethany L., Elaine A. Anderson, and Sally A. Koblinsky. 1998. Social Support of Homeless and Housed Mothers: A Comparison of Temporary and Permanent Housing Arrangements. *Family Relations* 47 (4):415-421.

Letkemann, Paul G. 2004. First Nations Urban Migration and the Importance Of "Urban Nomads" In Canadian Plains Cities: A Perspective from the Streets. *Canadian Journal of Urban Research* 13 (2):241-256.

Liebow, Elliot. 1993. *Tell Them Who I Am: The Lives of Homeless Women*. New York: Basic Books

Light, Duncan. 2010. The Final Stage?: Writing up Ethnographic Research. In *Ethnography in Social Science Practice*, edited by Julie Scott Jones and Sal Watt, 173-186. New York: Routledge.

Lightman, Ernie S., and Graham Riches. 2000. From Modest Rights to Commodification in Canada's Welfare State. *European Journal of Social Work* 3 (2):179-190.

Linders, Annulla. 2008. Documents, Texts, and Archives in Constructionist Research. In *Handbook of Constructionist Research*, edited by James A. Holstein and Jaber F. Gubrium, 467-490. New York: The Guilford Press.

Lindsey, Elizabeth W. 1996. Mothers' Perceptions of Factors Influencing the Restabilization of Homeless Families. *Families in Society* 77 (4):203-215.

———. 1997. The Process of Restabilization for Mother-Headed Homeless Families: How Social Workers Can Help. *Journal of Family Social Work* 2 (3):49-72.

———. 1998a. The Impact of Homelessness and Shelter Life on Family Relationships. *Family Relations* 47 (3):243-252.

———. 1998b. Service Providers' Perception of Factors That Help or Hinder Homeless Families. *Families in Society* 79 (2):160-172.

Loseke, Donileen R. 1992. *Battered Woman and Shelters: The Social Construction of Wife Abuse*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

———. 2003. *Thinking About Social Problems*. 2nd ed. New York: Walter de Gruyter.

Lyon-Callo, Vincent. 2000. Medicalizing Homelessness: The Production of Self-Blame and Self-Governing within Homeless Shelters *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* 14 (3):328-345.

———. 2001. Homelessness, Employment, and Structural Violence: Exploring Constraints on Collective Mobilizations against Systemic Inequality. In *The New Poverty Studies: The Ethnography of Power, Politics, and Impoverished People in the United States*, edited by Judith Goode and Jeff Maskovsky, 293-318. New York: New York University Press.

———. 2004. *Inequality, Poverty, and Neoliberal Governance: Activist Ethnography in the Homeless Sheltering Industry*. Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press.

Lyon-Callo, Vincent, and Susan Brin Hyatt. 2003. The Neoliberal State and the Depoliticization of Poverty: Activist Anthropology and "Ethnography from Below". *Urban Anthropology* 32 (2):175-204.

Main, Thomas. 1998. How to Think About Homelessness: Balancing Structural and Individual Causes. *Journal of Social Distress and the Homeless* 7 (1):41-54.

Marcus, Anthony. 2006. *Where Have All the Homeless Gone?: The Making and Unmaking of a Crisis*. New York: Berghahn Books.

Marketwire. 2012. "Rise in Calgary's Homeless Population Slowed Down but Being Pressured by Migration." October 25.

———. 2013. "Calgary Homeless Foundation Directs $8.5 Million to Agencies Supporting Homeless Families." April 12.

Markusoff, Jason. 2011. "Agency Set to Resume Calgary Homeless Count." *Calgary Herald*, May 30, B1.

Martinbault, Jean-François. 2009. Which Came First: 'Bad' Rules or 'Bad' Clients? In *Growing Home: Housing and Homelessness in Canada*. Calgary.

Marvasti, Amir. 1998. "Homelessness" As Narrative Redemption. In *Perspectives on Social Problems*, edited by James A. Holstein and Gale Miller, 167-182. Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.

———. 2002. Constructing the Service-Worthy Homeless through Narrative Editing. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 31 (5):615-651.

———. 2003. *Being Homeless: Textual and Narrative Constructions*. Lanham, MA: Lexington Books.

———. 2008. Interactional Constructionism. In *Handbook of Constructionist Research*, edited by James A. Holstein and Jaber F. Gubrium, 315-330. New York: The Guilford Press.

Maskovsky, Jeff. 2001. Afterword: Beyond the Privatist Consensus. In *The New Poverty Studies: The Ethnography of Power, Politics, and Impoverished People in the United States*, edited by Judith Goode and Jeff Maskovsky, 470-482. New York: New York University Press.

Mathieu, Arline. 1993. The Medicalization of Homelessness and the Theater of Repression. *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* 7 (2):170-184.

Maynard, Douglas W. 1989. On the Ethnography and Analysis of Discourse in Institutional Settings. In *Perspectives on Social Problems*, edited by James A. Holstein and Gale Miller, 127-146. London: JAI Press Inc.

McArthur, Morag, Joanna Zubrzycki, Anthony Rochester, and Lorraine Thomson. 2006. 'Dad, Where Are We Going to Life Now?' Exploring Fathers' Experiences of Homelessness. *Australian Social Work* 59 (3):288-300.

McChesney, Kay Young. 1992. Absence of a Family Safety Net for Homeless Families *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare* 19 (4):55-72.

