

Homelessness

The state of response in Inuvik, NT

Prepared for Hon. Floyd Roland

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Overview

At 200km north of the Arctic Circle, Inuvik has both a visible and hidden homeless population. Low-income residents contend with serious housing issues and those with more economic means find few housing options due to a low vacancy rate. In recent years, the state of local housing and vulnerability of our homeless population have received increasing recognition as crucial and pressing social issues in Inuvik.

Fears that the issue will be significantly exacerbated by the economic boom associated with resource development are real and substantiated. Transients arriving in Inuvik in search of employment already face the low-vacancy rate of a limited housing market, a six-month residency requirement to become eligible for the public housing waitlist, and an additional year of waiting for a unit to become available.

To date there is little locally specific formal documentation or measures defining the scope of the problem. At Interagency meetings, service providers report single mothers who are unable to find affordable housing, multiple families living in three or four bedroom row houses, and clients with two-inch gaps in their exterior door jambs.¹ Transients coming from other communities or provinces with few resources find it difficult to establish a home base from which to develop a livelihood. One wellness worker reported an incident of a group of homeless men living in an old transport container suffering the abuse of youth throwing rocks at them.

This report provides an overview of efforts to address homelessness in Inuvik to date. A literature review summarizes existing research ranging from a local to territorial scope, highlighting areas pertaining directly to Inuvik. An account of grassroots efforts to ameliorate homelessness and address its root causes reveals the challenges associated with this complex issue. The report concludes with recommendations regarding areas requiring further exploration, possible avenues for action and the resources required to make a lasting difference.

¹ Inuvik Interagency Committee, Minutes (2005).

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The Inuvik Interagency Committee

For more than twenty years, the Interagency has worked to identify, address, and resolve gaps in social services programming. It is the Interagency's goal to implement changes in the town of Inuvik which are responsive, proactive, progressive and, ultimately, community-driven. Efforts to enact positive social change in the past have led to the establishment of entities such

As the Inuvik Food Bank, Suicide Hotline, Victim's Services, and the New Beginnings Alternative School.

The Interagency performs a unique function in our community, serving as a forum and a model for collaboration. Members are able to identify local needs and gaps in current service provision and to work together to address and fill those gaps. Members have also reported that the Interagency has filled an important role in orienting and networking new employees with the anticipated result of improving employee retention.

The Inuvik Interagency Committee has an open membership currently ranging between 60 and 85 individuals representing over thirty local agencies and programs and including members of the general community. Member involvement ranges between active participation in projects and subcommittees, attendance of monthly meetings, attendance of special events, and receiving informational communications.

Currently, all Interagency activities take place within Inuvik but in many cases benefit the surrounding Beaufort-Delta communities through Inuvik's function as a regional centre. Benefits of our activities are directly realized by participating members and positively impact participating agencies, their clientele, and the general Inuvik community.

Our Mission

The Inuvik Interagency Committee is a non-profit network of community representatives collaborating to implement community-driven social change.

Community-driven issues are those based on the expressed needs of the community.

To accomplish this mission, we:

- *Facilitate communication between existing programs and services,*
- *Engage our community in consultations, needs assessments and issue-identification processes,*
- *Identify and resolve gaps in social programming,*
- *Act as a resource for service access, and*
- *Foster the development of new social programs and services.*

Literature Review

Homelessness in Inuvik

In 2002, the Interagency Homelessness Committee contracted a researcher to evaluate the scope and nature of homelessness in Inuvik. From this work came a foundational report entitled *Homelessness in Inuvik* that has provided community groups, government departments and national organizations with much needed information in this area. This report is the best resource to-date in terms of identifying available resources, and the needs and challenges experienced by homeless and at-risk populations in Inuvik.

Homelessness in Inuvik provides background information on individuals and families who are homeless, at risk of homelessness, living in substandard conditions, or inappropriately housed in Inuvik. It makes the point that homelessness is not just caused by a shortage of appropriate housing, but identifies other inter-connected factors (such as substance use, or the high cost of living) which have contributed to these circumstances. In addition to addressing these issues, the document also makes a number of recommendations and lays out a plan for a continuum of care.

