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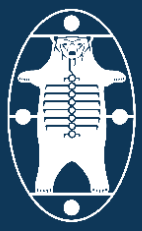
Together Design Lab

Creating a Home for Our Youth

Final Report

September 24, 2024



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This study has been reviewed and approved by Toronto Metropolitan University's Research Ethics Board (REB 2020-543)

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TABLES & FIGURES LIST

ACRONYMS

CHRT	Canadian Human Rights Tribunal
CHT	Canada Health Transfer
CMHC	Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation
CFS	Child and Family Services
CAHFOY	Creating a Home for Our Youth
DSSAB	District Social Service Administration Board
IRS	Indian Residential Schools
ISC	Indigenous Services Canada
IE	institutional ethnography
NAN	Nishnawbe Aski Nation
NANHS	Nishnawbe Aski Nation Housing Strategy
NNEC	Northern Nishnawbe Education Council
ODSP	Ontario Disability Support Program
OHRC	Ontario Human Rights Commission
OW	Ontario Works
TMU	Toronto Metropolitan University

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The project team would like to thank all interview participants for sharing their experiences and knowledge with us. Without your careful and thoughtful participation we could not accurately share the unique ways that the current housing emergency impacts youth across the NAN territory. Your trust in the project team to represent the standpoint of youth is one we hope to honour in this report and in our work moving forward. Together, we hope to enact the change you envision for youth and ensure that all young people have a safe place to call home.

OSHKAATISAK COUNCIL - NAN ALL YOUNG PEOPLE'S COUNCIL - STATEMENT

Building a better home for NAN youth can take many forms such as improved housing, school infrastructure, recreational spaces and health service facilities. NAN youth have diverse and interconnected needs that must be addressed holistically like roots, rising to form a tree, building a better future for NAN youth.

Safe, accessible, and affordable housing for NAN youth means we have the right to choose to live independently, with friends, or with family. It means we can be empowered to practice life skills and independence, while having time to participate as active members in our community, without fear of homelessness or of health issues. In NAN communities in particular we have all struggled with overcrowding or know someone facing this struggle. The confinement and claustrophobic feelings of overcrowded homes have a significant impact on our mental health. Additionally, youth face other well-being issues within their homes including exposure to substance misuse, violence and unsafe living environments.

There is an urgent need for safe spaces in all of their forms for youth across NAN territory as well as in the urban centres and rural areas of northern Ontario. Safe spaces can provide hope for another day, that there's something we can look forward to tomorrow. Providing NAN youth access to safe spaces such as parks, playgrounds and recreation centres, as well as access to affordable and meaningful programming to go along with those centres, means a safer and more connected community for all, including youth. Providing these spaces allows us to connect with our community, and become community builders ourselves. It provides a place for us to hang out and to take a break from home when we need to. It motivates us to exercise, socialize, and maintain our spiritual, physical, mental, and emotional health.

Oshkaatisak envisions a future where everyone can access safe, affordable, and accessible housing that meets their unique needs, whether they live on- or off-reserve. This includes supports for NAN youth who are facing challenges living off-reserve such as grants, workshops, and affordable housing units. On-reserve, this means fire-safe, mould-free homes ranging from one-bedroom to multi-generational housing where everyone is provided a bedroom and bed of their own, where repairs take place as needed, and clean water flows through the taps. Finally, we envision a future with a healthy, clean environment and supporting community infrastructure such as schools, recreation spaces, health services as well as safe, clean drinking water. This report is a step towards achieving this vision.

A better future for youth, means a better future for all.

Executive Summary

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2014, Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN) Chiefs-in-Assembly declared a Collective Housing Emergency, describing existing conditions as "deplorable" as a result of limited housing lifespans, overcrowding and extreme mould growth amongst other factors. In 2018, the Chiefs-in-Assembly reaffirmed the ongoing housing crisis and mandated the development of a modern housing strategy. Community engagement over the next four years looked to document the unique challenges and priorities across NAN territory. From these discussions an understanding of the systems change required within housing and infrastructure that intersects with health and well-being, education, governance and climate change emerged. In August 2022, the NAN Housing Strategy (NANHS) was accepted by NAN Chiefs-in-Assembly at the annual Keewaywin Conference as Resolution 22/12: Acceptance and Implementation of NAN Housing Strategy Roadmap.

The need for *Creating a Home for Our Youth* emerged during the NANHS engagement process where housing for youth was identified as a top priority requiring immediate action. Across workshops with youth, community members and housing and health professionals, participants identified the struggle facing community youth in obtaining adequate and appropriate housing and the impacts on mental health that this challenge caused. The persistent shortage of on-reserve housing and prioritization of larger families often results in youth and singles remaining on waiting lists indefinitely, being forced in the interim into precarious housing situations on reserves or into cities away from their families. In addition, youth Housing Strategy participants identified a series of additional housing issues resulting from being forced to interact with off-reserve systems: education, healthcare and child and family services which they described also lead to housing precarity. Together, Nishnawbe Aski Nation's Housing & Infrastructure Department, Oshkaatisak Youth Council and Together Design Lab at Toronto Metropolitan University devised *Creating a Home for Our Youth* to better understand youth's unique experience of the housing emergency.

Creating a Home for Our Youth documents the struggle youth face in securing appropriate housing and the impact this has on their well-being. An in-depth understanding of the housing challenges facing youth from NAN territory reveals the systemic and institutional failures which leave youth inappropriately housed, precariously housed or unhoused. This report illustrates the individual journeys of 27 NAN youth together highlighting the shared struggle to access and improve their housing outcomes and finishes with their understandings of home and their visions for an improved future.

METHODOLOGY + FRAMEWORK

Institutions –including child and family services, education, healthcare and justice– play an oversized role in the housing of NAN youth. Understanding the policies and programs which shape relationships between these institutions and NAN youth is critical to understanding youth housing outcomes. The critical, feminist research method Institutional Ethnography (IE) was deployed as the primary methodological framework for this project (Smith, 1987, 1999, 2005). From the "standpoint" (Bisaillon, 2012, p. 619) of NAN youth, a series of virtual interviews with both primary (youth) and secondary (service provider) informants were conducted to reveal how existing institutions, and their policies, documents and forms, impact youth access to housing. This project relies on the individual, lived experiences of NAN youth as an entry point into understanding how

systems must change (Deveau, 2018). The interviews with primary informants in IE are less concerned with the particularities of an individual story than in forming a map or diagram from across many interviews which situates participants within a series of interactions and processes that can control or limit their actions (Carroll, 2010; Rankin, 2017). Interviews are focused on the "work" undertaken by participants as they interact with institutions in their day-to-day lives as they try to improve their housing and as such, the interview serves as a tool for understanding how existing programs and policies support or conflict with the efforts of youth (DeVault & McCoy, 2012; Doll & Walby, 2019).

As part of the IE process, three primary methods of data collection were used: primary informant interviews (conducted virtually), secondary informant interview (conducted virtually) and textual analysis. All data collection activities in this first phase of project research are focused on the following research questions:

- How are the housing experiences of NAN youth mediated by existing institutions;
- Where do disjunctures exist in the existing housing service network; and
- How can the work currently being done by NAN youth to make their housing more appropriate shape a future alternative housing system?

Twenty seven primary informant interviews were conducted with youth, aged 16-29, from NAN communities. The semi-structured, collaborative interviews focused on retracing the participants' housing history with a focus on moments of change or flux, where participants accessed new housing or looked to improve their current housing. Participants collaboratively mapped their housing journey with the interviewer before having the opportunity to vision an alternative future.

Additionally, five service providers from housing-related institutions were interviewed. Identified by primary informants, these interviews looked to gain additional perspective from the role of service providers about the youth housing provision system in northern Ontario. Interviews focused on the work done by service providers to place youth in appropriate housing and support youth in improving housing. Secondary informant interviews recognized the diversity of housing-engaged professionals and the role played by diverse actors and institutions that shape youth housing journeys as described in primary informant interviews.

As part of the textual analysis all transcripts were reviewed and coded. Several methods were used to develop the codes for a total of 104 codes. A selection of eleven codes were reviewed to begin to identify themes focusing on institutional experiences. From the initial codes five emerging themes identified were:

- Agency in CFS system impacts outcomes
- Social networks and access to housing
- Challenges in accessing market housing
- (Hyper)mobility
- Need for youth specific infrastructure and social spaces

To begin the review of all codes, emerging themes were used as starting points for analysis and each institutional-related codes were reviewed for the new organising themes. Two of the emerging themes - (hyper) mobility and need for youth specific infrastructure and social spaces- did not fit completely into the new organising themes. On review, youth specific spaces were identified as a topic for recommendation development

reflecting part of future changes youth shared in their interviews. The emerging theme of (hyper)mobility could be understood as cutting across institutions and themes. From this perspective, the research team began a preliminary review of mobility literature.

MOBILITY LITERATURE

The initial scan of mobility literature found that mobility theory was a useful framework for analysis. A mobility lens could be applied to each theme to understand and situate youth housing journeys. Mobility is understood as the movement of people (e.g. travelling within a city, moving houses, changing schools, moving between communities) and the movement or allocation of resources or capital (e.g. where does funding go? How do policies facilitate movement?). A mobility framework serves as a way to understand how youth navigate the world and how individual choices can be shaped or influenced by other factors such as institutions or policies. When reviewing participant experiences, two main questions were applied during the code analysis:

- How does 'x' system impact the mobility of NAN Youth?
- How does this system shape participants' experience of home?

Examining how First Nation youth navigate and experience institutions from their own perspective is important to understanding connections between housing precarity and "broader sociopolitical and environmental structures" (Ansloos & Wager, 2020, p. 62). A mobility lens recognizes the spectrum of agency, from full personal autonomy to forced (im)mobility, as youth interact with institutions. Mobility described by youth occurred at a variety of scales, including within one community, between communities and cities across northern Ontario or across provincial and national borders.

Previous research on Indigenous mobilities has examined movement using quantitative and qualitative exercises. Studies using census data or national surveys on migration and urbanization of Indigenous peoples in Canada have shown that Indigenous people are generally more mobile, having higher rates of migration between, and higher rates of residential mobility within, a community than non-Indigenous people (Clatworthy & Norris, 2007; Norris et al., 2004). Within urban areas, residential mobility is greatest amongst Indigenous youth aged 15-29 with higher rates than Indigenous youth living on reserve and their non-Indigenous peers off reserve (Norris et al., 2004, p. 144). While younger people generally tend be more mobile, largely associated with life cycle trends (Clatworthy & Norris, 2007, p.226), the increased mobility of urban Indigenous youth likely results from a wider range of factors such as lower income, poverty, inadequate housing and discrimination (Clatworthy & Norris, 2007, p.226-7). Other factors such as access to education, employment opportunities and gender and sexuality can also influence mobility. While understanding broad trends in migration, change of residence between communities, and residential mobility, change of address within a community, is important for policy development and service provision, a greater qualitative understanding is also necessary to contextualise and capture a wider range of mobilities.

Qualitative studies have sought to reframe discussions on Indigenous mobility by situating mobility discussions within their historical context and focusing on first person experiences to move past the constraints of survey responses. Research questions have focused on understanding the wider context for why individuals or families move. In a series of interviews, Cooke and Bélanger (2006) explored movements between reserves

and urban spaces, finding through interviews that both personal and structural factors influence mobilities. While employment, education and health services were common motivating factors for migration, personal relationships and access to wider social networks or organizations played an important role. Prout and Hill (2012), in their review of global literature on Indigenous student mobility similarly identified the role of geography (or proximity), demographics (particularly life stages) and personal choice as factors shaping mobility (p.62). Snyder and Wilson (2015) identified through interviews with Indigenous people and service providers in Winnipeg that most people move to the city for positive opportunities. However, residential mobility within the city was viewed as stemming from negative factors such as "substandard housing conditions (e.g., pests, mould, disrepair), strained tenant-landlord relations and issues with neighbourhood safety" (p.185). Personal and structural factors can influence mobilities at different scales, requiring a greater understanding for how these factors may shift through a person's lifetime or major life events.

Understanding youth housing journeys through a mobility justice lens allows us to understand the relationships between individual journeys and larger systems and structures. Youth are highly mobile between and within communities resulting from a variety of personal and systemic factors. The policies and practices of governing bodies and agencies across multiple systems and jurisdictions including education, health, child welfare, social welfare, justice and housing and the corresponding allocation of resources interact with personal experiences to shape how youth are able or not able to access and maintain housing.

FINDINGS

HOUSING

Understanding how youth access safe and secure housing or improve their housing situations is the central concern of *Creating a Home for Our Youth*. Where do youth live? When and why did they move? What are the conditions of their housing? How did they access housing or shelter? Through interviews, several forms of housing were discussed across the housing spectrum: market housing or rentals, subsidized or social housing, on-reserve or band housing, transitional housing, emergency shelters, couchsurfing and homelessness. Different from many experiences of housing in Canada, housing journeys for youth in NAN territory often rely on non-market forms of housing. This section will treat different models of housing and housing tenure as distinct and discuss how each type of housing is understood by the youth who have experienced them.

On-Reserve Housing

The overall shortage of housing across NAN territory means that not everyone who wishes to remain or return to their community are able to access housing for themselves or their families. Participants described applying or their parents/guardians applying for housing and being placed on a waitlist. Waitlist times could vary, from a month to several years and beyond. Those who were able to quickly access housing were more likely to be facing a precarious housing situation, homelessness or serious health concerns. On-reserve housing is more likely to be crowded or in need of major repair than off-reserve housing. However, accessing on-reserve housing, when able, was an important source of stability and opportunity for youth.

Social and Subsidised Housing

For youth participants, experiences with social housing ranged from growing up in social housing units, moving into units with their family or applying to or accessing social housing as individuals or heads of households. For participants who applied to access social housing units there were a range of experiences navigating the application process. For many participants there was a greater need for support in completing the applications and housing support options while on the waitlist. Social housing acted as a place of refuge and stability for many participants who were able to access a unit. However, as waitlists continue to grow access to social housing seems more and more unattainable.

Couchsurfing

Many youth shared experiences of relying on family and friends for places to stay. Some of these stays were for short periods of time or happened infrequently while other stay periods were longer, more frequent or relied on multiple households to string together a consistent place to stay. For some, couchsurfing was a way to avoid spending nights on the street or in other unsafe situations. Participant accounts of couchsurfing reveal it is an important tactic youth can employ to stay housed. While relying on couchsurfing is not a long term solution or ideal way to maintain housing, for youth who are able to use their social networks it is one that can provide safety.

Shelters

Participants described accessing emergency shelters either as a child with a parent or guardian or on their own. As children, youth described accessing shelter after a family breakdown or other sudden change. Shelters offered short or long term support as their mother's or guardians secured new housing and services. While moves to shelters were often described as hectic or confusing at first some participants shared that the structure and policies of the shelter contributed to greater feelings of safety. In some cases, shelter stays were for longer periods of time while the family was waitlisted for social housing.

Participants who accessed emergency shelters independently or with their children usually did so due to interpersonal conflict/issues with family, intimate partner violence or not having a support network when moving to a new city. Currently there are no dedicated youth shelters in Thunder Bay. Youth must access the same shelters as adults which may not have the types of support needed or appropriate accommodations. A youth seeking help is a significant step and a brave act. Dedicated youth services and shelter spaces are needed to provide the appropriate support that understands the needs of vulnerable youth and recognizes that youth may struggle or make mistakes as they navigate, learn and grow.

Market Rentals

Market rentals may provide more options for housing but entering the market can be difficult for Indigenous youth due to rising costs, lack of credit, references, potential for discrimination and predatory landlords. Additionally, the cost of living and affordability of market rentals disproportionately impact those who are already most vulnerable and can drive individuals into more precarious and unsafe circumstances. Participants described rental units within their price range were more likely to have maintenance issues or be located in less desirable areas. For young people who are newly independent, working low wage jobs, studying for school or

without other forms of social or financial support, social and subsidised housing units and programs, especially for Indigenous youth, can provide a stable alternative for safe and adequate housing in comparison to the private housing market.

CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES

Interactions with CFS were part of nearly half of participants' housing journeys. Experiences of entering CFS, being housed in a variety of placements and interactions with social workers varied throughout the interviews. For many, CFS did not guarantee stability. Placement experiences ranged from staying with friends or family in-community to bouncing around through multiple short-term placements, separation from siblings and other family members to longer term placements. Participants who were separated from family members or from their community shared how the process was difficult and isolating. For one participant as a young child being reintroduced to family members for short visits felt like meeting strangers. Cases of disconnection from family, other siblings in care or community often meant that as older youth, they had to work to reunite or reconnect with their families.

Experiences with CFS shifts as youth age through the system. Participants shared they became more aware of the role of social workers as well as changes and challenges of teenagers in the system. Some participants shared that they struggled during this teenage period, as they felt their situations forced them to grow up faster. Because of these circumstances, some participants wanted greater independence but had few if any resources to achieve stable housing on their own. Whether a youth leaves CFS before they turn 18 or they age of out of care, greater supports and services are needed for youth during this transition period. Some supports may be available automatically depending on a youth's engagement or access to social workers. Other supports may require a youth to reach out to a worker to apply or enroll in a program. For youth who have been highly mobile, precariously housed or homeless, accessing information and resources may be more difficult. Additionally, reaching out for help can be a significant and difficult step for youth to take, especially if they have a lack of trust in the CFS system or are struggling with mental health or other concerns. Youth ageing out of care need greater support to support their transitions as independent young adults to ensure they have stable housing and access to any additional services needed.

EDUCATION

Participants shared that they changed schools due to moves between communities and because of other disruptions or challenges they were facing. It is important to note that not every move or change in schools participants described was a disruptive or a negative experience. The most common reason for change of schools were when participants moved between communities with their families. Participants also described how challenges they were facing with their personal lives impacted their ability to complete school. For youth who were struggling with their mental health or issues at home, school was often placed on the back burner in order to focus on their wellbeing. Accessing education can both require students to be mobile to secure accommodation and impact an individual's housing trajectory. Barriers youth experience in accessing and completing education need to be addressed both on and off reserve. The provision of adequate housing and

infrastructure on reserves and dedicated student housing options for students off reserve need to be improved as part of addressing educational outcomes and undesired youth mobility.

HEALTHCARE

During interviews, youth shared how access to healthcare impacted their wellbeing at various points in their life. Issues and challenges around mental health and accessing supports was a common theme in the interviews. Other health-related issues that emerged included accessing treatment centres, pregnancy/natal care and time spent in medical hostels. Youth housing journeys have intersected with the healthcare system in a variety of ways as inequitable access to healthcare has significant impacts on mobility. In particular, accessing treatment centres and being pregnant while living in a remote community require individuals to be mobile.

Research on Indigenous health and youth mental health point to several issues that were shared by participants. Fragmentation of the healthcare system, challenges transitioning between youth and adult care and other barriers such as racism and discrimination, geographical locations, and lack of culturally appropriate care (Weerasinghe et al., 2023; Thorburn et al., 2023; Toombs et al., 2021). A wider variety of healthcare options need to be available on reserves and in rural and urban communities. As interviews with both youth and service providers highlighted, healthcare delivered in silos from other supportive services such as housing or education can hinder the full effectiveness of some services because wider issues are not addressed. In interviews, youth identified the relationships between their wellbeing, connections with land and their wider environments including their housing. It is important to recognize that there are many paths both 'formal' and 'informal' to support individual wellbeing and that youth should be able to access the path or paths that are right for them.

JUSTICE SYSTEM

There is a negative, cyclical connection between homelessness and the criminal justice system. Precariously housed Indigenous youth interacting with the justice system may be more likely to be remanded into custody because they are seen as having no other stable place or person to be released to. For individuals who are released on bail or parole, the conditions of their release can impact access to housing by placing limitations on where they can return or who they can live with (JHSO, 2022, pp. 43-44). Individuals released from correctional facilities with a criminal record also face barriers to gaining employment or securing private market housing due to criminal record checks (JHSO et al., 2022, pp.11-13). For a vulnerable population over represented in the justice system, the risk of Indigenous youth being trapped in a cycle of incarceration and housing precarity due to interactions with the criminal justice system intersect with other forms of systemic inequalities and discrimination they may face. Addressing youth housing precarity and homelessness has wide reaching impacts from education, health and justice. Removing barriers to housing and creating multiple avenues to secure shelter, whether transitional or longer term, and social support is required to prevent and disrupt the connections between homelessness and the criminal justice system. Youth and Indigenous youth in particular, require solutions developed to respond to the unique challenges they face.

OTHER

Previous sections have organized youth housing journeys through institutions of housing, CFS, education and healthcare as broad themes to present youth experiences. Many of these institutions or themes intersect or have similar topics that are touched upon such as discrimination and racism and the role of social networks and trusted adults. It is important to highlight these threads to show the complexity of youth experiences. Anti-Indigenous discrimination and racism, the role of social networks, access to transportation, cost of living and financial independence and access to Land and culture emerged as topics throughout discussions.

YOUTH VOICES

Project Findings have focused on the challenges and barriers youth have faced in housing, CFS, education, healthcare and justice. However, it is important to emphasise what has worked for youth and what changes they want to see to improve housing outcomes and well-being for other youth. The last part of the interview asked participants two questions:

- What does home mean to you?
- What changes would you make for a better future?

This section presents youth responses to these questions in their own words. Two broad responses to the question of home emerged from participants relating to the importance of family and community and having stability or control over their living situation. The responses reflect participants' housing journeys and for many the hypermobility and precariousness they faced growing up. In imagining a better future, participants reflected on their own experiences and what type of support they would like to have received as young people accessing housing. There were a range of responses including more and diverse housing on reserve, support for navigating social housing, supporting youth wellbeing and dedicated shelters or housing with supports for youth. For both questions, there were many similarities and shared sentiments as well as unique perspectives provided by participants.

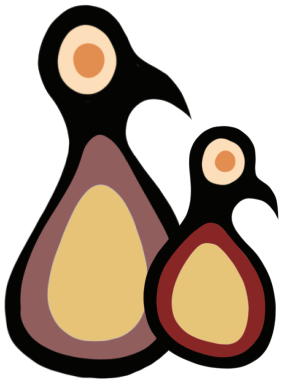
CONCLUSION

This report illustrates the experiences of First Nations youth from the NAN territory and northern Ontario and their experiences of accessing housing. It recognizes that housing goes beyond a basic provision of shelter, and requires a wholistic understanding that housing experiences are personal, are connected with historical events and intersect with multiple institutions including social housing, child and family services, education, healthcare and justice. This understanding of housing is rooted in the learnings from youth participant interviews. Many youth housing journeys were characterized by their mobility. Youth mobility was impacted by personal, systemic and institutional factors. This report records how youth mobilities are a reflection of social and family networks across a large geography, personal choices, institutional interventions and the lack of equitable access to housing and other infrastructure.

Youth housing journeys shared through CAHFOY interviews have revealed a range of shared and unique experiences. Taken together, participants' journeys trace the challenges and barriers they and many of their peers have faced and continue to face in search of secure, safe and appropriate housing. Youth and service provider interviews have also highlighted several areas for action and improvement. As this report demonstrates, accessing housing is not only about the physical form of a house, but also how it changes through life stages and intersects with other institutions. Action is required to address the ongoing housing emergency facing youth. In many cases, these actions create more options for youth in obtaining or improving their housing; more options can mean greater agency for youth. The stories shared by youth that shape this report detail the many barriers they face and the impact it has on their lives. To honor their words, and to ensure that not another generation faces these same barriers, change must come.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Many recommendations that address issues identified through this report exist as part of other inquiries including Seven Youth Inquest, Truth and Reconciliation Commission and Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Inquiry. Their implementation is critical to the well-being and safety of NAN youth. As Oshkaatisak Council highlighted in their statement there are many factors that impact individual and community wellbeing. Project recommendations were developed for each section and grouped by the parties they are addressed to such as different levels of government, agencies and institutions. The recommendations developed look to create equitable access to safe spaces, inclusive programming and an improved standard of service delivery; these are all forms of protecting mental, social, spiritual and physical wellbeing and can be understood as contributing to suicide prevention.



RÉSUMÉ

En 2014, l'assemblée des chefs de la N(NNA) a déclaré une urgence collective en matière de logement. Les conditions existantes étaient jugées « déplorables » en raison de la durée de vie limitée des logements, du surpeuplement et d'un développement extrême de la moisissure, entre autres facteurs. En 2018, l'assemblée des chefs a réaffirmé l'existence d'une crise persistante du logement et a mandaté l'élaboration d'une stratégie moderne en matière de logement. La mobilisation communautaire au cours des quatre années suivantes s'est attachée à documenter les priorités et les défis propres au territoire de la NNA. Les discussions ont permis de mieux comprendre les changements systémiques nécessaires dans les domaines du logement et de l'infrastructure, à la croisée des domaines de la santé et du bien-être, de l'éducation, de la gouvernance et des changements climatiques. En août 2022, l'assemblée des chefs de la NNA a adopté la stratégie sur le logement de la NNA lors de la conférence annuelle Keewaywin sous la forme de la résolution 22/12. Cette résolution porte sur l'acceptation et la mise en œuvre de la feuille de route de la stratégie sur le logement de la NNA.

La mobilisation autour de la stratégie sur le logement de la NNA a fait ressortir la nécessité du projet *Créer un chez-soi pour nos jeunes*. Le logement pour les jeunes a en effet été désigné comme une priorité absolue exigeant des mesures immédiates. Dans le cadre d'ateliers avec des jeunes, des membres de la communauté et des professionnels du logement et de la santé, les participants ont souligné la difficulté pour les jeunes de la communauté d'obtenir un logement approprié et convenable, ainsi que les répercussions de ce défi sur la santé mentale. Du fait de la pénurie persistante de logements dans les réserves et de la priorité accordée aux familles nombreuses, les jeunes et les personnes seules demeurent souvent indéfiniment sur liste d'attente. Dans l'intervalle, ces gens sont contraints de vivre dans des conditions de logement précaires dans les réserves ou dans les villes, loin de leur famille. Les participants à la stratégie sur le logement pour les jeunes ont relevé une série d'autres problèmes de logement découlant de l'obligation d'interagir avec certains systèmes hors des réserves. Les relations forcées avec ces systèmes dans les sphères de l'éducation, des soins de santé et des services à l'enfance et à la famille entraînent aussi, selon eux, une précarité en matière de logement. Le département du logement et de l'infrastructure de la NNA, l'Oshkaatisak Youth Council et le Together Design Lab de l'Université Toronto Metropolitan ont collaboré à la conception du projet *Créer un chez-soi pour nos jeunes*. Le but est de mieux comprendre l'expérience unique des jeunes dans le contexte d'urgence en matière de logement.

Le projet *Créer un chez-soi pour nos jeunes* documente la difficulté pour les jeunes d'obtenir un logement approprié et l'incidence de cette situation sur leur bien-être. L'analyse approfondie des défis en matière de logement pour les jeunes du territoire de la NNA révèle les échecs systémiques et institutionnels qui font que les jeunes occupent des logements inappropriés ou précaires, ou se retrouvent sans logement. Le présent rapport relate le parcours de 27 jeunes de la NNA. Tous ces récits montrent la difficulté commune d'accéder à un logement et d'améliorer les résultats en la matière. On y découvre la signification d'un chez-soi pour ces jeunes et leur vision pour construire un avenir meilleur.

MÉTHODOLOGIE ET CADRE

Les institutions, dont les services à l'enfance et à la famille, l'éducation, les soins de santé et la justice, jouent un rôle démesuré dans le logement des jeunes de la NNA. Pour apprécier les résultats en matière de logement des jeunes, il est essentiel de comprendre les politiques et les programmes qui façonnent les relations entre

ces institutions et les jeunes de la NNA. La méthode de recherche critique et féministe de l'ethnographie institutionnelle a été utilisée comme principal cadre méthodologique pour ce projet (Smith, 1987, 1999, 2005). Pour saisir le point de vue (Bisaillon, 2012, p. 619) des jeunes de la NNA, une série d'entrevues virtuelles ont été menées avec des informateurs principaux (des jeunes) et secondaires (des fournisseurs de services). Le but de ces entretiens était de révéler l'incidence des institutions existantes, ainsi que de leurs politiques, documents et formulaires, sur l'accès au logement des jeunes. Le projet repose sur les expériences vécues des jeunes de la NNA à l'échelle individuelle comme point d'entrée pour comprendre la manière dont les systèmes doivent évoluer (Deveau, 2018). Les entrevues avec les informateurs principaux dans l'approche de l'ethnographie institutionnelle portent moins sur les particularités d'une expérience individuelle que sur la création d'une carte ou d'un diagramme à l'échelle d'un grand nombre d'entrevues. On cherche ainsi à situer les participants dans une série d'interactions et de processus qui peuvent contrôler ou limiter leurs actions (Carroll, 2010; Rankin, 2017). Les entrevues sont axées sur le « travail » accompli par les participants dans leurs interactions quotidiennes avec les institutions pour améliorer leur situation résidentielle. Ainsi, l'entrevue sert d'outil pour comprendre la façon dont les politiques et programmes existants soutiennent ou entravent les efforts des jeunes (DeVault et McCoy, 2012; Doll et Walby, 2019).

Dans le cadre du processus d'ethnographie institutionnelle, trois méthodes principales de collecte de données ont été utilisées : des entrevues avec des informateurs principaux (menées virtuellement), des entrevues avec des informateurs secondaires (menées virtuellement) et une analyse textuelle. Toutes les activités de collecte de données de la première phase de recherche du projet se sont articulées autour des questions de recherche suivantes :

- En quoi les expériences des jeunes de la NNA en matière de logement sont-elles facilitées par les institutions existantes?
- Où observe-t-on un manque de coordination dans le réseau de services de logement existant?
- Comment le travail actuellement accompli par les jeunes de la NNA pour améliorer leur situation résidentielle peut-il façonner un autre système de logement pour demain?

Vingt-sept entrevues avec des informateurs principaux ont été menées auprès de jeunes des communautés de la NNA âgés de 16 à 29 ans. Collaboratives et semi-structurées, les entrevues ont cherché à retracer les antécédents en matière de logement des participants. On a mis l'accent sur les périodes de changement ou d'évolution, lors desquelles les participants ont accédé à un nouveau logement ou ont cherché à améliorer leurs conditions de logement actuelles. En collaboration avec l'intervieweur, les participants ont cartographié leur parcours en matière de logement avant d'exposer leur vision d'un avenir différent.

Cinq fournisseurs de services issus d'institutions liées au logement ont aussi été interrogés. Ils avaient été désignés par les informateurs principaux. Ces entrevues avaient pour but d'obtenir un point de vue supplémentaire, celui des fournisseurs de services, sur le système d'offre de logements pour les jeunes dans le nord de l'Ontario. Les entrevues ont porté sur le travail accompli par les fournisseurs de services pour loger les jeunes dans une habitation appropriée et les aider à améliorer leur situation résidentielle. Les entrevues avec les informateurs secondaires ont permis de reconnaître la diversité de professionnels mobilisés autour du logement et le rôle joué par diverses parties prenantes et institutions. Celles-ci façonnent le parcours des jeunes en matière de logement, comme l'ont décrit les informateurs principaux dans leurs entrevues.

Dans le cadre de l'analyse textuelle, toutes les transcriptions ont été révisées et codées. On a employé plusieurs méthodes pour parvenir à un total de 104 codes. Une sélection de 11 codes a été passée en revue pour commencer à déterminer les thèmes liés à l'expérience institutionnelle. Cinq thèmes émergents sont ressortis des codes initiaux :

- L'incidence sur les résultats de la capacité d'agir au sein du système des services à l'enfance et à la famille
- Les réseaux relationnels et l'accès au logement
- Les difficultés d'accès aux logements du marché
- La mobilité ou l'hypermobilité
- Le besoin d'infrastructures et d'espaces sociaux destinés aux jeunes

Les thèmes émergents ont servi de points de départ à l'analyse pour commencer l'analyse de l'ensemble des codes. Chaque code lié à une institution a été examiné pour déterminer les nouveaux thèmes structurants. Deux des thèmes émergents (la mobilité ou l'hypermobilité et le besoin d'infrastructures et d'espaces sociaux destinés aux jeunes) ne s'inscrivaient pas entièrement dans les nouveaux thèmes structurants. Après examen, il est apparu que le thème des espaces destinés aux jeunes pouvait servir à l'élaboration de recommandations reflétant une partie des changements futurs évoqués par les jeunes dans leurs entrevues. On peut considérer que le thème émergent de la mobilité ou l'hypermobilité recoupe plusieurs thèmes et institutions. Dans cette perspective, l'équipe de recherche a entamé une analyse préliminaire de la documentation sur la mobilité.

DOCUMENTATION SUR LA MOBILITÉ

L'examen initial de la documentation sur la mobilité a révélé que la théorie de la mobilité constituait un cadre utile pour l'analyse. Chaque thème pouvait être abordé à travers le prisme de la mobilité pour comprendre et situer les parcours des jeunes en matière de logement. La mobilité s'entend du déplacement des personnes (se déplacer au sein d'une ville, déménager, changer d'école, passer d'une communauté à une autre, etc.) et de la circulation ou de l'affectation des ressources ou des capitaux (affectations des fonds, influence favorable des politiques sur le mouvement, etc.). Un cadre de mobilité permet de comprendre comment les jeunes s'orientent dans le monde et comment les choix individuels peuvent être façonnés ou influencés par d'autres facteurs, comme les institutions ou les politiques. Pour évaluer l'expérience des participants, deux questions principales ont été posées pendant l'analyse des codes :

- Quelle est l'incidence de tel ou tel système sur la mobilité des jeunes de la NNA?
- Comment ce système façonne-t-il l'expérience du « chez-soi » des participants?

Il est important d'examiner la façon dont les jeunes des Premières Nations s'orientent dans les institutions et quelle expérience ils en ont de leur propre point de vue. Ces informations permettraient de comprendre les liens entre la précarité du logement et les structures sociopolitiques et environnementales élargies (Ansloos et Wager, 2020, p. 62). Le prisme de la mobilité reconnaît le spectre de la capacité d'agir des jeunes dans leurs interactions avec les institutions, de la pleine autonomie individuelle à la mobilité ou l'immobilité forcée. La mobilité décrite par les jeunes se joue à différentes échelles : au sein d'une communauté, entre les communautés et les villes du nord de l'Ontario ou au-delà des frontières provinciales et nationales.

Des recherches antérieures sur les mobilités des Autochtones se sont penchées sur les déplacements au moyen d'exercices quantitatifs et qualitatifs. Des études fondées sur les données du recensement ou les enquêtes nationales sur la migration et l'urbanisation des Autochtones au Canada ont montré que cette population est généralement plus mobile que les autres. D'après ces études, les Autochtones ont des taux de migration plus élevés entre communautés et des taux de mobilité résidentielle plus élevés au sein d'une communauté que les personnes non autochtones (Clatworthy et Norris, 2007; Norris et coll., 2004). Au sein des régions urbaines, la mobilité résidentielle est la plus forte chez les jeunes Autochtones de 15 à 29 ans. Les taux de mobilité de cette population sont plus élevés que ceux des jeunes Autochtones vivant dans les réserves et de leurs pairs non autochtones hors réserve (Norris et coll., 2004, p. 144). Les jeunes sont plus mobiles de manière générale, ce qui est largement associé aux tendances du cycle de vie (Clatworthy et Norris, 2007, p. 226). Cependant, la mobilité accrue des jeunes Autochtones en milieu urbain découle probablement d'un éventail de facteurs élargi, comme le faible revenu, la pauvreté, des logements inadéquats et la discrimination (Clatworthy et Norris, 2007, p. 226-227). D'autres facteurs, comme l'accès à l'éducation, les occasions d'emploi, le genre et l'orientation sexuelle, peuvent aussi influer sur la mobilité. Il est important de comprendre les tendances générales de la migration (changement de résidence entre communautés) et de la mobilité résidentielle (changement d'adresse au sein d'une communauté) pour l'élaboration de politiques et la prestation de services. Une meilleure compréhension qualitative est toutefois aussi nécessaire pour mettre les données en contexte et cerner un éventail élargi de mobilités.

Des études qualitatives ont cherché à présenter les discussions sur la mobilité des Autochtones sous un nouveau jour en les replaçant dans leur contexte historique et en privilégiant les récits à la première personne pour dépasser les limitations des réponses aux enquêtes. Les questions de recherche visaient à comprendre le contexte général des raisons pour lesquelles les personnes ou les familles déménagent. Dans une série d'entrevues, Cooke et Bélanger (2006) ont exploré les mouvements entre les réserves et les espaces urbains et ont constaté que des facteurs tant personnels que structurels influencent les mobilités.

Bien que l'emploi, l'éducation et les services de santé soient des incitatifs courants à la migration, les relations personnelles et l'accès à un large éventail de réseaux relationnels ou d'organisations jouent un rôle important. Dans leur analyse de la documentation mondiale sur la mobilité des étudiants autochtones, Prout et Hill (2012) ont aussi observé que la géographie (ou la proximité), la population (en particulier les étapes de la vie) et les choix personnels faisaient partie des facteurs qui façonnent la mobilité (p. 62). Snyder et Wilson (2015) ont déterminé, lors d'entrevues avec des Autochtones et des fournisseurs de services à Winnipeg, que la plupart des gens partent s'installer en ville pour profiter d'occasions positives. On considérait cependant que la mobilité résidentielle au sein de la ville découle de facteurs négatifs comme des conditions de logement inférieures aux normes (p. ex., animaux et insectes nuisibles, moisissure, délabrement), des relations tendues entre les locataires et les propriétaires-bailleurs et des problèmes de sécurité dans le quartier (p. 185). Les facteurs personnels et structurels peuvent influencer les mobilités à différentes échelles. Il est donc nécessaire de mieux comprendre la façon dont ces facteurs peuvent évoluer tout au long de la vie d'une personne ou lors des grands évènements de la vie.