———. 1995. A Review of the Empirical Literature on Contemporary Urban Homeless Families. *The Social Service Review* 69 (3):429-460.

McCormick, Kathy. 2003a. "Homeless to Stay in Hotel." *Calgary Herald*, December 13, HS03.

———. 2003b. "Plan to House Homeless Delayed until New Year." *Calgary Herald*, December 27, HS05.

McCoy, Liza. 2008. Institutional Ethnography and Constructionism. In *Handbook of Constructionist Research*, edited by James A. Holstein and Jaber F. Gubrium, 701-714. New York: The Guilford Press.

McGinnis, Sarah. 2005. "Police Make Shopping Safer." *Calgary Herald*, April 15, B8.

———. 2007. "Shelter Closes as Weather Takes Turn for the Worse." *Calgary Herald*, April 2, B1.

McKeganey, Neil. 2001. To Pay or Not to Pay: Respondents' Motivation for Participating in Research. *Addiction* 96:1237-1238.

McLean, Linda. 2008. *Beyond Ending Homelessness: An Alternative Perspective*. Calgary: Calgary Drop-In & Rehab Centre.

Meadows-Oliver, Mikki. 2003. Mothering in Public: A Meta-Synthesis of Homeless Women with Children Living in Shelters. *Journal for Specialists in Pediatric Nursing* 8 (4):130-136.

Meanwell, Emily. 2012. Experiencing Homelessness: A Review of Recent Literature. *Sociology Compass* 6 (1):72-86.

Menke, Edna M., and Janet D. Wagner. 1997. The Experience of Homeless Female-Headed Families. *Issues in Mental Health Nursing* 18 (4):315 - 330.

Metraux, Stephen, and Dennis P. Culhane. 1999. Family Dynamics, Housing, and Recurring Homelessness among Women in New York City Homeless Shelters. *Journal of Family Issues* 20 (3):371-396.

Miller, Gale. 1997. Contextualizing Texts. In *Context and Method in Qualitative Research*, edited by Gale Miller and Robert Dingwall, 77-91. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Miller, Leslie J. 2003. Claims-Making from the Underside: Marginalization and Social Problems Analysis. In *Challenges and Choices: Constructionist Perspectives on Social Problems*, edited by James A. Holstein and Gale Miller, 92-119. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.

———. 2008. Foucauldian Constructionism. In *Handbook of Constructionist Research*, edited by James A. Holstein and Jaber F. Gubrium, 251-274. New York: The Guilford Press.

Mills, Crystal, and Hiro Ota. 1989. Homeless Women with Minor Children in the Detroit Metropolitan Area. *Social Work* 34 (6):485-489.

Morris, Rita I., and Rachael A. Butt. 2003. Parents' Perspectives on Homelessness and Its Effects on the Educational Development of Their Children. *The Journal of School Nursing* 19 (1):43-50.

Morris, Rita I., and Linda Strong. 2004. The Impact of Homelessness on the Health of Families. *The Journal of School Nursing* 20 (4):221-227.

Mulder, Mark. 2004. Faith-Based Homeless Shelters And "Hyper-Institutionalization": A Case Study. *Michigan Sociological Review* 18:136-165.

Murphy, Elizabeth, and Robert Dingwall. 2001. The Ethics of Ethnography. In *Handbook of Ethnography*, edited by Paul Atkinson, Amanda Coffey, Sara Delamont, John Lofland and Lyn Lofland, 339-351. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Myers, Sean. 2007. "Homeless Shelter Loses Bid for Permanent Site." *Calgary Herald*, February 21, B9.

———. 2010. "Inn from the Cold Covets Pepsi's $100,000 Prize." *Calgary Herald*, August 17, A1.

———. 2011. "Shelter for Families Bursting at the Seams: Most Exhausted Their Supports and Can't Pay Rent." *Calgary Herald*, July 26, B2.

———. 2012. "Homeless Count Not Expected to Decline." *Calgary Herald*, February 4, B1.

National, Council of Welfare. 1999. *A New Poverty Line: Yes, No or Maybe?* Ottawa: National Council of Welfare.

National Alliance to End Homelessness. 2000. *A Plan, Not a Dream: How to End Homelessness in Ten Years*. Washington, DC: National Alliance to End Homelessness.

Neale, Joanne. 1997. Homelessness and Theory Reconsidered. *Housing Studies* 12 (1):47-61.

Nenshi, Naheed. 2008. "MLA's Fuzzy-Headed Thinking Shows It's Time for a Rest." *Calgary Herald*, July 17, A14.

Newsdaily Canada. 2007. "Calgary Committee to End Homelessness: City Leaders Launch Effort to End Homelessness." January 9.

Nichols, Naomi Elizabeth. 2008a. Gimme Shelter! Investigating the Social Service Interface from the Standpoint of Youth. *Journal of Youth Studies* 11 (6):685-699.

———. 2008b. Understanding the Funding Game: The Textual Coordination of Civil Sector Work. *Canadian Journal of Sociology* 33 (1):61-87.

Nikander, Pirjo. 2008. Constructionism and Discourse Analysis. In *Handbook of Constructionist Research*, edited by James A. Holstein and Jaber F. Gubrium, 413-428. New York: The Guilford Press.