Data was gathered from interviews with service providers, a community meeting, focus groups with high-school students, and questionnaires completed at the community meeting and by homeless individuals.

This report employs a broad definition of homelessness. It accounts for those who experience ‘absolute homelessness’ and are sleeping out-of-doors, in emergency shelters or in a series of friends or relatives’ homes and those who are at risk or experiencing ‘relative homelessness.’ The smaller number of absolute homeless people on the street belies the much larger number of hidden homeless who are ‘couch-surfing;’ sharing cramped space with relatives, friends or strangers; paying more than 30% of their income on shelter; or living in substandard homes or unsafe family environments.² The pervasive nature of relative homelessness in Inuvik is not well documented or understood.

As a regional centre, people travel to Inuvik to seek employment and/or access government services. However, existing housing infrastructure is insufficient with a noted shortage of affordable, temporary accommodation contributing to the transient homeless population in town. There is more to homelessness in Inuvik than the measurable housing shortage. A competitive and selective rental market, and a limited number of available and suitable public housing units converge with social factors such as job loss, separation from a partner, unsafe home environments, addiction, mental illness, inter-generational trauma and abuse, domestic violence, or a lack of crucial life skills. The result is a population of homeless youth, families, and single men and women sharing space with relatives and friends, staying in emergency shelters, or

² Eilidh Mackenzie, *Homelessness in Inuvik*, (2003) 9.

sleeping outside. *Homelessness in Inuvik* reveals that there are inadequate support services or facilities to address many of these root causes.

Community agencies anticipate that problems underlying and associated with homelessness will be exacerbated by the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline with the inevitable influx of transient workers and resultant increase in rents and housing shortages.

Following is a summary of recommendations that emerged from the findings of this report.

Interagency Coordination

- Review and prioritise recommendations to formulate an Inuvik homelessness plan of action, identifying short and long-term goals, available and required resources, partners and project teams, and associated timeframes.

Shelter

- Establish emergency shelters for substance using clients,
- Strengthen role of transitional housing programs and other supportive housing options for semi-independent living,
- Create transient housing for temporary visitors, and
- Increase accommodation for people trying to access education and training.

Prevention

- Develop and pilot an eviction/foreclosure prevention programme for tenants or homeowners, and
- Advocate for the establishment of Independent Housing Advocate and Rental Officer positions in Inuvik for the Beaufort Delta area.

Support Services

- Establish a local and long-term addiction programme and detox facility,
- Provide follow-up support services for clients released from treatment,
- Expanded delivery of life skill programmes,
- Coordinate outreach and advocacy for people with special needs,
- Develop an accessible daily meal programme,
- Establish an accessible used furniture depot,
- Establish public laundry and shower facilities, and
- Establish drop-in spaces and resource centres for individual client groups like seniors and youth.

Communication, Cooperation, and Collaboration

- Establish a delegation to coordinate and champion ongoing action on homelessness,
- Coordinate programming and services for the purpose of avoiding duplication, maximising available resources and accessing new sources of funding and support,
- Accept a common vision and foster community ownership of problems and solutions related to homelessness,

- Build capacity within existing organisations to provide new programmes and services, and
- Compile and distribute resource packages to service providers and clients.

This report was intended as a reference point from which leaders, service providers, and community members could springboard into a coordinated approach to address local homelessness issues. While progress has been made on some of the above recommendations, much work remains. Actions taken since the release of *Homelessness in Inuvik* are outlined in the next section.

Homelessness in the NWT: Recommendations to Improve GNWT Response

In 2005, the GNWT acted on the priorities laid out in its 2004 strategic plan by initiating a territory-wide examination of factors contributing to homelessness in the NWT. Information was gathered from interviews and workshops with NGOs, and municipal and territorial employees. The resulting report aimed to “identify the gaps, overlaps and challenges in the system of existing programs and supports that contribute to homelessness” and to make recommendations that would improve GNWT response.³

While recognizing the existence of “hidden homelessness”, particularly in smaller communities, this report focuses on those who experience “absolute homelessness”, characterizing them in three broad groups: single men and women, families with children, and youth. The report identifies and describes existing services provided by NGOs and government departments including those in Inuvik; however, some information pertaining to Inuvik organizations appears to be inaccurate.