La connaissance des parcours des jeunes en matière de logement dans une perspective de justice en ce qui concerne la mobilité nous aide à comprendre les relations entre les parcours individuels et les systèmes et structures en général. Les jeunes sont très mobiles entre les communautés et au sein de celles-ci en raison de divers facteurs personnels et systémiques. Les politiques et les pratiques des gouvernements et des

organismes dans de multiples systèmes et domaines (éducation, santé, protection de l'enfance, bien-être social, justice, logement, etc.) ainsi que l'affectation de ressources correspondante interagissent avec les expériences individuelles pour façonner la façon dont les jeunes sont en mesure ou non d'accéder à un logement et de le conserver.

CONSTATATIONS

LOGEMENT

La compréhension de la manière dont les jeunes ont accès à un logement sûr ou améliorent leurs conditions de logement est au cœur du projet *Créer un chez-soi pour nos jeunes*. Où les jeunes vivent-ils? Quand ont-ils déménagé et pourquoi? Quelles sont leurs conditions de logement? Comment ont-ils eu accès à un logement ou à un hébergement? Plusieurs formes de logement de l'ensemble du continuum du logement ont été abordées dans les entrevues : logements locatifs ou du marché, logements subventionnés ou sociaux, logements de bande ou dans les réserves, logements de transition, maisons d'hébergement d'urgence, hébergement temporaire chez des amis ou la famille (de sofa en sofa) et itinérance. Contrairement à bon nombre d'expériences en matière de logement au Canada, les parcours des jeunes en la matière dans le territoire de la NNA reposent souvent sur des formes d'habitation hors marché. Dans cette section, nous aborderons séparément les différents modèles de logement et de mode d'occupation. Nous discuterons de la façon dont chaque type de logement est perçu par les jeunes qui en ont fait l'expérience.

Logements dans les réserves

La pénurie globale de logements dans l'ensemble du territoire de la NNA a une conséquence : toutes les personnes qui souhaitent rester ou retourner dans leur communauté n'ont pas toujours accès à un logement pour elles-mêmes ou leur famille. Les participants ont expliqué avoir présenté une demande de logement ou avoir vu leurs parents ou tuteurs présenter une demande et s'être retrouvés sur une liste d'attente. Les délais d'attente peuvent varier d'un mois à plusieurs années, voire davantage. Les personnes ayant pu accéder rapidement à un logement étaient plus susceptibles d'être aux prises avec une situation de logement précaire, l'itinérance ou de graves problèmes de santé. Les logements dans les réserves sont plus susceptibles d'être surpeuplés ou de nécessiter des réparations majeures que les logements à l'extérieur des réserves. Cependant, l'accès au logement dans les réserves, dans les cas où il a été possible, a été une source importante de stabilité et de possibilités pour les jeunes.

Logements sociaux et subventionnés

Les jeunes participants ont vécu toutes sortes d'expériences avec les logements sociaux. Ils ont grandi dans un logement social, emménagé dans un logement social avec leur famille, présenté une demande pour un logement social ou ont accédé à un logement social en tant que personnes seules ou chefs de ménage. Les participants qui ont présenté une demande pour accéder à un logement social ont vécu des expériences très diverses en ce qui concerne le processus de demande. De nombreux participants ont eu un besoin accru de soutien pour remplir la demande et obtenir des options de logement pendant qu'ils étaient sur liste d'attente. Les logements sociaux ont apporté un refuge et une stabilité à beaucoup de personnes qui ont pu y accéder. Toutefois, à mesure que les listes d'attente s'allongent, le logement social semble de plus en plus inaccessible.

Hébergement temporaire chez des amis ou la famille (de sofa en sofa)

De nombreux jeunes ont expliqué avoir dû compter sur leur famille et leurs amis pour les héberger. Si certains séjours étaient de courte durée ou peu fréquents, d'autres étaient longs, fréquents ou répartis chez plusieurs ménages pour parvenir à un semblant de stabilité. Certaines personnes ont trouvé dans cette solution d'hébergement temporaire un moyen d'éviter de dormir dans la rue ou de se retrouver dans d'autres situations dangereuses. Les récits des participants révèlent l'importance de cette solution pour permettre aux jeunes de rester logés. Bien que l'hébergement temporaire chez des proches ne soit pas une solution à long terme ni un moyen idéal de demeurer logé, pour les jeunes qui peuvent mettre à profit leurs réseaux relationnels, c'est un moyen de préserver leur sécurité.

Maisons d'hébergement

Les participants ont mentionné avoir accédé à des maisons d'hébergement d'urgence en tant qu'enfants avec un parent ou un tuteur ou en tant que personnes seules. Les jeunes ont expliqué avoir eu accès à une maison d'hébergement lorsqu'ils étaient enfants après l'éclatement de leur famille ou un autre changement soudain. Les maisons d'hébergement leur ont offert un soutien à court ou à long terme en attendant que leur mère ou leur tuteur obtienne un nouveau logement et des services. Les participants ont décrit leurs déménagements dans des maisons d'hébergement comme des épisodes mouvementés ou déroutants au début, mais certains ont aussi expliqué que la structure et les politiques de la maison d'hébergement avaient contribué à accroître leur sentiment de sécurité. Dans certains cas, les séjours en maison d'hébergement se sont prolongés, car la famille était sur liste d'attente pour un logement social.

Les raisons généralement invoquées par les participants qui ont eu recours aux maisons d'hébergement d'urgence seuls ou avec leurs enfants sont les conflits interpersonnels, les problèmes familiaux, la violence conjugale ou l'absence de réseau de soutien à l'arrivée dans une nouvelle ville. À l'heure actuelle, il n'y a pas de maisons d'hébergement réservées aux jeunes à Thunder Bay. Les jeunes doivent se rendre dans les mêmes maisons d'hébergement que les adultes, alors que ces établissements n'offrent pas toujours les types de soutien nécessaires ni des logements appropriés. Un jeune qui demande de l'aide fait un grand pas et accomplit un acte de courage. Des places d'hébergement et des services réservés aux jeunes sont nécessaires pour offrir un soutien adapté aux besoins des jeunes vulnérables. Ce soutien doit intégrer le fait que les jeunes peuvent éprouver des difficultés ou faire des erreurs tandis qu'ils cheminent, apprennent et grandissent.

Logements locatifs du marché

Les logements locatifs du marché peuvent offrir davantage d'options de logement, mais l'entrée sur le marché peut être difficile pour les jeunes Autochtones. Cette difficulté s'explique par la hausse des coûts, le manque de crédit et de références, le risque de discrimination et l'existence de propriétaires-bailleurs ayant un comportement abusif. De plus, le coût de la vie et l'abordabilité des logements locatifs du marché ont une incidence disproportionnée sur les personnes qui sont déjà les plus vulnérables. Ces facteurs peuvent les mener à des situations précaires et dangereuses. Les participants ont indiqué que les logements locatifs dans leur fourchette de prix étaient plus susceptibles de présenter des problèmes d'entretien ou d'être situés dans des secteurs peu attrayants. Il y a des jeunes qui viennent de prendre leur indépendance, qui gagnent un faible revenu, qui sont encore aux études ou qui n'ont pas d'autres formes de soutien social ou financier. Pour cette population, et en particulier pour les jeunes Autochtones, les programmes et les logements sociaux et

subventionnés peuvent offrir une autre solution stable permettant d'obtenir un logement sûr et convenable par rapport au marché du logement privé.

SERVICES À L'ENFANCE ET À LA FAMILLE

Près de la moitié des participants ont eu affaire aux services à l'enfance et à la famille au cours de leur parcours dans le domaine du logement. Diverses expériences d'accès aux services à l'enfance et à la famille, de placement et d'interactions avec des travailleurs sociaux sont ressorties des entrevues. Pour bon nombre des participants, ces services n'ont pas été une garantie de stabilité. Les expériences de placement varient énormément dans les récits, de la cohabitation avec des amis ou la famille au sein de la communauté à une série de placements à court terme, en passant par des placements à long terme. Certaines personnes ont aussi été séparées de leurs frères et sœurs et d'autres membres de leur famille. Les participants qui ont été séparés de leur famille ou de leur communauté ont confié à quel point le processus avait été difficile et les avait isolés. Un participant a notamment raconté qu'enfant, il avait l'impression de rencontrer des étrangers lorsqu'il réintégrait sa famille pour de courtes visites. Les jeunes plus âgés qui ont été séparés de leur famille, de leurs frères et sœurs confiés aux services à l'enfance ou de leur communauté ont souvent dû faire des efforts pour réunir leur famille ou rétablir les liens.

L'expérience des services à l'enfance et à la famille évolue à mesure que les jeunes grandissent. Les participants ont expliqué avoir pris conscience du rôle des travailleurs sociaux ainsi que des changements et des défis rencontrés par les adolescents dans le système. Certains participants ont mentionné avoir éprouvé des difficultés à l'adolescence, car leur situation les avait fait grandir précocement. Du fait de ces circonstances, certains participants avaient un désir accru d'indépendance, mais ils n'avaient pas les ressources nécessaires pour obtenir un logement stable par eux-mêmes. Qu'il quitte les services à l'enfance et à la famille avant ses 18 ans ou qu'il cesse d'y avoir accès en raison de son âge, un jeune a besoin de davantage de soutien et de services pendant cette période de transition. Certains services de soutien peuvent être offerts automatiquement, selon l'implication du jeune ou son accès aux travailleurs sociaux. D'autres mesures de soutien peuvent nécessiter que le jeune communique avec un travailleur social pour présenter une demande ou s'inscrire à un programme. Pour les jeunes qui ont été très mobiles, qui ont occupé des logements précaires ou qui ont été en situation d'itinérance, l'accès à l'information et aux ressources peut être très difficile. De plus, demander de l'aide peut être une étape importante et éprouvante à franchir pour les jeunes, surtout s'ils ont peu confiance dans le système des services à l'enfance et à la famille ou s'ils sont aux prises avec des problèmes, notamment de santé mentale. Les jeunes n'ayant plus accès aux services à l'enfance en raison de leur âge ont besoin d'un soutien accru pour réussir la transition en tant que jeunes adultes autonomes. Ils peuvent ainsi s'assurer d'avoir un logement stable et un accès à tous les services supplémentaires nécessaires.

ÉDUCATION

Les participants ont expliqué avoir changé d'école en raison des déménagements d'une communauté à une autre et d'autres perturbations ou défis rencontrés. Il est important de noter que les participants n'ont pas vécu chaque déménagement ou changement d'école comme une expérience déstabilisante ou négative. Le plus souvent, le changement d'école était motivé par un déménagement d'une communauté à une autre avec leur famille. Les participants ont aussi décrit l'incidence des difficultés qu'ils rencontraient dans leur vie personnelle

sur leurs résultats scolaires. Pour les jeunes aux prises avec des problèmes de santé mentale ou des difficultés à la maison, l'école était souvent reléguée au second plan. Ils se concentraient surtout sur leur bien-être. L'accès aux études peut non seulement nécessiter une certaine mobilité des étudiants pour obtenir un logement, mais aussi avoir une incidence sur la trajectoire en matière de logement. Il faut s'attaquer aux obstacles que doivent surmonter les jeunes pour accéder aux études et les terminer aussi bien dans les réserves qu'en dehors des réserves. L'offre d'infrastructures et de logements convenables dans les réserves ainsi que d'options de logement réservées aux étudiants vivant hors des réserves doit être améliorée. Une telle initiative permettrait d'aider les jeunes à obtenir de meilleurs résultats scolaires et de remédier à la mobilité forcée.

SANTÉ

Au cours des entrevues, les jeunes ont parlé de l'incidence de l'accès aux soins de santé sur leur bien-être à divers moments de leur vie. Les problèmes et les défis liés à la santé mentale et à l'accès aux services de soutien ont souvent été mentionnés. Parmi les autres problèmes de santé qui sont ressortis des échanges, mentionnons l'accès aux centres de traitement, les soins pendant la grossesse et à la naissance, ainsi que le temps passé dans des foyers d'accueil médicalisés. Les parcours des jeunes en matière de logement croisent le système de soins de santé de diverses façons, dans la mesure où l'accès inéquitable aux soins de santé a des répercussions importantes sur la mobilité. Plus particulièrement, l'accès aux centres de traitement et le suivi de grossesse lorsque l'on vit dans une communauté éloignée imposent aux personnes d'être mobiles.

La recherche sur la santé des Autochtones et la santé mentale des jeunes met au jour plusieurs problèmes dont les participants ont fait part : la fragmentation du système de soins de santé, les défis liés à la transition entre les soins aux jeunes et les soins aux adultes et d'autres obstacles comme le racisme et la discrimination, l'emplacement géographique et le manque de soins adaptés à la culture (Weerasinghe et coll., 2023; Thorburn et coll., 2023; Toombs et coll., 2021). Une variété étendue d'options de soins de santé doit être offerte dans les réserves ainsi que dans les communautés rurales et urbaines. Comme l'ont mis en évidence les entrevues avec les jeunes et les fournisseurs de services, le manque de connexion entre les soins de santé et d'autres services de soutien, comme le logement ou l'éducation, peut nuire à la pleine efficacité de certains services. En effet, ce mode de fonctionnement ne permet pas de traiter des problèmes globaux. Au cours des entrevues, les jeunes ont évoqué les relations entre leur bien-être, le rapport à la terre et leur environnement en général, y compris leur logement. Il est important de reconnaître qu'il existe de nombreuses voies, tant formelles qu'informelles, pour soutenir le bien-être individuel. Les jeunes devraient pouvoir accéder à celle qui leur convient.

SYSTÈME DE JUSTICE

Il existe un lien négatif et cyclique entre l'itinérance et le système de justice pénale. Les jeunes Autochtones vivant dans un logement précaire qui ont des démêlés avec le système de justice peuvent être plus susceptibles d'être placés en détention préventive parce que l'on considère qu'ils n'ont aucun autre endroit stable où aller ni aucune personne vers qui se tourner. Quant aux personnes qui sont mises en liberté sous caution ou sous condition, le contexte de leur libération peut avoir une incidence sur l'accès au logement. Ce contexte peut en effet limiter l'endroit où elles peuvent retourner ou les personnes avec lesquelles elles peuvent vivre (JHSO, 2022, p. 43-44). Les personnes libérées d'un établissement correctionnel et ayant un casier judiciaire se heurtent aussi à des obstacles pour obtenir un emploi ou un logement du marché privé en raison de la

vérification des antécédents judiciaires (JHSO et coll., 2022, p. 11-13). Les jeunes Autochtones forment une population vulnérable surreprésentée dans le système de justice. À ce titre, le risque qu'ils soient coincés dans un cycle d'incarcération et de précarité du logement en raison de leurs relations avec le système de justice pénale s'ajoute à d'autres formes d'inégalités systémiques et de discrimination qu'ils peuvent subir. La lutte contre la précarité du logement et l'itinérance chez les jeunes a de vastes répercussions sur l'éducation, la santé et la justice. Pour prévenir et rompre les liens entre l'itinérance et le système de justice pénale, il faut éliminer les obstacles au logement et créer une diversité de moyens d'obtenir un hébergement (qu'il s'agisse de logement de transition ou de logement à long terme) et un soutien social. Les jeunes, et les jeunes Autochtones en particulier, ont besoin de solutions spécifiquement élaborées pour relever les défis uniques qui se posent à eux.

AUTRES SUJETS

Dans les sections précédentes, nous avons divisé les parcours en matière de logement selon plusieurs thèmes généraux pour présenter l'expérience des jeunes : les institutions offrant une aide au logement, les services à l'enfance et à la famille, l'éducation et les soins de santé. Bon nombre de ces institutions ou de ces thématiques se recoupent ou ont des caractéristiques en commun, comme les problèmes de discrimination et du racisme, ainsi que le rôle des réseaux relationnels et des adultes de confiance. Il est important de souligner ces fils conducteurs pour montrer la complexité des expériences vécues par les jeunes. La discrimination et le racisme à l'encontre des Autochtones, le rôle des réseaux relationnels, l'accès au transport, le coût de la vie, l'indépendance financière et l'accès aux terres et à la culture sont des sujets qui sont ressortis des discussions.

LA VOIX DES JEUNES

Les constatations du projet de recherche se sont concentrées sur les défis et les obstacles rencontrés par les jeunes dans les domaines du logement, des services à l'enfance et à la famille, de l'éducation, des soins de santé et de la justice. Toutefois, il est important de mettre l'accent sur ce qui a fonctionné pour les jeunes et sur les changements qu'ils souhaitent dans le but d'améliorer les résultats en matière de logement et le bien-être des autres jeunes. Dans la dernière partie de l'entrevue, deux questions ont été posées aux participants :

- Que signifie un chez-soi pour vous?
- Quels changements apporteriez-vous pour un avenir meilleur?

Cette section présente les réponses des jeunes à ces questions dans leurs propres mots. Les participants ont donné deux grandes réponses à la question sur la notion de chez-soi : ils ont parlé de l'importance de la famille et de la communauté et du fait d'avoir de la stabilité ou du contrôle sur leur situation. Les réponses reflètent les parcours des participants en matière de logement et, pour bon nombre d'entre eux, l'hypermobilité et la précarité qu'ils ont connues en grandissant. Pour ce qui est d'imaginer un avenir meilleur, les participants ont réfléchi à leurs propres expériences et au type de soutien qu'ils auraient aimé recevoir en tant que jeunes accédant à un logement. Cette question a reçu toutes sortes de réponses, par exemple : un nombre accru d'options diversifiées de logement dans les réserves, du soutien pour s'orienter dans l'offre de logements sociaux, du soutien au bien-être des jeunes et des maisons d'hébergement ou des logements avec services de soutien réservés aux jeunes. Les deux questions posées ont fait émerger de nombreuses similitudes et des sentiments communs, tout autant que des points de vue uniques de la part des participants.

CONCLUSION

Le présent rapport illustre l'expérience des jeunes des Premières Nations du territoire de la NNA et du nord de l'Ontario en matière d'accès au logement. On y reconnaît que le logement va au-delà du simple fait de fournir un hébergement. Une compréhension globale est nécessaire. Il faut prendre en compte le fait que les expériences en matière de logement sont individuelles, qu'elles sont liées à des évènements historiques et que de multiples institutions entrent en jeu, comme le logement social, les services à l'enfance et à la famille, l'éducation, les soins de santé et la justice. Cette compréhension du logement repose sur les leçons tirées des entrevues avec les jeunes participants. La mobilité a caractérisé les parcours de bon nombre de ces jeunes en matière de logement. Cette mobilité a été influencée par des facteurs personnels, systémiques et institutionnels. Le présent rapport montre que les mobilités des jeunes reflètent les réseaux relationnels et familiaux sur un vaste territoire, les choix personnels, les interventions des institutions et le manque d'accès équitable au logement et à d'autres infrastructures.

Les entrevues menées auprès de jeunes dans le cadre du projet *Créer un chez-soi pour nos jeunes* ont révélé un éventail d'expériences vécues à la fois communes et uniques. Collectivement, les parcours des participants rendent compte des défis et des obstacles auxquels eux-mêmes et bon nombre de leurs pairs se sont heurtés et continuent de se heurter dans la recherche d'un logement sûr et approprié. Les entrevues avec des jeunes et des fournisseurs de services ont aussi mis en évidence plusieurs domaines d'intervention et d'amélioration. Comme le montre le rapport, l'accès au logement ne se limite pas à l'espace physique d'une habitation. Il concerne aussi la façon dont il évolue au fil des étapes de la vie et les liens qui existent avec d'autres institutions. Des mesures sont nécessaires pour remédier à l'urgence persistante en matière de logement que vivent les jeunes. Dans bien des cas, ces mesures augmentent les options offertes aux jeunes pour obtenir un logement ou améliorer leur situation résidentielle. L'accroissement des options peut être synonyme d'une capacité d'agir accrue pour les jeunes. Les récits des jeunes qui façonnent le rapport décrivent en détail les nombreux obstacles auxquels ils se heurtent et leur incidence sur leur vie. Pour honorer leurs paroles et éviter les mêmes obstacles à une autre génération, des changements doivent être apportés.

RECOMMANDATIONS

Les nombreuses recommandations visant à régler les problèmes relevés dans le présent rapport sont rattachées à d'autres enquêtes, notamment Seven Youth Inquest (l'enquête sur la mort de sept Autochtones à Thunder Bay), la Commission de vérité et réconciliation et l'Enquête sur les femmes et les filles autochtones disparues et assassinées. Leur mise en œuvre est essentielle au bien-être et à la sécurité des jeunes de la NNA. Comme l'a souligné l'Oshkaatisak Council dans sa déclaration, de nombreux facteurs ont des répercussions sur le bien-être individuel et communautaire. Des recommandations ont été élaborées pour chaque section dans le cadre du projet et regroupées selon les parties auxquelles elles s'adressent, comme les différents ordres de gouvernement, organismes et institutions. Les recommandations formulées visent à créer un accès équitable à des espaces sûrs, à des programmes inclusifs et à une meilleure norme de prestation de services. Ce sont autant de formes de protection du bien-être mental, social, spirituel et physique qui peuvent être considérées comme contribuant à la prévention du suicide.

Introduction

INTRODUCTION

In 2014, Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN) Chiefs-in-Assembly declared a Collective Housing Emergency, describing existing conditions as "deplorable" as a result of limited housing lifespans, overcrowding and extreme mould growth amongst other factors. In 2018, Chiefs-in-Assembly reaffirmed the ongoing housing crisis and mandated that a modern housing strategy be developed. Over the next four years, community members, Chiefs and Councils and housing and other related professionals were engaged to understand the unique challenges and priorities across NAN. From these discussions common themes emerged that were reviewed and refined into the seven main thematic areas of the Strategy: advocating for inclusive housing systems, addressing health impacts of housing, appropriate and sustainable design and materials, integrated infrastructure planning, improving funding structures, governance and policy reform, and capacity development and training. These areas present a wholistic understanding of the systems change required within housing and infrastructure that intersects with health and well-being, education, governance and climate change. In August 2022, the NAN Housing Strategy (NANHS) was accepted by NAN Chiefs-in-Assembly at the annual Keewaywin Conference as Resolution 22/12: Acceptance and Implementation of NAN Housing Strategy Roadmap.

Creating a Home for Our Youth was developed during the NANHS engagement process where housing for youth was identified as a priority requiring immediate action. Across workshops with youth, community members and housing and health professionals, participants have identified and shared the struggle facing community youth in obtaining adequate and appropriate housing. The persistent shortage of on-reserve housing and over-representation of 3- and 4-bedroom dwelling units create long waitlists which often prioritize larger families. As a result, youth and singles remain on waiting lists indefinitely, being forced in the interim into precarious housing situations on reserves or into cities away from their families. In addition to the challenge youth face resulting from longstanding housing shortages in communities, youth Housing Strategy participants have identified a series of additional housing issues. These issues result from being forced to interact with off-reserve systems: education, healthcare and child and family services that also lead to housing precarity.

This report looks to approach housing for First Nations youth in the NAN territory and northern Ontario holistically, understanding experiences of housing are personal, are connected with historical events and intersect with multiple institutions including social housing, child and family services, education, healthcare and justice. Through interviews with 27 NAN youth, aged 16 to 29, a diverse set of housing journeys reveal the many ways youth navigate systems and work to access and maintain housing or shelter. The report is divided into three main sections: Methodology, Findings and Conclusion. The methodology section reviews academic and grey literature in relation to project design and analysis and provides an overview of project process. The findings section is divided into seven subsections: Housing, Child and Family Services, Education, Healthcare, Justice, Other and Youth Voices. Each subsection is shaped by youth housing journeys and features quotes from interviews from youth and service provider participants. Participants shared both positive and negative experiences in relation to accessing housing as well as other challenges they encountered as young people and quotes reflect the diversity and similarities of their journeys. Youth participants also shared their understanding of home and changes they would like to see to improve housing for other youth. The Conclusion section draws on lessons learned from youth participants and identifies areas of action where policy and program interventions are needed.

OVERVIEW OF NISHNAWBE ASKI NATION

Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN) was established in 1973 and represents 49 First Nations with a total population (on and off reserve) of approximately 45,000 people. The NAN territory spans 210,00 square miles, covering two-thirds of the Province of Ontario. It includes the James Bay Treaty No. 9 and the Ontario portion of Treaty No. 5. The traditional languages include Cree, Algonquin, Anisininew, and Ojibway.

NAN Housing Crisis

Across NAN, the ongoing housing shortage and inappropriate housing types are negatively impacting individuals and community well-being. The ongoing housing crisis in NAN Territory has developed out of decades of inappropriate intervention. The deplorable conditions of housing across NAN have been recognized by the NAN Chiefs-in-Assembly through multiple resolutions.

In 2014, the 49 NAN Chiefs-in-Assembly declared a Collective Housing Emergency through Resolution 14/40. In 2018, NAN Chiefs-in-Assembly passed Resolution 18/18 calling for the development of a modern NAN Housing Strategy, that would address the current housing crisis. The NAN Housing Strategy was adopted by Chiefs-in-Assembly in August 2022 (Resolution 22/12).

Oshkaatisak “All Young Peoples” Council

The NAN Oshkaatisak Council is mandated by resolutions from the Chiefs-in-Assembly to provide guidance and advice to the NAN Chiefs and NAN Executive Council, and to ensure that youth have a voice in the governance of NAN.

The Oshkaatisak Council represents the youth of NAN. The Oshkaatisak Council strives to promote youth empowerment and engagement with the goal of improving the livelihood and hope for the future of all NAN youth.


Nishnawbe Aski Nation
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QUEBEC
N
MANITOBA
ONTARIO
First Nations
& Tribal Councils
Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug
Kenora
Dryden
Sioux Lookout
Thunder Bay
Timmins
Hearst
Kashechewan
Ottawa
Toronto
UNITED STATES

Credit: Ingaged, 2023.

PARTNERSHIP - TOGETHER DESIGN LAB

Nishnawbe Aski Nation Housing Strategy and it's related projects are undertaken by a team of partners from NAN, the seven Tribal Councils within its territory, it's forty-nine member First Nations and institutional partner Together Design Lab (TDL) at Toronto Metropolitan University (TMU). NAN is a Political Territorial Organisation representing 49 First Nation communities in northern Ontario. NAN continues to work to improve the quality of life for the Nishnawbe Aski territory and to advocate on behalf of the communities it represents for self-determination with functioning self-government. TDL is a team of students, staff and faculty with training in planning and architecture led by Dr. Shelagh McCartney. Relying on a collaborative and immersive approach, the listen-learn-share model, TDL believes that each community member brings unique and valuable knowledge and experience to housing discussions.

NOTES ON CONTENT

This report includes discussions and quotes from youth participants on sensitive topics which may cause distress in readers. Topics include: intimate partner violence, abuse (sexual, mental or physical), suicide, self-harm, racism, and substance abuse.

- NAN Hope provides resources available to all NAN members. Call or text toll free 1-844-626-4673 or visit https://nanhope.ca
- To connect with health, community, government and social services call 211
- Hope for Wellness Helpline: 1-855-242-3310 or www.hopeforwellness.ca

Participant quotes

Throughout this report quotes from interview transcription are used. Participants are anonymous and are identified using a transcript number. Transcripts were sent to participants, reviewed and edited or redacted at participant's requests. Where a conversation is quoted, the facilitators voice is shown in ***italics*** while participants voices are presented with a **regular** font. Quotes used in this report may be edited for formatting or legibility purposes, as described below:

- Filler words such as: *like, um, uh, y'know* have been reduced or removed.
- Some instances of misspeaking or false starts have been removed or reduced (such as saying the same phrase twice "...as well, as well as...")
- Facilitator crosstalk or affirmations have been removed or reduced such as *yes, yeah, ok, right* so the participants' response is shown as a continuous statement.
- Names of individuals such as family members, friends, co-workers are redacted. Some names may be shown where the individual is considered a public figure. Names of streets, schools and towns or communities may have been redacted where information could be used to triangulate or identify a participant.
- Pauses in speech are shown as (.) OR ...
- Two or more parts of the same interview presented together is shown as [...]
- Square brackets are added to provide context such as person, place or time. For example: "Except the building is closed [during COVID lockdowns], so how do you get there to get your mail?"

Methodology

METHODOLOGY

PRIMARY AND SECONDARY INFORMANT RESEARCH

Interrogating the relationships between existing institutions and the struggle for NAN youth to secure appropriate housing, Institutional Ethnography (IE) is deployed as the principal methodological framework. From the "standpoint" (Bisaillon, 2012, p. 619) of NAN youth, a series of virtual interviews with both primary (youth) and secondary (service provider) informants were conducted to reveal how existing institutions, and their texts shape the housing experiences of NAN youth. This project builds on the work of both Institutional Ethnographers and Indigenous researchers across social science disciplines who recognize the lived experiences of oppressed individuals as the point of entry into systems research (Deveau, 2018). Developed by Dorothy E. Smith (1987, 1999, 2005), IE "is reflective of a commitment to the exploration of institutional processes from the perspective of embodied subjects" (Doll & Walby, 2019). Critically, these inquiries are focused on the institutional relationships given importance by the subjects themselves, by undertaking "an investigation of the translocal ruling relations that hook into and coordinate the experiences that the 'subjects' or 'informants' are unable to explain from their positions in a local setting" (Deveau, 2008, p.16). Interviews and document analysis are the primary means of data collection in IE. The semi-structured, collaborative interviews with primary informants in IE are less concerned with the particularities of an individual story but instead in forming a kind of map (Carroll, 2010) or diagram (Rankin, 2017) which orients the participant within a series of interactions and processes. Interviews are focused on the "work" undertaken by participants as they interact with institutions and texts in their day-to-day lives and as such, the interview serves as a tool for understanding these ruling practices (DeVault & McCoy, 2012; Doll & Walby, 2019).

Interviews in the IE process are cumulative, where "each interview provides an opportunity for the researcher to learn about a particular piece of the extended relational chain, to check the developing picture of the coordinative process, and to become aware of additional questions that need attention" (DeVault & McCoy, 2012, p. 385). Examples of IE work which have led to this project's adoption of the methodology include interviews from the standpoint of frontline health care workers (Ng et al., 2013; Ng, Biasaillon &Webster, 2016; Nichols et al., 2016; Quinlan, 2009), individuals in the justice system (Doll & Walby, 2019), students in post-secondary education (Restoule et al., 2013), families accessing services (Ingstrup, 2014; Underwood, Smith & Martin, 2018) and youth accessing services (Nichols, 2017). Importantly, in each of these projects IE has contributed directly to action for the standpoint population, through the successful identification of disjunctures and in many cases standpoint-populations identified alternative futures. Beyond interviews with primary informants, interviews are often conducted with the institutional administrators of ruling relations. These interviews also examine day-to-day work and its relationship to texts; however here, focus is placed on the disjunctures, the places in which ruling discourse breaks from the experiences shared by individuals (Underwood, Smith & Martin, 2018)). These are the contested spaces within the ruling relations where action becomes possible (Bisaillon, 2012). Interviews and their associated maps will identify relevant texts for close examination. IE suggests that ruling relations are carried out through the texts that mediate interactions; the forms, regulations and program guidelines that sit at the foundation of all modern institutions (Smith, 1990). Textual analysis provides an additional opportunity to identify disjunctures and moments for systemic change.

As part of the IE process, three primary methods of data collection were used: primary informant interviews (conducted virtually), secondary informant

interview (conducted virtually) and textual analysis. All data collection activities in this first phase of project research are focused on the following research questions:

- How are the housing experiences of NAN youth mediated by existing institutions;
- Where do disjunctures exist in the existing housing service network; and
- How can the work currently being done by NAN youth to make their housing more appropriate shape a future alternative housing system?

Project recruitment and research strategies were reviewed and approved by TMU Ethics Board (REB 2020-543).

PRIMARY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS: Youth (aged 14-29) from NAN communities participated in semi-structured, collaborative interviews using a digital platform (Zoom, facetime, skype or over the phone depending on participant preference) exploring their housing experiences. Using an interview guide co-developed with members of the Oshkaatisak Council, interviews focused on retracing the participants' housing history with a focus on all moments in which the participant accessed new housing or looked to improve their current housing. At these moments of change, follow-up questions focused on the particularities of institutional interactions and texts encountered. Participants collaboratively mapped their housing journey with the interviewer before having the opportunity to vision an alternative future.

SHARING CIRCLES: Youth (aged 14-29) from NAN communities participated in sharing circles in-person, no larger than 12 people, focusing in particular on research question 3: How can the work currently being done by NAN youth to make their housing more appropriate shape a future alternative housing system? The sharing circle format is chosen given their appropriateness in providing a platform for the sharing of stories and life experiences (Lavallee, 2009). Rooted in the oral tradition of First Nations peoples, sharing circles provide a tangible alternative to the Western hierarchical reliance on textual data, placing clear value on other ways of knowing (Barry & Porter, 2011). The sharing circle also recognizes the interconnectedness of all knowledge—the connections between physical, emotional and spiritual worlds— which is critical to the understanding of housing (Lavallee, 2009). In allowing participants to share their unique knowledge and experience, participants can learn from one another and work towards solutions in an iterative manner. Sharing circles look to complement primary data analysis ensuring community voices are being accurately represented and documenting potential solutions not recorded in interviews or textual analysis. In addition, sharing circles provide a more relaxed and community-oriented platform for youth to participate in the project- recognizing that individual interviews can be daunting for potential participants. This data collection method allowed for us to engage a wider set of voices and further develop our understanding of this particular research question.

SECONDARY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS: Service providers from housing-related institutions were interviewed to explore ruling relations identified in primary informant interviews. Interviews looked to gain additional perspective from the role of service providers about the youth housing provision system in northern Ontario. Interviews focused on the work done by service providers to place youth in appropriate housing and support youth in improving housing. Secondary informant interviews were also used to identify relevant texts which may be more familiar to service providers than primary informants. Interviews took place using a virtual platform or telephone. Secondary informant interviews recognized the diversity of housing-engaged professionals and the role played by diverse actors and institutions that shape youth housing journeys as described in primary informant interviews. As a result in addition to interviews with representatives from of each the region's three district social services and administration boards who offer formal housing supports recruitment targeted shelter service operators, child and family services organizations, educational institutions, healthcare providers and a number of non-governmental organizations who work in related spaces.

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS: Interviews will probe to uncover the specific texts (forms, program guidelines, etc...) which mediate specific institutional interactions. Texts will then be analyzed and synthesized with mapping created through the interview process to, "bring visibility to the power texts have on how an institution operates and how that influences people's lives" (Underwood, Smith & Martin, 2018).

INTERVIEWS & ANALYSIS

Recruitment

Recruitment followed two different streams for primary and secondary informants. Primary informants: Three main strategies were used to recruit NAN youth which rely heavily on the project team and existing networks.

1. Youth were recruited directly from the Oshkaatisak Council's existing contact network of NAN youth throughout the territory;
2. Youth were recruited through NAN's existing network of community-based youth programmers. In nearly all NAN First Nations there is a staff position responsible for youth programming. NAN maintains regular communication with these frontline staff workers and can distribute recruitment material through them. These individuals can also play a role in providing follow up and ongoing support for individual participants if needed; and
3. The recruitment flyer was shared on NAN's Facebook page. NAN Housing staff worked with the NAN Communication department to confirm permission to use the Facebook page. Comments on the Facebook post were closed to support anonymity and potential participants were directed to contact individuals found on the recruitment flyer if they had any questions or were interested in participating.

Secondary informants were recruited through organizations using existing NAN, TMU or other partner contacts where possible or through web-listed contacts. Organizations were identified through primary informant interviews or through the project team's research into service providers.

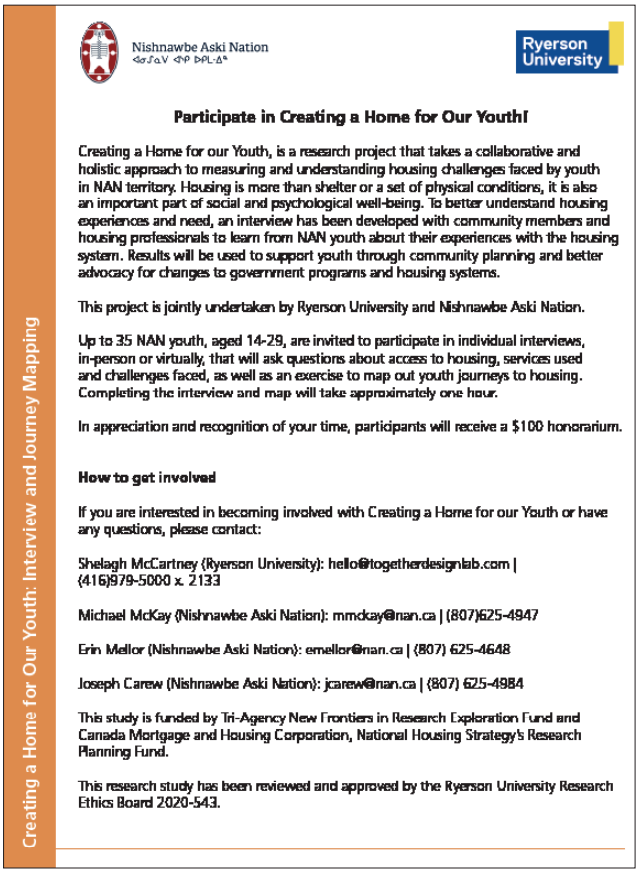


Figure 1 & 2: Recruitment one-pager developed by TDL and approved by Toronto Metropolitan University Ethics Board (REB 2020-543). NAN developed a second poster with recruitment inclusion criteria and distributed at events and on social media.