North, Carol S., and Elizabeth M. Smith. 1993. A Comparison of Homeless Men and Women: Different Populations, Different Needs. *Community Mental Health Journal* 29 (5):423-431.

Novac, Sylvia, Joyce Brown, and Carmen Bourbonnais. 1996. *No Room of Her Own: A Literature Review on Women and Homelessness*. Ottawa: Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation.

Nuñez, Ralph. 2001. Family Homelessness in New York City: A Case Study. *Political Science Quarterly* 116 (3):367-379.

Nuñez, Ralph, and Cybelle Fox. 1999. A Snapshot of Family Homelessness across America. *Political Science Quarterly* 114 (2):289-307.

O'Connor, Alice. 2001. *Poverty Knowledge: Social Science, Social Policy, and the Poor in Twentieth-Century U.S. History*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Øyen, Else. 2005. *The Polyscopic Landscape of Poverty Research*. Bergen: Research Council of Norway.

Paquette, Kristen, and Ellen L. Bassuk. 2009. Parenting and Homelessness: Overview and Introduction to the Special Section. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 79 (3):292-298.

Park, Jung Min, Stephen Metraux, Gabriel Brodbar, and Dennis P. Culhane. 2004. Child Welfare Involvement among Children in Homeless Families. *Child Welfare* 83 (5):423-436.

Parker, David. 2006. "Ronald McDonald House Going on the Auction Block." *Calgary Herald*, October 6, D2.

Pascale, Celine-Marie. 2005. There's No Place Like Home: The Discursive Creation of Homelessness. *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies* 5 (2):250-268.

Perlman, Staci, Abigail Gewirtz, Beryl Cowan, Mary Haskett, and Lauren Stokes. 2012. Promoting Positive Parenting in the Context of Homelessness. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 82 (3):402-412.

Pollner, Melvin, and Robert M. Emerson. 2001. Ethnomethodology and Ethnography. In *Handbook of Ethnography*, edited by Paul Atkinson, Amanda Coffey, Sara Delamont, John Lofland and Lyn Lofland, 118-135. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Potter, Jonathan. 1996. *Representing Reality: Discourse, Rhetoric and Social Construction*. London: Sage.

Potter, Jonathan, and Alexa Hepburn. 2008. Discursive Constructionism. In *Handbook of Constructionist Research*, edited by James A. Holstein and Jaber F. Gubrium, 275-293. New York: The Guilford Press.

Presser, Harriet B., and Amy G. Cox. 1997. The Work Schedules of Low-Educated American Women and Welfare Reform. *Monthly Labor Review* 120 (4):25-35.

Pye, Sarah. nd. *The Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS) Initiative: Using Information and Communication Technologies to Build Knowledge and Understanding on Homelessness*. Gatineau, QC: National Secretariat on Homelessness.

Rafferty, Yvonne, and Marybeth Shinn. 1991. The Impact of Homelessness on Children. *American Psychologist* 46 (11):1170-1179.

Renne, Kathleen. 2008. "A Home for the Holidays; Agencies Give Hope to Those on the Streets." *Calgary Herald*, December 11, NA1.

Richards, Rickelle, and Chery Smith. 2006. The Impact of Homeless Shelters on Food Access and Choice among Homeless Families in Minnesota. *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior* 38 (2):96-105.

Richter, Tim. 2008. "Parking Lot Is No Answer to Traffic Jam." *Calgary Herald*, July 22, A11.

Riessman, Catherine Kohler. 1993. *Narrative Analysis*. Newbury Park: Sage.

Roberts, Terry. 2005. "Campaign's a Good Move." *Calgary Herald*, October 10, A9.

Rocha, Cynthia, Alice K. Johnson, Kay Young McChesney, and William H. Butterfield. 1996. Predictors of Permanent Housing for Sheltered Homeless Families. *Families in Society* 77 (1):50-57.

Rock, Paul. 2001. Symbolic Interactionism and Ethnography. In *Handbook of Ethnography*, edited by Paul Atkinson, Amanda Coffey, Sara Delamont, John Lofland and Lyn Lofland, 26-38. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Rog, Debra J., and John C. Buckner. 2007. Homeless Families and Children. Paper read at Towards Understanding Homelessness: The 2007 National Symposium on Homelessness Research, at Washington, DC.

Roschelle, Anne R., and Peter Kaufman. 2004. Fitting in and Fighting Back: Stigma Management Strategies among Homeless Kids. *Symbolic Interaction* 27 (1):23-46.

Rosenblatt, Paul C. 2002. Interviewing at the Border of Fact and Fiction. In *Handbook of Interview Research: Context and Method*, edited by Jaber F. Gubrium and James A. Holstein, 893-909. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Rossi, Peter H. 1990. The Old Homeless and the New Homelessness in Historical Perspective. *American Psychologist* 45 (8):954-959.

———. 1994. Troubling Families: Family Homelessness in America. *American Behavioral Scientist* 37 (3):342-395.

Roy, Francine. 2004. Social Assistance by Province, 1993-2003. *Canadian Economic Observer* 17 (11):3.1-3.7.

Russell, Margaret L., Donna G. Moralejo, and Ellen D. Burgess. 2000. Paying Research Subjects: Participants' Perspectives. *Journal of Medical Ethics* 26 (2):126-130.