An exploration of service limitations and associated problems resulted in a number of solutions suggested by interviewees. Highlights included:

- Strengthen role of transitional housing programs and other supportive housing options,
- Increase number of residential alcohol treatment facilities,
- Establish discharge support programs for inmates and addictions clients returning to communities,
- Enhance communications and collaboration between NGO and governmental service providers,
- Explore policy adaptations to Income Support programs,
- Provide life skills education on topics such as good tenancy practices and financial planning, and

³ GNWT, *Homelessness in the NWT*, (2005) 1

- Establish an interdepartmental group with a mandate of being aware of homelessness issues and established programs.

The report concludes with a number of recommendations aimed at improving the GNWT response to homelessness that were guided by the assumption that the GNWT will continue to provide funding to NGOs through its Social Program Departments rather than develop and provide direct services to address the issues raised earlier in the document. These recommendations are summarized as follows:

1. Expand options in the “housing continuum” through the provision of funding to NGOs,
2. Support NGOs in developing new programs and making program revisions and consider policy adaptations to services offered by Social Programs Departments
3. Support youth overnight programs by funding NGOs
4. Undertake better release planning through the involvement of NGOs and facilitation of Income Support assessment
5. Improve understanding of public housing eligibility requirements through communication with NGOs involved in transitional housing support services
6. Support Childcare programs at transitional housing

Information Sharing on Homelessness in the North

Issues associated with Northern homelessness differ from those experienced by communities in the south. In response to a perceived lack of information resources pertaining directly to the experience of homelessness in the North, this report undertakes a needs analysis, seeking “to determine what sources and types of information are most useful to those addressing the problem of homelessness in the North.”⁴

The information in this report was gathered from service providers in all three Northern Territories through a questionnaire and a number of interviews. The focus of the questionnaire was to determine the usefulness of existing sources of information and to identify what further sources and formats of information are required. Interviews were used to elaborate on the issues that arose from the questionnaire.

The questionnaire asked respondents to describe the role of their organization in addressing homelessness. They were provided with a list of 69 existing reports on or relating to homelessness in the North and were asked to indicate whether they had read them and to rate their usefulness. A final question inquired about the priorities of participants with relation to homelessness.

⁴ Peter Jackson, Information Sharing on Homelessness in the North, (2006) 2.

Thirteen agencies from the Northwest Territories participated in the study. Only the Inuvik Interagency Committee's *Homelessness in Inuvik* report (2003) was rated "very useful" and was done so by the two Inuvik respondents. Reports that were rated as "useful" included:

- Engeland, John, Lance Jakubec and Roger Lewis. *The Geography of Household Growth and Core Housing Need, 1996-2001*. Ottawa: Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation, 2004.
- GNWT, *Social Agenda Conference Report*. Hay River: 2001.
- GNWT, *Social Agenda: A Draft for the People of the NWT*. Yellowknife: 2001.
- GNWT, *NWT Housing Needs Survey*. Yellowknife: 2001.

Of particular note was that only four of the thirteen NWT respondents were very aware of the range of existing information sources and that respondents working directly with the homeless tended to get most of their information from the homeless themselves.

NWT respondents identified the following information needs:

- An electronic database of community resources available to clients
- Information pertaining to the training of shelter staff
- Pamphlets, videos and other educational material for public education
- Listing of other agencies working with homelessness
- Downloadable academic and government reports
- A literature review with an annotated bibliography
- Detailed census data
- A clarification of the definition of Northern Homelessness

NWT respondents identified the following priorities:

- The need for more housing to address the chronic overcrowding
- Helping the homeless "get back on their feet"
- Facilitating programs for the homeless
- Providing for basic needs for shelter, food and support

A general consensus among respondents indicated that enough research had been done in the area and that what is truly needed are resources and action.