Interviews

Interviews took place between May 2021 and August 2022 with 27 participants. Interviews ranged in length from approximately 35 minutes to just over one and a half hours.

TABLE 1: PARTICIPANT OVERVIEW	
Average age	23
Age range	16-29
Gender - Female	85%
Male	11%
Male, 2-spirit	4%
Total interview participants	27

Interviewees shared a wide variety of experiences with accessing housing both on and off reserve. Over 80% of participants shared that they have stayed with family or friends because they had nowhere else to go, 41% had accessed an emergency shelter with family members or on their own, 41% had accessed housing through a Native Housing program and 59% had been on a waitlist for housing at some point in their life. Participants came from across northern Ontario with connections throughout NAN territory. Seventeen First Nations were identified as participant's home communities. Of the seventeen First Nations, 52% were road access communities.

Limitations

Recruitment was done through social media posts, word of mouth and at other NAN events in-person and virtually. While a variety of methods were used for recruitment there remains some potential limitations to consider during analysis.

While data shows that participants from road-access communities are over-represented in interviews it also demonstrates a high level of participant mobility. An important finding from early analysis shows participant experiences go beyond a simple dichotomy of living and being either on or off reserve or urban and rural. Movements between housing and services ranged from 5-28, with participants referencing an average of 14 moves between various forms of shelter in their lifetime. Distances traveled included small moves within a community or city to hundreds of kilometres traveled to access housing. The median maximum distance traveled for participants was 588 km. This connection between mobility and accessing housing will continue to be explored in future analyses.

The majority of participants in the interviews identified as female. Participants were not asked to explain why they wanted to participate and so potential explanations for female over-representation would only be speculative in nature.

An additional limitation to recruitment was the reliance on a virtual or a long distance platform. As census data shows, many households in communities are crowded which can become a barrier to conducting a private interview. Additionally, internet access can be limited and less reliable in remote communities. Some interviews were interrupted or stalled due to faulty connections or participants having to switch to phoning into the platform to ensure a stable connection.

Emerging themes

Interviews were reviewed and coded using Dedoose software as part of the first round of analysis. Several methods were used to develop the codes. An initial list of codes was made based on interview objectives (i.e. institutional ethnography, 'work', 'text'), the interview checklist (i.e. waitlist, Native housing program, boarding) and known institutions or systems (i.e. child family services, education system, justice system).

Three interviews were selected to test initial codes and identify potential news codes using "in vivo" or direct quotes or words of participants (i.e. "displaced", "exciting", "big change") and general descriptors (i.e. seeking help, crowding, stability). Coding from the three interviews was reviewed and a codebook was developed (see Table 2 & 3).

A selection of eleven codes were reviewed to begin to identify themes. The initial themes focused on institutional experiences and with other topics

emerging from their review. Through the iterative process of code development, the code definitions were confirmed or adjusted. A final set of codes were finalized and then verified by members of the research team.

Emerging themes identified were:

- Agency in Child Family Services system impacts outcomes
- Social networks and access to housing
- Challenges in accessing market housing
- (Hyper)mobility
- Need for youth specific infrastructure and social spaces

TABLE 2: CODE BOOK TEMPLATE
CODE

Definition	Meaning of code term
Origin	Part of interview guide (deductive), from an interview (inductive), which interview
Importance	Why is it used in this project
Example	In text example
Counterexample	Clarify when a code should NOT be applied
Reflection/Notes	How the code has evolved as more data are coded, what is being notice, track usage, changes, etc

Transcript Coding

Three members of the research team were assigned a mix of primary and secondary coding responsibilities for the remaining transcripts. After a transcript was coded by the primary coder, the second team member reviewed the codes, adding any codes that may have been overlooked. In a small number of cases some codes were flagged, reviewed by the team and amended for consistency. Overall, 104 codes were developed and used for transcript analysis. Through the coding process 2,311 codes were applied to 978 transcript excerpts across the 27 interviews.

Theme Refinement and Second Literature Review

To organize the review of codes, themes were reviewed and first organized by institution: housing, Child and Family Services, education, healthcare and the justice system. Some of the emerging themes identified in the interim report were used as starting points for analysis and combined with the new themes. Two of the emerging themes - (hyper)mobility and need for youth specific infrastructure and social spaces- did not fit completely into the new organizing themes. On review, youth specific spaces were identified as a topic for recommendation development reflecting part of future changes youth shared in their interviews. The emerging theme of (hyper)mobility could be understood as cutting across institutions and themes. From this perspective, the research team began a preliminary review of mobility literature.

The initial scan of mobility literature found that mobility theory could be a useful framework for analysis. A mobility lens could be applied to each theme to understand and situate youth housing journeys experiences. Mobility is understood as the movement of people (e.g. traveling within a city, moving houses, changing schools, moving between communities) and the movement or allocation of resources or capital (e.g. where does funding go? How do policies facilitate movement?). A mobility framework serves as a way to understand how youth navigate the world and how individual choices can be shaped or influenced by other factors such as institutions or policies. When reviewing participant experiences, two main questions were applied during the code analysis:

- How does ‘x’ system impact the mobility of NAN Youth?
- How does this system shape participants’ experience of home?

Examining how First Nation youth navigate and experience institutions from their own perspective is important to understanding connections between

TABLE 3: CODE EXAMPLE Child and family services	
Definition	A participant who has been involved in or interacted with Child and Family Services (CFS). CFS is understood to be a children aid's society established by the province or territory, and can be in partnership with private organizations, which provide services to supplement or substitute for parental care or supervision. Could includes but is not limited to: Children's Aid Society of the District of Thunder Bay Child and Family Services of Timmins and District Dilico Ojibway Child and Family Services North Eastern Ontario Family and Children's Services Tikinagan Child and Family Services Kunuwanimano Child and Family Services
Origin	Identified prior to coding as an institution First Nations youth would likely interact with.
Importance	As part of the institutional ethnography it is important to trace how participants interacted with and navigated CFS, how CFS interactions and placements impacted housing experiences and understand how youth have reflected on their experiences.
Example	"Youth participant: Well my childhood, I wasn't really living on the reserve because after I turned three well like, a while after I turned three I got put into foster care"
Counterexample	N/A
Reflection/Notes	This code was also applied to participants whose families acted as fosters and was applied to discussion on how it shaped their experience of housing.

housing precarity and "broader sociopolitical and environmental structures" (Ansloos & Wager, 2020, p. 62). A mobility lens recognizes the spectrum of agency, from full personal autonomy to forced immobility, as youth interact with institutions. In CAHFOY interviews, many participants shared housing journeys with numerous moves, both big and small. Participants accessed housing for a variety of reasons and lengths of stays. Moves included changes between longer term housing such as moving to a larger or renovated house or moving to a boarding house(s) for the school year. Other moves were for shorter periods and often coincided with periods of instability, change or transitions. These included couch surfing for short periods, stays in transitional or emergency housing or participating in a treatment program. These periods of mobility could not always be predicted when it occurred or for how long and were not always a result of an individual youth's choice. These movements were often followed by accessing services or supports. However, services or supports were not always in the location the participant was experiencing housing insecurity. Participants discussed moving or traveling to access services or moving due to interactions with institutions such as education, health, CFS and social housing. Within many of these interactions, a range of push and pull factors impacted youth and their ability to make choices or the type of choices they could make. Mobility described by youth occurred at a variety of scales, including within one community, between communities and cities across northern Ontario or across provincial and national borders.

OTHER CAHFOY STREAMS ACTIVITIES

Literature Review - Social Housing Policies

This project stream focused on housing and homelessness policies and strategies that are found in northern off-reserve Population Centres. The project was added to the work plan to address questions expressed by participants and the Oshkaatisak Council about what approaches were being taken elsewhere to address youth homelessness. The scan of northern housing policy interventions replaces the evaluation framework which was no longer seen as appropriate or relevant after conducting the primary informant interviews. Interview participants struggled to define characteristics of home, safety and other concepts that would form an evaluation matrix. Undertaking a review of northern policy responses provided a platform for understanding and discussing existing measures and considering with NAN youth what possible routes of advocacy for change exist.

A total of 262 documents were found through the search process and application of inclusion criteria of population centres in northern Canada. Document types included Official Plans, homelessness strategies, homelessness counts, housing needs assessments and housing reports or studies.

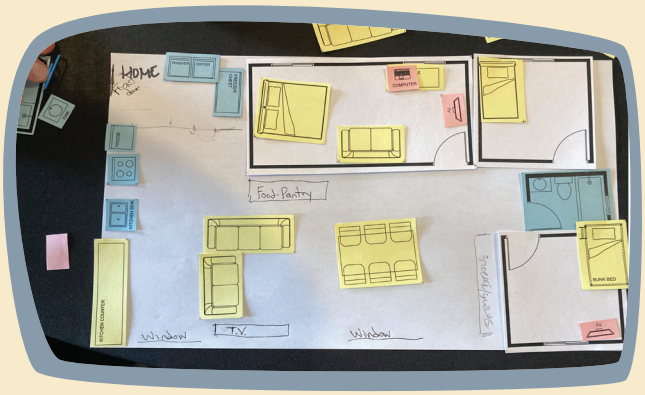
Specific definitions, strategies and policies responses have been identified from each document to understand local and regional responses to Indigenous and Indigenous youth housing needs.

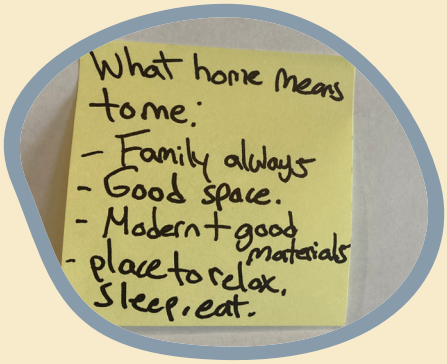
Institutional Housing Design Review

A review of institutional youth housing typologies was completed. Case studies were identified using a stratified approach beginning with northern examples before extending to global Indigenous and finally Canadian examples. Each case study was reviewed using a matrix to classify each programming, servicing and architectural components.

Network Mapping

Systems mapping was completed in 2020 for all four service district geographies; Cochrane District Social Services and Administration Board, Kenora District Services Board, Thunder Bay District Social Services and Administration Board and NAN member First Nation communities. These housing systems allow for relationships between stakeholders and policy to be geographically identified, and to draw connections between housing adjacent social services. This mapping exercise reflects social infrastructure provided only by formal services and it is understood that youth access a variety of other formal and informal services in the process of improving their housing situation.





Youth Gathering Workshop

A two-part workshop was hosted at NAN Youth Gathering 2023. The first half of the workshop used a sharing circle format and questions from the interview guide to further understand housing experiences and journeys. While not as in-depth as individual interviews, the sharing circle allowed participants to identify common barriers or challenges they or their peers may face as well as begin to identify solutions or their own goals for housing. The second part of the workshop focused on understanding what safe spaces can mean for youth. Safety was identified as an emerging theme from the interviews and was discussed in a variety of contexts. Workshop activities will help to better understand the relationships between safety, access to spaces or resources and potential design interventions.

Results from this workshop complements learnings from interviews. Participants shared similar experiences of housing including issues of overcrowding, mould and inadequate housing, housing waitlists and cost of living challenges. Participants also spoke about the role of personal space and privacy for mental health and the ability to relax and work through emotions.

During the design portion of the workshop, participants explored individual home designs and safe space designs. Individual home designs focused on 2 to 3 bedroom homes that could accommodate guests or "friends that need help." The concept of flex spaces or guest spaces has been a major design theme in previous youth workshops.

The idea of safe spaces were explored and revolved around different levels and types of services. A youth drop-in space or community hub with social spaces and private spaces to access mental health supports and trained staff was identified. This space was envisioned as providing other services or regular workshops such as resume building and cooking classes, semi-private or private spaces to relax or decompress as well as places to hang out and socialize. Other safe spaces looked at providing shelter or places to sleep for individuals or families experiencing homelessness or other emergency situations (such as family or intimate partner violence). These spaces were envisioned with communal areas such as a kitchen and would be staffed to provide support. Through the workshop youth recognized that safety required both housing and community infrastructure and that these could be integrated into a single space or exist across multiple spaces.

These workshop findings mirrored themes from both youth and service provider interviews. Both sets of interviews identified the need for youth and Indigenous-youth specific spaces and shelters.

MOBILITY JUSTICE

Interest in the movement or mobility of Indigenous peoples predates the confederation of Canada. From the early 17th century Jesuits who established missions in an attempt to settle (semi-)nomadic First Nations to the first reserves established under the 1876 Indian Act, colonial agents have sought to control where and how Indigenous people live. As Norman et al. write, "The seemingly unpredictable and irrational movements of Indigenous peoples proved to be troublesome for settler aspirations and were thus subjected to a number of disciplinary mechanisms designed to control and restrict both their mobilities as well as their physical cultural practices." (2015, p.168). One mechanism that had emerged by 1886 was the Pass System which was used to regulate First Nations peoples' movement. First Nations people in parts of western Canada could not leave their reserve without obtaining permission or a physical pass from an Indian agent. Further, agents would decide when people could leave and when they had to return and required the person to disclose where they were going. The Pass System, despite not being codified in law or enforceable, persisted into the 1930s. Denial or delay of a pass could also be used as a disciplinary measure, furthering Indian agent control over Indigenous people (Bennet, 1974; Storey, 2022). The system controlled and limited the mobility of Indigenous people curtailing the opportunity to participate in the local workforce, to buy and sell goods and services and to politically organize across reserves.

During this period, the Residential School System or Indian Residential Schools (IRS) was also being developed and implemented. Established in 1879, IRS sought to assimilate Indigenous children into mainstream Canadian society through the education system. Both boarding and day schools controlled the mobility of Indigenous children by forcing them to attend school, removing them from their families and communities, imposing educational material, disrupting lifeways and seasonal patterns of living and taking away Indigenous childrens' ability to grow and learn as members of their family and wider community. At least 4,100 children died while in custody of the residential school system with many believing that number is much higher due to poor record keeping. Many more children who survived the system experienced mental, physical, emotional, spiritual and sexual abuse and neglect through unsafe living conditions (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015; National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation & Indian Residential School History and Dialogue Centre, 2021). In 1969 the number of residential schools began to decline with the last school closing in 1996. Throughout the time IRS operated, Indigenous children's mobilities were controlled and oftentimes by extension their parents' mobilities.

Indigenous children's lives and connections to their community were also disrupted through what is now known as the Sixties Scoop. Children again were forcibly removed from their families and communities and were often placed into middle-class Euro-Canadian families through the child welfare system. As residential schools began to close there was an increase in the apprehension of Indigenous children into the system. By the 1970s, approximately one third of children in care were Indigenous with the majority being placed into non-Indigenous homes (Hanson, 2009). Forced displacement separated children from their families, communities and culture. With pressure from Indigenous organizations and leaders, apprehension practices were reviewed leading to the 1985 *Kimelman Report* which stated that "cultural genocide has been taking place in a systematic, routine manner." (Kimelman, 1985, pp. 328-29). By 1990, the federal government created a program to transfer administration of child and family services to First Nations (Hanson, 2009). Despite this transfer in responsibilities, Indigenous youth are still apprehended at a disproportionate rate.

While today Indigenous communities have relatively greater control over education and child and family services programs, the legacies of these practices persist. The impact of historical government policy and practice over Indigenous people has created a history of

intergenerational trauma. Understanding contemporary Indigenous youth mobilities requires understanding them within their (recent) historical context (Norman et al., 2015, p.168). A mobility lens explores how and why people, resources, capital and information move or are allocated across different geographies. Going further a mobility justice lens provides, "an overarching concept for thinking about how power and inequality inform the governance and control of movement, shaping the patterns of unequal mobility and immobility in the circulation of people, resources, and information (Sheller, 2018, 23, 30)." (Perry et al., 2021, p.8). Indigenous youth must often navigate these systems of power and uneven mobilities as part of their journeys to access and maintain safe, stable housing.

The following sections provide an overview of the mobility literature as it relates to Indigenous people, particularly in Canada, and how research on Indigenous peoples movement and mobility has expanded from a quantitative exercise to more qualitative approaches.

Migration and Residential Mobility: A Quantitative Approach

Previous research on the migration and urbanization of Indigenous peoples in Canada has shown that Indigenous people are generally more mobile, having higher rates of migration between and higher rates of residential mobility within a community than non-Indigenous people (Clatworthy & Norris, 2007; Norris et al., 2004). Studies have shown net migration flows from rural areas and smaller urban areas to major urban areas and to reserves. Migration between major urban areas and reserves has been a main focus of Indigenous mobility, with the data showing overall a small flow of people from urban centres to reserves (Norris & Clatworthy, 2011; Norris et al., 2004; Cooke & Penney, 2019). However, some urban CMAs, such as Thunder Bay, have shown Indigenous net migration (Norris & Clatworthy, 2011, p. 59), suggesting that patterns of Indigenous mobility are not uniform across all geographies. More recent work using an alternative approach to analysing census data has demonstrated that from 2006 to 2011 and 2011 to 2016, more people were leaving reserves than moving to reserves contributing to negative net migration flow (Morency et al., 2021). While interpretations of census data may differ, the numbers demonstrate that there is a high level of movement of First Nations peoples.

Despite conflicting interpretations of census data, some demographic trends were consistent. In their review of migration data between 2011 to 2016, Dion and Morency (2022) found that rates of migration of young people and women were consistent with previous studies showing both groups having higher rates of mobility than the overall average (p. 35; Cooke & Penney, 2019, pp. 130-132). Within urban areas, residential mobility, the change of address within a community, is greatest amongst Indigenous youth aged 15-29 with rates higher than Indigenous youth living on a reserve and their non-Indigenous peers living off a reserve (Norris et al., 2004, p. 144). While younger people generally tend be more mobile, largely associated with life cycle trends (Clatworthy & Norris, 2007, p.226), the increased mobility of urban Indigenous youth likely results from a wider range of factors such as lower income, poverty, inadequate housing and discrimination (Clatworthy & Norris, 2007, pp.226-7).

Gendered differences in mobility are likely due to different experiences of mobility push-pull factors. Younger women within the 15-29 age cohort have higher rates of mobility than their male peers (Norris et al., 2004, p.144). Previous research has cited that Indigenous women are more likely to move for family reasons such as family breakdown, lone-parent households accessing social services or "problems with their home communities" (Cooke & Penney, 2019; Norris et al., 2004, p. 153). Negative factors of mobility can compound other forms of systemic or gender-based issues. Indigenous women are more likely to experience violence than Indigenous men and their non-Indigenous peers and Indigenous people with disabilities are more likely to experience violence than non-Indigenous people with disabilities (Gehl, 2021, p.18). Indigenous 2SLGBTQ+ individuals may face additional layers of violence due to homophobia

or transphobia. In their study on Indigenous Two-Spirit and LGBTQ Canadians, Ristock et al. (2019) write, "And we see how living at the intersections of indigeneity, class, gender, sexuality, forced mobility and migration can create vulnerabilities such as lack of social and formal supports, isolation, disconnection, and lack of options for staying safe" (p.780). The majority of emergency shelter services in northern Ontario are located off reserve, requiring women and/or their families to leave in order to access support or safe shelter. Within NAN, there are currently only three emergency shelters on-reserve meaning that the majority of community members needing to access safe shelter must leave their home communities. This lack of access contributes to uneven mobilities within communities and the corresponding barriers or challenges women and 2SLGBTQ+ people must navigate in order to access safety.

Understanding the push and pull factors contributing to Indigenous mobility are important when interpreting movements beyond macro migration flow measurements. As many studies have noted, there are limitations to the use of census data to measuring migration and residential mobility. Census data can be limited by who is and who is not able to be enumerated. Individuals who are highly mobile may not be captured in the census in addition to those in institutions such as prisons, rooming houses and chronic care facilities. Additionally, some First Nations data is suppressed due to low to no participation which can lead to on-reserve populations being underestimated (Clatworthy & Norris, 2007, p. 209). Migration is measured by comparing addresses between a five-year period and residential mobility by comparing addresses between a one-year period. Mobility within these periods or reasons for changes of address are not able to be tracked. Individuals who may have exhibited no residential mobility or migration based on census data may still have experienced mobility for shorter periods of time.

Results from the Aboriginal Peoples Survey (APS) begin to provide insight showing that the most commonly cited reasons for moving by Indigenous people living off reserve at the time of surveying were family-related issues and improved housing conditions, regardless of destination. Additionally, educational opportunities were a major pull factor to urban areas and employment opportunities played a role in migration between urban areas (Clatworthy & Norris, 2007; Cooke & Penney, 2019). The particular circulation of Indigenous people between reserves and major urban areas, as well as movements between smaller urban and rural places, can have policy and service implications. Higher rates of mobility both within and between off-reserve communities can lead to residential instability and have disruptive effects impacting service delivery as well as individual and family well-being, educational attainment, relationships and social networks (Norris et al., 2004, p.154; Goodman et al., 2018). The impacts of shorter term mobilities that are not captured through census or other large scale surveys requires further study. As Cooke and Bélanger (2006) have noted, greater qualitative research is needed in order to contextualize and more deeply understand the trends that survey and census data has revealed.

Qualitative Understandings Of Indigenous Mobility

In response to research recording increased mobility amongst Indigenous people, studies have looked to understand at a more human-scale the personal and structural factors creating these greater levels of mobility. Qualitative studies have sought to reframe discussions on Indigenous mobility by situating mobility discussions within their historical context and focusing on first person experiences to move past the constraints of survey responses. Many scholars in their review of mobility literature and policy landscape have identified the use of deficit discourses to frame Indigenous mobilities (Prout & Hill, 2012; Norman et al., 2015; Wilson and Peters, 2005). Deficit discourses identify Indigenous mobility as a problem, issue or "a source of considerable public anxiety and ongoing governmental regulation" (Prout & Yap, 2012 as cited in Norman et al., 2015, p.169). Responses to Indigenous mobility that seek to control movements in an attempt to align Indigenous people's actions to

settler expectations or ways of being have a significant history in Canada, as discussed above. Indigenous mobilities need to be understood within a wider, wholistic context that considers cultural, historical, structural and personal factors.

In recent studies on Indigenous mobility, research questions have focused on understanding the wider context for why individuals or families move. In a series of interviews, Cooke and Bélanger (2006) explored movements between reserves and urban spaces, finding through interviews that both personal and structural factors influence mobilities. While employment, education and health services were common motivating factors for migration, personal relationships and access to wider social networks or organizations played an important role. Prout and Hill (2012), in their review of global literature on Indigenous student mobility similarly identified the role of geography (or proximity), demographics (particularly life stages) and personal choice as factors shaping mobility (p.62). Snyder and Wilson (2015) identified through interviews with Indigenous people and service providers in Winnipeg that most people move to the city for positive opportunities. However, residential mobility within the city was viewed as stemming from negative factors such as "substandard housing conditions (e.g., pests, mold, disrepair), strained tenant-landlord relations and issues with neighbourhood safety" (p.185). Personal and structural factors can influence mobilities at different scales, requiring a greater understanding for how these factors may shift through a person's lifetime or major life events.

The supportive network of family and friends whether on or off reserve has been identified as an important motivating factor for mobility. Cooke and Bélanger (2006) note that family or personal social networks in a community or urban spaces were understood to make moves less difficult. When looking at migration to reserves, the concept of 'cultural hearth' has been used as a potential explanation for moving. Reserves as 'cultural hearths' can represent a central home base where there is a stronger connection to family and friends as well as cultural activities and the land (Norris et al., 2004, p.151). Off-reserve Indigenous organizations such as Friendship Centres or political organizations also provide social ties as well as employment opportunities. These organizations can contribute to the creation of Indigenous public spaces within the city and spaces of cultural safety while facilitating or supporting links to home communities. Goodman, Snyder and Wilson (2018) focused on urban Indigenous youth mobilities in Winnipeg, Manitoba and understanding the impacts of mobility on social relationships. Three key themes emerged from their study: mobility is a common and persistent part of youth's experiences, mobility plays a role in fracturing connections between geographic spaces and in forming relationships, and mobility impacts the types of relationships youth form. Issues around racism and discrimination, family breakdown, foster care, poverty and substance misuse were shared by participants as being factors leading to or stemming from mobility. Additionally, the role of grandparents, relatives and extended family and recreation centres and programs for Indigenous youth were shared as important sources of stability and connection in their study.

Other structural factors that contribute to mobility are accessing health and education services. Depending on locations of reserves relative to service centres, access to health and education services can be limited. Remote reserves (fly-in or winter road access) have only a minimum level of services such as nursing stations, daycares, primary schools and grocery or co-operative stores, still requiring travel to access higher levels of medical care, in-person secondary schools or other higher education and training options. Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) uses four geographic zones (see Table 4) to measure remoteness of communities to the nearest major population centre or service centre, where a service centre is defined as a community which can provide at least one financial institution, suppliers (i.e. construction or office material and equipment) and a pool of skilled or semi-skilled labour and typically government (provincial and federal) services. Reserves which are located closer to service centres or are connected by an all-year road are less likely to have

been funded for additional services such as nursing stations since they are considered to be within an accessible distance.

TABLE 4: GEOGRAPHIC ZONES	
Zone 1	Located within 50 km of the nearest service centre with year-round road access.
Zone 2	Located between 50 and 350 km from the nearest service centre with year-round road access.
Zone 3	Located over 350 km from the nearest service centre with year-round road access.
Zone 4	The First Nation has no year- round road access to a service centre and, as a result, experiences a higher cost of transportation.
Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada, 2021	

Being in proximity to service centres can still pose a challenge to service accessibility and contribute to experiences of uneven mobility. Requirements to be mobile can further compound other barriers Indigenous people face when accessing healthcare such as poverty, language and racism, lack of culturally appropriate care and transportation (Snyder & Wilson, 2012, p. 2431). Transportation to and from a service centre may not be affordable, reliable or consistent even if a community is within close proximity. In the development of the Nishnawbe Aski Nation Housing Strategy, participants shared experiences of discrimination from local taxi drivers and difficulty accessing nearby towns without a license or access to their own vehicle (Nishnawbe Aski Nation [NAN] & Together Design Lab [TDL], 2022b). Participants in road access communities expressed a desire to see a higher level of servicing in their own communities such as daycares, grocery stores and nursing stations in order to increase accessibility to basic services. Even if servicing could be increased in rural and remote communities, transportation options are still needed to increase connectivity between communities, urban areas and across homelands.

Consistent, safe and reliable transportation is a challenge in many rural and remote communities across western Canada. Policy analysts, researchers and advocates have highlighted the implication for rural and poor people and particularly the safety of Indigenous women, girls and gender-diverse people (Native Women's Association of Canada, 2018; Riddle, 2018; Alhassan et al., 2021; Perry et al., 2021). Transportation options such as railway and bus services have decreased in frequency or have been eliminated in many parts of the country. In 2021, Greyhound closed its remaining Canadian routes after beginning to eliminate services in 2018. These route closures resulted in patchwork or fragmented routes and raised concerns for the safety of Indigenous women and 2SLGBTQ+ people who may have to rely on other forms of transport such as walking or hitchhiking (Perry et al., 2021). As noted above, young Indigenous women are among the most mobile groups and are also more likely to face harassment and violence due to a lack of safe and affordable transportation (National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, 2019, pp.551-52). These experiences of uneven mobility, where the ease, comfort and safety varies by user are important to fully understand in order to develop appropriate responses.

Inconsistent access to transportation across rural and remote communities must also be considered along with existing disparities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, especially in health and education. Required mobility between communities can affect continuity of care, disrupting both patients' access and service providers' ability to maintain adequate care (Snyder & Wilson, 2012, p.2421; Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation [CMHC], 2004). Additionally, when the only option to receive care is away from community for short or long periods of time, personal networks of care and support can be severely disrupted. The cost of travel can further make providing support or visiting individuals or families receiving health treatment, long term or end of life care difficult. This can leave individuals without advocates or help to navigate systems that may not provide culturally appropriate or safe services (Perry et al., 2021), which in turn can have its own negative impacts on wellbeing.

In Canada, the majority of funding for off-reserve healthcare is transferred from the federal government to provinces and territories through the Canada Health

Transfer (CHT). The provinces and territories are then responsible for the administration and service delivery of the health programming funded by the CHT. Although additional funding for healthcare is sometimes made available outside of the CHT, it is the most reliable funding source at the provincial and territorial level. To continue receiving the CHT, provinces and territories must ensure that all "insured health care services" as set out in the Canada Health Act are provided with no extra-billing or user charges (Government of Canada, 2021). In addition to insured services, the Canada Health Act also mandates that the provinces and territories provide "extended health care services" off reserve. Extended health care services include home care and long-term care, and eligibility, level of service, coverage and cost to the user for these programs is governed entirely by the province or territory where service is being delivered (Indigenous Services Canada, 2019; Indigenous Services Canada, 2021).

As reserves remain federal territory, healthcare requires an alternative service provision mechanism. Indigenous Services Canada fills this role and distributes funding to Indigenous communities and organizations for the delivery of health care services on reserve. Federal health care funding for Indigenous communities is alloted annually, and unlike the CHT, federal funding for health care in Indigenous communities is not protected by legislation under the Canada Health Act. It is therefore subject to increases and reductions as determined by the priorities of the federal government. Although healthcare both off and on reserve must comply with the standards set out in the Canada Health Act, the additional standards and services mandated off reserve by provincial and territorial governments often result in a higher level of care than is federally required, and in on-reserve services only being funded to the minimum standard. As Cidro et al. (2020) write, "Canadian nation building has relied upon managing Indigenous spatiality. The reserve system, dictated in the Indian Act, RSC 1985, c15, which affirms the authority of the federal government over First Nations, resulted in healthcare delivery falling to federal rather than provincial or regional authorities, which in turn resulted continuing jurisdictional disputes that lead to gaps and absences of care (Lawford and Giles 2012a, 331)" (p. 184). Specific services and level of care are available through these programs varies greatly between communities, and often, falls short of what is available off reserve through provincial programming.

In order to access needed services, Indigenous people may have to leave their communities temporarily or permanently for service centres. For example, for people giving birth this often means leaving their community two to four weeks before their due date to stay in a medical hostel or designated place. As Cidro et al. (2020), write, "mandatory birth evacuation may appear neutral as 'policy,' the ensuing travel practices ... force pregnant women out of their community at a time when culturally-and place-based support is fundamental to maternal and infant health," (p.184). This form of forced mobility is disruptive, separating birthing parent from family and community support networks during a vulnerable period. For individuals requiring specialized care or support, such as individuals with disabilities or older adults, moving to a service centre may be the only place to receive specialized care (Dextrase et al., 2023). Without resources to stay in community and receive care, First Nations peoples are displaced, forced out of their home communities.

Education related mobility can also be disruptive to social and support networks when students must migrate to access education. In Australia, Taylor and Dunn (2010) examined the mobility of students in the Northern Territory, a remote area in Australia with more than a third of the population identified as Indigenous in the 2006 census. Remote Indigenous mobility is often described using the term, "'temporary mobility', where a change of residence is not featured, and where fluid exchanges of population in, around and between discrete communities as well as between these and towns or urban areas is commonplace." (p.88). Temporary mobility can be difficult to measure and trace which in turn is seen as an issue by school administrators, impacting the ability to measure demand for services (p.89). In tracing student's

unique pupil number through enrollment records at government schools, Taylor and Dunn found that Indigenous students were significantly more mobile than their non-Indigenous peers. Rates of mobility were highest among students in 'very remote' or 'remote' areas. However, after recorded departures, most students returned to the same school after a period of time (p.93). A greater understanding of the motives for student mobility is needed in order to appropriately address or accommodate these moves.

While student mobility may be viewed through a "deficit framework" (Prout & Hill, 2012, p.62) by administrators, students' motivations can partially be understood as prioritizing values and events or milestones that do not easily conform to mainstream expectations. Prout and Hill (2012) noted that in Australian literature much of student mobility, "is actually the product of efforts to gain or maintain strong social, cultural, emotional and economic tethers" (p. 62). Student mobility can be driven by a mix of predictable social factors such as annual events or reactionary factors such as a death within the family (Prout & Hill, 2012, p. 63). Structural factors also contribute to student mobility, including the intersections of race and poverty and its impacts on housing, transport and health services availability (Prout & Hill, 2012, p. 66). Similarly, in the Canadian context it is found that students from remote communities often leave their homes and communities to pursue secondary education in urban areas which can sometimes be openly hostile to Indigenous people:

> "Today, for many Indigenous youth, attending school means separating from loved ones and acclimatizing to new and sometimes hostile environments. Once in the classroom, the curriculum scarcely, if at all, reflects Indigenous histories, pedagogies, and worldviews (Tuhiwai Smith,1999; Smith et al.,2019). These factors create conditions that may leave students to slip through the cracks." (Ansloos et al., 2022, p. 1922)

In NAN, only eight communities have schools that can accommodate enrollment to grade 12 in their community with the rest of NAN communities relying on off-reserve or distance learning options. As Hohenthal and Minoia (2022) argue in their analysis of Indigenous youth, education and mobility justice in Ecuador, "The spatial proximity of educational opportunities is another important dimension of socio-cultural justice from a territorial perspective. All children and young people should have the right to schooling in their communities or, at least at a reasonable distance from home and safe means to reach it" (p.851).

In northern Ontario and Thunder Bay, in particular, the experiences of discrimination, racism, violence and death impact understandings of mobility, especially youth who are mobile because of education service options or lack thereof. The death of seven First Nation youths - Jethro Anderson, Curran Strang, Paul Panacheese, Robyn Harper, Reggie Bushie, Kyle Morrisseau and Jordan Wabasse- between 2000 and 2011 led to the Ontario coroner's office investigation. The final Coroner's report, Inquest in to the deaths of seven First Nations youths (2016) contained 145 recommendations to a number of parties including Canada, Ontario, City of Thunder Bay, Thunder Bay Police Services, Nishnawbe Aski Nation, Northern Nishnawbe Education Council, Keewatinook Okimakanak, Matawa Learning Centre and Dennis Franklin Cromarty High School. Recommendations addressed a range of issues and needs including increased funding for on-reserve education from early years to K-12, funding for increased internet access and hard infrastructure; travel allowances and support for families who move for their child's education and funding for physical and emotional needs (Ministry of the Solicitor General, 2016). The recommendations recognized many factors that contribute to student safety and well-being. Supporting Indigenous students requires a recognition that structural factors including housing, transport and access to health services that contribute to student mobility must be addressed (Prout & Hill, 2012, p.66). Many of the recommendations from the inquest are ongoing and are yet to be fully completed, with many of the challenges and barriers identified for Indigenous youth through the inquest continuing to be experienced.

The Seven Youth Inquest cast light on the role of colonial legacies and intergenerational trauma from residential schools on current conditions shaping the lives and experiences of Indigenous youth. The Inquest endorsed the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action that acknowledged the relationship between government policies and health outcomes in Recommendation 137 to Canada, Ontario and NAN.

> 137. In order to improve health outcomes of First Nations youth, we support and endorse Recommendations 18 through 20 of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action that:
>
> ci.x xxvii. Call upon the federal, provincial, territorial, and Aboriginal governments to acknowledge that the current state of Aboriginal health in Canada is a direct result of previous Canadian government policies, including residential schools, and to recognize and implement the health-care rights of Aboriginal people as identified in international law, constitutional law, and under the Treaties. (CTA#18)

The residential school system forcibly removed children from their homes and families in an attempt to assimilate Indigenous children into Canadian society. Schools were commonly sites of abuse, illness, and death the impacts of which are still felt (Nutton & Fast, 2015; Baskin, 2016; Barker et al., 2019 via Finlay et al. 2019b, pp. 35-36). In the 1960s, Indigenous children were apprehended from their homes and placed into the child welfare system in foster care or as adoptees with white families (Kidd et al., 2018; Ristock et al., 2019). These experiences of forced mobility and disconnection from family, friends and wider communities are still echoed today in current child welfare practices (Kidd et aWl., 2018; Fayant & Bach, 2021) and cannot be separated from the broader challenges and mobilities youth and their families experience. Today, Indigenous children remain overrepresented throughout the child welfare system. In 2016, the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal (CHRT) found that, "the federal funding formulas for the First Nations Child and Family Services Program incentivized the removal of First Nations children from their families and communities "as a first resort rather than as a last resort." (Fayant & Bach, 2021, p.8). And in 2018, the Ontario Human Rights Commission, "reported that Indigenous young people are over-represented in 25 out of 27 of the CAS agencies they reviewed. According to this report, the number of Indigenous children admitted into care was 2.6 times higher than the child population at large. Although Indigenous children represent only 4.1% of the population of young people under the age of 15 in Ontario, they make up 30% of the children in foster care." (Finlay et al., 2019, p. 36). The child welfare system contributes to youth mobility through child apprehension and placement of youth into homes or settings outside of their communities.

Research has shown that involvement within the child welfare system is a predictor of homelessness and like in the child welfare system, Indigenous youth are over-represented in homeless populations (Alberton et al., 2020; Kidd et al., 2019; Bonakdar et al., 2023). Disruptions and disconnections from family, networks of care and their wider community can contribute to housing precarity and uneven mobility. Housing precarity can encompass a wide range of housing conditions including overcrowding, inadequate or substandard housing, unaffordable housing, inaccessible to couchsurfing or having no shelter at all (Ansloos et al., 2022, p. 1920). Housing precarity can be exacerbated for youth who come of age or age out child welfare services. In 2022, the CHRT ordered Canada to fund post-majority services as part of the First Nations Child and Family Services program (First Nations Caring Society, 2022). These services and supports can include accessing housing, (re)connecting to their community, and ensuring there is a social safety net.