Ruttan, Susan. 2011. Klein-Era Cutbacks Pushed Thousands onto the Streets. Alberta's 10-Year Plan to Fix the Damage Is a Start. *Alberta Views* 14 (1):28-32.

Ryan, Ellen, and Michael Hartman. 2000. Homeless Families on the Border: A Demographic Profile. *Journal of Children & Poverty* 6 (2):169-177.

Sager, Rebecca, and Laura Susan Stephens. 2005. Serving up Sermons: Clients' Reactions to Religious Elements at Congregation-Run Feeding Establishments. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 34 (3):297-315.

Sanjek, Roger. 1991. The Ethnographic Present. *Man* 26 (4):609-628.

Schindler, Holly S., and Rebekah L. Coley. 2007. A Qualitative Study of Homeless Fathers: Exploring Parenting and Gender Role Transitions. *Family Relations* 56 (1):40-51.

Schneider, Barbara. 2011. Sourcing Homelessness: How Journalists Use Sources to Frame Homelessness. *Journalism*.

Schneider, Barbara, Kerry Chamberlain, and Darrin Hodgetts. 2010. Representations of Homelessness in Four Canadian Newspapers: Regulation, Control, and Social Order. *Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare* 37 (4):147-172.

Schultz-Krohn, W. 2004. The Meaning of Family Routines in a Homeless Shelter. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy* 58 (5):531-542.

Schütz, Alfred. 1967. *The Phenomenology of the Social World*. Evanston; IL: Northwestern University Press.

Seddon, Toby. 2005. Paying Drug Users to Take Part in Research: Justice, Human Rights and Business Perspectives on the Use of Incentive Payments. *Addiction Research & Theory* 13 (2):101-109.

Seltser, Barry Jay, and Donald E. Miller. 1993. *Homeless Families: The Struggle for Dignity*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press.

Shapcott, Michael. 2007. *U.S. Homeless Czar Mangano Preaches Local Action as U.S. Federal Government Cuts Funding*. Toronto: The Wellesley Institute.

Shinn, Marybeth. 1992. Homelessness: What Is a Psychologist to Do? *American Journal of Community Psychology* 20 (1):1-24.

———. 1997. Family Homelessness: State or Trait? *American Journal of Community Psychology* 25 (6):755-769.

Shinn, Marybeth, and Colleen Gillespie. 1994. The Roles of Housing and Poverty in the Origins of Homelessness *American Behavioral Scientist* 37 (4):505-521.

Shinn, Marybeth, James R. Knickman, David Ward, Nancy Lynn Petrovic, and Barbara J. Muth. 1990. Alternative Models for Sheltering Homeless Families. *Journal of Social Issues* 46 (4):175-190.

Shinn, Marybeth, and Beth C. Weitzman. 1990. Research on Homelessness: An Introduction. *Journal of Social Issues* 46 (4):1-11.

———. 1996. Homeless Families Are Different. In *Homelessness in America*, edited by Jim Baumohl, 109-122. Phoenix, AZ: Oryx.

Shinn, Marybeth, Beth C. Weitzman, Daniela Stojanovic, James R. Knickman, Lucila Jinénez, Lisa Duchon, Susan James, and David H. Krantz. 1998. Predictors of Homelessness among Families in New York City: From Shelter Request to Housing Stability. *American Journal of Public Health* 88 (11):1651-1657.

Shlay, Anne B., and Peter H. Rossi. 1992. Social Science Research and Contemporary Studies of Homelessness. *Annual Review of Sociology* 18:129-160.

Silverman, David. 1993. *Interpreting Qualitative Data: Methods for Analyzing Talk, Text and Interaction* London: Sage.

Smith, Dorothy E. 1989. Women's Work as Mothers: A New Look at the Relation of Class, Family, and School Achievement. In *Perspectives on Social Problems*, edited by James A. Holstein and Gale Miller, 109-125. Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.

———. 1990. *Texts, Facts, and Femininity: Exploring the Relations of Ruling* London: Routledge.

———. 2005. *Institutional Ethnography: A Sociology for People*. New York: AltaMira.

———. 2007. Making Change from Below. *Socialist Studies* 3 (2):7-30.

Smith, Elizabeth, and Carol North. 1994. Not All Homeless Women Are Alike: Effects of Motherhood and the Presence of Children. *Community Mental Health Journal* 30 (6):601-610.

Smith, Vicki. 2001. Ethnographies of Work and the Work of Ethnographers. In *Handbook of Ethnography*, edited by Paul Atkinson, Amanda Coffey, Sara Delamont, John Lofland and Lyn Lofland, 220-233. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Snow, David A. 2001. Extending and Broadening Blumer's Conceptualization of Symbolic Interactionism. *Symbolic Interaction* 24 (3):367-377.

Snow, David A., and Leon Anderson. 1987. Identity Work among the Homeless: The Verbal Construction and Avowal of Personal Identities. *The American Journal of Sociology* 92 (6):1336-1371.

Snow, David A., Leon Anderson, and Paul Koegel. 1994. Distorting Tendencies in Research on the Homeless. *American Behavioral Scientist* 37 (4):461-475.

Snow, David A., Susan G. Baker, and Anderson Leon. 1988. On the Precariousness of Measuring Insanity in Insane Contexts. *Social Problems* 35 (2):192-196.

