

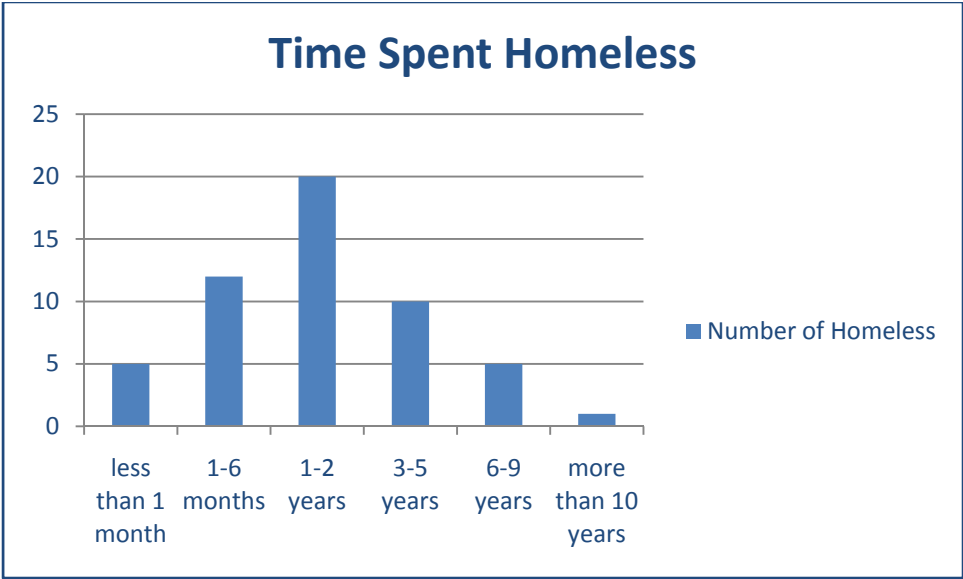
3.0 Highlights from Consultations

3.1 The Homeless Citizens

As an essential first step, the Community Engagement Sub-Committee consulted with the people who would be the recipients of housing - the people who are homeless themselves. The Bissell Center joined in the coordination of the interview process. The work of the Bissell, and Marilyn Fleger in particular, resulted in rich and meaningful data on what it means to be homeless.

The Sub-Committee designed and pre-tested an interview format. The format for the interviews was based on suggestions from Streets to Home-Toronto, and may be adapted to track progress once the people who are homeless have been housed.

62 people were interviewed. 5 people had been homeless for less than a month, 12 had been homeless between 1 and 6 months, 20 between 1-2 years, 10 between 3-5 years, 5 between 6 and 9 years and one person was homeless for more than 10 years.



Their ages ranged from a 16 year old girl who had left a group home to a 71 year old woman whose apartment was converted into a condo. 18% were under age 25, 66% were between 25 and 49, and 16% were over 50. There was an almost even gender split - 32 males and 30 females. 36 of those interviewed (58%) were Aboriginal including 22 First Nations, 3 Inuit and 10 Metis.

The findings of our consultations appear in the report, *"You Never Know if You're Going to Wake Up Dead: Living Without a Home"* by Kerr Creative (See the Appendix) and are summarized below

What people are looking for in housing

“When I was homeless it didn’t matter where I lived. But after living 2 months in an unsafe place, I want to be safe.”

Location, location, location

“Location, location, location” applies to people who are homeless when considering housing. Of the people interviewed, 26 identified that location was important, 22 wanted to be away from the drug scene/street environments, and 15 selected close to agencies/drop-ins/medical.

“It has to be close to all the important things that a person does. I don’t want to take a bus to get groceries.”

“I would look on the south side or west end, downtown and north side are too violent.”

Someplace where there’s no drinking.”

What everyone wants in a home

In addition to location, people who are homeless want the same things in their housing that most people want: cleanliness, affordability, comfort.

“Cheap, affordable. Safety. That they would understand that I was homeless and not hold it against me.”

“A place where I could maintain medication.”

“Something that’s not scummy. When you go in there’s not cockroaches, etc. It doesn’t have to be elaborate. It’s just me. Bachelor pad. Fridge, stove, bathroom.”

Finding and maintaining housing

Governments (provincial and federal) should put more money into housing. There should be a lot of different kinds of housing. No one should be homeless in Alberta.


Affordable housing

Affordability was a unanimous answer. 97% of the people interviewed requested help in finding an affordable place and 86% said more money would help.

“We need housing. We need affordable housing to keep people off the street. Being single and a woman, it is hard to find housing. It is hard for women, more than men.”

Practical support

The suggestions for what would help to find or maintain housing were varied. Practical issues such as someone to talk to (42 of those interviewed), transportation (42), help budgeting (36) and help finding furniture/wares (35) were mentioned.

 *“If everything is included in the rent, that’s all I want. So I don’t have to deal with a bunch of bills.”*

“No credit checks. No references.”

“Somewhere to keep/store your stuff is necessary while you look for housing.”

“I owe so much money to Bell and Telus - I would like help in how to pay it back. I don’t know where to start.”

“We would need to go for family counseling.”

“Maybe an outreach worker who comes to check on you after you find a place. Someone who drops by to see if you are alive and kicking.”


Easy access to services

A number of people interviewed expressed frustration with the hassles of obtaining existing services. There were suggestions to remove the “hassle factors,” make it easier to access services, and improve the knowledge of what’s available.

 *“If there was one place, with all the above supports, it would be helpful. I would benefit with a life skills course.”*

Help to look for housing

Interviewees said that transportation and someone to go with them would be helpful when trying to find a place to live.

 *“Somewhere to leave your stuff while you’re looking for a place. Someone to drive you to places to look for apartments.”*

“Someone who could take you around to see places. Someone who can support you in looking for a place.”

Help with landlords

Practical help with landlords would help, particularly to reduce the effects of discrimination. Some of the people interviewed faced discrimination based on race, some based on income, and for others, it was both.

 *“Help with landlord-tenant problems, knowing my rights.”*

“Landlords are more likely to rent you if you have an outreach worker with you. They take you more seriously.”


“I apply for a place and they think my friends and family will follow.”

“It’s hard, especially when you are Native. They automatically think you’re a crack head, druggie or alcoholic.”

“They’re picking and choosing who they want. You can’t go there with a rent report.”

Help with addictions

Many of the people interviewed who had addictions problems said that help with addictions was needed to help with housing.


 *“Get more detox centres. Access to detox! Help me sober up, I can’t do it on my own. Then I’ll go back to work, make money, and I won’t need help.”*

“Get more detox centres. Help people help themselves. I want my name on here so they know who I am. I’m Richard Dubois. I speak my mind.”

“There should be more treatment programs. Big waiting lists.”

Aboriginal services

When people who are homeless who identified as Aboriginal were asked if they would like Aboriginal services, most responded that it didn’t matter. For some, however, receiving services from an Aboriginal agency was important to them.

 *“They seem to understand more about being raised on a reservation. They do not make you feel stupid or ashamed of your upbringing.”*