Significant in this report is the attention given to a discussion of the definition and uniqueness of homelessness in the north. It argues that "homelessness in the North is typified by chronic over-crowding, but absolute homelessness also exists."⁵ The author explained that "on the street homelessness may not be as obvious as in the south because in order to find shelter from the cold, northern homeless need to find more private spaces to get warm than the public places available in the south."⁶ Hidden homelessness is more common but constitutes a grey area as it "leaves the impression that people are living as part of an extended family."⁷ Other factors unique to housing challenges faced by Northern centres relate to the social dynamics of small, isolated communities and the high costs of living. Additionally, residents' can reportedly lose

⁵ Peter Jackson, x.

⁶ Peter Jackson, 13.

⁷ Peter Jackson, 13.

their public housing unit due to extended absences for out-of-territory medical treatment.

The report concluded with several recommendations to address the issues raised during the course of the research. These were as follows:

- Establish an internet-based group to facilitate the sharing of homelessness information in the North,
- Ensure greater consultation of Northern residents in the development of research plans,
- Promote academic and political recognition that absolute homelessness does exist in the North, and
- Bring national attention to the issue of Northern homelessness to assist in garnering resources to address the issue.

Local Efforts

The Inuvik Interagency Homelessness Committee

The Interagency addresses priority areas identified by its member agencies through subcommittees, which are comprised of a diverse representation of local organizations. Homelessness has been a priority issue for the Interagency Committee for over four years. The Interagency Homelessness Committee (hereafter referred to as the Committee) was formed to address a rising concern about homelessness in Inuvik and was comprised of representatives from groups such as the Gwich'in Tribal Council, Nihtat Gwich'in Council, Inuvik Community Corporation, Inuvialuit Regional Corporation, Social Services, Beaufort Delta Regional Health Authority, Town of Inuvik, Anglican Church, and the RCMP.

For some time the Committee has been concerned with the limitations of service provide by the existing homeless shelter (formerly called Turning Point) and sought to enhance existing services and to fill identified service gaps by working towards a continuum of care for the homeless. Collaboration with the existing shelter proved to be difficult and unproductive: shelter directors would not come to the table. Aware of the continued vulnerability of the under and un-served population of homeless, the Committee organized and planned for the establishment of a new facility that would fill immediate housing needs by providing safe shelter from our extreme climate for substance-using and non-using clients. The envisioned facility would also address long-term needs through appropriate programming and transitional housing aimed at assisting clientele in building healthy and independent living situations. Broad support was expressed for this project by community organizations.

Plans were developed over the course the year, beginning in early 2004 with speculation about an available building site and the design of the physical layout of the facility. The Committee inquired into the availability and possible donation of a site located at one end of the main street that was owned by the Town of Inuvik. At this time, the Town reserved this land for the shelter pending the approval of an adequate proposal. The Interagency coordinator assembled and submitted a proposal to the Town of Inuvik in November 2004; however, this project was tabled when it became apparent that the existing shelter, formerly called Turning Point, was in financial crisis.

When the Homelessness Committee reconvened in February 2005, the meeting was attended by the manager and chairperson of the local shelter. It was revealed that the shelter's governing organization was in crisis and likely to close its doors at the end of the fiscal year. This meeting marked a significant shift in the focus of the Homelessness Committee as attentions and efforts were shifted to the exploration of the circumstances of the shelter and to strategizing for the continued provision of emergency shelter.

On the eve of closure, community leaders convened to keep the shelter doors open. At this meeting, the Nihtat Gwich'in Council stepped forward with a three-month commitment to sustain the service and to plan for its long-term sustainability. As of September 2006, this organization continues to run the shelter but struggles with retaining qualified staff and has not yet been able to expand its range of service and thus does not provide for the identified under and un-served population. The Interagency continues to liaise with the shelter manager to provide support where needed and possible.

In the spring of 2006, the Homelessness Committee began assessing what interim actions could be taken to meet immediate needs. The Interagency is developing a pamphlet entitled, "Meeting your Basic Needs in Inuvik" for distribution by support workers to clients in need. Other objectives in this area include exploring possibilities for clothing vouchers and a public laundry service.