Snow, David A., and M. Gerald Bradford. 1994. Broadening Perspectives on Homelessness: An Introduction. *American Behavioral Scientist* 37 (4):454-460.

Spencer, J. William. 1997. Homeless in River City: Client Work in Human Service Encounters. In *Social Problems in Everyday Life: Studies of Social Problems Work*, edited by Gale Miller and James A. Holstein, 149-164. Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.

Spencer, J. William, and Jennifer L. McKinney. 1997. "We Don't Pay for Bus Tickets, but We Can Help You Find Work": The Micropolitics of Trouble in Human Service Encounters. *The Sociological Quarterly* 38 (1):185-203.

Spencer, Jonathan W. 1994. Homeless in River City: Client Work in Human Service Encounters. In *Perspectives on Social Problems*, edited by Gale Miller and James A. Holstein, 29-45. Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.

Spicker, Paul. 2011. Ethical Covert Research. *Sociology* 45 (1):118-133.

Stainbrook, Kristin A., and John Hornik. 2006. Similarities in the Characteristics and Needs of Women with Children in Homeless Family and Domestic Violence Shelters. *Families in Society* 87 (1):53-62.

Stark, Louisa R. 1994. The Shelter As "Total Institution": An Organizational Barrier to Remedying Homelessness. *American Behavioral Scientist* 37 (4):553-563.

Statistics Canada. 2008. *Canada Year Book 2007*. Ottawa: Statistics Canada.

———. 2010. *Canada Year Book 2010*. Ottawa: Statistics Canada.

———. 2011. Labour Force Characteristics. Ottawa: Statistics Canada.

———. 2012. *Income in Canada*. Ottawa: Statistics Canada.

———. 2013a. *Labour Force Characteristics*. Ottawa: Statistics Canada.

———. 2013b. *Labour Force Survey Estimates, by Census Metropolitan Area, Canism Table 282-0110*. Ottawa: Statistics Canada.

Stern, Mark J. 1984. The Emergence of the Homeless as a Public Problem. *Social Service Review* 58 (2):291-301.

Stewart, Susan D. 2007. *Brave New Stepfamilies: Diverse Paths Towards Stepfamily Living* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Stojanovic, Daniela, Beth C. Weitzman, Marybeth Shinn, Larissa E. Labay, and Nathaniel P. Williams. 1999. Tracing the Path out of Homelessness: The Housing Patterns of Families after Exiting Shelter. *Journal of Community Psychology* 27 (2):199-208.

Stretch, John J., and Larry W. Kreuger. 1992. Five Year Cohort Study of Homeless Families: A Joint Policy Research Venture. *Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare* 19 (4):73-88.

Styron, Thomas H., Ronnie Janoff-Bulman, and Larry Davidson. 2000. Homelessness in the Context of Single Mothers' Lives. *Journal of Social Distress and the Homeless* 9 (2):143-165.

Susser, Ida. 1993. Creating Family Forms: The Exclusion of Men and Teenage Boys from Families in the New York City Shelter System, 1987-91. *Critique of Anthropology* 13 (3):267-283.

———. 1996. The Construction of Poverty and Homelessness in US Cities. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 25:411-435.

Sweeney, Megan M. 2010. Remarriage and Stepfamilies: Strategic Sites for Family Scholarship in the 21st Century. *Journal of Marriage & Family* 72 (3):667-684.

Swick, Kevin. 2005. Helping Homeless Families Overcome Barriers to Successful Functioning. *Early Childhood Education Journal* 33 (3):195-200.

Sznajder-Murray, Brittany, and Natasha Slesnick. 2011. "Don't Leave Me Hanging": Homeless Mother's Perceptions of Service Providers. *Journal of Social Service Research* 37 (5):457-468.

Takahashi, Lois, Jaime McElroy, and Stacy Rowe. 2002. The Sociospatial Stigmatization of Homeless Women with Children. *Urban Geography* 23 (4):301-322.

The Children's Cottage Society. 2009. Annual Report 2008/2009. Calgary: The Children's Cottage Society.

The City of Calgary. 2008. Biennial Count of Homeless Persons in Calgary: 2008 May 14. Calgary: The City of Calgary, Community & Neighbourhood Services, Social Research Unit.

Thompson, John B. 1991. Editor's Introduction. In *Language and Symbolic Power*, edited by Pierre Bourdieu, 1-31. Cambridge: Polity Press

Thompson, Sonia. 1996. Paying Respondents and Informants. *Social Research Update* Autumn (14).

Thrasher, Shirley P., and Carol T. Mowbray. 1995. A Strengths Perspective: An Ethnographic Study of Homeless Women with Children. *Health & Social Work* 20 (2):93-101.

Toneguzzi, Mario. 2010. "Inn from the Cold Helping Change Lives." *Calgary Herald*, A1.

———. 2011. "Homeless Find a Home at the Inn." *Calgary Herald*, N11.

Toohey, Siobhan M., Marybeth Shinn, and Beth C. Weitzman. 2004. Social Networks and Homelessness among Women Heads of Households. *American Journal of Community Psychology* 33 (1/2):7-20.

Torquati, Julia C. 2002. Personal and Social Resources as Predictors of Parenting in Homeless Families. *Journal of Family Issues* 23 (4):463-485.