As Ansloos, Wager and Dunn (2022) write, "Poverty, inadequate housing, family histories of trauma, experiences of racism and discrimination, and negative experiences with child welfare and the education system often underscore the accounts of Indigenous youth experiencing homelessness (Wager,

2014; Baskin, 2007; Patrick, 2014; Brown, 2007). By the time Indigenous youth experience state-defined homelessness, they have often survived a host of negative living conditions and life experiences." (p.1919). Experiences of homelessness and housing precarity of Indigenous youth is usually part of, "multiple cycles of being housed, precariously housed, and homeless over several years with pathways out of homelessness challenged by poorly funded and designed service systems and policy-related barriers" (Kidd et al., 2018, p. 164). The cycle of housing precarity can force youth to become highly mobile as they search for safe, stable and quality housing.

Youth in the child welfare system and out of home care placements are also at increased risk for interactions with the justice systems (Finlay et al., 2019b, p. 31). While Indigenous young people represent under 8% of the youth population in Canada, they are over represented within correctional services and are also more likely to spend time in detention, representing 50% of custody admissions (Finlay et al., 2019b, p.36; Statistics Canada, 2022). Factors that contribute to Indigenous youth's interaction with the justice system include lack of infrastructure and services, which is true of Thunder Bay and northern Ontario (Finlay et al., 2019b). Youth accessing services must travel far distances including to southern Ontario or out of province, away from family and support networks. For some youth, the only way to access support services is through the justice system highlighting the inequitable allocation of resources (Finlay et al., 2019). Additionally, placement instability while in care could lead to issues with interpersonal skills or emotional regulation due to frequent disruptions impacting psychological processes associated with settling and resettling with each move (Chiu, Ryan & Herx, 2011 as cited in Finlay et al., 2019b, p. 53). Instability and precarity youth experience within CFS can negatively impact the education and social outcomes of youth, creating additional barriers for youth to navigate and work through in order to secure stable and safe housing.

Understanding youth housing journeys through a mobility justice lens allows us to understand the relationships between individual journeys and larger systems and structures. Youth are highly mobile between and within communities resulting from a variety of personal and systemic factors. The policies and practices of governing bodies and agencies across multiple systems and jurisdictions including education, health, child welfare, social welfare, justice and housing and the corresponding allocation of resources interact with personal experiences to shape how youth are able or not able to access and maintain housing.

Forms of Mobility

The mobility literature provides a useful framework for analyzing youth housing journeys because of its understanding of different forms of movement. At the most basic level of mobility we can measure or track movement using migration, a change of residence between two communities and residential mobility, the change of address within a community. However, these terms do not explain or reveal the factors that contribute to an individual's movements. A more critical mobility can expand the way we understand the movements of people and also resources and capital. In the literature review above, terms such as uneven mobility, temporary mobility and forced mobility were used to explain a range of experiences and ways an individual's mobility can be shaped by larger structural factors.

Uneven mobilities "refers to a "terrain for movement in which there are divergent pathways, differential access, or partial connectivity;" kinds of movement that "have a greater or lesser degree of ease, comfort, flexibility, and safety;" and "spatial patterns, forms of mobility management, and control architectures that govern relations of mobility and immobility." (Perry et al., 2021, p.8). In *Creating a Home for Our Youth*, youth housing journeys reveal the uneven mobilities many youth navigate to access and maintain housing or shelter. The range of uneven mobilities will be explored in each theme.

The term **temporary mobility** referred to movements, "where a change of residence is not featured, and where fluid exchanges of population in, around and between discrete communities as well as between these and towns or urban areas is commonplace" (Taylor & Dunn, 2010, p. 88). In CAHFOY, temporary mobility is useful for understanding travel often to visit family and friends. Some of this travel was one-off events such as a vacation while others were seasonal or annual trips. Other forms of mobility that could be understood as temporary are accessing health services or secondary school in service centres or urban areas. However, travel to access services is likely to be influenced by external factors such as where resources and services are funded and may not be an individual's ideal choice but only option.

Terminology such as **forced or involuntary mobility** can help reveal how larger systems or factors influence or exert control over an individual's movements. As Moran et al. (2012) writes, "The focus here is on power, and [access to] mobility, and as Skeggs argues,'[m]obility and control over mobility both reflect and reinforce power. Mobility is a resource to which not everyone has an equal relationship'(2004, 49)" (p. 447). Forced mobility describes movements that a participant may have very little to no autonomy or control over. Kaufman (2022) argues that expulsions of homeless individuals is a form of forced mobility related to social exclusion and spatial displacement:

> "In the second mode of expulsion, insufficient social and health resources compound residential expulsions. Social and health service provision is a crucial state function. Public spending decisions define the social interior by prioritizing service provision to specific populations (Sassen, 2014). Likewise, the exclusion of bodies from certain services delineates the social exterior. Therefore, these service exclusions can exacerbate systemic marginalization while driving people from particular places. Survival is individualized as the state transfers responsibility onto people coping with significant health and social issues." (p.333)

Forced mobility is also understood as movement resulting from the deprivation of resources. A lack of access to safe, quality housing, healthcare and education can be understood as a form of involuntary mobility. However, as revealed in interviews through this project within this forced mobility individuals may still exercise some autonomy as structural factors intersect with the personal. Delaying going to school or switching schools, couchsurfing with friends and family, requesting a new foster placement or choosing to apply to a treatment program are all ways young people have navigated uneven mobilities where their choices are constrained and limited by existing institutions and structures.

Additionally, mobility can be described as a tactic. Choosing to move or to be mobile to avoid unwanted or dangerous situations is another way youth may navigate their circumstances. Jackson (2012) describes **tactics** as, "a move made in the present without the luxury of a view of the whole terrain from a secure standing place... Mobility is used as a tactic to respond to a state of uncertainty and danger... Conversely, being in a state of mobility requires the development of tactics" (p.733). A tactic differs from a strategy because the outcome is unknown or less predictable. Therefore youth may choose to be mobile as a way to improve or at least avoid unwanted situations within the range of choices they are able to make.

Mobility exists on a spectrum and the terms above can capture a range of mobilities but are not exhaustive. Youth interactions with systems can change based on a variety of factors such as age, jurisdiction, resources, personal networks and knowledge. An example of the complicated nature of mobility through a youth's lifetime can be shown with interactions with Child and Family Services (CFS). A youth may have experienced forced mobility, being separated from family and siblings and relocated outside of their community at a young age. At some point in time they may have been reunited with family. After a few years they contact CFS to seek support because of issues that have (re)

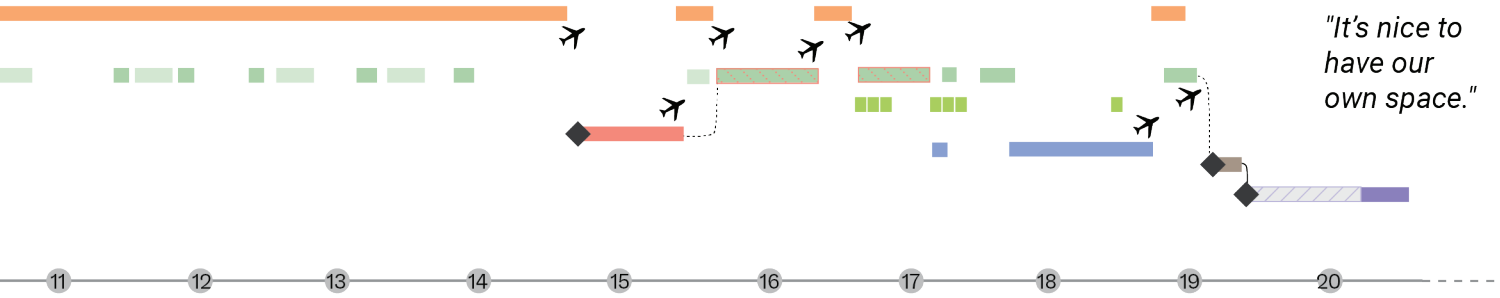
emerged. They know that they might have to move out of their community because of the knowledge and experiences they have developed but are able to ask questions or advocate for themselves to a greater degree. This does not undo or lessen the impacts of earlier experiences of forced mobility because they have chosen to reach out to CFS. Instead it demonstrates the uneven mobility, limited options and resources youth have to navigate difficult situations.

Understanding youth experiences of housing from their own perspectives is critical to the development of appropriate and effective housing solutions. This report follows the journeys of youth, in accessing and improving their housing. Participant interviews are used to demonstrate how youth understood, felt or experienced different parts of their journeys. Their words demonstrate both shared and unique experiences helping to develop a clearer understanding of the challenges Indigenous youth face in the region and the supports available to them. Finally, participants reflected on their own experiences to offer their understandings on the meaning of home and a vision for change to support youth in the future.

What is your earliest memory of home?

Figure 3: This is an example of a journey map created from youth interviews. It has combined elements from three to four interviews to show a fictional map.

"Yeah, and then boyfriend's place, it was, him, his brother, his parents, yeah. In his room and then I stayed at a friend's for a bit same thing..."



Would occassionally stay with grandparents for a few nights if needed some space.

Stayed with a boarding family the first year of high school in Thunder Bay.

Mom spoke to a family member and participant got paperwork at NNEC office to board with family.

Had some trouble and school fell behind. Couchsurfed with family and friends.

Moved in with boyfriend and roommates.

Moved back home and stayed with mom and then grandparents for a bit.

Found out was pregnant and stayed in a shelter for a bit. Applied and was waitlisted for housing.

Stayed in single mom's housing while on waitlist.

Received a house and moved in with child. Started attending an adult education program.

Findings

HOUSING

Understanding how youth access safe and secure housing or improve their housing situations is the central concern of *Creating a Home for Our Youth*. Where do youth live? When and why did they move? What are the conditions of their housing? How did they access housing or shelter? Through interviews, several forms of housing were discussed across the housing spectrum: market housing or rentals, subsidized or social housing, on-reserve or band housing, transitional housing, emergency shelters, couchsurfing and homelessness.

Different from many experiences of housing in Canada, housing journeys for youth in NAN territory often rely on non-market forms of housing. This section will treat different models of housing and housing tenure as distinct and discuss how each type of housing is understood by the youth who have experienced them. Additionally, this section explores how each form of housing impacts the well-being of young people.

ON-RESERVE HOUSING

Nishnawbe Aski Nation represents 49 First Nations within northern Ontario with the total population (on and off reserve) of approximately 45,000 people. Over 20,000 community members live on reserve in approximately 6,190 private dwelling units. Participants who live or have lived on reserves shared experiences of living in overcrowded housing, housing in need of repair and the long wait times to obtain housing. However, others noted how on-reserve housing could act as a refuge, at times when accessing off-reserve housing was not possible, they were able to access at least temporary housing within their community.

In NAN territory, the average household size is 3.7 people, higher than the provincial average of 2.6 people per household (NAN & TDL, 2022a; Statistics Canada, 2023). Crowding due to limited housing options can result in family doubling, couchsurfing, staying in precarious shelter such as shacks or tents or displacement out of community. For youth looking for homes for themselves, with partners or families or desiring their own spaces for increased privacy, on-reserve housing options can be limited. With the majority of housing comprising 3- and 4-bedrooms, housing options for singles or couples is limited. Growing up in crowded conditions can also be challenging, with a growing need for privacy or space as one grows older.

> **... and there were only two rooms again so we all stayed in one room again. There was at least 8 of us in one big room on the floor on mattresses. And we didn't have no running water either or no toilet. I remember using a slop pail and outside there was an outhouse. I used to be so scared to go there in the middle of the night. Ya, that's how I grew up. Ya, that's why I'm so close to my family we were all together while we were growing up until maybe 10, no 11 years old. (NAN Youth #001)**

> **Mm, my youngest age I can remember growing up, the house that I that I grew up in it was just basically me, my two older brothers my mother my father, my aunts my uncles and my grandparents, so it was pretty um, there was a lot of people in the house, as I can remember I think it was like a four bedroom house. There three uh like on the main floor and there was one on the basement. The basement wasn't finished though. Yeah I just remember it being like, crowded. (NAN Youth #018)**

> **There were times when living in my household, my parents house, it was way too cramped up because my older siblings, my older sisters, they would move back home, into my parents place so, I would be sleeping with three of my other siblings. It was very hard because you know, I was lack of sleep and the overcrowding in the house was a lot to deal with, especially being a child. That's a lot of, like a four bedroom house and you have your- I have 7 siblings, there's 8 of us, so when they had their kids, like my sister, she had her daughter and she moved back into my parents house. So she had, I had to give up my room for her and same with my other, my brothers and my other sister. And having to go stay with my grandparents and my aunty and uncle, just because**

how bad the mould was getting and we had to get out of there, just to- for the guys to come in and to fix it. So, and like my parents, stayed in there just to you know, like watch the house because in the community, you know, you can't really leave the house alone. (NAN Youth #016)

Within communities where there is a housing shortage, the number of people living within a home can fluctuate as circumstances and needs change. Grandparents, siblings, extended families may spend different amounts of time in a home, causing internal shifts or room sharing. For example, mobility within a home can be shaped by the school year and the return of young people, family breakdowns or returns to the community due to lack of affordable housing elsewhere. Youth often have little choice in where they sleep and as houses become more crowded, or are used by multiple families, which then can be made to feel less safe by having less privacy and less control of their personal spaces. Feelings of crowding are increased by this lack of control (McCartney et al., 2018) and have a direct impact on the well-being of youth.

Housing across NAN is in varying levels of physical condition and age. However, in general, the condition of housing is far below the national average with 40% of housing identified as in need of major repair compared to 5.7% in Ontario (Statistics Canada, 2023). Common housing issues described by NAN members include mould, foundation issues and drafts from windows and doors. Repair needs are often exacerbated by aging housing stock, that was inappropriately built for the region with 1 in 3 houses constructed before 1990. Housing lifespans are considered to be shorter on reserves with some lifespans reported as low as 10 years (First Nations National Building Officers Association, 2011). Reports have suggested shorter housing lifespans are due to inadequate materials, lack of proper inspection, code compliance, and crowding. At least 7,500 houses are already needed in NAN territory to meet immediate need and this number will grow quickly over the next decade as existing housing meets the end of its useful life and repair backlogs are not met (NAN & TDL, 2022a). The poor quality of housing on reserves, including the abundance of mould, creates significant health impacts and forces individuals and families away from their homes in search of safer conditions. A participant explains their experience of this displacement and toll it took on their family, sharing:

So, staying in that trailer, that was a very- that was an experience because it was very cramped up, it was uh, cold in the winter times especially when the weather got cold. It didn't feel like a home. It felt like a trailer, I guess. Yeah, it was hard. And when we finally got our house back after we're done renovating, tt was good for a little while, until literally, the mould in our basement kept coming back- coming back and flooding. So, every time we had a flood in our basement, it would just make the mould, increase it more. It would make it more worse. So, we had a lot of issues with that, we had housing having to come in, to our house to try to clean it up and try to do the best we can with the mould situation. And literally, I must have been living in that house for about (...) 15, it felt like my whole childhood, I moved in there when I was like 8 years old, how old my son is, up until I was 20. And they finally just tore the house down, a couple- two years ago and they rebuilt it. They remade the house, a different house, because the mould situation was way too bad and it had to be completely fixed, right from ground up and torn down. So now, my parents house, it's the same, it's just a brand new house, it's different, they don't have any issues like that with the mould or anything, which is good. And, when I was living with the mould situation, I developed skin problems. You know, I had eczema as a child and as I grew up it decreased I guess, especially, I'm assuming when we had those little bit of short renovations. My other sister, she was really, had severe skin eczema problems where she had to take skin creams with antibiotics, a lot of steroids and it just wasn't working. (NAN Youth #016)

Participants described applying or their parents/guardians applying for housing and being placed on a waitlist. Waitlist times could vary, from a month to several years depending on circumstances. Those who were able to quickly access housing were more likely to be facing a precarious housing situation,

homelessness or serious health concerns. Accessing on-reserve housing, when able, was an important source of stability and opportunity.

Okay. And they called you back pretty quickly?

Yeah, because I already had the letters of the eviction notices and that. And then all three kids and -

(overlapping) And so then you moved back to the community?

Yeah, into a three bedroom house and I'm still here. (NAN Youth #006)

So I went back. After she kicked us out I went back to my partner's mom's place. At that time I was writing letters to the housing committee, to the Chief to anybody that could really help give support. And within- I would probably say like a month, I got a place, like my own place. The house that they gave me was a two bedroom, a duplex. It wasn't really renovated before I moved in so like there was still broken doors, broken windows.

Right. But it was yours.

Yeah

So how did you feel having that place?

I was happy. (NAN Youth #018)

I wrote a letter, I keep writing letters to them every Friday. I got this place because my sister, I have my sister under my care now. (NAN Youth #001)

The persistent shortage of on-reserve housing and ongoing maintenance challenges have a significant impact on youth. Both mental and physical health are severely impacted by experiences of crowding, mould and the precarity of having access to safe and secure housing. Housing conditions can impact the physical and mental health of youth differently throughout their lives. Challenges may shift with age, as youth grow older and have a greater need for privacy or personal space. For those living on a reserve, or desiring to live in community, immediate action is required to address the significant need and to ensure that housing is being built appropriately for northern climates, geographies and lifeways.

Yeah there was always a couple of us that was sleeping in the living room because there's not enough room

Ok, and how do you remember feeling about that?

It was always tense. There was always a tense feeling around here.

Right. And would you say that affected the way that you were feeling then? Knowing that it was always going to tense at home. How did you feel about that? It's tough being a teen feeling that right?

Yeah it was hard. I guess. I never wanted to be home. (NAN Youth #021)

SOCIAL & SUBSIDIZED HOUSING

Social, subsidized or affordable housing in Ontario can be provided by the municipality, region or district service board or non-profit organizations. The most common definition for affordable housing units, sets the threshold as a household spending less than 30% of its pre-tax income on housing costs. Depending on the needs of the applicant and unit availability there are different types of social housing units. Applications for social housing often provide options between units for singles, families, or seniors. In addition, depending on the unit, additional services may be available for residents.

Rent-geared-to-income (RGI) housing assistance programs provide dedicated housing accommodations that are rented to tenants based on their income as opposed to the current market rate. The standard for RGI units is set at 30% of the household's gross monthly income as outlined by the Housing Services Act, 2011. If individuals are accessing social assistance, then rent will be calculated based on Ontario Works or Ontario Disability Support Program rent scales. To become eligible for RGI income programs at least one of the household members has to be 16 years old and capable of living independently. Individuals are required to complete an application to enter a chronological waitlist. An exception may be made for individuals facing unique circumstances that would secure a special priority placement. Applicants will

only receive one offer based on their housing selections, if the offer is refused then their application may be terminated or placed at the bottom of the waitlist.

Other forms of housing support can come through rent supplement programs, grants or forgivable loans that are available to those struggling with housing costs in the private market. Programs established through the federal and Ontario governments under National Housing Strategy (NHS) in 2018 such as the Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit (COHB), are available to assist with rental costs for households on a social housing waitlist or who are eligible to be on a waitlist. Funding through the Ontario Priorities Housing Initiative (OPHI), another program under NHS, can assist with repairs and renovations, rental assistance and downpayment assistance for households to purchase affordable homes. These programs have their own set of eligibility criteria and may be dependent on availability and the length of the funding agreement between the federal and provincial governments.

In 1973, various changes were introduced to the National Housing Act, and the federal government established a number of social housing programs. Programs such as the Urban Native Housing Program (UNHP) and Rural and Native Housing (RNH) program were developed based on the need for geographic or culturally appropriate social housing. As time has progressed, the role of Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) as a social housing provider has changed and the UNHP and RNH were discontinued in 1993. Rather than being involved in the provision of social housing units, the federal government downloaded the provision of social housing programs to the provinces which was later passed to municipalities (Hulchanski, 2009), district service boards or other non-profit service providers such as Ontario Aboriginal Housing Services. In northern Ontario there are eleven service delivery organizations that provide social housing, child care, emergency medical services and Ontario Works programs. The eleven service providers operate approximately 12,000 social housing units (NOSDA, n.d.) and are responsible for the development and implementation of 10-year housing and homelessness plans. These plans document the growing wait times for social housing and the rising cost of managing and maintaining units, often referencing the need for more senior levels of government to again become directly involved in the provision of housing.

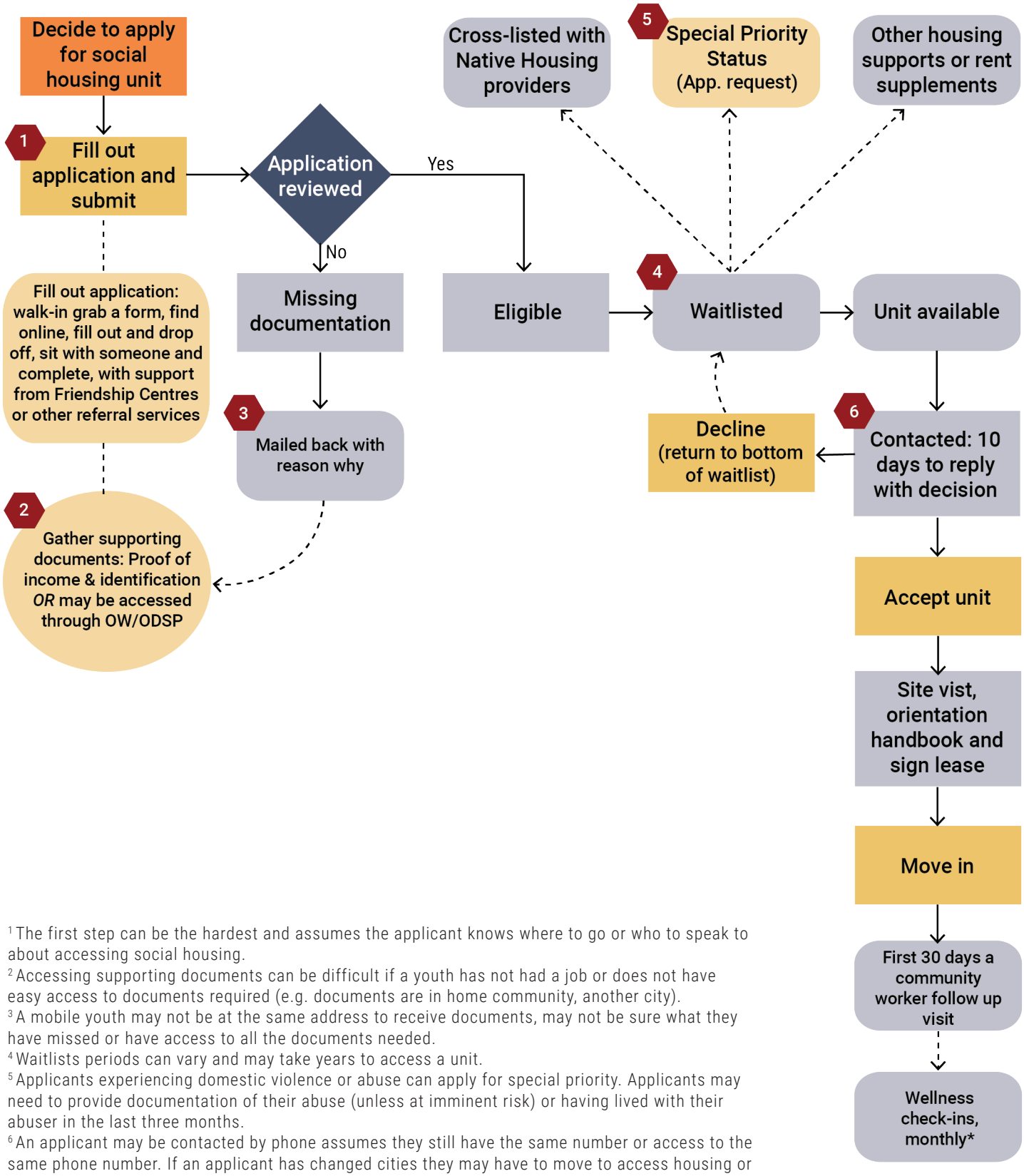
For youth, experiences with social housing ranged from growing up in social housing units, moving into units with their family or applying to or accessing social housing as individuals or heads of households. For participants who applied to access social housing units there were a range of experiences navigating the application process.

> So, access meaning like, accessibility, like easiness, like convenient, like right there. For youth to even walk into a service provider on their own, it's courageous. (Service Provider #005)

One of the first steps of an application process is filling out a form and submitting any required documentation. Forms can be accessed online or at district social service administration board offices. Applicants can fill out forms independently or with help from service staff. Referrals or support from another service provider may also provide help during the application process.

> It has a guide with a series of items that they would be asked to provide supporting documentation. If an individual is on Ontario Works or ODSP [Ontario Disability Support Program], they don't have to hand in the supporting pieces. But, for some youth, they're on the transitional funding from phasing out of the child welfare system, they would provide all those supporting docs. (Service Provider #002)

> For me it was applications, like it would be nice if we actually get help doing it all. Yeah, cause it took me like what, 6 months just to do one application? Which it could've just taken a day. And like, they could have added a list of everything you need to hand in with the application all at once. Other than handing the- cause they hand the entire application back to you. So, you have to redo it over and over again.



[1] The first step can be the hardest and assumes the applicant knows where to go or who to speak to about accessing social housing.
[2] Accessing supporting documents can be difficult if a youth has not had a job or does not have easy access to documents required (e.g. documents are in home community, another city).
[3] A mobile youth may not be at the same address to receive documents, may not be sure what they have missed or have access to all the documents needed.
[4] Waitlists periods can vary and may take years to access a unit.
[5] Applicants experiencing domestic violence or abuse can apply for special priority. Applicants may need to provide documentation of their abuse (unless at imminent risk) or having lived with their abuser in the last three months.
[6] An applicant may be contacted by phone assumes they still have the same number or access to the same phone number. If an applicant has changed cities they may have to move to access housing or decline and begin the wait period again until a unit closer to them becomes available.
* If applicable.

Figure 4: Social housing application process as described by service providers and youth participants.

Right. That's frustrating.

Yeah. (NAN Youth #011)

If an applicant is eligible, they are most likely to be placed on a waitlist for housing. Waitlist times can vary, many participants who had applied for housing experienced waits longer than one year. If an application is missing documentation it will be mailed back with a reason why. An applicant will require a stable or reliable address to ensure they receive the information. This can be difficult for individuals, especially youth in precarious housing situations or experiencing homelessness. Supporting documents include identification such as a birth certificate or passport, income tax returns and T-slips. Participants shared feeling frustrated by the application process and some even "giving up" because of not having the required documentation.

I've applied for housing, I'd say, about three separate times and I guess the application, how it works is you can apply for multiple different types of housing - Because, here it's a really long waiting list. And I kept getting my application sent back because it was either I did something wrong and, like I've always been working and then they ask for, like, different stubs- they just asked for like my pay stubs - or like my bank statements and then I just got fed up, because I kept getting my application sent back and just kind of stopped. But I do plan on trying to fill it out, time and time again. (NAN Youth #002)

Other participants shared it was difficult to get a hold of someone to talk to or visit during business hours due to their jobs or other commitments. For applicants who receive Ontario Works (OW) or ODSP, supporting documentation information can be shared between service providers within certain District Social Service Administration Boards (DSSABs) such as Thunder Bay and Cochrane. Despite this making the application process easier, participants shared that it could still be difficult to talk to a worker about housing and would often leave phone messages. Participants felt alienated and frustrated with the application process being uncertain as to the state of their application or place on the waitlist.

Like any time. Even if you're on welfare because I've been on Ontario Works. And like it's really hard to get a hold of your work or the person that you talk to about housing, like you kind of just have to leave them a message 'cause they never answer their phone. And, you just kind of hope, you know, they phone you back or whatever. Cause I work fulltime like 8 till 4:30 and the office closes at, you know, at 3:30 - 4 or so, so I never make the phone call, or I never even have time to go there.

Right. Right. And then when you do, or like when you have got through to them it's just them telling you that you're missing stuff and not really providing much assistance?

Yeah, I kind of wish it was kinda like in person or somebody could walk me through it. That would be really helpful. It's like they just tell you, do this and that, over the phone. (NAN Youth #002)

Yeah. So we're lucky that here at Thunder Bay DSSAB [District Social Services Administration Board] we're integrated, so we have Ontario Works here and so we sign when they apply, we have an open confidentiality form signed so that we can work with our housing team, with the case workers at Ontario Works so that the shelters component can be set up, the direct payment, those things, same with ODSP, so we know in other regions, those two departments sometimes don't even talk, so we're pretty lucky that way. And we actually then also, the housing staff have read access only to SAMS [Social Assistance Management System], the computer program that Ontario Works and ODSP use. So that helps to alleviate some pressures for people. (Service Provider #002)

For waitlisted applicants, there may be other forms of support while they wait for an available unit. Rent supplements and other affordable housing subsidies or benefits may be available for applicants such as Investment and Affordable Housing subsidies, Canada Ontario Housing Benefit or Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative. These supports have increased in recent years as a response to the wider challenge of housing affordability but are often limited in the support they can provide and their time horizons (CMHC, 2019; Canada Revenue Agency, 2022).

Yea, so we've a couple programs so on that application we ask a question, you know, basically it's along the lines of, 'Are you happy where you're living but you just can't afford it?' Maybe not those exact words. So, when people check that box off, then we add them to another list, so that if we have affordable housing benefits, or IAH, Investment and Affordable Housing subsidies become available, that we monitor that list and we can offer that. Sometimes I even tell people if they call with questions or our intake will tell them, 'Write it in on the top of the sheet kind of in bold,' so that on the application we know that that might be something they're interested in. So we do have that sub-list and that definitely is an option for some. We also have access to the COHB, the Canada Ontario Housing Benefit, at a province wide, where a region is given 'x' amount of dollars and you apply through the Ministry of Finance. And that one is closed, we have a small window to that one, but it does help. I think locally here we have 32 subsidies through the COHB right now that we're providing. So that is an option as well. (Service Provider #002)

Like is there just less and less places for people to be housed?

Yeah. Yes. Which is where things like portable housing or CHPI [Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative]. All of those other things, through DSSAB are the only way that we keep kids safe in marketable rent. But that's a barrier too because then the landlord has to be willing to file the paperwork and kids are ashamed and then people are like 'I don't want people on welfare, blah-blah-blah', so then they lose the apartment anyway. (Service Provider #003)

Waitlisted applicants may be fast tracked to a housing placement for a number of reasons including health or safety. An example from the interviews includes a participant who shared that after several years on the waitlist they learned that a doctor's note could help prioritize their application through a peer at a Friendship Centre. The unit the participant lived in with her children had existing mold issues, and they made a tactical decision to allow the mould to grow back in order to record the mould growth to show to doctors. After presenting photos and concerns for her children's health the participant received a doctor's note for housing.

And you know, I gotta say that this process that we're talking about, although it is there for single males and single youths, we do not have a lot of applicants or a lot of space for, like what I said before our - And really the process we are talking about applies to mostly RGI units, I mean, when we talk about our affordable and market units. The waitlist goes out the window. We basically just triage need. Essentially DSSABs, just like any service manager in the province, are in the business of assessing need. So, it's been a different process. But I guess for consistency's sake, everybody has to fill out an application and just lead to different places. (Service Provider #001)

Yep. Well I applied for Native housing, because there was Native housing in [City] and also low rental housing, which was like open to everybody in [City].

With [District] social service program?

I think so, yeah.

Yep. And you get both of those at the same time, kind of?

(overlapping) Yep, yep. In 2013.

And how did you know to do that then?

I was going to the friendship centre with my kids and they told me about it. And then after I had [my child], who was my third kid, I was told that I could move to a priority list, if I had a doctor's note.... So I went into my basement for my one bedroom apartment, and I took pictures of like all the black mold - I usually cleaned it, but for this purpose I let it grow, right. And I didn't clean it for a while and it got really dirty, really moldy and I took pictures of it. And then I brought my son in, who had asthma at the time. So I took him to the emergency room and I said my son's having, like his asthma's been acting up worse lately. And showed him pictures of this mold and do you think this mold is a problem with his asthma? And he said 'Ya, for sure, 100%. You can't have your baby boy around this mold.' So he gave me a note, a doctor's note to housing. So, I re-did all my applications and then I attached this doctor's note and I think I got a recommendation letter from the

friendship centre. I might have. And then after that, after that, I got a house within a couple of weeks.

Oh wow, so it was fast then once that happened.

Yeah, we were on the waitlist for just like over [two?] years.

But then, once this happened, then it -

(overlapping) Once that happened, it was accelerated, yep. I was moved to the priority list. (NAN Youth #006)

While the application process and waitlists can present a delay in obtaining safe and secure housing for many young people, many are unaware of how to even reach this stage. Participants spoke to the challenge of entering the housing system and the lack of knowledge available to them, in particular for individuals who lived primarily on-reserve or who were highly mobile. Participants suggested that even if they were aware that social housing existed, they were uncertain if they were eligible, how to apply or who to speak to. Some participants suggested that while they are able to find social housing applications on their own, or were pointed to them by other service providers in their lives, they often became aware later of other housing supports that they were eligible for all along that could have assisted them in securing housing earlier. Finally, others spoke of specific eligibility criteria that would have accelerated their access to social housing, for example medical needs, that were not made clear to them and prevented them from securing housing as quickly as possible. Each of these situations points to the need for greater clarity in institutional housing and, in particular, increased outreach to young people who are especially vulnerable to housing need.

For individuals or families experiencing violence there are also avenues available through Special Priority Program (SPP). The SPP can place applicants or their children experiencing violence or abuse on a priority waitlist. However, as noted below in service provider interviews, these can be difficult to prove. Records for verification of abuse are needed in support of an application such as records of police intervention, of physical injury, sexual abuse, threatening words, actions or gestures, or undue control of daily personal or financial activities. Records can be from a variety of sources and can include doctors, lawyers, law enforcement, social worker or teachers. Recording and disclosing abuse can be a risk for individuals experiencing violence. Additionally it requires access to support services and trust with relevant professionals.

Oh okay, so it's very unsafe. So most of my young people, even if they are victims, and they'll never admit it. Because they have to make the report, they have to do this. And it's really hard, like people don't lie about that stuff. Right? And SPP [Special Priority Program] applications are really hard to prove. (Service Provider #003)

The barriers and risks of accessing shelter and social housing while experiencing domestic violence need to be eliminated. When safe housing options are not easily available or accessible individuals are forced to choose between remaining or returning to live with an abuser, housing insecurity or homelessness (Melbin et al., 2003; Anderson et al., 2003; Jategaonkar & Ponic, 2011; Rizo et al., 2020).

Once a unit is available, an applicant will be notified and will have ten days to reply likely by phone if a number is listed. For applicants who are in precarious housing circumstances, homeless or experiencing poverty, they may not have cell phones or a consistent phone number.

Yeah. We're literally human 2-on-1s if you have a problem, we are going to help you solve it. One other thing, just that we have is that most of Ontario Works or DSSAB people know us so that, so they'll let me- I'll get the forms signed by kids, I'll scan them myself and email them directly to the worker. Which young kids- young people don't have that ability so then they bus, or whatever if they have a bus fare and then they get all the way to DSSAB to drop it in the thing and then the person is like, 'Oh but um, you never sent it'. I had ODSP tell me three times, tell me that I did not drop something off and finally, I recorded myself. I got out of the car, I'm so passive-aggressive. I recorded myself walking up to the building, like 'Here is the envelope, going in your

mailbox'. And they were like we didn't get the forms and I sent their manager the email, I was like 'I've been dropping forms off here for fourteen years I know where your mailbox is'.

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Well one of the barriers that we get all the time is that people dropped their forms off at DSSAB. They get a call , x time later from a person they don't know and they'll be like 'Oh, you didn't attach something and you have to start all over again'

Yeah!

And there is just no faith in the system, there is just no trust in that system for young people. I mean, the voicemail that they are getting doesn't make sense to them, they don't know the person at the other end.

Well most of my kids don't have phones. So then all of my kids list me as a big [contact person], which I think is a huge advantage. Like, when kids have bigs. That holds other organizations accountable, because I'm like 'Yeah you go ahead and phone and tell me I didn't do something.'

[...]

Yeah, and well so you used to be able to use DSSAB as the place to get your mail sent. Except the building is closed [during COVID lockdowns], so how do you get there to get your mail? (Service Provider #003)

An applicant may be able visit an available unit before making their decision but in service provider interviews it was shared that this was becoming less common. If an applicant decides to not take the unit, they are placed back on the end of the waitlist. This may create some pressure for units to be accepted since wait times are unlikely to decrease. If an applicant accepts the unit, they are able to do a site visit and then receive their keys, an orientation handbook and sign their lease. Within the first two months of moving in, a community worker will do a follow-up visit. Monthly wellness checks or calls may also occur.

For some individuals this rapid change can present additional challenges. After an extended time being on a waitlist, sometimes years, having to relocate within two weeks can cause significant upheaval. Youth expressed how at some of their most precarious times they might be on waitlists in multiple jurisdictions and trying to find secure housing wherever they could. Relocation on such short notice, potentially traveling a long distance, may not always be possible or may require leaving employment or other social networks.

Participants who accessed affordable housing units shared that it brought stability and a sense of security into their lives. Accessing stable and affordable housing was a contrast for those who had high levels of mobility due to housing precarity.