More recently, the activities of the Homelessness Committee have diminished considerably with the loss of momentum and in recognition of the enormity of the task. A group of service providers alone cannot comprehensively address the issue without the backing of leadership and government. Organizations represented by members of the Committee have failed to back efforts with economic or in-kind resources. This issue requires the undivided attention and financial resources of lead organizations. It must be managed as a community project.

Emergency Shelters

The Inuvik Homeless Shelter

Up until recently, the Inuvik Homeless Shelter was called Turning Point and was operated by the Inuvik Alcohol Committee. In March 2005, the Inuvik Alcohol Committee was found to be no longer in good legal standing and consequently could no longer secure the funds required to run the facility. At this time, the Nihtat Gwich'in Council (NGC) stepped forward to maintain the service. The NGC was able to secure some money from the National Homelessness Initiative, however the amount was received nearly a year after application and was only sufficient to provide a basic shelter service. The NGC's ongoing commitment to operating this shelter has continued to keep its doors open.

The Inuvik Homeless Shelter provides short-term emergency shelter and two meals a day to adult residents, transients, and visitors to the community. The demand far outweighs the capacity of the facility, requiring staff routinely to turn homeless clients away. While there are eleven beds available, the facility does not accept clients who are under the influence of substances or who are unable to live within the guidelines of the facility. This leaves a notable number of people to remain out in the cold, "couch-surf", or, if they are found intoxicated in a public place, spend the night in an RCMP holding cell. In the past, the shelter had an on-site drug and alcohol counsellor. However, this has not been sustained due to with funding difficulties, the centralization of territorial drug and alcohol services, and the challenges associated with attracting sufficient and qualified social services staff to the far North.

The Inuvik Homeless Shelter does not accept anyone under the age of 19. Currently, there is no emergency shelter for youth under the age of nineteen, who have left the family unit, are not working or attending school. Young people tend to shelter with friends or relatives. Youth under the age of sixteen can be taken into foster care, if they fall under the criteria of the Child and Family Services Act. The GNWT's *Homelessness in the NWT* recommends that youth centres in the territory consider operating overnight programs for youth between the ages of 16 and 18, arguing that they would not be regulated as emergency shelters if they provided sofas instead of beds.⁸

The building occupied by the current shelter is in an unknown state of repair as maintenance, until recently, was the responsibility of the original society, which was revealed to be operating in substantial deficit. There are no known records of upkeep held by this society or by the Town of Inuvik, the owner of the lot and building. The Town of Inuvik leased the site in the past to the original society and is now negotiating a lease with the NGC. When NGC took over shelter operation, the Town stated that the lot might be sold for a token price to an appropriate legal entity operating the shelter.

The building envelope for the site of the current shelter has been reviewed by the Town engineer and found to allow for the possible development of a much larger facility in the

⁸ GNWT, 38.

future. Constructing the facility proposed in 2004 by the Interagency Homelessness Committee remains a possibility.

The Inuvik Transition House

The Inuvik Transition House shelters women and their children who are victims of domestic violence. Male children are accepted up to fifteen years of age. Clients can remain at the Transition House for up to six weeks although exceptions have been made in the past for extenuating circumstances. The GNWT's *Homelessness in the NWT* reports that the Inuvik Transition House has averaged five women and eight children per month over the last five years.⁹

This facility has also provided shelter for women from other Beaufort Delta communities and assisted with their relocation to and establishment in Inuvik.

Additional services provided at this facility include in house support, one to one counselling and referrals to other helpful agencies in the community.

The Inuvik Transition House is funded in part through contributions from the department of Health and Social Services and through fundraising initiatives such as bingos. Like other similar services, the Transition House struggles with inadequate resources and with finding and retaining qualified staff.

Barriers to Amelioration

As noted in the sections above, work to address homelessness in Inuvik has progressed slowly and with great difficulty. Small successes are beset with obstacles; agencies struggle to maintain the existing yet inadequate programs and services with few resources to address the identified gaps in service provision. Outlined below are some of the main challenges experienced in efforts to address homelessness.