Van den Berg, Axel, Claus-H. von Restorff, Daniel Parent, and Anthony C. Masi. 2008. From Unemployment to Employment Insurance: Towards Transitional Labour Markets in Canada? In *Flexibility and Employment Security in Europe: Labour Markets in Transition*, edited by Ruud J.A. Muffels. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar.

Van Maanen, John. 1988. *Tales of the Field: On Writing Ethnography*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

van Rassel, Jason. 2012. "Shelters Facing Perfect Storm: Homelessness Rising with Hot Economy." *Calgary Herald*, June 28, A1.

———. 2013. "Restraint Leaves Wing Empty at Calgary Homeless Shelter - Slight Funding Increase Won't Cover Staff Shortage." *Edmonton Journal*, March 9, A11.

Wacquant, Loïc J.D. 2007. Pierre Bourdieu. In *Key Sociological Thinkers*, edited by Rob Stones, 261-277. London, New York: Macmillan.

Waegemakers Schiff, Jeannette. 2004a. Community Collaboration for Housing Homeless Families: Results from the Field. *Canadian Review of Social Policy* Fall 2004 (54):103-107.

———. 2004b. Westgate Emergency Housing Project Evaluation Study. Ottawa: Human Resources Development Canada.

———. 2007. Homeless Families in Canada: Discovering Total Families. *Families in Society* 88 (1):131-140.

Wagner, David. 1993. *Checkerboard Square: Culture and Resistance in a Homeless Community*. Boulder, CO: Westview.

Wagner, David, and Jennifer Barton Gilman. 2012. *Confronting Homelessness: Poverty, Politics, and the Failure of Social Policy*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner.

Wasson, Reyna Reed, and Ronald Paul Hill. 1998. The Process of Becoming Homeless: An Investigation of Female-Headed Families Living in Poverty. *The Journal of Consumer Affairs* 32 (2):320-342.

Weinreb, Linda, and Peter H. Rossi. 1995. The American Homeless Family Shelter "System". *Social Service Review* 69 (1):86-107.

Weitzman, Beth C., James R. Knickman, and Marybeth Shinn. 1990. Pathways to Homelessness among New York City Families. *Journal of Social Issues* 46 (4):125-140.

———. 1992. Predictors of Shelter Use among Low-Income Families: Psychiatric History, Substance Abuse, and Victimization. *American Journal of Public Health* 82 (11):1547-1550.

Wenger, Brandy. 2004. Feature Article #04: The Westgate: Helping Families in from the Cold. Calgary: The City of Calgary, Affordable Housing Calgary.

Williams, Jean Calterone. 1996. Geography of the Homeless Shelter: Staff Surveillance and Resident Resistance. *Urban Anthropology* 25 (1):75-113.

———. 2003. *A Roof over My Head: Homeless Women and the Shelter Industry*. Boulder, CO: University Press of Colorado.

———. 2005. The Politics of Homelessness: Shelter Now and Political Protest. *Political Research Quarterly* 58 (3):497-509.

Williamson, Kerri. 2006. "Inn from the Cold Eyes Ronald McDonald House: Agencies Bid in Building in Southwest." *Calgary Herald*, December 15, B7.

Wilson, W. Brett. 2011. "Your Support Can Help Families." *Calgary Herald*, December 3, A1.

Wong, Yin-Ling Irene, Dennis P. Culhane, and Randall Kuhn. 1997. Predictors of Exit and Reentry among Family Shelter Users in New York City. *The Social Service Review* 71 (3):441-462.

Wood, David, R. Burciaga Valdez, Toshi Hayashi, and Albert Shen. 1990. Homeless and Housed Families in Los Angeles: A Study Comparing Demographic, Economic, and Family Function Characteristics. *American Journal of Public Health* 80 (9):1049-1052.

Wright, Susan E. 1993. Presidential Address: Blaming the Victim, Blaming Society or Blaming the Discipline: Fixing Responsibility for Poverty and Homelessness. *The Sociological Quarterly* 34 (1):1-16.

Wright, Talmadge. 1997. *Out of Place: Homeless Mobilizations, Subcities, and Contested Landscapes*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Yapa, Lakshman. 1996. What Causes Poverty?: A Postmodern View. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 86 (4):707-728.

Yeich, Susan. 1994. *The Politics of Ending Homelessness*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America.

APPENDIX A: A RESEARCH TIME-LINE

2006	
September	secured volunteer position at the Guest House
October	observations of the Guest House's Church Program intake process for a methods class
November	interview with a Guest House staff member for a methods class
2008	
October	secured volunteer position at the Guest House's newly opened Family Shelter; monthly dinner and hospitality service
November	verbal approval for research obtained from ED during a team leader meeting I attended on behalf of my volunteer group
December 6	ethics application submitted to CFREB
December 8	email sent to Guest House ED requesting a meeting to discuss research
December 15	follow-up email sent to ED after non-response
2009	
January 10	initial feedback from CFREB – written approval from organization requested
January 11	email sent to the ED requesting meeting to obtain written approval for my research project – no response
January 15	called the Guest House main line, would not put my call through to the ED but took a message
January 28	discussion about my research with volunteer coordinator during a team leader meeting – volunteer coordinator promised to follow up with ED
February 5	another discussion with the volunteer coordinator – suggests to email research proposal to ED
February 6	research proposal emailed to ED – no response
February 14	follow-up email sent to ED
February 18-20	Growing Home conference at University of Calgary –the Guest House ED was scheduled to hold a workshop, but was indisposed; Board member facilitated workshop instead – approached Board member after workshop
February 19	emailed research proposal to Board member
February 23	received email from ED requesting a meeting responded to email suggesting different meeting times
February 24	received email from ED suggesting a meeting on March 2nd
March 2	meeting with ED – written approval obtained; written approval submitted to CFREB; feedback regarding ethics application received from CFREB
March 9	my response to CFREB comments sent back to CFREB
March 10	meeting with Guest House Board member
March 12	feedback regarding my responses received from CFREB – application will have to be reviewed by full Board
March 21	additional material submitted to CFREB