Yeah, it was, it brought stability into our lives. It was nice to have a place and to call our own after you know, many years of moving back and forth to my loved ones, my family's place and yeah, it was really nice, I found it. Although you know, the neighbourhood was a little bit rough and the neighbours, you know, you can get that all over. But we made it, you know, liveable. Nobody bothered us, you know, walking down the road, nobody asked me for a smoke or got mad if I said, no, I don't have any. I didn't get harassed by anybody so that was nice. That was when I was on welfare, when I was living on [Street name] and I signed up for housing with Thunder Bay housing [District of Thunder Bay Social Services Administration Board] here. (NAN Youth #016)

Trying to finish my grade 12 my parents ended up finding a house. Ah, it was part of Native Housing in the town of Chapleau. It was a nice place. For the first time like, we didn't have to share a building with neighbours like a duplex or a townhouse, downstairs neighbours, that sort of thing, y'know? We had our own place, our own backyard, my dog was able to run in the backyard by herself, and that was a really good time. My parents have that place.

That was like, again a pretty positive place for your family, you would say.

Yeah, yeah it really felt, like a place of security and where I felt comfortable. (NAN Youth #023)

And would you say that having somewhere stable to live helped you focus on your school?

Yeah. Well also having a place stable but also having a kid (laughs) it was a big motivation push to be a good role model.

Right. And so how were things at this time? What was home like for you at this time?

It was good, you know it was just me and my mom, my daughter, so it was peaceful.

It was peaceful? Is that the first time in your life that you could say that about home do you think?

Yeah.

And is that the home that you're still living in now?

Yeah.

And would you still say that about your home now?

Yeah. (NAN Youth #011)

Okay. So then you moved into this house. Can you describe this house to me a little bit?

It's a two bedroom, just a main floor and a basement.

And it's just you and your daughter living there?

Yes.

Okay. How do you find this experience? I mean you've stayed a while so.

I love it! It's the only stability I've had since forever.

Right so this feels like home for you, you would say?

Yeah. (NAN Youth #024)

Social housing acted as a place of refuge and stability for many participants who were able to access a unit. For some, their time in social housing represented the most stable period of housing in their lives, and they valued the formality and structure that came with social housing programs. However, for many obtaining a social housing place was a serious challenge and may have even given false hope at a time of great need. Participants shared how they were unaware of programs, faced challenges in applying for housing and did not have documents required for applications. Further, as waitlists continue to grow access to housing seems more and more unattainable. Additional social housing units and supports are needed to make it possible for social housing to become a place of safety for all those who need it.

COUCHSURFING

In interviews youth shared a range of experiences of housing precarity. As described in previous sections, housing precarity can include situations of overcrowding, inadequate or substandard housing, unaffordable housing, inaccessible to couchsurfing or having no shelter at all (Ansloos et al., 2022, p. 1920). In particular, youth shared times they couchsurfed or relied on friends or family for having a place to stay. These periods of housing instability contributed to a higher degree of mobility for youth and are distinct from regular or planned visits with friends and family. Couchsurfing or relying on friends or family for temporary shelter can be understood as a form of hidden homelessness. In reports and academic literature, hidden homelessness has a gendered component (Klassen & Spring, 2015; Schwan et al., 2020). Women, girls and gender diverse people are more likely to be undercounted in homelessness counts because of the ways they navigate situations of housing precarity to avoid absolute or visible homelessness.

Many youth shared experiences of relying on family and friends for places to stay. Some of these stays were for short periods of time or happened infrequently while other stay periods were longer, more frequent or relied on multiple households to string together a consistent place to stay. From interviews, shorter stays were likelier due to disagreements or arguments with a parent or guardian and needing a place to "cool down." Other times participants left to gain some space from tensions in their household. For some participants, staying with friends or family was a choice they made while other participants described being forced out for a period of time.

Not really, no like I never really like couch-hopped or anything unless I got kicked out for a night or two but, never like nothing major.

Not for like weeks at a time you would say?

Yeah. Not really to be considered living there, more like just crashing there for a night. (NAN Youth #007)

While some youth may have only needed infrequent or short term stays, youth who faced ongoing challenges within their home environments had to keep track of the type or length of help they received. Participants were aware of not "over staying" with friends or family and would move back home. Youth navigated social expectations of friends and family while working to maintain shelter that felt safer for them.

> **Yeah, that's essentially what I did is that even when I was at my dad's I wasn't home or home very much. I stayed at my friend's house a lot. My friend [Friend's name]. Her family's house, so I stayed there quite a bit.**
>
> *Would you say that that was like, the safest place for you at that time?*
>
> **It was, but I didn't want to be too much of a burden-**
>
> *(overlapping) Yeah, yeah.*
>
> **Y'know it's their house, I didn't want to live there. So I felt really safe in the house there, but I didn't want to like um-**
>
> *You didn't want to like over-extend that-*
>
> **Yeah, overextend my stay type thing. (NAN Youth #026)**

For participants navigating on-reserve housing where rates of housing need and crowding are higher, they may have chosen to cycle between houses to avoid additional housing pressures.

> *And where did you go then?*
>
> **Kinda just like back-and-forth to like my mom's house, my dad's house, my sister's house kinda thing.**
>
> *Those were all in [First Nation]?*
>
> **Yeah. (NAN Youth #019)**

Participants also stayed with family during difficult periods or times of transition and change. Participants who moved to a new city or who had separated from their partners relied on family to meet their housing needs.

> **At her [aunt's] apartment building. I'm currently searching for an apartment here in Sault Ste Marie. I'm having tremendous difficulties finding a place. But that's kinda where I'm at right now. (NAN Youth #023)**

Some participants had a reliable place to stay when they needed it while other participants would rely on a wider network of friends for support. This was especially true if a participant was needing a place to stay beyond a few nights.

> *Right. So it was just like, friends who you could find around town, you would, you would crash in different places -*
>
> **Yep ... yep.**
>
> *Okay. And how long would you say you did that for before you moved in with your aunt?*
>
> **Maybe a month or two? (NAN Youth #006)**

For some, couchsurfing was a way to avoid spending nights on the street. Visible homelessness, living on the street or in public areas, can carry greater risks and challenges for women, girls and gender diverse people (Van Berkum & Oudshoorn, 2015, p.14). Couchsurfing can provide a temporary and safer way to maintain housing. When a participant could not find a place to stay with friends or family, they shared that they relied on spaces that were open 24/7 or hotels to secure a place to stay overnight.

> **In the beginning we were like couch surfing. If we didn't have a place to sleep, there was a 24/7 open coffee shop, I guess. So we'd go there.**
>
> *Ok, but you were finding you were finding people's couches to sleep on mostly?*
>
> **Yeah**
>
> *How long would you say you were couchsurfing like that?*
>
> **A half a year I think.**
>
> *Ok and how would you describe what that was like for you?*
>
> **Very traumatizing I think.**

Traumatizing how, can you say?

I don't know I just felt like, when I think about it just like the memory feels dark ok like. Do you know what I mean? (NAN Youth #021)

While while I was using, I got kicked out of the house a couple times. So I went to live with my grandma. Who was my other safe person but it was my stepmom that kicked me out of the house. Both times.

And were you like, crashing at friends' places a bunch at that period as well, like, were you kind of in and out at that time or were you pretty safe, yeah?

I was, I was in and out. Like, I was always with my friends. [...] There was a time when I literally had to pack up my stuff and then I was like, thought that I was going to live on the street so I had to couch surf every night. (NAN Youth #027)

While couchsurfing is an important method for avoiding more precarious circumstances, it can still have negative impacts on mental health and wellbeing. The precarity of couchsurfing for longer periods of time was described as having a negative impact on participant's mental health. Participants' described longer periods of couchsurfing as being a difficult or a bad period of time. Additionally, participants shared that they could not always predict when they needed to couchsurf. Homelessness and housing precarity can compound other forms of trauma for individuals experiencing domestic/family or intimate partner violence (Van Berkum & Oudshoorn, 2015, p.14). Alternative spaces for youth experiencing housing instability and needing longer term housing support must also include supportive services to address and support youth's mental health and wellbeing.

Yeah. Were there any nights where you didn't really have anywhere to stay?

Uh, no.

Ok. So you were able to kind of patch it together through that period?

Yeah.

And how were you doing at that time?

I was- depression was starting to get heavy on me and that's also a time when I became pregnant. So I was very worried about housing.

And were you going to school at that time at all?

Kind of. I was going every now and then, it wasn't- school had sort of gone onto the back burner. (NAN Youth #024)

At his mother's but he would most nights, he would kick me out.

Ok. So you were staying all kinds of places then.

Wherever I could xxxxx [inaudible]

Yeah, like couchsurfing mostly.

Yeah.

Or like, some hotels around there maybe sometimes.

No (laughs)

No. Couchsurfing or staying at a coffee shop or wherever you could find somewhere.

Yeah.

Ok. And how were you doing at that time?

Very bad spot in my life, I think. (NAN Youth #021)

Couchsurfing is an important strategy and tactic youth can employ to stay housed. It is used under a variety of circumstances from a short reprieve from tensions at home to having no other shelter options. While relying on couchsurfing is not a long term solution or ideal way to maintain housing, for youth who are able to use their social networks it is one that can provide safety. Participants who needed to use couchsurfing as strategy to address longer term housing instability or homelessness reveal a gap in housing and program provision.

SHELTERS

Within NAN communities, there are only 3 on-reserve emergency shelters in addition to the 15 emergency shelters across northern Ontario and approximately 34 emergency housing options for women including: shelters, transitional houses or crisis centres for women and families (Langdon & Stewart, 2014; Northwest Healthline, n.d.; Northeast Healthline, n.d.). A lack of emergency or VAW shelters and support can contribute to mobility in search of resources and following referrals in order to access adequate support (Schwan et al., 2020, p.16). Forcing individuals to seek emergency services and supports outside of their community and support networks can undermine safety through displacement and disconnection. As discussed in the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, housing precarity and increased risk of violence can be linked to the lack of financial supports "for Indigenous housing, Indigenous-led anti-violence services, and Indigenous-run shelters and supports"(Schwan et al., 2020, p.26).

Participants described relying on emergency shelters either as a child with a parent or guardian or on their own. As children, youth described accessing shelter after a family breakdown. Shelters offered short or long term support as their mother's or guardians secured new housing. In some cases, shelter stays were for longer periods of time while the family was waitlisted for social housing. These early periods of transition from home to a shelter were often described as hectic or confusing. Despite challenging transition periods some participants described the structure and policies of the shelter as having contributed to greater feelings of safety.

Well, it was an emergency shelter for when my parents split up for, umm, I think it was just a couple of weeks.

Ok. Where was that, that you stayed at the shelter?

That was in Geraldton.

In Geraldton. How old were you about would you say?

I would say about nine.

Nine. Ok. And do you remember anything about that experience?

Um no. I didn't ask questions, no.

Yeah, no, that's ok.

I just followed my mom. (NAN Youth #020)

Yes so at 7, was when my parents separated. And we were in a situation where we had to relocate, and we did so, kinda under emergency circumstances, so. After that kind of happened we relocated to Sault Ste Marie. (NAN Youth #023)

Well things got really too hectic. So that's when me and my mom went into Beendigen.

Right, and do you remember what that was like when you first arrived at Beendigen?

It was scary because I wasn't sure if I would ever see my brothers or dad again. And I wasn't sure if we would ever find a place. So it was scary.

And do you remember like, and maybe you don't know I'm not sure, is it something your mom had considered before? Like, do you remember the process for her?

Well I remember her telling me she was going to call a place. And then she came back inside, she went outside to make the call, then she came back inside and said, to pack my things.

Ok. And how did you get to Beendigen? Do you remember?

We had a cab, they called a cab for us.

Mhm. And then when you arrived there, what happened?

They did intake. They just did, you know like, how are you mentally? Is there any health issues? They set the rules. Then, they gave us a room.

Ok. And so you and your mom had a room, just the two of you?

Yeah.

And were you still going to school at that time?

Yeah.

The same school?

Yeah.

Ok, and how long did you stay in Beendigen?

I think about five, six months. (NAN Youth #024)

Yeah, and then she has- because they split up, so, she went to the women's shelter because she didn't want to stay at home anymore, I guess. And then we didn't want to stay with my dad so we went to the women's shelter with her.

That happened right away?

Yeah. Well, my mom left for a while, she left for a month and we were all stressed out. And we were like 'we want mom' freaking out, 'where's our mom?' kind of thing and then she was like, gone to the shelter and she said, 'Ok, you guys can come with me' and we went back and forth from the shelter to my dad's house.

[...]

Ok. And then, can you, can you talk about what happened, you know, let's say the summer after grade eight, or, what, what came next for you?

Mm ... my mom, she got into housing through the shelter. And then, that's where we are right now. So when we moved into there, that was really, really exciting. And she had a car back then so we could- it was just nice. It was a little freedom time I guess. (NAN Youth #025)

Ok. And do you remember anything about staying in Beendigen? Do you remember what it was like, what the people were like, how you felt there?

Um, yeah, it was really nice inside there, and it was just a women's shelter too so there was a lot of other women there and they had little kids with them, and I liked it. And from what I can remember we went to school on the bus everyday and my mom would make us our lunches. And for birthdays we'd go to the movies or we'd go outside at the shelter. We couldn't really leave anywhere, because it was like, for the safety of the women that were there, I guess? ... Yeah. But it was fun, I had fun with all the little kids that were there. They said like always like (mimicking voice) 'Wheres [Participant], wheres [Participant]?', and all that and I'd always hang out with them. Cuz it was like a playroom, or like a TV room. Yeah. (NAN Youth #019)

Accessing emergency shelter while living on a reserve requires individuals or families to leave and travel long distances. Off-reserve shelter users may still need to travel long distances or between cities depending where they are located and then may be relocated after accessing a shelter for safety reasons. Participant's described having taxi or bus trips arranged for them in order to access shelters. The lack of accessible emergency housing or emergency supports reduces the choices that youth have and can cause individuals to stay in unsafe situations when they wish to leave.

Participants who accessed emergency shelters independently usually did so due to interpersonal conflict/issues with family, intimate partner violence or not having a support network when moving to a new city. Interpersonal violence is considered one of the most common pathways into homelessness (Van Berkum & Oudshoorn, 2015, p.51). Participants who left situations of domestic violence shared that they were temporarily or permanently moved to other shelters or motels out of town due to the high risk of being tracked down at the shelter. In one case a participant shared that they were being harassed while staying at the shelter. Only after a worker caught the individuals on camera did they decide to move the participant to another shelter despite the participant voicing their concerns earlier. Another participant spent time in motels alone. After sharing they did not feel safe to be by themselves another housing solution was sought.

Umm, shoot, I had to stay in another shelter for emergency because I didn't have anywhere else to stay and that was, I forgot what the name was.

Where was it?

It was by city hall in Thunder Bay.

Was it Beendigen?

I think yeah I think it was Beendigen.

Was it a women's shelter in Thunder Bay there?

Yes yeah, that's what it was, yeah.

And how old were you at that time?

That is when I just moved here so like that was about a year ago.

Ok.

Yeah because I don't have any family in Thunder Bay, so when I had a problem, I had to go there (NAN Youth #020)

I understand. And so then you go to Faye Peterson [House] next.

Yes. I left that morning, a year after that morning. I left- first I went to the Underground Gym [Underground Gym and Youth Centre]. I know Peter Panetta very well so he helped me out that morning. And then I got in contact with Faye Peterson [House] that same morning and then from the underground gym I went to Faye and they helped me from there.

That's incredibly brave, right. Can you talk to me about what that was like? Like, the day before, did you know you were going to do it?

No. I never would've guessed that I would've left like that. I didn't think that I- that was the day where I had enough and-

When you left, where did you tell him you were going?

I was straight up, I said, 'I'm going to the Underground , Peter's going to help me'. Because that morning, we actually ended up getting into an argument and stuff. I'm like 'Ok, I'm done, straight up'. So it was very fast-paced just like how the transition from my auntie's to my mom's, it happened so quickly.

Right. Before that moment, had you thought about leaving other times?

Yeah. I actually did try leaving before but he wouldn't let me leave. (NAN Youth #022)

Process intakes for some shelters described a multi hour process, walking through individual circumstances to assess needs and rules and policies of the shelter. While staying in shelters, some participants described being connected with supportive services such as counselling as well as support applying for housing and looking for employment.

Do you want to talk about what it was like going to the women's shelter? Like did you just decide one day that you'd had enough like?

Yeah, pretty much, I was just like this is enough like I just kinda wanna like experience like being on my own for a little bit so that's what I did and plus I was like going through a lot of shit at the time and it was kinda scary at first cause I was like the youngest person in there and I was like seventeen like I had no idea what I was getting myself into with stuff but they had a lot of support there. They had got me into counselling and stuff and they even like it was actually fun living there cause you would be able to leave every- I think it was like every weekend and they would pay for your bus ticket and they would give you money for meals and stuff just to go out and find a job or like a place where you can get an apartment or whatever so they would do that every weekend. And umm it was not bad there was girls there that were pretty crazy besides that, it was kinda, it was okay. (NAN Youth #003)

Currently there are no dedicated youth shelters in Thunder Bay. Youth must access the same shelters as adults which may not have the types of support needed or appropriate accommodations. A youth seeking help is a significant step and a brave act. Asking for help in any form requires a leap of faith, which can be difficult if past experiences with service providers or support workers have led to disappointment or unfulfilled promises. Building trusting relationships for and with youth can be difficult, requiring time, dedicated spaces and a range of supports. Expecting youth who are experiencing housing precarity or processing trauma to meet stringent expectations can also lead to frustrations for service providers. Dedicated youth services and shelter spaces need to provide the appropriate support that understands the needs of vulnerable youth and allows for the space for youth to make some mistakes, learn and grow.

Yeah. I mean, it's 99 per cent of the time that it is never that need. It's like- When people go to a shelter, they aren't there to ask, how can you help me for the next month? Two months? The rest of my life? They aren't even thinking about filling out an application for housing because they have been screwed over by so many people who have asked them to fill out those forms. They don't want any

part of that so where the biggest gap is. We've been talking about a lot of system stuff but, where it is, is on the ground with people they can trust. Somebody who can develop that relationship so that, if it doesn't happen today, maybe next week. We get to the point where they will fill out an application, and I tell them to believe me that it will lead to something. And it's up to that person to say that I got the application, here's what I promised and what I told you know- And people not running away when- when the youth screws it up. And it's that relationship from trust and that's not easy man. There's a lot of turn over in the field. It's not an easy job. (Service Provider #001)

... I think that's important to go hand in hand with housing. And not only have a warm shelter but also have the supports to kind of, help you along, whether it be addiction, opioid addiction or mental health challenges. Just having that readily available, or next door, or down the street. It's so important, we can't just get into the mindset that just because we have housing, shelter that- yea, you may have a shelter, but if you don't have those supports available, that person is gonna be back in the shelter again that night. So, and there's just a revolving door... (Service Provider #004)

And talking about the different, like the hard thing about youth housing is we don't have a youth homeless shelter in Thunder Bay. Twenty bed adult shelter which goes completely against best practices when we talk about youth homelessness and like the type of housing they need. It's just like, even my setting, a congregate living setting, it's communal, it's dorm, that's not going to work for youth, they need their own suites and stuff like that and so, it's very interesting like, I'm very intrigued to see like, at one point we had like something like 998 youth that were identified as homeless. Pretty much couchsurfed, and like hopping and like, you know staying at, wandering the streets and it's just like, I just don't understand how we battle a complex problem like housing if we don't you know, nip it in the bud. So a lot of our youth homelessness, especially in Thunder Bay, stems from that gap that used to happen in the child welfare legislation, 16 years old, you get kicked out of home, we've never had contact with you, CAS had to take care of you ... I'm just very surprised that a lot of the stuff they are doing with adults is- seems like more of a priority than what we're doing with our youth housing. (Service Provider #005)

MARKET RENTAL HOUSING

Market rentals are housing units whose price is not predetermined or adjusted based on the occupant but instead set by the landlord. Due to the extensive waitlist to access affordable housing units, some applicants may be referred to access market rentals and other rent supplement programs. Affordability was a major factor in accessing safe, stable and quality housing. Across Canada, rental markets are facing increased pressure due to low vacancy rates and increasing costs (CMHC, 2023, p.5). In Thunder Bay, vacancy rates decreased from 3.3% to 1.6% between 2021 and 2022, while the average 2-bedroom rental cost increased by 7.5%. These changes pose challenges for low-income renters. In Canada, Aboriginal households off-reserve are more likely to experience core housing need overall compared to non-Aboriginal households (18.3% vs 12.4%), but especially Aboriginal households who rent (33.6% vs. 26.3%) (CMHC, 2020b). Additionally, 24% of Aboriginal households are maintained by young adults aged 15 to 34 (CMHC, 2020). Access to adequate and affordable housing can be challenging for youth in general however Indigenous youth are likely to face additional barriers such as racism and discrimination.

How did you find that place?

Ahh, Kijiji.

Did you look at a lot of places? Do you remember?

Yeah but like every time we would go look it would already be like somebody looking at it or somebody rented it so like as soon as I seen it like the post that it like when it went up I right away just called the landlord and I was just like kay can we see it and then we saw it and we were just like kay I just wanna move here. Like it was so long tryna find, what seemed long, to find another apartment, so.

Okay, so you got it through Kijiji after a little while of trying?

Yeah it was, oh man, it was so stressful ... just like- but yeah we ended up getting it, stayed there for a while. (NAN Youth #003)

A recent study by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives found that to afford a 2-bedroom apartment in Thunder Bay would require a minimum rental wage in 2022 of $22.60/hour or for an individual to work 76 hours per week at minimum wage of $15.50/hour (Macdonald & Tranjan, 2023, p.14). As discussed above, rent supports such as Shelter Allowance can be up to $844 for a family of six or more people (Government of Ontario, 2022) are insufficient for most rental costs.

Yeah yeah that's what I did and then from there I got ... I got my worker to help me sort that all out so they can pay for it and stuff and yeah ... like she did most of the work and then I just like moved in there. Like I don't know how I like ... I don't know, it was super weird.

You don't, like you just kinda told your worker you wanted to live there and they made it happen?

Yeah, that's exactly what happened. And I was only getting ... cause the apartment itself was seven fifty and I had a ... like a monthly like whatever for eight fifty so I was only living off of a hundred bucks a month ... which was- it was really shitty ... but my band had helped me out a lot like I would go ask and they gave me ... I don't know they gave me a couple hundred bucks anyways just to help me out ... and then I was just like from there on I just didn't wanna ... ask for help anymore so I just went back to my Mom's.

[...]

Yeah ... well not unhappy I mean like I was okay but just financially I was just like didn't have enough money to like ... take care of myself either. I was always getting sick too like I was like I wasn't eating right and stuff and going to school and all this like I was super stressed already like oh it was super bad. (NAN Youth #003)

I was there for a bit and then I went back to Geraldton and I got this apartment my sister was living in but she moved out of it. And that was like that was a really small, small apartment. I was on welfare that time. Welfare paid for my rent. So the rent took most of my welfare so I would only get thirty bucks left over each month. So like, yeah.

That's pretty tough.

Yeah. It was. (NAN Youth #021)

The need for credit checks, references or guarantors also limited choices for many participants. The need for financial checks or references can be difficult to obtain for participants coming from low-income households, households with debt or those previously living in community where it can be difficult to develop credit.

Cause at the time, I couldn't really get my own apartment cause I had to cosign there and I couldn't really get a place without credit cause there really was no place for me to make credit in Pelican or in Cat Lake or anywhere else as a younger child.

Right. So, how did you find that room that you ended up staying in?

Let's see, I did actually end up finding the room off Facebook. My brother directed me to websites that he found safe and that he found reliable. He just told me to be careful while looking for a place so, I just told people that I was going to college and I was looking for a place with females preferably. So, the lady whose room I was subletting reached out to me and she just quickly introduced herself, we spoke for a bit then she told me about her roomates, what she was doing for school, and what they were doing, and how she was giving info- like quickly info for rent and bills and stuff like that. I just said, okay, that sounds good to me, I can do that for you, and I can move in by the time you want me to. So, me and my brother went to the bank, we got, set up the-the housing agency, and that's it. The housing agency that was for this apartment. All I had to do was just take some of my bank information so they could get my rent information and that was it for me there. (NAN Youth #015)

So they [previous landlords] were able to be a reference for me when I was trying to find a new

place and that was a big thing too. I don't know, it's also rent's super expensive (laughter) like everywhere-

(overlapping) It's just really expensive.

Yeah, that's, I can't even imagine because I work and I also get my school sponsorship - And even I still consider it expensive, so I can't even imagine trying to make ends meet, just working minimum wage. And then, yeah I don't know where I was going with that (laughing). (NAN Youth #005)

Ok, so the one thing is when we're looking for apartments everyone did like credit checks or you have to have a reference, but if you don't, if you've never lived outside of your house before it's like, impossible to get a place. And we got denied so many times because of that.

Ok. Yeah. That's one we've heard a lot in this project, and I think there's ways we can think about changing that. Is there anything else you would like to see changed? Or be different for young people in the future?

Like, pricing.

More affordable places.

Yeah, different, a single person living on their own can't afford an apartment for themselves. Because it's like a thousand dollars and their paycheque isn't even a thousand bucks. (NAN Youth #025)

Participants shared that rental units within their price range were less reliable or had maintenance issues or were located in 'rougher areas'. This limited range of market rental apartments at an accessible price range was described as forcing participants into housing they felt was unsafe.

And, finally, I was able to get my own place.

Great.

But then again, it's not the best. It's not really a safe environment to raise a family or to do anything like that. It's pretty much just sliding by. That's all it is. And that's how a lot of affordable housing is. Is just like the basic slide by like, you get what you get. (NAN Youth #022)

Yeah sure, and you didn't have any trouble, like a lot of times in these, discussions, people talk about having trouble about, like, credit checks or landlords give them a really hard time because they don't have a lot of letters of recommendation or previous landlords -

Oh, no, no, [wifi cutting out] it was easy because it's not in the best part of town. There's- [wifi cutting out] I don't remember getting our credit check. Or references. (NAN Youth #002)

Yeah, so five years later we decide to move into our own apartment. So got everything settled into our own apartment, 'Oh the roofs leaking. Oh the sinks are clogged. There's no fire extinguisher.' We lived on the top, the attic basically. There was no fire escape. There was a window but no ladder to get down. (NAN Youth #028)

Additionally, some participants shared experiences of anti-Indigenous discrimination by landlords and spoke to the knowledge within the community that certain landlords were known to not rent to Indigenous people. Discriminatory rental practices against Indigenous people are often based on negative stereotypes (Ontario Human Rights Commission [OHRC], 2017) with some landlords screening prospective tenants "based on their names and perceived ethnicity, thus eliminating them before they have even had the chance to view the unit" (Laidlaw Foundation, 2023, p.36).

I went to college in Thunder Bay... I was looking for apartments for a long time with no success cuz no one wants to give a Native kid a place. Like the first time I had no references or that stuff. I ended up staying with a family that I know here. I stayed in their basement bedroom. Paid rent. (NAN Youth #001)

Yeah, well I feel like in some ways it might have been easier [during COVID] because my kids can clean up a little bit easier from here up [gestures shoulders up]. You know what I mean? On paper, they can go and get haircuts of whatever, so they tend to if they are doing a three-sixty virtual tour, then that tends to be a little easier than me having to take them and get them a whole new outfit, shower, then visiting

> an apartment and the other thing is sometimes if I'm going to be super honest about working with Indigenous young people, sometimes we'll just say our camera isn't working and then that reduces for the ability for landlords to be able to stereotype that way. (Service Provider #003)

The combination of lack of affordability, discrimination and application barriers pushed some participants into other forms of precarious or unsafe housing. This was echoed in service provider interviews where discussions on anti-Indigenous discrimination posed a risk for youth trying to navigate and find safe housing options. Service providers working directly with youth shared that the rental market could be an unsafe place for youth as they could be taken advantage of, exploited or are at risk of human trafficking.

> Yeah, so then we start to break down where is potential problems , so okay, have you been hospitalized in the last twelve months for mental health illness? Okay, check referral. Have you been blah-blah-blah. And it's interesting because so- I'm Italian and Ukrainian, so my staff, we feed kids all the time. And I think that that's just my culture. Like, take the kids out for a sandwich. Take the kids out for whatever, don't ask these kids who are hungry and cold to start to- don't pick their scab and leave them bleeding to death, you know? So, oftentimes, we just ask young people to tell us what they are comfortable with and then we build rapport. I will say, probably eighty percent of our referrals into our program are peer-to-peer referral. So yeah, we helped- have a young person who then says, 'Hey I have another young person', so then that person comes in and that's kind of how our programs work. So yeah, then we'll go through all of the potential ways that we might be able to help them through other funding. And then if we have no other options, then we look at marketplace rent. But, it's impossible. So even for rooms for rent right now, our young people have to extend their honesty about how many people would be staying in a room, what is the actual address of the room. Do you know what I mean? Lots of my young girls are exchanging nude photos to be able to afford a room for rent right now in our community. Yeah, and most of my young boys too, so yeah.
>
> Right, right, so market rent is really the last resort here?
>
> Yeah.
>
> And would you say that you are having to turn to more frequently?
>
> Yes.
>
> Like is there just less and less places for people to be housed?
>
> Yes. Which is where things like portable housing or CHPI Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative]. All of those other things, through DSSAB are the only way that we keep kids safe in marketable rent. But that's a barrier too because then the landlord has to be willing to find the paperwork and kids are ashamed and then people are like 'I don't want people on welfare, blah-blah-blah', so then they lose the apartment anyway.
>
> Yeah, yeah, yeah. I mean rent itself in Thunder Bay is going wild.
>
> Yeah, it's ridiculous.
>
> And in the like five years that I've been working in Thunder Bay, even in like that time, it's gone wild.
>
> Yeah, and traffickers have gotten really smart, because they are buying more units and turning them into rooms for rent and they are picking my kids off so quickly. (Service Provider #003)

While market rentals may provide more options, entering the market can be difficult for Indigenous youth due to rising costs, lack of credit, references, potential for discrimination and predatory landlords. Additionally, the cost of living and affordability of market rentals disproportionately impact those who are most vulnerable and can often drive individuals into more precarious and unsafe circumstances. There is a greater need for social and subsidized housing units and programs, especially for Indigenous youth, that can provide safe and adequate housing.

CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES

Child and Family Services (CFS) has been characterized as the continuation of the Indian Residential School (IRS) system. Indigenous children are over represented with CFS systems at rates higher than their non-Indigenous peers, often leading to a greater chance of being placed outside their family networks or communities (Fallon et al., 2021, p. 47). Overrepresentation has in part been attributed to structural inequality including poor housing, poverty and lack of access to safe drinking water and adequate health care (Brittain & Blackstock, 2015, p. 12; Fallon et al., 2021, p. 38). Cindy Blackstock, social worker and executive director of First Nations Child and Family Caring Society, stated that "First Nations families, particularly families on reserve, are being set up for failure by state policy," and that "if parents are held accountable for neglect, the government should be held accountable for neglect too" (Brittain, 2017). Underfunding of housing and infrastructure on reserve is part of a larger issue of underfunding and underservicing communities that negatively impacts individual, family and community wellbeing. In 2016 the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal found that the federal government was underfunding child welfare services on reserve (Fallon et al., 2021, p.18).

Interactions with CFS were part of nearly half of participants' housing journeys. Experiences of entering CFS, being housed in a variety of placements and interactions with social workers varied throughout the interviews. For many, CFS did not guarantee stability. Placement experiences ranged from staying with friends or family in-community to bouncing around multiple short-term placements, separation from siblings and other family members to longer term placements. Participants who were separated from family members or from their community shared how the process was difficult and isolating. For one participant as a young child being reintroduced to family members for short visits felt like meeting strangers. Cases of disconnection from family, other siblings in care or community often meant that as older youth, they had to work to reunite or reconnect with their families.

I think my mom was the one really pushing for it, cause she wanted the three of us to be together. We also have an older sister, she's like 27 now but she's like 12 years older than me. So she wasn't in the foster system. But yeah my younger twin siblings, they were and my mom was really pushing for it cause she wanted all of us to be together. (NAN Youth #014)

For about another four years, I would say, we lived with my mom again, and then I remember going back to foster care around the age of six or seven. And during that time they actually split up me and my brother and I ended up going with my younger sister. Yeah so it was a bit of back and forth between care with me and my siblings until I was around the age of ten, nine years old. That's when I actually stayed with my mother until I was about fourteen, I moved out again. (NAN Youth #022)

(laughing) I went from foster house to foster house for a while. Maybe about four times? That I can remember. Before I went back home.

The foster houses that you went to were all in Kingfisher also?

No different places.

Do you remember where? Like, were they in town, were they in other communities?

One was in Wunnumin Lake ... another was in Sioux Lookout, Eagle Lake, and I think the last one was Kingfisher for a while.

And, so you weren't staying in those houses for very long, you don't think?

No, not too long.

Like a couple of months in each one, or not even?

Yeah. Maybe a month.

Ah, okay. And then you said you returned back to your parents home?

Yes. (NAN Youth #017)

Kay so, well when I was younger I lived with my dad and my mom for, like, till I was probably four, and

then my mom ended up getting like a new boyfriend so we stayed with him for about ... ahh two years, three years maybe. And then I went back to my, well I went to my Grandma's and stayed with my mom, my grandma took me in. And I don't know how long I was there, maybe for like like a year or two. And uhh ... I went back to my Dad's, I stayed with him for about a year too. And then from there on I was just in foster care, for like and I was like house to house actually from probably when I was like umm ... maybe six to like eight. Just like kind of staying with like different people, but like in my community like I didn't leave

Do you remember why you switched or how that happened or did you, did anyone talk to you about it?

Yeah like, cause we were bad like when we were kids we were like kind of like rebelling, cause we just didn't like wanna stay there, and I guess when I think about it now yeah I was just rebelling and getting into trouble, they didn't like it cause they had their own kid, and it was just from there we just ended up, I don't know they got rid of us though. Like not get rid of us but they wanted, they didn't want us anymore, so we ended up with one of my mom's friends like ... I don't know cause on this reserve it's really small, so we know a lot of people. Like we'd call people like Aunts and Uncles when they're not even our Uncles and stuff cause we've just known them for so long. (NAN Youth #003)

Interactions with CFS could lead to sudden changes and moves in young peoples' lives. Participants shared being informed of moving placements or being removed from their family with short notice or immediate effect. For many, these experiences as young children were jarring and traumatic. Paired with sudden moves or changes of placements, participants felt there was often a lack of adequate communication from social workers; their lives were being changed without their input or knowledge.

I was six when that happened. I remember just my social worker taking me out of school one day to go to her office and she told me the news that I couldn't see my mom for a while. And like she didn't really- I feel like she wasn't really open and honest because she left out a lot of detail. Like she would just say like you're not going to go back to your community or like you're not going to go home you're not able to like speak to any of your family members and I have five brothers and one sister and we all got separated we were all into different foster homes and it was really hard.

So you had no contact with any of your siblings either?

No.

Okay. Um and that was at six?

Yeah. (NAN Youth #018)

That was a temporary placement in Red Rock then?

I was actually only supposed to be there for (laughing) a weekend, and yeah, I ended up being there for almost 2 months.

Oof.

Yea, it was not fun, not-not a great time. (NAN Youth #014)

Participants shared a range of experiences interacting with social workers including anxiety around social worker visits, having a turnover of workers every few months to more positive and longer term relationships. While check-ins from social workers are a regular part of CFS, participants shared feelings of fear or anxiety around these visits due to uncertainty of being removed from their home and family.

Maybe throughout my whole years living with my dad and brothers. Because obviously neighbours would call and so you know Dilico [Anishinabek Family Services] would come and knock on the door and say 'Hey, you have a child, and you know what not' but my mom's a very, very strong and opinionated woman (laughter) and she would be like, 'No, it's safe here, she's good, I handle everything' so I never got taken away.

Do you remember what any of their visits were like? And how you felt? Like, as a kid do you remember learning what Dilico [Anishinabek Family Services] meant? Or learning what those visits were and how you felt about that?

I never really, as a kid- as a kid I didn't really understand. I was just like, 'I can talk to strangers?'

(laughter) I liked talking to people when I was young. And so, it was just like making a friend or something. But then when I got older, I started to be more standoffish because I learned about Dilico and stuff. And I felt very, um what do you call it? Standoffish. I didn't want to talk to them.

Do you remember an age at which you felt scared about being taken?

When I was about, when we were in, what do you call it, [street name].

So that's when you were like, twelve or thirteen?

Yeah.

And how long did that last? How long do you remember feeling scared or worried about Dilico ?

Pretty much the whole time I was there. Even though they weren't visiting. They would come by like once in a while, like maybe once a year or something. But, throughout that time, I would still feel worried because I knew what was going on with the house. (NAN Youth #024)

Yes, there were frequent visits where Dilico worker, occasionally two workers, would come by to the house to do regular check-ins. It was very like, consistent, to the point where they wouldn't even tell us, they wouldn't tell my mother when they would come, they just come unexpectedly.

And do you remember what the feeling was like at those visits or like?