Resources

Current resources available to existing programs in the area of homelessness and for the start up of new programs are inadequate. Not only are resources required to address the immediacy of housing those who are homeless and those who are at risk of homelessness, they are required to address the root causes of homelessness, namely addictions, capacity and family violence. Required resources are explored in the next section.

⁹ GNWT, 15.

The Isolation of NGOs

Short on resources and time, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), whether volunteer-based or staffed, can become isolated from existing networks of services providers much to the detriment of all. The crisis of the near closure of the Inuvik Homeless Shelter may have been diverted if steps had been taken early on to address the lack of communication from and involvement of the Inuvik Alcohol Committee (IAC). Despite invitations, the IAC did not participate in the Interagency. Broad participation in Interagency roundtables enables agencies to be better informed about the challenges of front-line service provision and provides benefits through the involvement and assistance of other organizations in times of need. NGOs similarly on the periphery of existing networks and crucial to addressing homelessness include the Inuvik Transition House, the Inuvik Food Bank, and the Inuvik Youth Centre.

Leadership

Some progress in the planning of the new homeless facility was inhibited by the need for a legal entity to take responsibility for acquiring and administering funds. Collaborative organizations such as the Inuvik Interagency Committee, by nature, face great difficulty in accessing funds to maintain operational status and thus would be poorly equipped to lead such a large community project.

While the Interagency Homelessness Committee was representative of a wide range of local agencies it was also largely comprised of service providers who were without the resources or authority to make the key decisions required to truly address the issue. The problem of homelessness is great. Alone, service providers cannot manifest a solution; the unrestrained commitment of the leadership is required to lend validity to the issue, to create formalized partnerships between organizations, and to carry out a multi-year strategy.

Crisis of the Commons

Homelessness is a horizontal issue crossing numerous departmental and organizational boundaries. However, as everyone's issue, the lines of responsibility become unclear and no progress is made. Within the GNWT, homelessness has been shuffled through numerous departments over the last few years. With various directly related programs and mandates remaining in the Department of Education, Culture and Employment, the NWT Housing Corporation and the Department of Justice, homelessness currently resides in the portfolio of the Department of Health and Social Services.

At the local level, another struggle takes place. The community recognizes homelessness as a significant issue, yet organizations do not make it a priority in their strategic plans and resource allocations. Considerations associated with the economics of potential resource developments occupy a disproportionate amount of the local agenda.

Resources required

Housing Supports

The GNWT describes the present range of available housing supports in the territory as a “continuum [that] is not, in fact, continuous” due to gaps between each step. Beginning with homelessness, elements in this continuum progress through the following steps: emergency shelter, transitional housing, public housing, subsidized home ownership, and finally, market housing.¹⁰ In Inuvik, resources available to homeless people are even more discontinuous as services comprising each step are fewer and more limited than in Yellowknife with the step of transitional housing supports missing all together.

Moderate inputs of resources as well as effective collaboration are needed to improve the adequacy of existing supports such as the homeless shelter and meal programs; however, additional new housing options are also required, specifically the following components:

- A “wet shelter” for substance using individuals,
- Shelter services for families & youth,
- Transitional housing supports for people released from treatment programs and incarceration and to support shelter clients in becoming independent, and
- Semi-independent housing programs for youth aged 16-18, elders and mental health clients.

Resources for and direction in the development of an eviction prevention program and tenancy education workshops would offer a proactive approach in helping to reduce the risk of homelessness for portions of the population.

Treatment Services

A supply of adequate, affordable shelter is necessary, but not sufficient to eliminate homelessness for those who are struggling with addictions. Some people may not be ready to make the changes in their lives needed to maintain the average household. Not being able to meet the expectations of landlords has created a cycle of arrears, damages, eviction and eventually homelessness. Most community members would agree that this population is the most difficult to house and that there are very few services for them. Yet with appropriate shelter and supports in place, issues such as chronic addiction could be managed more easily.¹¹

Literary sources and local efforts are unanimous in the call for increased mental health and addictions services as a means of alleviating homelessness. The GNWT’s *Homelessness in the NWT* reports that “very often, the population of homeless singles

¹⁰ GNWT, 22.