March 24	comments regarding additional material received from CFREB
March 27	CFREB board meeting
March 27	CFREB comments received
March 31	requested revisions submitted to CFREB
April 3	CFREB approval received

Setting up Observations

April 5	discussion with ED regarding observation opportunities and participant recruitment; ED suggests I support the family program facilitator and help her with planning and facilitating weekend activities
April 23	follow-up email sent to ED regarding the family program facilitator – no response
May 7	Guest House team leader meeting – spoke to ED in person about establishing contact with the family program facilitator
May 12	emailed family program facilitator directly, asking for a meeting
May 25	discussion with volunteer coordinator's assistant who offered to follow up with the family program facilitator about the email I sent
May 27	volunteer coordinator's assistant informs me that the family program facilitator is taking a leave of absence for medical reasons, a replacement will be hired
June 6	job posting for family program facilitator – application submitted
June 7	first dinner announcement to recruit research participants from families
June 11	first guest interviews conducted
June 15	talked to volunteer coordinator about possible naptime volunteer position – volunteer coordinator said she would talk to the program manager who liked the idea but indicated that it needs to be an official volunteer position and a second volunteer needs to be recruited
July 14	job interview for family program facilitator position
July 21	emailed management asking for an interview – no response
July 20	job application for teaching position submitted
July 22	new volunteer opportunity as naptime supervisor advertised – no volunteers found
August 7	discussion with the program manager re my job application – she indicated that she and the ED have yet to meet to discuss the interviews
August 8	withdrawal of my application for the family program facilitator positions to take on teaching position
August 30	job opportunity as naptime supervisor offered
August 31	emailed program manager to indicate my interest in position
September 03	program manager emailed back indicating that the weekend slots needed to be filled
September 04	program manager informs me that I have the job, work will begin on September 14
September 19	first shift as Guest House residential staff member
November 11	first staff interview conducted

APPENDIX B: GUEST INTERVIEW GUIDE

First off, I appreciate your willingness to help me with my research. I want to emphasize that I won't share any of the information you provide during the interview with the Guest House. I would also like to emphasize that you are the expert and I want to learn from you, so it's not about what I want to hear from you than about your knowledge, thoughts, and insights.

I. Family/Personal Background

- How old are you?
- How many children do you have?
- How old are they?
- Are they Boys? Girls?
- Who is living with you at the Guest House? Are there immediate family members who are not staying with you at the Guest House? Where are they staying? (married/single)
- What is your main source of income now?
- What kind of jobs have you been working? If employed: where are you currently working? What are you doing there?
- Tell me a bit about your life so far.
- Where were you born/did you grow up? How did you grow up? What was your childhood/youth like? What education did you receive?
- What was it like growing up for you?
- Can you describe to me how the way you grew up is linked to your situation today?

II. Becoming Homeless

- Could you describe to me the events that led up to you seeking shelter at the Guest House?
- Tell me about your thoughts and feelings when you learned about the (event that led to losing the home)? What was that like?
- What was going on in your life at that time?
- When and how did you lose your home?
- How long have you been living at the Guest House?
- If applicable: Where did you stay in the meantime?
- Is this the first time you sought shelter or have you been housed by a shelter before?
- If applicable: Where did you stay?
- Can you describe to me how other shelters compares to the Guest House?
- How would you describe the person you were then/now?
- Could you describe the most important thing you take away from this experience (yourself, your relationship, other people institutions)?

IV. Finding Shelter

- Can you describe to me the process of seeking shelter at the Guest House?
- Can you describe to me the process you had to go through in order to get into the Guest House?
- Tell me about the thoughts and feelings you had at that time.

V. Daily Routines/Shelter Life

- There are a lot of people who don't know what being homeless is like. How would you describe your current life to people like that?
- Can you please describe to me what your day yesterday looked like from getting up in the morning until going to bed at night? (probe for morning routines, meal times, school, work, afternoons, evenings, family time, etc.)
- Can you please describe to me how your last Sunday looked like? (weekend)
- Do you participate in any programs/services provided by the Guest House?
- If yes: which ones?
- What do you do there?
- How do you feel about them?
- How is shelter life organized? Who does the cleaning, cooking, grocery shopping, etc.?
- How do you feel about living in the shelter? What problems do you encounter? What is the source of those problems?
- What aspects of living here do you like?
- What aspects don't you like?
- Describe to me shelter rules that you have to watch while living here?
- How do you think or feel about them?
- How are the staff treating you here? Other service providers?
- What would you change about the way the shelter is run, if you had the power to?