Yeah, every time I heard a knock on the door and I looked outside and I see them, I'm like, 'Oh they're here to take us away again'. Like, this is going to happen again and I'd get scared so I'd go hide in my mom's room and I wouldn't come out of the room until they would leave but it was necessary for them to see me, that's the whole point of why they were there. So I would just be hiding in my mom's room and I'm like, 'No, please don't, please don't take me away.' But every time, mostly every time, they would just want to talk and do a check-in but it was almost too much, that they were doing that, to the point that it felt like ... what's the word? Like, they were doing it so much it felt like they were harassing us. (NAN Youth #022)

For some participants longer term relationships with social workers allowed for more trust to develop and allowed for a better understanding of personal circumstances. Participants who had good relationships with their workers had greater support for their choices or preferences when it came to placements and could also rely on their workers for advice or to help deal with difficult situations.

Ok, and at that time let's say, before seven and a half, before the family that you mentioned, who would you say were the adults in your life that you trusted? Do you remember anyone or anything in particular?

My worker.

Yeah, ok. So you had a positive relationship with the social worker?

Yes.

Ok, and how often would you have been seeing your worker at that time?

I would say maybe like once a week.

Oh, very regularly.

Yeah

Ok and that would have been at their office or they were coming to the houses you were staying at?

They would come and pick me up and bring me to McDonalds, somewhere fun. (NAN Youth #028)

And when you were in the system did you have much contact with like a social worker at that age or any kind of mental health supports do you remember?

Yes, I did have a social worker.

And were they like a part of your life at all? Or was it just someone who was assigned to you?

Yes I still have a really good connection with her today. (NAN Youth #018)

My social workers would change every month.

Right so you never had any relationship there?

No. My foster mom was actually my counselor and she just took me on.

Oh wow.

Yeah

And you ended up staying with her for quite a while on and off?

Yeah, I'm still in contact with her. (NAN Youth #011)

Having consistent access to a reliable or trusted adult is important for youth who interact with CFS, especially if placed outside of their community or family network. Social workers or foster parents, as trusted adults, can provide stability and continuity to youth who may not have other connections they can rely on. Some participants shared how stability in placements provided the time to develop trusting relationships and work on feeling accepted and cared for. Participants with stronger relationships with social workers or foster parents also shared times they could rely on them for support and advice when making life decisions. Other participants shared that changes in placements, sometimes at a foster parents' request, made them feel unwanted and were difficult emotionally to deal with. These varying experiences reinforce the need for stable CFS placements for youth in care for longer periods of time.

Because I had too much anger issues. They sent me to a strict home. And I really liked the place because they gave me a couple options to go places. And I said I wanted to go to this home and they sent me there. [Foster guardian 1] and [Foster guardian 2] , they would say, 'You can call me aunt, you can call me uncle.' Because they didn't want to say, 'Call me mom, call me dad.' Because they didn't want to put that pressure. Because they knew I was on an adopting list. So they didn't want to say, 'Call me mom, call me dad.' They didn't want to confuse me. At this point I felt, 'cause I was switched to different houses, that no one loved me. But after staying there for two whole years and being adopted after. They really cared about me and stuff. They still keep me posted, updates. I'm still close with them. I tell them what's going on and they're like, 'Oh, I'm so sorry.' Or 'You got this, you can do this.' And they're really, really positive. Because I'm an adult now I would like a second [opinion] sometimes or from my adopted mom. (NAN Youth #028)

At thirteen, I changed foster homes.

Okay. Can you talk us through how that happened?

I think that my foster parents were the ones who recommended it. I think it was because I was getting old and they only wanted younger children.

Ok and how did you find out, what do you remember about that?

I just remember I had a visit with one of my social workers and she just told me that I was just going to get put into another home.

Wow. Yeah.

So it was like, unexpected.

Yeah. How did that feel? Like at thirteen, that, y'know-

Yeah, well I felt basically like I was just getting thrown out

Yeah yeah and it had been going pretty well in that house, you thought?

Yeah.

So it just happened kind of in one day? She told you that you were getting a new house and then you kind of packed up and left?

Yeah. (NAN Youth #018)

I'm honestly not- like I can't really be a straight answer, I don't remember, specifically, I know about a month, maybe two or three months ago, I was going to be sent back to my younger siblings placement to go live with them, again. But, I said- I said no. I said I was not interested in that, they said okay, and then they revisited it, and because [Foster Parent Name], where I'm staying right now she would have taken another kid so it was like they were trying to make a bed, but [Siblings Foster Parents] and [Siblings Foster Parents] that's where they were going to send me okay. [Foster Parent Name] is where I'm staying now, [Siblings Foster Parents] and [Siblings Foster Parents] is where I was going, or where they were trying to send me. But, I kind of just- I like- was like no, I don't- I don't wanna go, they asked me if I wanted to, I said 'You know, don't think so, like I've been here, I am stable, I just wanna stay here, I do not wanna move again'. And then, they, my social worker kinda told me, 'Well they had a meeting about it last week, and you don't

really have a choice anymore, you're going because it would free up another bed for another kid'. And so [Foster Parent Name] and I ended up writing letters to the agency, saying why I should be staying at [Foster Parent Name] and they ended up letting me stay.

Right, so that's good.

Yeah.

I mean, nice to know that you can have some impact anyways.

Oh, yeah. Oh, no I told them I was gonna sign myself out of foster care if they were going to do that. And I just would have just left completely. (NAN Youth #014)

Another form of stability for youth placed in care outside of their community was maintaining cultural connections. Indigenous foster parents and access to cultural activities was important to participants. For youth placed in non-Indigenous households, some described a culture shock or needing time to adjust to a different way of living.

So in that housing it was an all non-Indigenous family. The way they lived, the way they did their daily routines, it was very different from what I saw. To me it seemed more formal. More, yeah.

Yeah.

So I'm like, ok, this is new, this is something different and it wasn't always the best. I could say that they were strict. (NAN Youth #022)

Well, the family that I went to, they had no kids and they were Métis so I felt more connected to them because they did a lot of traditional things, like hunting, and they went to powwows and events like that. So it was really different, like a positive change I would say.

And you felt that right away you think?

Yeah.

That felt like a kind of safer place to be living would you say?

Yes. (NAN Youth #018)

Experiences with CFS shifts as youth age through the system. Participants shared they became more aware of the role of social workers as well as changes and challenges of teenagers in the system. Some participants felt that in foster home situations, younger children are preferred and as youth age their placement situations can become more tenuous. Participants also shared that they struggled during this period, as they felt their situations forced them to grow up faster. Because of these circumstances, some participants wanted greater independence but had few if any resources to achieve stable housing on their own.

Is there anything else you can think of that would make it easier for young people to get housed properly?

A lot of these houses, they are for 16 year olds and over. But, yeah, it would be like cause what about for like the under 16 year old, where are they gonna go? And I know a lot of people that are homeless that are- that were under the age of 16 and had nowhere to go. And we were always just waiting for a place to go.

You mean they're basically waiting to turn 16 is that right?

There's a lot of us leaving our foster homes. I got lucky.

Yeah. So would you say that, when you were in the foster system, you knew a lot of kids who were really struggling. Is that fair?

Cause we were all stuck in- nobody wants a grown kid so, we were all stuck in the assessment home, the treatment centres.

Just waiting for somewhere.

Yeah.

And so there, what you're saying is that there needs to be a bigger focus on the kids who are less than 16 and providing somewhere safe for them?

Yeah. (NAN Youth #011)

For youth in the system who turn 16, there are more options available but challenges of navigating the system and securing stable housing remain. Some participants considered emancipation or claiming

their benefits at age 16 to leave CFS in order to gain more agency but were then faced with a new set of challenges navigating social housing and support systems. For youth who sign themselves out of care and receive a monthly allowance, there is still the challenge of finding adequate and safe housing and other cost of living expenses such as furnishing a space, monthly utilities and food costs. Some participants found roommates or lived with friends or significant others in order to afford living independently. During this time participants were often still students and were also trying to complete their schooling while balancing newer responsibilities.

When you moved out of your foster mothers house did you have to- were you old enough that you didn't need emancipation. You were 19 you said right?

When you're 16 you can sign yourself out of there if you want. But if you stay until you're 18, they give you your child tax back. So I stayed (...) So I had to be in foster care when I was 18. But actually they let me sign myself up when I was 16 and- but still be in foster care.

Fair.

They just gave me a monthly allowance.

Yea. And that makes sense. That's better.

But now I lose my child tax.

Was there any other interactions you had with the system at all around housing, around making your, you know, around like improving your situation in any other ways.

No, you kind of just have to kind of do everything yourself. It's like what's available for you so you have to find it. (NAN Youth #011)

Whether a youth leaves CFS before they turn 18 or they age of out of care, greater supports and services are needed for youth during this transition period. Some supports may be available automatically depending on a youth's engagement or access to social workers. Other supports may require a youth to reach out to a worker to apply or enroll in a program. For youth who have been highly mobile, precariously housed or homeless, accessing information and resources may be more difficult. Additionally, reaching out for help can be a significant and difficult step for youth to take, especially if they have a lack of trust in the CFS system or are struggling with mental health or other concerns. Youth aging out of care need greater support due to being more likely to have "poor outcomes across other domains besides housing, including education, employment, health, mental health, substance abuse, justice system involvement and early parenting (Courtney et al., 2001, 2011; Courtney & Dworsky, 2006; Pecora et al., 2006; Reilly, 2003)." (Schelbe, 2018, p. 298). Barriers to achieving stable housing and other desired outcomes need to be removed before a youth decides to leave care or age out of the system.

EDUCATION

In 2018, an education infrastructure needs assessment was completed for NAN. The assessment found that there are 44 schools in 34 communities which have an estimated $3.96 million need for repairs with an additional $2.5 million dollars in repairs to the 129 teacherages. Over the next twenty years capital needs to maintain existing schools would grow to $1.597 billion or $1.95 billion if schools were expanded to provide up to grade 12 education in all 34 communities. Capital needs for schools and teacherages would be in addition to approximately $52 million in operation and maintenance (O&M) funds which include repair, preventative and general maintenance as well as heating, electricity and insurance costs. NAN schools, as of 2020, receive $23.1 million dollars or 44% of actual O&M funding needed to properly maintain and realize the full design life of schools (First Nations Engineering Services, 2018; Saunders & Williams, 2020). Education infrastructure needs are interconnected with broader housing and community infrastructure requirements. Water, wastewater and electrical systems are in immediate need of upgrades across nearly every NAN community. Without meeting the estimated housing backlog of at least 7,500 units and infrastructure repairs, upgrades and expansions NAN community members will continue to be displaced in order to access housing and education.

Of the 34 communities that operate schools, 20 communities only have K-8 education available. The other 14 communities have a mix of K-9 to K-12 education available. Secondary school options for students from NAN communities include Keewaytinook Internet High School (KiHS), Matawa Education and Care Centre (MECC) and the Northern Nishnawbe Education Council (NNEC) and provincial schools. Distance education options are provided by all three privately operated First Nation school organizations with NNEC providing two in-person high schools. Pelican Falls First Nations High School in Sioux Lookout provides student residences, located on a former residential school site and Dennis Franklin Cromarty High School in Thunder Bay currently relies on boarding houses for students. The education options available force the majority of NAN youth without secondary school access to choose between staying in their community or leaving to live in an unfamiliar and sometimes unwelcoming or dangerous urban environment. As Finlay et al. (2019) write:

> "The dilemma for these young people is that they are necessarily making a choice. They can either remain in their impoverished First Nation with limited hope of improvement because they don't have access to adequate secondary education or they can travel to an urban setting that is unfamiliar, far from home and community and fraught with racism in order to fulfill their education. Ultimately just surviving in either environment is extremely challenging (Finlay & Akbar, 2016). If youth choose to leave their First Nation, they typically end up in the Thunder Bay area. The patchwork of services and resources offered to these young people as they enter Thunder Bay do not target or address this dilemma or the challenges they face. Until the underlying causes or causes of the causes are confronted, change efforts will garner limited meaningful outcomes." (p.144)

In making this choice, youth are also considering the quality of education, support services and the opportunities an off-reserve education could provide. In a 2017 report on a national survey for on-reserve education, equity, funding and education quality were issues raised by students, parents/guardians and teachers (Hill + Knowlton Strategies Canada). Having access to a high-quality education in community was important for youth respondents as they felt that they were not receiving the same level of quality education as non-First Nation students. The education gap between students living on a reserve and students educated off reserve is understood as a result of historic and current underfunding of on-reserve schools (Canada, Parliament, Senate, 2011). In Canada, gaps in educational outcomes for First Nations students on a reserve has been the focus of government reporting. In reports from 2000 and 2004, the Office of the

Auditor General of Canada highlighted the significant education gaps between First Nations on reserves and the rest of Canada (Auditor General of Canada, 2018). In their 2018 report on Socio-economic Gaps on First Nations Reserves, it was found that the education gap had widened over 15 years and that Indigenous Services Canada was not adequately tracking or measuring the available data (Auditor General of Canada). One major issue related to inequitable education outcomes is the lack of funding for Indigenous schools by the federal government. Most funding for First Nation schools is through the Interim Funding Formula, implemented in April 2019, which is comprised of the province's formula for funding provincial schools and school boards along with additional grants from ISC to address some of the identified gaps in the provincial funding formula. However, the legacy of underfunding, compounded with unique student needs, need for infrastructure upgrades and increased staff levels means schools continue to be underfunded with schools applying for additional partnership based grants to close gaps. Time spent fundraising and advocating for greater funding can mean less time spent with students and providing needed support (Cimellaro, 2023). As long as underfunding in both education infrastructure and programming continues, students and their families will be forced to consider off-reserve options in order to gain equitable education opportunities.

In addition to education infrastructure and system shaping youth mobilities, housing instability and residential mobility experienced throughout a young person's life can potentially impact educational outcomes. In a review of literature on the direct and indirect impacts of housing affordability and educational outcomes, it was found that there is "support for the residential instability pathway as an indirect mechanism through which housing affordability struggles can influence child schooling and developmental outcomes" (Holme, 2022, p.971). Further disruptions associated with mobility can be felt more by lower income students and students of colour (ibid). In their review of challenges facing youth transitioning out of homelessness, de Pass et al. (2023) found that stable housing alone is not enough for all youth and that wrap-around supports are needed to support their health, education and employment outcomes. Youth who are precariously housed or homelessness, are more likely to experience psychological or behavioural difficulties due to stressful life events which can become a barrier to educational participation (Hyman et al., 2011, p. 255). These findings reflect themes emerging from interviews with NAN youth and the barriers they faced in regards to accessing and managing housing and their participation and completion of school.

Participants shared that they changed schools due to moves between communities and because of other disruptions or challenges they were facing. It is important to note that not every move or change in schools participants described was a disruptive or a negative experience. The most common reason for change of schools were when participants moved between communities with their families. Participants who moved between on-reserve schools (or in smaller communities) and urban or larger schools off reserve noted a change in academic expectations. Participants felt that provincial schools had higher academic expectations or more intense curriculum. For those moving from a school on a reserve to a larger school, there was a period of adjustment. For participants moving from a provincial school to a school on a reserve, they described the curriculum as less challenging. One participant returned to the city and stayed with a family member so they could complete their courses at the same academic level. The impacts of an underfunded on-reserve education system can push First Nations youth to be mobile in order to seek out better education opportunities.

> *Ok and how did you find going to school in your community after having been to school in Thunder Bay before that?*
>
> **I didn't really like it because the work here is a lot easier than it is out there.**
>
> *Yeah.*
>
> **So it's not, like, I guess I wouldn't recommend going to school here. (NAN Youth #021)**

And then, yeah. So, because I grew up in the city and went to school there, I guess my education level was higher than what they offered here. So, then in grade 10, I moved to the city so I could take academic courses that they didn't provide here. (NAN Youth #012)

And so did you do all of your schooling in the community then or did that change as you got older?

That changed when I was- when we moved into town I was going to the yeah 'cause we had the high school in 77 Ginoogaming [First Nation].

Yeah yeah.

So that's where I started off grade eight in Ginoogaming [First Nation] and then as we moved into town I was able to attend the Geraldton Composite High School.

Yeah.

And that's where I finished.

And how did that feel going well first going to Ginoogaming [First Nation] for school and then going to Geraldton for school, was it a big transition?

Yeah it was it was super different and the curriculum was much more intense (laughs). (NAN Youth #020)

So then when I moved to Porquis Junction, I was failing grade eight but it was at a different school and they're like looking at your attendance and your grades, there's no reason that you should have failed. So they actually bumped me up the next semester to high school, and then by the time we moved back to Wahgoshig [First Nation], I just jumped on the high school bus. (NAN Youth #006)

Participants also described how challenges they were facing with their personal lives impacted their ability to complete school. For youth who were struggling with their mental health or issues at home, school was often placed on the back burner in order to focus on their wellbeing. Other common reasons that contribute to disruptions or dropping out of school for First Nations youth include boredom, problems at school (bullying), desire to work or financial problems and pregnancy or childcare responsibilities (First Nations Information Governance Centre, 2016; National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health [NCCAH], 2017, p.6). For participants who did not complete high school many shared they returned to upgrade their education or planned to return after achieving a milestone such as improving their mental health.

Were you going to school at that time?

Yeah. I was at the adult ed.

Yeah, and how were you finding that?

It was a little hard. It still is for my schooling because like, I'm dealing with so many other stuff so it doesn't seem fitting to do school right now?

Yeah.

Yeah, I was struggling with school growing up, for many years I didn't actually finish high school, I ended up dropping out due to all of this stuff [hospitalization, movement between housing, shelter stay] that had happened. (NAN Youth #022)

So where were you going to school then?

Umm, when I moved to the reserve it's called MHEC [Mamawmatawa Holistic Education Centre].

Yeah.

So I graduated grade 8, from there to grade 9, and I dropped out in grade 10 I think.

Ok so you finished grade 8 on reserve, was grade 9 somewhere else then? Were you going to town to do grade 9? Is that right?

Grade 9, I started grade 9 on the reserve then I moved to Nakina with my dad, so I went to Geraldton Composite High School, which is a 45 minute drive from Nakina. (NAN Youth #019)

No. I worked a lot when I was younger so I never graduated high school.

Okay so you're finishing your high school stuff.

Yeah.

[...]

My teachers were really great.

Were they? Yeah?

Yeah.

How would you say you relied on teachers at that time? What kind of supports would they provide you?

Just helping me get to school cause I wasn't really a great student, just helping me stay in class, just keeping my marks up. But then I started- and couldn't do it.

Sorry, could you say that again?

But then I started working and kind of just couldn't keep up with work and school.

Yeah. What age would you say you started working?

I wanna say 15.

And why did you think you needed to do that?

It was a lot of money for a teenager. (NAN Youth #011)

Participants had a variety of experiences with boarding homes or school residences during high school. Some participants were placed in boarding homes with strangers while others were able to rely on social networks and stay with family or close friends. Others stayed in multiple boarding houses over a school year or changed with each school year. The varying experiences reveal the leap of faith or risk youth have to take when moving away from home for school. Those that are able to rely on friends and family may have an easier transition because of existing relationships and trust with their boarding guardians. Participants who lived with unfamiliar boarding parents shared both positive and negative experiences. There were boarding parents who went above and beyond then just providing a house while other students were exposed to racism or substance misuse. Negative instances often caused a change of home for reasons of safety but also contributed to negative behaviours.

A day before I came out to Thunder Bay, I was still trying to find a home. So, I messaged my basketball coach [coach's name]. Individually, I didn't have like any of the NNEC [Northern Nishnawbe Education Council] workers call him, and I asked him if I will be able- or if he will have a place to stay with me until my brother got an apartment. But my brother wasn't able to get an apartment, so I told him before I came out, and he agreed, his son [son's name], we have the same name, he was instantly, hopped on top of that. He was going to move out of his room, he will sleep in the garage if he had to. So yeah, he's staying in a room with his sister, which I really appreciate because, it makes me a little emotional to think about that they gave me this room to focus on my education. (NAN Youth #009)

What was the boarding house like?

It was really good, really good. Really good house boarding mother or foster mother, I'm not too sure. But she was good. She would give us rides and everything, wherever we needed to go.

Did you have your own room or share with some people or?

I had my own room, yeah. (NAN Youth #008)

I didn't get put into a great first home, but I was put there with one of my friends from Cat Lake and I grew up with her, so we were lucky enough to be roommates and we had a whole basement to ourselves. But my mom [crosstalk], yeah, my mom did eventually pulling me out of the house, because like the boarding parents eventually did burst on my roommate and she did eventually pull racism which my mom didn't like. So she pulled me out right away. And I was eventually moved into a Native home.

[...]

[In the second boarding house] The younger, the boarding parents daughter that she lived with was pretty careless at times. Like she would bring alcohol around. And at that time, I was pretty reckless too, so I would partake in it. She did tell me though at the time like she- like you know what, if we're gonna do it, it might as well be here instead of out there. And I was like, okay, well that's kind of still a bad reason but- still a bad thing but okay. (NAN Youth #015)

And did you like living in Sioux Lookout?

At first I did. (laughing)

Okay. What does that mean? What happened after at first?

Alcohol. (laughing)

Okay.

So I dropped out and went back home. (...) Not too long after that.

In the first year that- yeah.

Yeah. (NAN Youth #017)

I went to Thunder Bay one semester for high school

Yeah

I stayed in maybe 2 or 3 homes there, in rooms. (NAN Youth #001)

Participants who changed boarding houses either through a parent or guardian contacting NNEC or going to NNEC office to speak to a worker and complete paperwork. Often this was done on the participant's own initiative in order to find a preferred boarding situation, ensure they were located near to their school or staying with someone within their social network.

Do you remember how that happened [change of boarding homes]? Like did you have to request that, did you- how did you do that?

Yeah. I requested it. And I asked my best friend's dad if it's okay and he said I have to be under NNEC [Northern Nishnawbe Education Council] so he can get monthly allowances or whatever.

How did you make the request?

I think they have a little office in there. So, I talked to one of the workers. I forgot what they're called. [xxxx] workers, I think. I'm not too sure, but I talked to one of them, and they would help me set it up.

Okay. So, it was just like you spoke to them, you spoke to the dad. Some paperwork probably happened and then it was -.

Yup.

Okay. Great, so, how long did you live at the second place?

I think I was there for a year, I believe.

Okay, so a little while.

Yeah.

Okay. Was that until you finished high school then?

Yeah, yeah. (NAN Youth #008)

For students attending schools in either urban/rural areas or are boarding in a city to attend school, there are an additional set of challenges Indigenous students may face then some of their peers. Discrimination, racism and bullying impact student wellbeing and consequently their studies. Experiences of bullying from other students were shared by participants who sometimes felt they could not rely on teachers for support. In some cases, participants shared that other adult figures, including education professionals, were the sources of discrimination and racism. Violence and bullying increases the likelihood of students dropping or being pushed out (Goodman et al., 2019 p. 34; NCCAH, 2017, p.3). Participants described pushing through and having to learn to deal with racism and bullying as young students.

It was very scary because I endured a lot of racism, I was bullied a lot because of my skin colour, a lot of like teachers and my other friends' parents would have like racial slurs and would like call me Pocahontas and like it was just really uncomfortable. (NAN Youth #018)

But they get a bad rap. So it's just, I don't know, I remember being called a dirty Indian by a girl because she saw the apartment I lived in. It was a small apartment. And it was white but, because it was white you could see the stains and the dinge on the outside. So there was like brown marks on the front of the white building so it looked dirty and I actually lived right across from my elementary school, like across the street, so if I was in class I could see my house and I would watch my parents leave the house or whatever. But because of that, that subjected me to more bullying, because it was like 'Oh, you're Native and you're from the reserve and you live in that building across the street that's dirty' (laughing).

Yeah, yeah that's pretty tough when you're that young too, it's hard to (...) you know you don't really have the tools yet on how to deal with that always.

No, and it was just super upsetting but, I don't

know. It gives me a different lens of viewing things. I'm definitely more paranoid than others around me. But I also think I'm a little more street smart (laughing). A Little more cautious. I am able to like, kind of like, I don't know another word for this but like vibe check people. Get their vibes and see if they're going to hurt me or not. (NAN Youth #004)

From students, they would sometimes, I guess, you know, do like, the Indian calls, what they would call. You know do the mouth, the hitting the mouth thing. Or say don't scalp me, I remember one kid saying that to me. But it wasn't often, it was just like a once in a time thing. (NAN Youth #024)

Participants also shared the important role adults within the school system did play in their lives. Trusted adults or people participants felt a form of safety were positive influences or reliable adults during difficult periods. In particular, the role of coaches for school sports had a positive impact on students. Participants shared that coaches and teachers supported their extracurricular activities, driving hundreds of kilometres to practices, games and tournaments. Sports programs have been shown to improve support networks for urban Indigenous youth (Goodman et al., 2019, p. 40). As mentioned above, another participant shared that when their boarding situation fell through at the last minute, it was their coach who offered a space within their home for them. The participant was able to rely on the network they developed through school sports to help secure their housing for the school term.

Yeah, it was awesome. I was captain of the volleyball team. I started playing in grade 10 and then I did a victory lap at [High School in Thunder Bay]. So yeah, it was awesome. I took the team to OFSAA [Ontario Federation of School Athletic Associations] twice. My coach was awesome. He was a really good coach. He recorded me and everything and sent them out to different coaches. So, I went to play college volleyball. (NAN Youth #008)

My teacher [teacher's 1 name], she and [teacher's 2 name], those two would drive me to every practice, every game, wherever we needed to go to.

Oh wow.

Because the games weren't only in Ignace.

Right. It would've been all over.

Yeah, it would be like places like Fort Francis, Sioux Lookout, Dryden, Kenora, and Atikokan.

Yeah. Kind of like the whole Northwest.

Yeah.

Wow.

So, I'm really grateful and appreciative for those two putting in the effort for me to just to attend sports like that.

[...]

Yeah, and that was every year [elementary school sports tournament]. It is what I looked forward to. And if I was being honest, sports is what kept me in school.

Right. Yeah, I think that's the impression I got from the story you were telling is that- I mean the sports and also the people associated with the sports is really what made the difference for you. Is that fair to say?

Yeah, I can agree on that. (NAN Youth #009)

Participants' experiences demonstrate both the importance of having access to supportive teachers and coaches but also how educators may have to go beyond their duties to help fill the gaps within the education system for students living in rural and small urban areas or coming to school from remote reserves. This reliance on the exceptional contributions of education-system employees is not a reliable or sustainable substitute for a system which provides safe and secure housing and support for youth.

There was one teacher, my french teacher, I was friends with her son, so I'd go over to her house every now and then, sometimes I'd stay the weekend, sometimes they'd stay the weekend at my place. But other than that the principal did nothing, the other teachers practically did nothing at all [about the bullying]. (NAN Youth #007)

> **Yeah. And then my teacher ended up visiting me in the hospital too [after a suicide attempt] and offered like, if I was going into foster care, that I was allowed to stay with her and it didn't end up happening, but she was a safe person, too. (NAN Youth #027)**

Having access to a cultural safe place and mentors within the education system is also important both for fostering trusting relationships and student success (NCCAH, 2017, p.3). For participants who grew up in rural or urban areas, they may have been one of a handful of Indigenous students. While having reliable and supportive non-Indigenous teachers or coaches was an important part of some participants' educational experience, for some needing greater understanding and having access to an Indigenous mentor within the school system would have been important for them as well. For other participants, being one of a few or only Indigenous students contributed to feelings of isolation from non-Indigenous peers. Part of the feelings of isolation stemmed from not being able to relate or fully share their own experiences with their peers.

> **Oh, I think, the biggest reason for me, this the reason why I'm getting into the education system. A lot of the times in high school I didn't feel safe - not that I didn't feel safe - I didn't feel understood when I talked about a lot of the issues. For instance, being an off rez kid. I could talk to [Teacher's Name] about that and she tried her best to understand it but she couldn't get what it is like cause she was not Indigenous so I didn't have anyone in my high school who was brown or who was Native. So I think having those people in the education system who can relate to us and say 'Yeah [Participant], I understand what it's like to walk in two worlds, to feel like when you go to the reservation you get made fun of because your too white and when you go to the school off rez you get made fun of because your too brown', right? Like what world do I walk in? You get made fun of no matter what world you're in. So its, 'Ok, so what do I do?' and no one really understands that unless you walk in that world. So thats my big thing that I want to see happen is just to see Indigenous people in our education system. And to just look at our youth and say 'Yeah, I understand you.' I think that's what I want to see. (NAN Youth #013)**

> **It was a little, it was a little hard, honestly, because I knew that my other classmates wouldn't have to go home to such a scene or like they wouldn't have to deal with these things on the weekend. And just like regular, in class, at school, I felt a little, kind of like a little isolated. Because there wasn't many Native kids there. And I kind of get picked on a lot sometimes. It wasn't really the best but you just kinda gotta get through it. (NAN Youth #022)**

> **The whole time I lived in Thunder Bay all the- like the school was always with like there wasn't much Natives there so, it was kinda felt like just not included I guess with all the other people because like they were their friends with each other and there would just be a couple of us Natives there (laughing). (NAN Youth #019)**

> **Yeah, it was good, I felt, you know I was around a bunch of other Native kids [at Matawa Education and Care Centre]. So I didn't feel as left out, because you know the previous schools were Catholic schools and they were filled with non-Native kids so I didn't feel so alone in my identity. (NAN Youth #024)**

For other participants, accessing post-secondary education provided an opportunity to reconnect with their culture, access safe and supportive spaces on campus or groups in the wider community. The importance of safe community spaces in post-secondary education highlights a greater need for youth to have access as well. Youth should not have to access higher education or move away from their home communities to find and experience safety or connection.

> **University really helped me reconnect with my culture and have an understanding of like, intergenerational trauma and realizing that like, I'm a granddaughter of a survivor and a daughter of a Sixties Scoop survivor. And that's kind of when I wanted to learn more about Wahgoshig and our people so, when I was living in London I ended up reconnecting with one of my aunts. (NAN Youth #027)**

Because my school's only got like seven or eight residences. But yeah, I think it's my [xxxxxx] house, like I feel like they need a house for Native students. I think that would be kind of cool like, having houses available instead of Native students having to try and go through finding apartments and stuff -

[...]

And I met, just yeah, so I found so much community at school and I met so many friends and, yeah, no I love Western [University]. Just great community. And yeah, I have lots of friends here, especially from the neighboring communities because there's three reserves that kind of surround London. So I've been really lucky just to find community in London. And then even in Thunder Bay now I'm on, I work with Nishnawbe Aski [Nation] and I'm on their youth council. And I feel really close with the Anishnaabe community there in Thunder Bay too. And yeah, so just finding, finding safe spaces and it's been... yeah it's nice. I love London. (laughing) (NAN Youth #005)

Access to post-secondary education and financial supports also influenced or impacted youth's housing circumstances including where they attend or how they are housed. The Post-Secondary Student Support Program administered by ISC acknowledges that not every applicant will receive funding (Canadian Federation of Students-Ontario, 2021). Some youth may receive support through their Band, but must budget accordingly. One participant described the process as strategic, comparing the cost of residence and meals with different boarding options.

So I chose Sault College, I remember the colleges that I applied to was all over Ontario. But, strategically I chose Sault College because of the accommodations. I remember that support that I was getting from my community to attend college was 1000 bucks a month. And that covered everything, that was your living, that was your food that was everything, you had to make it work. And if I was to stay in dorms it would be the same thing, but they would cover my food and my shelter, but I would really have no money left. Right? So the choice I was left with was staying in the dorm, my accommodations, everything is covered, have no money or find someone that I know, to kinda room and board with to have some money left for myself-

Bring down those costs.

Yeah. So I made the choice to stay with my uncle and his spouse. During the time that I was attending Sault College. It was in a rough neighbourhood. (NAN Youth #023)

Accessing education can both require students to be mobile to secure accommodation and impact an individual's housing trajectory. Barriers youth experience in accessing and completing education need to be addressed both on and off reserve. The provision of adequate on-reserve housing and infrastructure and dedicated student housing options for students outside of their communities need to be improved as part of addressing educational outcomes and undesired youth mobility.

HEALTHCARE

The provision of healthcare services on reserves in Canada remains uniquely under the jurisdiction of the federal government. Nearly all healthcare services– including those delivered in hospitals, primary care facilities and in community – in Canada are delivered by provincial and territorial agencies and supported by the Canada Health Transfer. Provincial and territorial service provision must maintain a minimum level of service provision that is outlined by the Canada Health Act; however, services often far exceed these minimums (Dextrase et al., 2023). The direct delivery of healthcare services by the federal government on reserves often means a different, and reduced, level of service being available than from individuals living off reserve. In addition, NAN communities have limited access to healthcare services and service providers who are primarily clustered in service centres. The result is a system which can disadvantage NAN members in three overlapping ways, based on: their identity, their living on a reserve and their living distance from service centres.

As a result of the above mentioned disadvantages, NAN members requiring long-term, advanced or acute healthcare services are often forced to relocate away from their home communities and into service centres. This relocation, ranging from temporary to permanent, requires a place to stay in an often unfamiliar environment. For those accessing out-patient healthcare services including specialist appointments, day surgeries or other short-term care the First Nations and Inuit Health Branch (FNIHB) covers required accommodations through its Non-Insured Health Benefit program. These stays, arranged by local health authorities in conjunction with FNIHB are often arranged with specialized medical hostels; or when these are over capacity, as is often the case, local hotels. However, for longer-term and specialized healthcare needs permanent relocation is often the only solution.

In addition to systemic barriers in accessing health services, NAN youth also face a variety of inequitable health outcomes. In particular, the mental health challenges faced by Indigenous youth. Data and health research have shown that Indigenous young people "experience higher rates [of] mental health concerns and more limited access to appropriate care and resources when compared with their settler Canadian counterparts" (Carrier et al., 2022, p. 2). While provincial and federal services may be organized into defined geographies, Indigenous youth mobilities are not defined by the same boundaries. Indigenous youth are likely to face additional barriers to accessing health care and receiving support "due to factors such as racism and discrimination, the ongoing effects of colonialism, remote geographical locations, lack of trauma-informed care, lack of trust with the healthcare system and/or negative historical impact on care seeking behaviours, and cultural discontinuity." (Weerasinghe et al., 2023, p.35). The barriers youth face in accessing healthcare can in part be understood by where and how much of resources such as services and infrastructure are mobilized or allocated.

It is also important to understand the relationship between health and housing. Housing is a social determinant of health. The environment of a home can impact the physical and mental health of its occupant (Shaw, 2004). Homes in need of repair or renovation can create unsafe living conditions with long term effects. For example, the indoor air quality and pervasive mould growth common across the north on reserves, has been found to negatively impact infants' and young childrens' respiratory health (Kovesi et al., 2022). The shortage of on-reserve housing means individuals and families must often choose between remaining in these unhealthy conditions, leaving their community in order to secure healthy housing or sharing a home with another family. Family doubling, in turn, can have its own implications on individual wellbeing. For youth, a lack of privacy and access to a personal space to decompress, has been described as negatively impacting mental health. For individuals who leave crowded home conditions, their options for return may be limited or will require them to share bedroom space, sleep on couches or wherever space

is available (NAN & TDL, 2022b). Housing waitlists in community often prioritize larger families in need, leaving single adults and youth without many options. Living through short or long periods of housing instability and insecurity can negatively impact youth wellbeing.

In their work with Indigenous youth in Winnipeg, Manitoba Goodman et al.(2019) share that youth identified residential mobility as weakening supportive networks (Goodman et al., 2019, p.36) which posed a challenge for finding and maintaining positive relationships. Health research has highlighted the role of community, family and culture as important protective factors for mental wellness (Carrier et al., 2022, p. 2). Youth experiencing housing instability and high rates of residential mobility may experience more challenges navigating services when they do not have reliable access to their social networks or individuals they can trust or rely on.

During interviews, youth shared how access to healthcare impacted their wellbeing at various points in their life. Issues and challenges around mental health and accessing supports was a common theme in the interviews. Other health-related issues that emerged included accessing treatment centres, pregnancy/natal care and time spent in medical hostels. Below we highlight how youth housing journeys have been impacted by the healthcare system and understand how inequitable access to healthcare has significant impacts on mobility. In particular, we examine a range of forced mobilities caused by the healthcare system and the associated inappropriate housing outcomes.

Mental Healthcare and Treatment

Greater support for Indigenous youth mental health is critical. Studies and surveys have shown that Indigenous youth are more likely to be diagnosed with a mood disorder (1 in 5), an anxiety disorder (nearly 1 in 4) and five to seven times more likely to experience depression and suicide than non-Indigenous youth (Weerasinghe et al., 2023, p.34). During interviews, youth shared their experiences with their mental health, exposure to and attempts of suicide and the counselling or treatment they received. Participants accessed mental health services at various points of their life through a variety of channels including social worker referral, court order, hospitalization, on their own initiative and/or as part of another service.

For some of the youth interviewed, accessing services was through another institution such as addictions treatment, stay at an emergency shelter or correctional services. Services may have been accessed by choice or by other decision making authorities. Participants shared that they had used or were currently receiving counselling by choice, searching for counselling services after ageing out of care and living independently or as required through another institution. In some cases, accessing these services or higher levels of care required traveling to an in-person treatment facility outside of their home community.

> **I applied during the time of fall 2018. Because I wanted help and they got- I got the call to go on in February but I was working at that time so I went in April.**
>
> **[...]**
>
> *How did you know about the program?*
>
> **The NNADAP [National Native Alcohol and Drug Abuse Program] worker in our community**
>
> *So you had been seeing the worker sometimes maybe?*
>
> **Yeah**
>
> *Like you had said that maybe you wanted to get help or something?*
>
> **Yup.**
>
> *And then they mentioned the program. Did they get you the forms or did you go online and get them or how did you? Do you remember?*
>
> **They got me the forms and then I filled it out [and] I gave it to them to send out.**
>
> *And the worker was a community member? Or someone from outside?*
>
> **A community member (NAN Youth #001)**

Attending short term treatment for addictions or counselling away from support networks or in an unfamiliar place can be a difficult but necessary step for individuals needing higher levels of care. Even when a person recognizes the need for additional support, applying for off-reserve treatment programs or away from their families is a choice that can feel scary. The participant shared that even though the initial few days of entering treatment were difficult they were able to build relationships with other patients and are still in touch to provide support to one another.