¹¹ Eilidh Mackenzie, 12.

has underlying addictions and/or mental health issues that exacerbate their ability to find, secure or keep a permanent residence.”¹²

To address this area, the following resources must be secured:

- The designation of a caseworker to facilitate access to services for mental health clients and to provide follow-up support services for those released from treatment,
- Increased funding for staff wages and positions in existing mental health and addictions services,
- The establishment of a local and long-term addiction program including the provision of a residential treatment facility, and
- The establishment of additional local and long-term mental health supports such as residential services for clients requiring long-term services, drop-in facilities, on-site psychiatric services, and services tailored to dual-diagnosis clients.

Support Services

Addressing homelessness necessitates building the capacity of individuals and families to meet their own basic needs, including housing themselves. The establishment of the following support services would address numerous gaps in the continuum of care:

- Accessible capacity building workshops focusing on financial counselling, debt prevention, budgeting, etc.,
- The designation of a caseworker to provide outreach services, routinely checking in on the absolute homeless and hard-to-house and facilitating access to services,
- The delivery of life-skill programs on issues such as anger, depression, healthy relationships, parenting, etc., and
- The establishment of public or semi-public laundry and shower facilities.

Communication and Coordination

Existing programs and service delivery relating to homelessness is fragmented and difficult to access in Inuvik. The Interagency’s *Homelessness in Inuvik* reports that “community residents and some service providers have found that red tape, paperwork and stringent requirements, present barriers to accessing support and services.”¹³

People entering the system are typically in a state of crises, often experiencing a complex set of intersecting issues that affect their capacity to navigate the system. Even when appropriate services exist somewhere in the community, most homeless people need some help identifying and accessing them. Good coordination among providers, through streamlined points of entry and improved assessment and referral practices, is important if individuals are to

¹² GNWT, 3

¹³ Eilidh Mackenzie, Executive Summary, (2005) 4.

*get the help they need from different system components and eventually leave homelessness.*¹⁴

All sources consulted in the development of this report and in the general activities of the Interagency point to the need for the establishment and maintenance of a “cross-sectoral group” to address homelessness issues. The formation of an effective collaborative response to homelessness necessitates the involvement and endorsement of local leadership and the longevity of existing collaborative networks such as the Interagency. The involvement of local leadership would both draw attention to the issue of homelessness as well as enable the motivation of local financial and human resources to further projects. Collaborative networks would provide a forum for collaborative action and administrative support to the group.

The development of a long-term viability study and creation of a community homelessness plan has been suggested as a means of providing a framework for action and promoting a community vision. Such a plan, in conjunction with a new Homelessness Working Group, could significantly improve the coordination of programs and services, reduce duplication, maximize available resources, and improve agency access to new sources of funding and support.¹⁵

Conclusion

An inclusive and collaborative course of action will be important in enabling the participation of smaller agencies, understanding the breadth of the issue, and building an effective continuum of care. Small non-governmental entities such as the Transition House, Food Bank, and Youth Centre should not be underestimated for their role in addressing homelessness issues, yet in many cases, they are the least capable of participating in planning and communications exercises. Larger entities have a broader scope of responsibility and may find it difficult to prioritize one social issue over a myriad of others. In consideration of the challenges and needs described above, the development of a community homelessness plan seems like a logical next step. A plan that addresses root causes is likely to bear relevance for and draw upon the involvement of all socially concerned agencies.

The Inuvik Interagency Committee has done considerable background work in researching and raising awareness about the issue of homelessness but does not have the capacity to take the lead in this area. The work that needs to be done is extensive and cannot be done off the desk corners of interagency volunteers. The leadership of

¹⁴ Burt et al, Evaluation of Continuums of Care for Homeless People, (2002) 53.

¹⁵ Eilidh Mackenzie, 4.

one or more of our main local organizations is required, as is the long-term commitment of local and territorial agendas and resources.

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