VI. Family/Children

- How important is it to you that you can be here as a family?
- How do you think your experience would be different if your part/husband/male children couldn’t stay here with you?
- Can you describe to me how your current living situation affects your life? Your children's lives? Your family's life?
- Can you describe to me what your relationship with your child/children is like since you moved into the shelter? Has it changed? How?
- Can you describe to me how caring for your children in a shelter compares to caring for your children in your own home?
- Tell me how you deal with your current situation? What helps you to manage the stress/frustration/anger…
- Who has been the most helpful to you during this time?
- How has she/he been helpful?
- In what ways, do you think, does living in the shelter affects your children's lives? Their school performance? Their behaviour?
- What do you do together as a family inside or outside the Guest House?
- Where do you see yourself in a couple of years?
- Describe the person you hope to be then.
- How would you compare the person you hope to be and the person you see yourself as now?
- What are your hopes for your family's future?
- What are your hopes/concerns for your child(ren)'s future?
- What do you picture his/her lives to be like as an adult?
- What risks and opportunities do you think he/she will encounter as he/she grows up?

V. Ending Questions

- Describe to me how you think other people outside the Guest House see you as a person.
- Tell me about your strengths/weaknesses that you discovered or developed through the process.
- What do you most value about yourself now?
- What do others most value in you?
- Tell me about your own views about what causes homelessness and what homeless people are like.
- Have your views changed or have they been confirmed since you started stayed here?
- The city of Calgary and the province of Alberta have released plans to end homelessness within the next 10 years. What would you tell the government they need to do in order to accomplish that goal?
- What do you think you need in order to get your family back on track?
- Is there anything that we haven't discussed but that you think is important to talk about?
- Is there anything you would like to ask me?

APPENDIX C: RESIDENTIAL STAFF INTERVIEW GUIDE

First off, I appreciate your willingness to help me with my research. I want to emphasize that I won't share any of the information you provide during the interview with the Guest House. I would also like to emphasize that you are the expert and I want to learn from you, so it's not about what I want to hear from you than about your knowledge, thoughts, and insights.

I. Staff Member's Background

- What is your current position at the Guest House? (facility staff title discussion)
- How long have been working in this position?
- What other positions have you worked in in the past?
- How did you end up in this particular shelter?
- What is your educational and professional background?
- What are your job responsibilities?
- What do you see as your main duty?
- What does your typical day at the Guest House looks like?
- How would you describe the people this shelter serves?
- Can you speak to the main reasons for why your guests are homelessness?
- What barriers do you think homeless families face?
- What do you find most challenging in your line of work?
- What do you find most rewarding in your line of work?

II. The Registration process

- Assume I am a new to the shelter. Can you please walk me through the registration process in detail?
- What kinds of documentation do you require for registration? Why?
- What kind of questions do you ask potential guests? What do you learn from those questions?
- Taking into consideration limited capacity, how do you decide which families/singles will be housed at the Guest House?
- How do you decide who constitutes a family to go upstairs?
- For what reasons would you not provide services to families/singles who turn to the shelter for help?
- What happens to families or individuals who are not admitted to the Guest House?

III. Programs and Services

- In what ways have things at the Guest House changed since the change in leadership?
- What's the rationale behind those changes?
- Who do you communicate with in regards to the other staff? How?
- Who do you report to and how?
- What do you hope to accomplish when working with families staying here? (i.e. continuum of care, examples and practices of positive role modeling)
- What kind of programs and services, in addition to housing, does the Guest House provide to the families and singles it houses?
- Is there a difference between singles and family programs?
- What goals do these programs seek to accomplish?

- Is participation in (some of) those programs voluntary or mandatory?
- How successful, do you think, are those programs?
- How, do you think, has the provision of programs and services changed since the Guest House moved from offering congregate living in churches to the permanent set up in its downtown location?
- What are the benefits/disadvantages of providing stable housing in comparison to congregate shelter?
- Why can singles no longer hang out on the 1st floor during the day?

IV. Shelter Life/Rules

- Do you distinguish between different types of families? (i.e. high needs families, etc.)
- Which rules govern life at the shelter?
- How do the rules for the seniors on the second floor compare to the rules for the families on the 3rd?
- How were those rules developed and by whom?
- How are those rules enforced and by whom?
- What purpose do the rules fulfill?
- To what extent do families get a say in how things are run?
- How much discretion do you have in enforcing the rules?
- Are there some rules that you bend or ignore? Why?
- Do the rules apply to all the guests the same? What are the exceptions?
- How do guests respond to the various rules?
- Are there any conflicts emerging around shelter rules? If so, between whom? How are these conflicts resolved? By whom?
- What are some of the issues that emerge working with the guests? What problems arise?
- What happens in cases of non-compliance with the rules?
- Do you keep log books?
- Do you write incident reports?
- What gets documented and how?
- Who is that documentation sent to?
- How is the person you sent the documentation to responding/reporting back to you/other staff?
- How does the busy time of the last few months compare to the less busy times before and after?
- How is the relationship between facility staff and guests? What are some common issues?
- How is the relationship among facility staff members?
- How is the relationship between facility staff and outreach?
- How is the relationship between facility staff and management?
- How would you organize your work with guests if you could make that call? What would you change?