And, did you get along with people there? What was it like?

It was scary at first. I was just crying when I got there.

Like scary to be away from home?

Yeah, and to just finally, finally get some help after so many years being alone. I just cried for like the whole weekend when I got there. Plus, I wasn't talking with my family because they didn't like what I did before I left.

[...]

... What was it like then staying there for the four weeks. In a shared space with I guess someone you didn't know.

Well, I was used to it right, I went to high school. It was pretty exciting to meet some new people and like the fact that we were all there for the same reason. We all still stay in touch now.

Oh, really?

We met there, yeah.

That's nice.

We encourage each other still, and all of that. (NAN Youth #001)

For another participant who did not have trust in the healthcare system and felt they had fallen through the cracks, working through their substance abuse issues was done largely on their own. As they struggled through this period, their housing situation was precarious and they were able to rely on other family members and friends to couch surf.

Ok. And then you just kind of, you just kind of became clean on your own? with some friends?

No, I was on my own, yeah.

That's pretty difficult, and did you change your living situation at any point in there? Were you living with your dad the whole time through, you know, before using, using and then after using?

While I was using, I got kicked out of the house a couple times. So I went to live with my grandma. Who was my other safe person but it was my stepmom that kicked me out of the house. Both times.

And were you like, crashing at friends' places a bunch at that period as well, like, were you kind of in and out at that time or were you pretty safe, yeah?

I was, I was in and out. Like, I was always with my friends. There was a time when I literally had to pack up my stuff and then I was like, thought that I was going to live on the street so I had to couch surf every night. (NAN Youth #027)

Receiving services without addressing root causes or having a wider variety of supports can lead to cycling between receiving help and returning to sources of distress or falling back into negative patterns. This is especially true for minors who generally have less agency over their lives than adults. Through interviews this became particularly evident with youth who struggled with suicidal ideation or suicide attempts. For one participant, going into treatment operated as a stop gap measure for a time when there were no other housing or care options available to them after hospitalization for a suicide attempt as a minor. Another participant shared that after multiple attempts of suicide within one year and hospitalization they refused to go back home and would only be discharged with a safety plan. Youth struggling with their mental health, ideating or attempting suicide need a wider net of supports in order to reach them and provide them the care they need. Without addressing the systemic and contextual factors which lead youth to acute service provision only temporary solutions can be administered.

Yeah. I had to, I got medivaced out, then, they tried to place me in care again, but there was no place I could go so they just sent me to treatment instead. Yeah. So I went to Fort Frances. At first I didn't like it, because it was in the middle of nowhere, in the bush. I was really homesick but after a while I didn't mind it.

[...]

... ***And where did you go next, when you left Fort Frances?***

I went back home to Kingfisher.

Were you staying at your parents?

Yeah, I didn't have anywhere else but my parents. (laughing). (NAN Youth #017)

And yeah, so, it was around the age of fourteen, I went into a mental hospital [after another suicide attempt] here in Thunder Bay, due to housing, my mother's housing and just a bunch of other complications. So I ended up moving out, during that time that I was in the mental hospital. Because I refused to go back to my mother's house and the only way that I was going to get discharged was if I had a safety plan. And that was to go live with my Auntie. My mom's sister. So that took place and I lived with her for just over a year.

[...]

And it is very hard to get out of that cycle, especially when you don't have anywhere else to go like, no home, no safe spot. So like, you're kind of stuck there with nowhere to go so, um, it took me quite a long time to get up and find a safe place to go other than my mom's or anywhere else. (NAN Youth #022)

Wellbeing

Throughout interviews youth spoke about their wellbeing and mental health, linking some of these discussions with their housing journeys. Wellbeing includes the mental, physical, spiritual and emotional parts of an individual. For youth who were hyper mobile or experienced housing instability throughout their early years, accessing predictable and affordable housing as young adults provided an important sense of stability. Having control over one's life, including the ability to choose where to live and who to live with, can contribute to individual wellbeing.

That's what I'm working for, like my goal has always been to make stability for myself in some way. And that felt out of reach for so long. [on buying a house with partner]. (NAN Youth #026)

Routine. What makes me feel at home is having a routine. Stability I guess, when you know what you're expecting. Does that sound ok? (NAN Youth #024)

Okay. How do you find this experience [accessing social housing]? I mean you've stayed a while so...

I love it! It's the only stability I've had since forever.

Right so this feels like home for you, you would say?

Yeah. (NAN Youth #011)

The chance to focus and take care of one's self can require space, privacy and time. Living in crowded homes, moving frequently or experiencing housing precarity or having to take on additional responsibilities within the family can be a barrier for youth to focus on themselves, process emotions, take care of their health and work on their own personal growth.

So after we relocated here in Sault Ste Marie with my aunt, I did a lot of work on my mental health. I did a lot of piecing myself back together and focusing on healing and prioritizing my wellbeing. And after caring for other people for so long, especially with my grandmother, her dementia. It kinda became unfamiliar to me putting myself first. And having that space after my grandma was in long-term care and whatnot, really allowed myself that time to teach myself again. To work on myself. Yeah.

Ok. So would you describe that as kind of a positive place then, like, a place of transition, or a place of healing for you?

Mmm, yeah that's exactly how I'd describe it. (NAN Youth #023)

Participants shared that focusing on their mental health and accessing services was an ongoing process. Many of the participants shared that they were doing the work to improve their mental wellbeing and lives but that this work can be complicated and requires supports and resources. For youth with or without previous connections to support services, barriers need to be reduced so they can access care that is appropriate for them.

> **Umm, I started dealing with my mental health. I think eighteen years old, I found there's this counsellor I had went to before, when I was young and I really liked her counselling technique and her personality and I found her again through my school. She ended up working with my school as a counsellor and so that's when I started to, I guess, filter out my emotions like, figure out how I'm feeling, what I'm dealing with and talk about my experiences in trauma and stuff.**
>
> ***Yeah. And that's something that you chose to do?***
>
> **The counselling?**
>
> ***Yeah.***
>
> **Yeah. (NAN Youth #024)**

> ***And are you accessing any services now for mental health or for anything like that?***
>
> **I'm getting back into it, yeah. Back into counseling.**
>
> ***And would you say that's something you want to be part of your future?***
>
> **Yeah.**
>
> ***And is that something that you have chosen to do, like, you sought out a counselor, you advocated for yourself or you referred yourself?***
>
> **Yeah, I have taken it upon myself to search for an adult counselor because I didn't have one when I was younger, in my youth. So yeah, I actually ended up going to my previous counselor to get a referral and help for adult services.**
>
> ***But you chose to do that?***
>
> **Yeah. (NAN Youth #022)**

Pregnancy

Participants shared experiences of being pregnant while living in northern rural and remote areas. Participants who lived in communities without hospitals were required to travel, often to Sioux Lookout, in order to give birth. Pregnancy related mobility is often referred to as mandatory birth evacuation. Forced evacuation is considered to undermine and disrupt Indigenous birth practices and networks of support (National Aboriginal Council of Midwives [NACM], n.d.). The Nihtâwikiwin Project, led by Alyssa Gagnon an Indigenous midwife, interviews Mushkegowuk Elders to learn the stories of their birth and traditional birth knowledge. In an interview with CBC, Gagnon said "one thing that stood out interviewing Cree elders in Ontario's far north was how happy and healthy they were as children, growing up on the land" (CBC News, 2023). In their position statement on blanket evacuations, NACM stated that, "Giving birth in community is safe; communities under the care of a community midwifery program with careful risk screening can have better health outcomes than communities which have a blanket evacuation policy." (n.d., p.1). Access to Indigenous midwives and doulas who can provide culturally appropriate care and support through all phases of pregnancy are not equally available across the north.

Participants shared a range of experiences during their pregnancy and post-partum period when they were accessing health services or housing. A participant shared their experience of going through a miscarriage and driving from Round [North Caribou] Lake to Sioux Lookout for medical tests. While waiting for the results of their test the participant stayed at a medical hostel.

> **I rented a room off her and then I ended up (...) My sister came to pick me up in Kenora so I went, I went home to go visit for a while. It was a surprise, I surprised everybody by coming, because I wasn't home for like half a year already because I was in treatment and then in Clarissa Manor. And of course I was pregnant, I was still pregnant. And then I came home and visited. And then I started to bleed, I drove out August 6 with my nephew, we went to**

Sioux Lookout. And I didn't find out about the miscarriage until like a week later, because I was still bleeding and that's when they confirmed it. (NAN Youth #001)

Later, this participant shared that during their following pregnancy they again faced challenges and were medevaced alone over a month prior to giving birth. During this time non-insured health benefits covered the cost of the participant's partner to travel after she arrived in Sioux Lookout. The experience shared by the participant demonstrates the challenges Indigenous people face during pregnancy in remote or distant areas, the need to travel and time spent away from home and support networks.

Another participant shared how they and their mother searched for permanent, stable housing after learning of her pregnancy. With the help of her mother, they were both able to stay at Beendigen and access their support to bridge their housing needs. The participant shared that they searched and contacted rental ads through various online platforms and were added to the Native Housing Waitlist. They were unable to find housing before the participant's due date and moved into a motel while on the housing waitlist.

And we [participant and her mother] were at Beendigen, there's only like a certain amount of time you can stay. And so we were told that we would have to leave soon. And thankfully though we found the Matawa [First Nations Management] program there and so they bought a motel room for us at [Motel].

At [Motel], ok. And so you moved back to [Motel], you had stayed there before? And, and then you had your baby the next day.

Basically, yeah.

Or, or two days later or whatever.

It was like, maybe less than 48 hours after leaving Beendigen is when I had her.

Wow. Ok. And how were you feeling then?

I was feeling, mmm, in between about it because, I'm going to be taking my baby to a motel room. I thought I would be in a house already and like have like a crib and like a nursery but it was- it was good, at least we had a roof over our heads because it was winter time too (laughs).

Right, right, so how long did you stay at [Motel] then?

Six months. (NAN Youth #024)

Through the Matawa First Nations Management program the participant had a family support worker who would check in weekly while staying at the motel. The participant described the support worker as a positive experience during a time when she was dealing with a range of postpartum emotions, anxiety around housing as well as repressed feelings and depression. Family services that supported the participant during this time were local and mobile, serving the participant where they were staying.

Another participant shared that they accessed a shelter program while pregnant and applied for housing through the advice of their foster parent. The participant was able to get a one-bedroom unit at June Steve Lendrum (JSL) Apartment Building, the single mother's housing in Thunder Bay. As a requirement for maintaining a lease at JSL, the participant shared they had to attend four hours of classes per week and were not allowed to have visitors or guests at the shelter for safety reasons. The participant shared that at times it was lonely but she was able to visit family and friends in Thunder Bay.

And then when you got into the mothers' building, what was that like?

They have a lot of resources. They have a Dilico office on their main floor, so they really helped me out.

What was your room like there?

I only had a one bedroom apartment. So I had to give it to the kid, my daughter, the bedroom and I had to sleep on the couch. Cause of Dilico regulations.

Right, yes. So was that the first place your daughter lived?

Yes.

And how long did you stay there?

About a year, and then- well a couple months in the one bedroom and then I applied for the two bedroom in that same building. So I stayed in the two bedroom- so I lived there for a year and a half all together. (NAN Youth #011)

Medical Boarding Homes

When nursing stations, rural or small town clinics or hospitals cannot provide the required level of service needed, individuals must travel to centres with larger healthcare facilities. With approval through Non-Insured Health Benefits patients stay in authorized medical boarding homes or other temporary accommodations including hotels for a predetermined amount of time (Indigenous Services Canada, 2019b). Individuals may also choose to stay with friends or family where they may receive a stipend for their time away from home. Medical boarding homes can often provide more culturally sensitive lodging but face challenges in their operations (Law, 2023), meaning increasingly those requiring medical attention are forced to other accommodations which can feel precarious or lead to precarious situations.

Yea, but I would sometimes come to my aunts because I had an accident when I was 15, I had to go to Winnipeg. I'm a burn survivor.

Oh okay.

Yea so, from like 16, I kept going back and forth from like 12 till I had my kid from my aunts and my foster moms.

Where's your aunt? Sorry.

She's in Thunder Bay, well she was in Thunder Bay.

Okay. (...) And that's because you needed the hospital in Thunder Bay?

Yeah. The hospital in Thunder Bay. I had to be there like every day and the hospital in Fort Frances couldn't meet my needs.

So Thunder Bay kind of had to become home is that right?

Yeah. (NAN Youth #011)

Models of Care

Research on Indigenous health and youth mental health point to several issues that were shared by participants. Fragmentation of the healthcare system, challenges transitioning between youth and adult care and other barriers such as racism and discrimination, geographical locations, and lack of culturally appropriate care (Weerasinghe et al., 2023; Thorburn et al., 2023; Toombs et al., 2021). A wider variety of healthcare options need to be available on and off reserves. As interviews with both youth and service providers highlighted, healthcare delivered in silos from other supportive services such as housing or education can hinder the full effectiveness of some services because wider issues are not addressed.

I've been in meetings with NAN, with Ovide Mercredi in meetings, leading the healthcare transformations. And people like to think it's a sequential approach. It's not. You need the housing support, you need the health supports in place, you need education. It's all at once. If it's not all at once, every single piece that is invested in is at risk. That's good money after bad.

[...]

No, it's like I said, it's not the capital we need. It's the service money. It's mental health, addiction workers, it's culturally appropriate land-based therapy programs. That's absolutely what we need. (Service Provider #001)

...Because it's so- so trying to change that mindset that mental health is a negative stigma where really we need to help individuals, embrace our cultural components, embrace what's yours is really there. So again, as much as it is having counselling available, sometimes it's about location, and where the home's gonna be. And what supports that are free, if you will, you know a lake is free. You know that nature and healing that comes about it, and the sun is free. The sun comes up everyday and gives us warmth, and sometimes we forget about that. ...

[...]

> And back you know, when I was young, nobody was dying at 30, no one was dying at 20, no one was dying at 40, that young, as a result of overdoses and now it seems to be the norm and so, if we can provide housing ...and support for individuals, and hope for those individuals, through that- those types of mechanisms. In addition to mental health and addictions support, that's the only way we can do it. But, I think a lot of those 49 Chiefs are probably, you know, I'm not trying to put on a dollar, amount on a person's death, but every funeral costs $10,000, $15,000 dollars, we could've- at least we could've sent individuals for treatment or bought a house. That's what's hard to tell our governments. We're spending so much dollars burying individuals, and we should be investing into their- supporting those individuals instead. That's just my message in the end is to- just seeing too many young people, seems to be a common trend and just seems to be a normal trend now and I'm not happy with it. (Service Provider #004)

A wider range models of care that support youth experiences and understandings of wellness as well as Indigenous models of care need to be supported to help address health inequity. Youth understand holistic forms of healthcare and the relationship between their wellbeing, connections with land and their wider environments including their housing. It is important to recognize that there are many paths both 'formal' and 'informal' to support individual wellbeing and that youth should be able to access the path or paths that are right for them.

> ... I was able to go to the park and sit by rapids. There was a rapids in the park and just on hills and it was nice to just go on morning walks. (NAN Youth #015)

> Trees. I like being by the bush. Right now, my current home, I can't get into the bush and I absolutely hate it. For me, I like to be able to get my medicines, be able to go by the water, being able when I get out of class, just being able to go take a deep breath of fresh air. (NAN Youth #013)

> And another thing that I feel like it would be more [boarding] home friendly is, let's see, I'm trying to think here, is more land based things around the household? Like, coming out from the North, you can go outside, there's a big forest already with you, you can sit by the lake, make a fire so, I feel like, trying to introduce them to either local parks or place where they can have a fire, go to a lake, or anything like that because for me the lake is what really helped me with my emotional state and my mental [state]. (NAN Youth #009)

JUSTICE SYSTEM

Two participants described their experiences with the justice system and incarceration or house arrest and probation. For one participant, they felt unfairly dealt with by being tried as an adult while the incident occurred as a minor. While under house arrest, the participant stayed with a family member and had a difficult experience during that time. After their house arrest ended they immediately sought another housing option but ultimately spent time in transitional housing while trying to find a longer term, stable solution. For the second participant, their conviction and period of incarceration occurred after a self-destructive period stemming from a series of events including housing instability, intimate partner violence, substance abuse and a mental health crisis while living in a rural area. During their period of incarceration they were able to access the support they needed for their healing journey. As part of their parole they were able to return to their community and access wider family and community support.

> *Yeah and what was that like, where was your head at, what were you thinking at that time?*
>
> **I just reflected a lot about my past. And there was actually a lot of resources over there, there was a lot helpful people. There was counselors and stuff like that. I actually- there was people from the city who would come to the jail to teach us stuff like meditation and stuff like that.**
>
> *Yeah. And so were there- what of those services would you say you were using regularly? Were you getting regular counseling at that time?*
>
> **The ladies that were also in there with me were the ones I talked mostly to and the guards. I feel like talking to the guards a lot helped. Because like talking to the guards there was really no pressure about talking to them because like with counselors there's kind of like a little bit of pressure I guess.**
>
> *Were there other services like more formal services that you were accessing? Were you going to those meditation classes were you going to anything like that?*
>
> **I still meditate to this day. That was really helpful with breathing and stuff like that. I started taking antidepressants and that's helped a lot I think.**
>
> **[...]**
>
> *Was that the first time that you had ever been prescribed medication for depression?*
>
> **Yeah, I've never been on any kinds of medication before.**
>
> *Had you ever brought that concern to a doctor before, were you seeing a doctor at all?*
>
> **No.**
>
> *Yeah, ok. So that experience opened up some things for you then like medication, meditation, some kind of mental health treatment, is that right?*
>
> **Yeah**
>
> *And those are things that you continue to follow up with now?*
>
> **Yeah and lots of self care. I never did any self care before. But since I went in there (...)**
>
> *Would you say that self care is kind of a regular part of your routine now?*
>
> **Yeah. (NAN Youth #021)**

Both cases highlight the issues young Indigenous people can face due to gaps or fragmented services, lack of culturally appropriate care, disconnection or displacement from community and anti-Indigenous discrimination. In 2016-2017, Indigenous youth (12 to 17 years) were overrepresented in the criminal justice system, accounting for 46% admissions to correctional services while comprising only 8% of the youth population in Canada (Department of Justice Canada 2018a as cited in Clark, 2019, p.11). As Finlay et al. (2019) write in their report on youth with experience in both CFS and justice systems or "cross over youth":

> Understanding the impact of colonization and collective trauma in the lives of the Indigenous Peoples leads to the acknowledgement of how it directly contributes to the overrepresentation of Indigenous children and youth within the child welfare and youth justice systems. Furthermore, oppression, colonialism and anti-Native racism

> continue to disadvantage Indigenous young people both informally and formally through our institutions (Corrado et al., 2014). (p.148)

Research has shown how both education and CFS systems can become a pipeline to prison for Indigenous youth. These systems can place youth at greater risk of offending due to experiences of racial profiling and over-policing in and outside of schools and CFS placements out of home or community (Laidlaw Foundation, 2023, p.10; Finlay et al., 2019b, p.31). Racial profiling of young people can lead to increased run-ins with law enforcement. As the Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres wrote in their submission to OHRC, interactions may take the "form of targeted questioning, harassment, and provocation, and can lead to police brutality, charges, and the act of 'over-charging' individuals" (OHRC, 2017). In a non-random survey from 2015, 57% of Indigenous youth responded that they had experienced racial profiling (Laidlaw Foundation, 2023, p.10). Profiling and discrimination can also lead to a failure of justice for Indigenous people. This issue has been raised in Thunder Bay where police have become "notorious" for not properly investigating or following through when Indigenous people are victims of violent crime (Jago 2021; Hobson 2023; Rinne 2022; Turner 2021 as cited in Laidlaw Foundation, 2023, p.12). Systemic policing failures have been documented through the Seven Youth Inquest and Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. These negative interactions of racial discrimination can be disparately felt by youth experiencing housing instability leading to a cycle of victimization and criminalization.

Without stable housing, youth who are precariously housed or homeless may be treated differently than youth with a stable home environment or reliable parents or guardians when interacting with police and the courts. Charges may be laid instead of releasing a youth "in an attempt to 'protect the youth'" (Finlay et al., 2019b, p.29). Dickson-Gilmore and La Prairie argue social marginalization, which can result in poor housing conditions, can increase the risk of offending, re-offending and breaching conditions (Clark, 2019, p. 30). The connection between housing precarity and homelessness and incarceration can become a vicious cycle, trapping individuals (John Howard Society of Ontario [JHSO] et al., 2022, p.13). Unstable housing and homelessness can increase the likelihood of incarceration, interactions with the justice system contribute to negative stigmas, further frustrating housing outcomes. As John Howard Society et al. (2022) notes:

> Incarceration is one example of an interruption to earnings that can result in homelessness for precariously housed people. Even a week or two of incarceration can lead to missed shifts and lost wages, and as a result, missed rent payments that can jeopardize housing. A person experiencing longer periods of custody will be more likely to experience a loss of housing and employment. It should be emphasized that people remanded to custody have not been convicted of a crime. Legally, they are presumed innocent. However, they may still suffer the loss of employment and housing, even if they are later released. (p.11)

As noted above, precariously housed Indigenous youth may be more likely to be remanded into custody because they are seen as having no other stable place or person to be released to. For individuals who are released on bail or parole, the conditions of their release can impact access to housing by placing limitations on where they can return or who they can live with (JHSO, 2022, p. 43-44). Individuals released from correctional facilities with a criminal record also face barriers to gaining employment or securing private market housing due to criminal record checks (JHSO et al., 2022, p.11-13). Pre-trial detention and incarceration can disrupt livelihoods and increase the likelihood of experiencing homelessness. For a vulnerable population over represented in the justice system, the risk of Indigenous youth being trapped in a cycle of incarceration and housing precarity due to interactions with the criminal justice system intersect with other forms of systemic inequalities and discrimination they may face.

> I work in criminal justice, but the backup system of- like criminal justice is the backup system for mental health and other social determinants. And we do- I work in prevention as in, you know, working with homeless individuals and I wrote my masters projects on Hirschi's [Travis Hirschi] social control theory. And that was from like eons ago and why deterrence theory and punitive measures don't work. It's about you know, taking a community approach versus individualizing a systemic issue. (Service Provider #005)

Addressing youth housing precarity and homelessness has wide reaching impacts from education, health and justice. Removing barriers to housing and creating multiple avenues to secure shelter, whether transitional or longer term, and social support is required to prevent and disrupt the connections between homelessness and the criminal justice system. Youth and Indigenous youth in particular, require solutions developed to respond to the unique challenges they face.

> But, I just want everyone to increase- to building that momentum, because, there can't be one catch all when it comes to working with vulnerable populations, when we walk through the continuum of housing and navigate through different systems how it all intersects, which are all social determinants of health. (Service Provider #005)

OTHER

Previous sections have organized youth housing journeys through institutions of housing, CFS, education and healthcare as broad themes to present youth experiences. Many of these institutions or themes intersect or have similar topics that are touched upon such as discrimination and racism and the role of social networks and trusted adults. It is important to highlight these threads to show the complexity of youth experiences.

ANTI-INDIGENOUS DISCRIMINATION AND RACISM

Participants shared a range of experiences of discrimination and racism, describing both subtle and overt forms of racism in their everyday lives. Not all experiences were same, with some participants sharing they experienced little to no overt discrimination while others shared how they felt unsafe in places such as Thunder Bay due to their identity. For some participants, the lack of direct or overt experiences of racism was attributed in part due to appearing white as opposed to other family members, friends or community members. However, these participants often witnessed or were exposed to the violence of racism of people who do not know their identity and shared how they would speak up in these moments. Participants shared from an early age they learned from their parents or guardians about discrimination while others said it was never really spoken about or a big issue in their lives. Experiences of racism were faced across systems and shaped participants' time at school, options for accessing housing and the places where they want to live.

Anti-Indigenous discrimination and racism makes people, especially Indigenous youth and other vulnerable populations, less safe. It undermines youth wellbeing and equitable access to services which can prevent youth from receiving the help and care they need or provide inadequate care and support. Experiences of racism and discrimination can sow distrust and create barriers for youth reaching out for the help they need. And in the most extreme cases, racism and anti-Indigenous discrimination can lead to neglect and death. Addressing and rooting out racism and discrimination is a large, societal project and cannot only be done in isolation of one community or one institution.

SOCIAL NETWORKS

Having access to supportive relationships or places is important for youth health and safety. Social support can be described as a basic determinant of health where positive relationships can "encourage health-promoting behaviours and reduce stress, particularly during transition periods (Simich et al., 2005)" (Goodman et al., 2019, p.35). Positive social relationships were also instrumental for many youth in attaining housing. Access to strong social support networks were found to provide youth a number of pathways to secure or improve their housing; however, in a number of situations such as accessing secondary education youth are either forced away from their social networks or forced to choose between their social networks and other opportunities which can lead to housing insecurity.

> *Okay. And what was it like to live with your aunt [after boarding with strangers for school]?*
>
> **Mm, I couldn't travel, but for the most part, she did set me on track for a lot of things. I did start involving myself into more social outings. And I did start educating myself a bit more. I wanted to get serious about my education and she would talk to me a lot about important stuff and try to teach me things she thought I would need to know.**
>
> *So was this a time where you were kind of, trying to make big changes for yourself?*
>
> **Yes, this was a time where I was starting to learn about my opportunities and what I could do with myself. (NAN Youth #015)**

Participants identified individuals who connected them with critical information for navigating through housing, health, CFS and education systems. These individuals included coaches, cultural workers, teachers, a friend's parent or a peer who provided resources or information to access housing or shelter. Professionals were often acting outside their formal roles to assist participants in accessing housing. These moments highlighted when formal resources were not directly reaching participants who were in need. Institutions or organizations that youth are likely to frequent including schools, community or youth drop in centres/programs and Friendship Centres are important points where greater information can be provided both for service providers or professionals working outside of housing and for youth themselves.

> **I was going to the friendship center with my kids and they told me about it. And then after I had [child's name], who was my third kid, I was told [by another parent] that I could move to a priority list, if I had a doctor's note. (NAN Youth #006)**

> **And there was [in the culture room] a I wouldn't say a teacher but somebody that gets involved with like our culture and whatever you wanna call like there's just somebody like an EA or like I don't know. Somebody that's just there that helps us and you know. But anyways, she's the one who ended up giving me the number [to the shelter] and I called and like it was just from there on and like I just got all my stuff and yeah went there. (NAN Youth #003)**

While participants shared how they relied on social networks for navigating through systems they also shared experiences of navigating these systems independently or with little external support. Many participants had to navigate through or around these systems from a young age without a full understanding of how these systems play a role or could play a role in their lives. Learning to navigate and advocate for oneself, siblings, and family members forced participants to take on adult responsibilities at a young age. Participants described this as 'adultification' and discussed the negative ramifications it had on their mental health as well as interruptions to their education at the secondary and post-secondary level.

> **Then again the older you are, the more independent you want to be. Because of younger, like, your younger self, you would have to see a lot, go through a lot, and experience some terrible things in a way to make you see how the world really is. To get almost like an adult perspective of the world at a very young age. And that will make you want to mature faster and in my case, I could not find proper and affordable housing because of how young I was. (NAN Youth #022)**

Accessing these social, positive networks of support can also contribute to youth safety. As highlighted in service provider interviews, youth who are vulnerable due to family breakdowns, housing instability, homelessness or other struggles can be targeted by gangs and predators. Youth may find social acceptance with individuals or groups that may pressure them "to conform [to] health-harming norms and behaviours." (Goodman et al., 2019, p.40). Greater supports are needed for youth in order to support healthy relationships with their family and community as well as with their chosen family or trusted service providers.

> **Yeah. Well think about it this way, at any given time in a day, a youth may have 10 or 12 people who are trying and are responsible for their environment here. But that's in 15, 20 minute half an hour blocks. Whereas, you got people full time from gangs, and from predators spending all day, trying to figure out a way to prey on that person, whether it's drugs, human trafficking, you name it. So, I mean, there's gotta be- we're always going to lose that. And we limit ourselves to a 20-minute window, with someone thinking we can make a relationship of trust to move this person to what they want their next step to be. (Service Provider #001)**

Housing journeys or how youth make their way through the world is a form of navigation and navigation is social (Caroline Knowles, 2011, p.139 as cited in Jackson, 2012, p.735). The displacement that can occur from hypermobility can weaken some of these social

connections or make maintaining connections difficult. While youth may experience periods of isolation or feelings of loneliness, it is often a connection, sometimes by chance, to another individual that helps them along the way through providing advice, support or shelter. The importance of social networks and having safe adults in a youth's life shows that the solutions for youth housing are also social and must be rooted as part of a larger community and network of support.

TRANSPORTATION

The majority of youth interviewed have grown up and live in northern Ontario and have lived or spent significant time in their First Nation, rural and small urban areas, in a larger urban area or some combination thereof. Northern Ontario is a large geographic area, primarily connected through highways with travel by private vehicle. Other travel options such as regional bus and rail are limited compared to transportation networks in southern Ontario. Across the NAN territory there are 33 communities which can only be reached by plane or during the short winter road season. Fly-in communities are most commonly connected by plane to Sioux Lookout, Thunder Bay or Timmins which are important service hubs providing health care and education. Traveling between urban and rural, and reserve and urban/rural can be hundreds of kilometres or several hours worth of travel time. Travel times and availability can further be impacted by weather conditions. Winter conditions can slow car travel, extending travel times and planning requirements. Additionally poor weather can impact smaller community airports which have shorter runways and particular condition requirements for take off and landings. Impromptu or last minute travel over such a large area can then be limited by costs, time of year and availability of travel options.

Participants' housing journeys reflect a high level of mobility over a range of geographic scales. Mobility could take place on a small, local scale within a city or within a community or across northern Ontario, between reserves, between reserve and a rural or small urban area or between urban areas. Whether trips were short or long, the method of transportation or how youth moved is important to understanding challenges hypermobility can create. Participants described moves using their own vehicle, relying on family members or other adults, public transportation and regional bus transit, flying and ridesharing or in some cases sneaking a ride. In some cases youth had control over how and when they moved while in others were able to rely on family or friends. For participants with limited options they may have sought out a ride from an acquaintance going in the same direction or regional bus networks when available.

Transportation understood as a form of social infrastructure is critical to connecting people with wider social services. In 2018, major national and regional bus networks were closed after the end of Greyhound service (see Mobility section). Since their closure in northern Ontario, bus routes have become more limited or are now serviced by smaller regional networks. Limiting the mobility choices for individuals without access to private transportation can lead to less reliable forms of travel such as ride sharing or hitchhiking. A major concern after the end of Greyhound services were safe travel options especially for Indigenous women and 2SLGBTQ+ people as they are more likely to experience violence. Safety when traveling is a concern both at a regional scale and within towns or cities. Transportation options within northern Ontario are limited and not always available locally or within the region and the options that exist can be unreliable or unaffordable creating barriers to services (Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres [OFIFC], 2018). Having safe, affordable access to transportation options can also impact Indigenous peoples' access to lands and ability to connect with family and community (Perry et al., 2021; OFIFC, 2018). A wide range of affordable and safe transportation options that connect northern communities provides a variety of benefits. Whether a youth is looking to travel across town or to the next city to access services, visit family or friends or find safety,

they should be able to make that journey without fear or worry about cost.

COST OF LIVING AND FINANCIAL INDEPENDENCE

Housing can be a significant portion of monthly expenses. For youth living off reserve and accessing the rental market, the cost of renting, furnishing a living space and monthly bills including food can be significant. Some participants who lived independently at a young age and relied on social assistance, described how subsidies could not cover all living expenses and the difficult choices they had to make while managing their income between bills and basic necessities such as food. Everyday living costs can be difficult to cover whether on social assistance or working a minimum wage or low paying job. These financial constraints can limit the choice youth can make in order to access better housing, leave an unsafe housing situation or travel to access supports.

Participants also shared the financial expectations they experienced from family or others around them. For some this meant supporting their family through attaining housing or changing educational plans to accommodate family needs. For other participants, accessing financial support could be hindered by lack of credit or guarantor on loan applications. This can limit or create a barrier for accessing the rental market or acquiring a vehicle. Youth shared the trade offs they made between affordable housing and safer neighbourhoods and how they planned to move once they had a higher income. These aspirations for improved housing were often linked with completing school or post secondary education to join a profession and earn a higher income.

Financial security can also impact food security. Youth have shared the financial decisions they have had to make between paying bills or eating. These decisions directly impacted their health and choice to return home, even if the decision to return was a difficult one. Youth also highlighted the cost of living on reserves and food security within their communities. In many fly-in communities, imported food is a primary source for food with traditional foods that are hunted, gathered and preserved supplementing what is available. For fly-in communities, vegetables and fruit are less accessible and are likely to past freshness due to transportation distances (NAN, 2022, p.89). In a recent survey of families in NAN territory, three quarters replied they are having difficulty providing for their families food needs (p.90). Youth may experience more challenges if they are unemployed or underemployed or have had less exposure, knowledge or access to tools (i.e. hunting gear) for traditional food collection and preservation. While there are several initiatives underway to address food insecurity across NAN with some targeting youth, the cost of food on reserves contributes to the larger cost of living challenges all NAN members face.

ACCESS TO THE LAND AND CULTURAL CONNECTIONS

When participants spoke of how they felt about their moves or the places they lived, having access to the land or wider cultural connections to their own communities or other First Nations emerged as an important feature of place that provided a sense of safety, comfort and belonging. For participants who grew up in community, having access to the land or natural areas such as parks provided a connection or familiarity that supported them. For participants who had a largely urban upbringing having the ability to access land was also a priority to them.

> **Trees. I like being by the bush. Right now, my current home, I can't get into the bush and I absolutely hate it. For me, I like to be able to get my medicines, be able to go by the water. being able when I get out of class, just being able to go take a deep breath of fresh air. I can't really do that. Even the house on [Previous Address] we had a little bit of land, wasn't even that much, but it was just a little bit of trees, where you could go for a little walk. We built a little cottage in the back when we were kids, it was nice, um so yeah. (NAN Youth #013)**

Figure 5: Illustration of home by NAN Youth #004.

It was a really good area for me. There was a park nearby, I didn't feel so out of place from moving from the reserve to a large city. Cause it does have a lot of wildlife and nature over there. (NAN Youth #015)

Yeah. So for me, I am an urban girl I can't really see myself, maybe when I'm like old, I'd move to Moose Factory. But I don't really enjoy Thunder Bay. I think I would, I don't really feel safe in Thunder Bay, I think I would only really move back to Thunder Bay if there was work I needed to do there but I do like more, I like kind of spread out cities like kind of how London is and not too congested or crowded. I like a lot of opportunity to be out on the land. I think that's really important. Just like being able to get outside. Like Toronto's nice but there's not like, you kind of have to go outside of the city to go on hikes and stuff. (NAN Youth #005)

It was fun visiting there because ... I got to experience the bush, and go camping and whatnot, that was fun for me because I grew up in cities right, you don't really see much of that while you're in the city. (NAN Youth #023)

Okay! So right now I'm drawing The Dykes in Moose Factory because this is probably one of my favorite places on the island. It's just really pretty. So it's this kind of cliff area here, there's this little island far away and there's water and you see boat drivers pass by. I think it's just really pretty and I always like coming here to look, like every time I go for a drive I pass by here. That's what I think of when I think of home. I pretty much just think about The Dykes. (NAN Youth #004)

Connection to nature, the land, home territories and the ability to continue cultural practices such as collecting medicines are important aspect of wellbeing for Indigenous youth. The ability to return to a place was for some participants key to their mental health. Being near or in a natural setting with friends, family or by themselves provided an opportunity to relax, reflect and improve their mood. For one participant who grew up away from their community, reconnecting with their family and visiting their First Nation for the first time was life changing.

Okay can you describe some of the surroundings that would make it feel like a home?

Like, you can be having the shittiest day of your life and then one of your best friends come up. And started chatting you up you know and they bring you to some nice like scenery and everything and next thing you know you just start going there all the time.

So it's about the people and the scenery?

People, scenery, the surroundings like, your mood. (NAN Youth #007)

And another thing that I feel like it would be more home friendly is, let's see, I'm trying to think here, is more land based things around the household? Like, coming out from the North, you can go outside, there's a big forest already with you, you can sit by the lake, make a fire so, I feel like, trying to introduce them to either local parks or place where they can have a fire, go to a lake, or anything like that because for me the lake is what really helped me with my emotional state and my mental. (NAN Youth #009)

Ok. And then, what did it feel like going to Wahgoshig for the first time? Being there.

It was crazy. I felt like that's where I was always supposed to be. It's where knowing your ancestors have been in the same area for thousands of years. And l so much history and meeting people and it's like, 'You're my cousin and you're my cousin and we're related'.It feels like you've known people forever. Maybe I just needed that the whole time

Yeah. Did that make for a different understanding of home, then? Would that?

Yeah. It did.

Ok.

Like it was, it was always hard growing up and people asking me where I come from and it's like, I don't know. But now I have an answer. I can say like, I come from Wahgoshig. (NAN Youth #027)

Cultural continuity through access to the land, ability to practice culture and the opportunity to reconnect were all important for participants in finding and maintaining feelings of home, belonging and supporting their wellbeing. For youth who are hyper mobile, are displaced temporarily or over a longer period of time, ensuring that they can continue to connect and practice their culture needs to be supported through a wide variety of programs and policies.

YOUTH VOICES FOR THE FUTURE

> *Ok. And can you talk to me about not so much the physical part of the place, you mentioned that earlier, but how does it feel for you to be in a place of your own and now with your boyfriend?*
>
> **It feels very, very good. It has been a very long journey to get to where I am right now and I honestly didn't think that I would get here, let alone past the age of fifteen so it is very ... let's see, it's just very proud, I guess. I'm kind of proud of myself in a way that I was able to push past and go through all of those horrible experiences to make me the person I am today and use that to better the future and brighten the upcoming generations. (NAN Youth #022)**

While previous sections have focused on the challenges and barriers youth have faced in housing, CFS, education, healthcare and justice, it is important to emphasise what has worked for youth and what changes they want to see to improve housing outcomes and well-being for other youth. The last part of the interview asked participants two questions:

- What does home mean to you?
- What changes would you make for a better future?

The responses to both questions from each participant are shared in the following sections.

WHAT DOES HOME MEAN TO YOU?

In the last part of the interview, participants were asked 'What does home mean to you?' Two broad responses emerged from participants relating to the importance of family and community and having stability or control over their living situation. The responses reflect participants' housing journeys and for many the hypermobility and precariousness they faced growing up. Participants were in different stages and places in their lives and their answers in part also reflected this. For some it was a difficult question to answer because having stability and secure housing was not their primary experience growing up. And for younger participants, experiences of boarding and being in school shaped their responses. Parenthood also shaped responses with participants sharing the hopes they have for providing a home for their family.

I think, just the thoughtfulness that they [grandparents] have. They always would greet me at the door whenever I come in and go. They would always say bye to me too. I'm going to draw my granny. She's a short little round lady. She's very cute. Like every time I come in the house she will come to the door and say 'hi!' or if I'm leaving she'll say 'bye' and they care about where I am and where I'm going and I always let them know where I'm going. This is not the best drawing but I think it gets the point across.

NAN Youth #004

What makes a home? I would say, the people, the people that you are living with. So, I always like grew up with my little brothers. So yeah, I guess, having people there. And, people that you are close to. [...] I guess wherever my mom was living is home. She would make it feel like a home.

NAN Youth #008

I would say the second one that was built or the second one that I lived in in the community because we lived in there longer and I was able to have my own room and it was next door to my grandmother's house. A lot of Christmases there (Laughs)

Oh that's sweet. Your grandmother's house, is that a place you would have visited often, growing up?

Yes, yeah it was just like a foundation of our every- all my family members were to see each other and visit our grandmother, she was really nice.

Would you say that that was like a very safe place for you as a child?

Yeah yeah.

[...]

I would say just like having your family members. Is that- having them with you is home. Like your child, they're pretty much home and wherever they are is where home is.

NAN Youth #020

Trees. I like being by the bush. Right now, my current home, I can't get into the bush and I absolutely hate it. For me, I like to be able to get my medicines, be able to go by the water, being able when I get out of class, just being able to go take a deep breath of fresh air. I can't really do that. Even the house on [Previous Address] we had a little bit of land, wasn't even that much, but it was just a little bit of trees, where you could go for a little walk. We built a little cottage in the back when we were kids, it was nice, so yeah. This ones really cheesy, but my mom. I realised that one, when I was about like 17 when I was like, yeah, I can't live without her.

Yeah, yeah. Well, and you said earlier, the people you live with really shape your experience of home.

Yeah, home is where my mom is... Yeah. A nice comfy bed... Yeah, I mean I don't know. I feel like when you have a lot of homes. Cause this is like, because I got the e-mail before - you guys had sent me a couple of emails. An email with a couple questions. So I had sat there and thought about it. For me this is a hard question to think about because I feel like that a lot of the homes I had, it was just the basic needs- it was the kitchen, our bedroom, our lounge area and a bathroom. And then it was just the people you lived with, you know what I mean? For me it was never I needed so many things, you know? And that's what I mean, for me home is where my mom is. You know, I don't need all of these accessories and all of these things. It's just I need the basic needs, I need my lounge area and I need my mom. Cause, when we first moved to [Current Street], I remember really struggling and because I had lived in [Previous Address] for so long. And I remember telling my mom, 'It's not home, like I want to go home.' And it took about two months for us to say 'No, this is home now.' That's a hard question for me.

NAN Youth #013

I guess it is the people [boarding family] that made me feel at home. So, having a comfortable level of communication and understanding is really what makes a home feel like home. Because you know, if you are living with somebody that you dislike or have problems with, that's not going to go so well, and that's only going to cause anxiety. And stress on yourself so. A friendly environment is what makes a home feel like home.

NAN Youth #009

Mmm, like just being surrounded by people that love and care about and just having a place where you can be yourself and just be at ease.

Yeah, that's fair. Just going to ask one kind of follow up to that. It's something that has come up a lot in these interviews. You know I think you're the twentieth interview we're doing here. And so again you can skip this question if you'd like but can you, in your words, and from your experience, can you kind of think about what safety in home or what a safe place to live would mean to you?

Like, a place where there's no judgment, there's no criticism, just a place where anybody can just be who they are

NAN Youth #018

How would you describe the difference between a house and a home? And what are things that make a place feel like home to you?

I think the difference would be maybe just the overall personal feelings of the house. Because I've always traveled around and moved, I've never actually had a permanent idea of home. But I did find that a lot of people say that like, a person makes a home. I do find that that's sort of true but I do look towards memories. Cause when we did live here, it felt a little bare and plain when I moved into our new home in Cat Lake with my dad. But eventually, me and him started really making it our own by decorating it with personal items and- items to our culture and our home. Cause we do have personal mementos, I would say that we do decorate around the area. Like we really made some attachment to the home possible. I find that just having personal items with memories attached to them around really makes it a home because you get to look at stuff and reminisce and feel comfortable there.

So when, when moving around often like in Pelican, or boarding homes, it really felt discomforting because it's not your home you're going to. It's someone else's life that they've lived there for a long time and, in Pelican, for us it was just a pre-, what is it, a temporary place for us to get our schooling. And we did call it home cause we did live there and our roommate, my roommates at the time were all really great people and I really trust- I really value them as friends today too. So, it wasn't really hard to get comfortable at Pelican because everyone else made it personal. By bringing a part of their home and brought everyone's home together and we just sort of made it our own place. I believe what would be a better system to finding a home is maybe trying to get out more and just explore around your community, really get to know the area. Cause I found while living in Ottawa, I really got to know my area just by walking around. There was a park nearby and it was a really comfortable house. I did end up making a home in that room there, and I got really comfortable. I was able to go to the park and sit by rapids. There was a rapids in the park and just on hills and it was nice to just go on morning walks.

NAN Youth #015

I don't know, just being with the people I trust I guess, and know that I can just go there whenever, and it doesn't matter and they won't ever say, 'No, you can't come here.'

NAN Youth #025

Um, that's actually a really hard question, because like I have been in so many homes. I don't know how to answer this.

NAN Youth #014

I don't know some good like homemade food like just like family gatherings I think

What's a classic dinner for your family?

Well cause- just like cultural foods. Comfort foods that's what that's what my comfort food is. Moose stew or just like anything we eat like different so XXXX [indecipherable] yeah that's good

Is there anything else that you would say means home to you?

I don't know, like what makes a home? Family for sure

NAN Youth #003

And so, you know, if we could go back and ask fourteen year-old [Participant], like, was there anywhere that she would say was home for her?

Being with my dad or grandma.

[...]

Ok. And then, what did it feel like going to Wahgoshig for the first time? Being there.

It was crazy. I felt like that's where I was always supposed to be. It's where knowing your ancestors have been in the same area for thousands of years . And so much history and meeting people and it's like, 'You're my cousin and you're my cousin and we're related' It feels like you've known people forever. Maybe I just needed that the whole time

Yeah. Did that make for a different understanding of home, then? Would that?

Yeah. It did. Like it was, it was always hard growing up and people asking me where I come from and it's like, I don't know. But now I have an answer. I can say like, I come from Wahgoshig.

NAN Youth #027

Well to answer your first question I think home - home is wherever you're comfortable, where you feel safe. To me, home is where my people are. I said in my testimony, like home is where my mother is or where my siblings were. That's where I felt safe as a child. But now this work that I do now that I'm an adult, and I know my purpose. With my community and speaking for them and being that voice for them. Home is where they are.

NAN Youth #023

Well, for the first question for me, that comes pretty easy. Home to me is the people in it, the people you surround yourself with, just like positive energy doesn't really matter where you are, it's just kind of like the saying, home is where the heart is and it's the people you surround yourself with.

NAN Youth #022

Anywhere can feel like home. It's just your surrounding.

Okay can you describe some of the surroundings that would make it feel like a home?

Like, you can be having the shittiest day of your life and then one of your best friends come up and started chatting you up you know and they bring you to some nice scenery and everything and next thing you know you just start going there all the time.

So it's about the people and the scenery?

People, scenery, the surroundings like, your mood.

What kind of scenery makes you think of home, you said like a pond earlier, do you like to see water?

Oh, I used to be terrified of water because one of my cousins threw me in the deep end when I didn't know how to swim. But that's how I learned how to swim, but ever since then, I've always been fascinated about water, for some weird reason. (laughing) It's just like, calmness I guess. You feel like you can breathe and not have to worry about anything. Like when you feel safe. In the surroundings.

NAN Youth #007

Really, for me I never really cared about the houses, it's just where I was. Who I was with I guess, the family. For this house, kind of - I'm really attached to this house right now cause like a lot of memories. With this house I'm really attached to, I'm scared to leave because of all the memories, all the marks on the floors. (...) Yea, my sister passed away last year and like that's one reason I really don't wanna leave because it's just- She's here you know, like, she's here in like every dent in the wall and everything. But I don't know, this is like my home right now.

So it's really about the people then, you would say?

Yeah. So, it really- everytime is- was always about the people but like, right now, this house is just my home.

NAN Youth #011

I always refer to Long Lake as my home like when I speak about home I'm speaking about over there. And I just, Thunder Bay, I've just been living here.

NAN Youth #016

Yeah. And where would you say when you were a kid that you thought of Thunder Bay as home, or that you thought of the island as home?

It's kind of tricky - probably Thunder Bay, but my parents always call Moose Factory home, because that's their home. They're kind of both my home but I've spent more time growing up in Thunder Bay, I guess.

And would you say that that relationship or your understanding of home has changed in your life at all?

Yeah, I just, I say I acknowledge both as home now versus having to choose between the two.[...] Yeah, I'd say I associate home to kind of where my family is or where my friends are. My friends in London are kind of like my family now because when I moved to London I didn't know anybody, and a lot of my friends I've been friends with since my first year here. But yeah, just kind of where family is, is really what home feels like, for me. Like, Thunder Bay, I visit Thunder Bay a lot but it doesn't really feel like home. I think if my parents were to move from there I don't, I wouldn't really have any connection to Thunder Bay versus Moose Factory. That's always where my parents called home and that's where so much of my family is and I think Moose Factory will always be home. I always, always first say I'm from Moose Factory whenever asked, someone asks, what's home.

NAN Youth #005

I do want to get a home in the future to call it home. The apartment I don't call it home. Like any day the apartment can sell or my landlord can evict me and I will have no where to go.

Yeah. So it's something you are still looking for in your life you would say?

It is.

NAN Youth #028

I guess the part that makes a home for me is having people that are close to me and not just random roommates that you have to put up with because I could never do that. And just, you know, having nice things would be nice too. And, I guess when you pay rent, it's really hard to get those things.

NAN Youth #002

Anywhere where I don't feel crowded or where I have to tip toe.

NAN Youth #021

It has to come- It can't rely on anyone else. In my world, I don't know if that's healthy, (laughing) but it's me. I think it has to be y'know stable, somewhere stable not like these short term rentals with roommates. Comfortable. Comfortable is like a huge one because that's what I didn't have for so long, like being comfortable anywhere just wasn't a thing. Somewhere that you're able to unpack. I mean even now I've had stability for some time, I still kinda live in boxes because I was just so used to that. I can unpack now, and put things out, it still feels weird. Somewhere where, yeah, I don't know, I think those are the biggest pieces for me, I don't want to tie it to like anyone or anything, because those things- I mean more so anyone because that's not stable to me really.

NAN Youth #026

A house that would feel like a home to me would be that, its stable and that we live there for a long time, like years and that we don't have to move again or move back-and-forth.

Ok. So stability is the main thing?

Yeah.

Is there anything else that would make a place feel like home for you?

Maybe having my own room (laughing), because I never - because growing up, I never had my own room.

NAN Youth #019

Routine. What makes me feel at home is having a routine. Stability I guess, when you know what you're expecting. Does that sound ok?

NAN Youth #024

And did you wanna have a go at what makes somewhere feel like home for you? What are some things that make you think of home?

I don't know. I don't know any.

NAN Youth #017

Everybody has their own room. Room for a barn, and animals, no neighbors. And some...

(overlapping) You said a pony before.

Yeah. ... Well insulated. Open concept living space. Woodstove. As well as electric just to fall back on...Definitely need a mudroom. So many shoes.

So thinking of your family now, what would it mean to you to be able to have a house like what you just described for them? What difference do you think it would make in your lives?

Oh, it would be a lot more comfortable, that's for sure. Happy parents, happy parents is like a big deal for kids, right? (laughs) You get away with more. (laughs) And actually, mortgages actually works out better than rent too, right. Like owning a house.

NAN Youth #006

Alright (...) So, I think a house is all like the basic necessities such as like, you know, hot water, heat, all that. And then a home is actually who you live with, who you are like comfortable with. Your access to food. To me, I would consider a home to be in a good neighbourhood because that would give you a sense of safety and like, if you have friends and stuff. That would just, overall make the individual happy. But then again, I feel like that ties into a house because - like having a good house in a good neighbourhood is obviously important for children to be like playing outside and you know? You don't want them exposed to violence and stuff. So, kind of both.

Do you have anything else of like- if you kind of just think about, you know, thinking into the future. What would make a place a home to you? What makes you feel at home?

I think having my own space. Because like right now, in grade 12, living with my mom. I think it's the first time having my own space since grade 8 when we moved from Thunder Bay. And I like that because, you know, I'm a teenager and privacy and all that.

NAN Youth #012

Can I put a bed in there?

Yeah, sure, whatever makes (..) what makes home for you.

Because the bed here sucks (laughing) the furniture came with the place and it's not ours so (...) We're getting some of our own things still and that's a struggle because it's like a grand per furniture. It's ridiculous how expensive the furniture is up here.

You have a Northern [Northern Store] in North Caribou right?

Yeah, and it's like fourteen hundred for a sectional and like nine, no eleven hundred for a queen size bed and then like seven hundred for a box spring.

It's expensive eh?

It is, very. So a lot of people try to fight over second hand stuff that people give away (laughing). I do have a bed at my grandma's but I don't want to take it away from her because she's using it. Yeah, from when I moved there a long time ago. When I was living there I had a queen size bed. She asked me last night if I could take it, but- if I wanted to take it but I said 'No, you need it'.

That's the bed that she's staying on right now?

No, it's a guest bedroom but she always has people sleeping over there so

NAN Youth #001

WHAT CHANGES WOULD YOU MAKE FOR A BETTER FUTURE?

The last question as part of the CAHFOY interview guide asked participants, "What changes or recommendations would you make so housing could be improved for young people in the future?" Participants reflected on their own experiences and what type of support they would like to have received as young people accessing housing. There were a range of responses including more and diverse housing on reserve, support for navigating social housing, supporting youth wellbeing and dedicated shelters or housing with supports for youth. The similarities and differences of each participants' experience reveal a strong vision for a better and safer future for all Indigenous youth.

Yeah... I think what would be nice is apartments for young parents, or you know, things like that. Little apartments, home placements. Especially if they're in a crowded house with a lot of people, you know. No room in a house or they could just go stay for a while, that's what would be nice. And more programs that would help low-income families. Like food, yeah, things like that cause, everything up north is expensive. Yeah, it's a lot and some people can't afford anything sometimes. So, yeah. More programs would be better. Yeah. And I don't know. More houses.

NAN Youth #017

Okay. I'm not really sure how they could - When I was talking about my uncle and how he is a single man, like living in a house that could've been suitable for a family. I think making that a priority on reserve at least, where there is limited- I guess there's limited houses everywhere but especially on reserve. Like maybe moving people to the smaller homes and giving the bigger homes to families, that would make sense.

NAN Youth #012

Well I feel like when I applied for houses, I really had to get a crisis worker to really support me and really to voice me.

Right, you needed someone external to you to be able to access housing.

Yeah.

And you think it should be easier for a young person to do that on their own.

Yes.

NAN Youth #018

So, say someone has a kid in high school. Maybe, showing them while in high school, how to get into Native housing once they're done school and whatever... yeah.

NAN Youth #008

Well, for my experience, I know that, like especially most Aboriginal people, they come from their parents' home, so when they come into the city trying to find a home, they need a reference, for landlords, previous landlords and they're just coming out of their parents' homes so they don't really have references or also now most most places they want the credit check and a whole bunch of other stuff, it's just a long it's a long process and um just yeah.

Would you say that it's particularly difficult for young Indigenous or First Nations people in the city right now to get a place to live?

Yeah. With the requirements, I would say.

Do you think landlords prefer renting to non-Indigenous people?

That's really hard for me to say because I don't have much experience with landlords but the I'm not to sure, yeah I wouldn't know

No that that's fair. And is there anything you would want to see change for the next generation?

Yeah I would like to see more of the age range from this particular group that you're dealing with have their own home, because it's- I don't think most of our age group have the resources to get their own apartment, like you're not able to get a home unless you have a family.

Right, so just more opportunities for young people to have places of their own even if they don't have a family.

Yes, yeah. Right, for my brother, for instance, he's staying at a family- a relative because he doesn't have a family of his own.

So it leaves him kind of without anywhere to go for himself.

Yes.

NAN Youth #020

Ok, so the one thing is when we're looking for apartments everyone did like credit checks or you have to have a reference, but if you don't, if you've never lived outside of your house before it's like, impossible to get a place.

Yeah.

And we got denied so many times because of that.

Ok. Yeah. That's one we've heard a lot in this project, and I think there's ways we can think about changing that. Is there anything else you would like to see changed? Or be different for young people in the future?

Like, pricing.

More affordable places.

Yeah, different, a single person living on their own can't afford an apartment for themselves. Because it's like a thousand dollars and their paycheque isn't even a thousand bucks.

NAN Youth #025

Yeah, so... it's tough, it's really, it's kind of hard to get a place as a youth because I know for me, like, I'm pretty lucky because I got my credit card when I was eighteen. I got it right away because I knew I had to build credit and stuff because I wanted to buy a car. And the same thing, I have a car so - I really built up my credit and that makes a huge difference, especially if you're trying to find a place in the city, because I know for me, I don't have parents with good credit to cosign me on anything so that was a really big struggle like if I ever need a loan when I wanted a car loan, that took me, kind of, years (chuckle) to get on my own and my own insurance and stuff - Because of trying to build my credit myself just because I really didn't have anyone to cosign me. And that kind of pressure coming from a really big family. Yeah, my parents just kind of- also when they were youth- not knowing how to manage finances and still recovering credit from that.

So yeah, that's kind of a big thing is like credit. Well, I guess I did realize because I got it when I was eighteen and I kind of knew to build my credit but yeah, you really need good credit especially when you're trying to find a place in the city. And references, like I'm again pretty lucky that I didn't really have any negative experiences in my first place I rented.

NAN Youth #005

What could have made that better at any time?

Like ... housing what do you call those when you have a protocol and all of that.

Yeah, like a policy?

Housing policy, yes.

Okay, and maybe also if there was more houses in the community

Yeah.

[...]

I mean you don't even have to think of that for you, but if you think of that for other young people in Thunder Bay what would you want them to have so that they have a better experience, you know?

Mmm (...)

You can say like less racist landlords, you said like no one would ever want to rent to-

Yeah! I would go out there to view apartments and nothing would ... 'I'll call you' but nothing ever happens. I had plenty of money. I probably could have paid the whole four months, but nothing.

NAN Youth #001

I think I wrote something about that. Maybe something different would be, like all the children would have to have their own separate like areas I guess? Instead of having to be crowded into a certain place, just because there's not enough room. Or maybe there should be like a playroom or some kinda thing, if that makes sense?

[...]

Or think about it for a while, not just not just like the first day and then know it. But one thing that I could say there here is that one of the hardships I faced with getting housing is that I find landlords don't rent out to people my age because they would automatically assume we'd be reckless with renting and looking after our homes, or houses and apartments. Secondly as a student, one hardship would be not having enough money to pay for gas and hydro, plus rent.

My own opinion about creating homes for youth, people my age, it would be nice to see housing grouping women together as in renting out one room each so that it could be more affordable for our budget. Especially if we were to live in a different city or community, it'd feel less scary living alone and we wouldn't struggle finding a roommate on our own, with the monthly allowance that we are funded for the year.

NAN Youth #019

Hmmm... For policy changes, I guess like, that's one of the reasons why I got into social work, was to be the difference that I needed when I was a kid. For policy changes too within our own community, for myself I put in a proposal for a homeownership program. So that, people that are in the community can get a loan to kind of build their own home and to how they want it in the community.

NAN Youth #027

I guess having more access for help. Like say if someone like me is struggling, like what if they can be like, "Hey, why don't we make an appointment and do this together?" You know, cause right now that's not even an option. Stuff like that, like, access to more help for people who are struggling with the application. Yeah.

And, I think earlier you had said also just like more clarity in the application process. Is that right?

Yeah, or if, or even if your application has been not accepted. It would be nice to know, not two weeks later - You know what if they can just, you know, give you a phone call - And you know, go through it with you instead of, you know, getting a piece in the mail because it gets upsetting and frustrating.

NAN Youth #002

For the next generation, more housing would be good because a lot of the houses here are very crowded or very old.

Ok. So housing on reserve, you mean right?

Yeah and off reserve I think for more resources to be available to younger people I guess.

What kind of resources, can you try to describe them?

Because I noticed a lot of young people don't really know how to start off I guess with getting their own place and stuff like that. They're kind of lost. In Geraldton there's this landlord, she owns most of the places in Geraldton but she doesn't rent to Natives. So maybe stuff like that to go away.

NAN Youth #021

I think having your own space is a big deal. I think like Indigenous students, especially, like a lot of us end up homeless or couchsurfing. So, even having those tools inside of the high school, to know any options that are available - Oh yeah, it would have been nice to know too about the priority list sooner, because by the time I knew about it I already had three kids in the one bedroom

Right yeah, and a kid with asthma already.

Yep. If like, cost of moving would have been helped, that would have been, that would've been really nice too. Cuz' when I first moved here, I had just gotten evicted and I didn't have my license and trying to figure out how to move my family here was a huge ordeal. And they didn't offer any help, like for my band or for in the place that I was getting evicted.

[...]

Was there anything else in what could be done to improve the system or finding a house?

No. Well, for me, there wasn't a lot of information out there, like which houses were available, or what you needed to get into those houses.

And just like how to start?

Right, yeah. I didn't know what I was doing. I was just busy with a ton of kids.

Right. That is, that's a full time gig. But you said when at the friendship center is where you heard a little bit, is that right?

Yeah, from the parents.

Right. Just like people you would kind of bump into?

Talk about our situations kind of thing.

Yeah. Do you think the friendship center could have done more to provide resources, or like where, you said in the high school would be one spot to make resources available -

Yeah, yeah, Friendship center would have been nice too. Cuz' I didn't really get any information from them but they did provide me with the support letters and stuff.

Right. Were there any other places that you were going to at that time that could have provided that information? Like were you going to, kind of moms groups anywhere or any other kind of community places where you think that information could be provided?

No, it would've been just the friendship centre, and the grocery store, and the park. Those were the only places I would go.

NAN Youth #006

For me it was applications, like it would be nice if we actually get help doing it all. Yeah, cause it took me like what, 6 months just to do one application which it could've just taken a day. And like, they could have like added a list of everything you need to hand in with the application all at once. Other than handing the ap- cause they hand the entire application back to you. So, you have to redo it over and over again.

Right. That's frustrating.

Yeah.

[...]

Is there anything else you can think of that would make it easier for young people to get housed properly?

A lot of these houses, they are for 16 year olds and over. But, yeah, it would be like if like- ... cause what about for like the under 16 year old, where are they gonna go? And I know a lot of people that are homeless that are- that were under the age of 16 and had nowhere to go. And we were always just waiting for a place to go.

You mean they're basically waiting to turn 16 is that right?

There's a lot of us leaving our foster homes. I got lucky.

Yeah. So would you say that, when you were in the foster system, you knew a lot of kids who were really struggling. Is that fair?

Cause we were all stuck in- nobody wants a grown kid so, we were all stuck in the assessment home, the treatment centres.

NAN Youth #011

A student residency, for students attending school in Thunder Bay to come to fruition, to not be forgotten y'know? I was involved with the Seven First Nation Youth Inquest, when I was in advocacy with Feathers of Hope -The OPACY, Office of Provincial Advocacy for Children and Youth, one of the recommendations that I put forth was a residency for students attending school in Thunder Bay to have a place to call home, somewhere they can feel safe, connected to their culture. I would like for them to have that. So that's what I would like to come from this.

NAN Youth #023

So, what I find to be more home friendly for students coming up from up north will be respecting their boundaries. That will be like, letting them take the time they need in their room to function. You know some come at different emotional levels, some may be worse than others. Some may be doing well. And I'd say that welcoming that, giving them the time they need but also trying not to push for anything, like force them out of their room, because some students need that space. And I guess another huge one would be internet. Because as a student, they going to want to be connected with their home family, as a way of communication. So, they feel comfortable and safe, right? I feel like that is a huge factor within a boarding home, so they are not completely alone while they are out here, so that they can still FaceTime, call or message their family, check up on them and see how they are doing and yeah.

And another thing that I feel like it would be more home friendly is, let's see, I'm trying to think here, is more land based things around the household? Like, coming out from the North, you can go outside, there's a big forest already with you, you can sit by the lake, make a fire so, I feel like, trying to introduce them to either local parks or place where they can have a fire, go to a lake, or anything like that because for me the lake is what really helped me with my emotional state and my mental. And then- So transitioning from here from that, I didn't really know how to grieve. When things have happened, and yeah Hmm.

Let's see, I'm trying to think more... I guess planning activities with your students. That they're comfortable to do as well.So, let's say, you ask them a question about what they like to do, they answer, or if they don't, than you can probably plan something out with them like say, going to the community centre, to go swimming, to go by an event that might be taking place, a sports game like- Yesterday, I went to a game with boarding parent. I told them that it would be a huge bonding experience and we're both big fans of basketball so, yeah. That's really made me feel comfortable here and I feel like it brought me up to a new level of comfortableness.

That's great.

So, to summarize all that, I say plan activities that the student is interested in, but you as well as a boarding parent.

NAN Youth #009

I found that while- when I first went to Pelican, I did get put into a house with a bunch of girls from different communities. And I did struggle with how to fit because they all had these pretty different lifestyles and they even talked different from me. Cause there are dialects in different communities. So it was really hard to try and make friends and connect with them. But my house actually put me into a room with an older Cat Lake student and she really guided me through my first year. And after that the second year, they tried to put in another Cat Lake student so I've always had a sort of piece of my community with me.

Mmm. Was that helpful to you then? To always have that connection to your community and feel some familiarity.

Yeah, I feel for students going to school, I think a boarding home set up by their communities organization, like Cat Lake now is covered by Windigo and Windigo is covering houses so like their making houses in Sioux Lookout for students going there so that they can live together. And Windigo is a set of communities that they're all sort of close together. Like I've always felt close with my friends from neighboring communities and I've always felt comfortable doing activities that our organizations have sent us off together to do. So, I feel like,like housing with inter-communities that are comfortable together like that is better like K.O [Keewaytinook Okimakanak], NNEC, …. The only thing that I see is that it does cause a little, tension between the communities. Like students, they get competitive .But, that's how I would go about housing. I would try to put some friends and community.

NAN Youth #015

Oh, I think, the biggest reason for me, this the reason why I'm getting into the education system. A lot of the times in high school I didn't feel safe - not that I didn't feel safe - I didn't feel understood when I talked about a lot of the issues. For instance, being an off rez kid. I could talk to [Teacher's Name] about that and she tried her best to understand it but she couldn't get what it is like cause she was not Indigneous so I didn't have anyone in my high school who was brown or who was Native. So I think having those people in the education system who can relate to us and say 'Yeah [Participant], I understand what it's like to walk in two worlds, to feel like when you go to the reservation you get made fun of because your too white and when you go to the school off rez you get made fun of because your too brown', right? Like what world do I walk in? You get made fun of no matter what world you're in. So its, 'Ok, so what do I do?' and no one really understand that unless you walk in that world. So thats my big thing that I want to see happen is just to see Indigenous people in our education system. And to just look at our youth and say 'Yeah, I understand you.' I think thats what I want to see.

NAN Youth #013

I think that Indigenous youth and Indigenous people, like something that's lacking is they don't feel like cared for. I find that with my own story, with the students I work with, I think y'know being cared for in a thoughtful way is important. And I know ways in which to do that in the [education field] is just thoughtful little things. In terms of housing, I think that people to- to be able to feel, if they don't get that from places that they should, like from families, how can we do that at the policy level to ensure that people feel cared for because that's so basic, everyone deserves that.

Yeah. Can you give me an example in your own work of what you mean by care? I think I get you, but part of this is I need it to be recorded so other people can understand the concept of care in a clearer way.

Right. I think it goes beyond just the necessities, or what we, y'know bare minimum do we need to do for people. What do we do to make them feel whole like as a person, how can we make people feel seen and cherished and cared for? An example [education field] is to start - this is usually budget dependent, I have to usually budget, bug my manager, so you know what a care package is, type thing? For the beginning of the school year, just to let them know that there's people here, you know and that we try our best to do that in various ways, but something that goes beyond just the bare minimum, we're here for you but no, we really are. The care package shows that, here's how you get in touch with us that type of thing.

NAN Youth #026

Let's see. My son isn't going to be living in mould, the way that I did, so what I would want for the children now, and the children that are going to be there in 10 years, I want them to not live in that kind of environment. I want them to not have this eczema, breathing problems, develop any of these health issues that, you know, cause there's many houses in the community that have these kinds of issues, whether it be mould or water damage and it just doesn't get fixed. So, it's very sad, and you know, if a child is still developing and when they are living in that kind of environment, it just seems like their health isn't gonna get any better being in that kind of situation.

NAN Youth #016

Are there any other kinda supports that could have been put in place to help you with that do you think?

Yeah (laughing), a hell of a lot of support. Back then they barely had any.

What kind of support? How do you imagine that? LIke if you look back what are the things that would have helped you?

Back then my principal for [school] used to be really racist. And like, I know it's bad to say and all that but my entire school, the entire school at [school] when she passed away, laughed. Cause everybody hated her cause of how racist she was. When I was in grade three, I didn't have a single recess. All year. Because I was Native. We had two EA [education assistant] teachers but, they got fired because they were from here. And my parents used to also be helpers for the school and everything but they got fired. I guess you could say it started going downhill when drugs started coming out here more.

Yeah. So I mean there's a couple things there right, there's the racism that you faced in school.

Yeah.

Both from, and correct me, but it sounds like from authority figures as well as from other students?

More just from authority figures. And I got beat up- when I got beat up in elementary in Sudbury it was because I went to an all Native school. And because I had white skin even though I'm Native, I still got beat up, and I was fat and smart. And no one likes that, when you can outsmart them. Just, I don't know. Some people are just, assholes.

Yeah, there's kind of no accounting for that. And then, so racism from authority figures in school, and you said drugs started making their way more-

Yeah, I actually got suspended from school cause I had weed on me in elementary.

So would you say that like from a pretty young age, like drugs were part of your life, something uhh- like something you had to-

From a very very young age. Alcohol, drugs, cigarettes, all that was part of my life. And I'm not proud of it, but, I started smoking weed and all that when I was young. It wasn't until like five, almost five years ago I've been clean from everything. The only thing I do is smoke weed cause it's legal now so no one can say nothing about it.

[...]

When I was living in Sudbury I didn't have that much support when it came to my speech. Because during highschool I only had my grade nine english. But, I have my grade nine, ten and eleven french. And I barely know french. So for some reason they passed me in french, but not in english.

So having more support with speech- that would have helped you stay in school maybe?

Yeah. Most likely. I was always terrible at writing and reading and all that. Still kinda am. (laughing)

That's alright. Yea so support along the way with that woulda maybe encouraged you to stay?

Yeah. That. And the crowd I was hanging out with. I wasn't really hanging out with the right crowd, they was skipping school a lot and smoking weed, drinkin' alcohol and yea. Wrong crowd of kids.

Yea. yea, happens. And then I guess just as a final point like, you know thinking- thinking down the road ten or fifteen years from now, if there was another kid like you kinda twelve or thirteen, what would you hope would happen for them? How would you hope that their journey could be different?

Well back then we did have activities for youth, like I did do activities and all that but lately, I don't know, cause I don't go outside much anymore so (laughing?) But, I don't know, I'd just try to tell the kid make the most of his experience.

NAN Youth #007

What we can try to think about is, you know, ten years from now, someone else in the same kind of age and boat that you're in, how would you want things to have been different for them? What are the kind of moments in a housing journey for a young person in Thunder Bay or in Ignace, or you know? What are things that would have made a big difference for you that you'd like to see for someone ten years from now? And it can be big or small.

Umm, when I- actually when I was in Red Rock, I was given a lot of false hope. Yeah, like from the Tikinagan foster agency. I was given a lot of false hope from them. So, I would've rather just like hearing the truth.

Right, so this is just a process that needs honesty?

Yeah.

NAN Youth #014

So, I guess, hmmm, what I really liked about London is I had a lot of friends there and there was a lot of stuff to do. Like I said, I took dance classes, I went shopping a lot with friends. I would go on lunch dates. After my classes were done I would go get a snack with my friends and stuff. Because there was two Tim Hortons. It's just like the availability of public spaces allowed me to connect with my friends, which we don't have public spaces on reserve here unfortunately. Like there's like playgrounds, but if you're twenty years old hanging out at a playground that's weird!

Right, there aren't like, there isn't like a coffee shop or like somewhere to just hang out.

No. No. And the one restaurant that is here, I feel like it's kind of weird if you sit there because people just don't do that. Like if you're sitting at your table for long the waitresses will give you dirty looks and they're like 'get out' (laughing). So what made London home? I guess my friends honestly. Like we would take the busses together. The busses in London were much nicer than the busses in Thunder Bay. I guess just like I loved going shopping. That was probably my favorite thing, retail therapy (laughter).

[...]

Okay. One thing I wish we had here was more fresh food. Every time I go to the store and buy like strawberries or something, they're rotten. every time I go to the grocery store I have to check every single vegetable I buy to make sure there's no mould and then when I bring it home I find mould. I don't know how this happens. (.....)

Oh there you go.

There we go, I did it. So other stuff I find for young people (...) Back in the day, I always hear my family talking about stuff like that. Like how they had a lot of recreational sports. They would always travel down south to like fight other teams, or like play other teams, not fight.

Yeah.

YTH004: I haven't really heard much of that happening. Not even before COVID. Like they never even had that many like recreational sports. What else is there? What else? I think, I just wish I could rent a one-bedroom apartment. I think that would make my life so much easier. Even like a two-bedroom apartment.

NAN Youth #004

You know programs like, Native housing, Thunder Bay housing, there's like those subsidized- It would be something like that. But also maybe more shelter homes for youth. I know there's a few here but they're hard to get in. You know because of lack of rooms and stuff. So it would be nice if there were more programs that had more buildings to help youth live in until they can find a home. Or even programs where youth can go to eat, hangout, play sports, do art, whatever. Like, have a place where they can just go to chill.

NAN Youth #024

Say like somebody wanted to actually like change their way of … living and stuff and wanted to do something on their own then … they would have that option like especially for youth. Actually that would be such a great idea for especially out here on the res we have a transitional house on the res but we also have an eightplex which is they just built the like an apartment building that has like eight little bachelor apartments in there … but that's for anybody and then they also built an elders complex for the older people and stuff but I was like what about like youth and stuff, like we don't have that option out here.

[…]

I don't know. Just like how I was saying like if there was somebody that was like going through like say … even like family like if there's like somebody that is living with their parents for too long and they wanna like get out and like actually have a place of their own to stay like on a reserve that'd be that'd be awesome if there was like like a youth like a place where they could stay like you know what I mean?

[…]

Like an apartment building or something and like … I don't know like to get on track with like school and to have a job or just … I don't know anything.

Yeah no I that's something we've we've heard before and it's something I think we're looking at what that would look like and how you'd be able to do it.

Mhm

Yeah. You think there would be kind of like … there'd be like some staffing in there with some support I mean not -

Yeah especially support for the youth like it's I don't know, I wouldn't say it's so bad but especially … there's people here too that have umm just a hard time with like stuff even at home or addiction or having problems with school or just trauma and all that stuff, you know? Like it'd be awesome if there was like a worker there that would actually … I don't know there's workers here like you know that do that but it'd be awesome if there was like a youth worker

Would it be kind of like the … the services that were offered to you when you were in the emergency housing that you accessed? The women's shelter?

Yeah I guess so but it's like if there was somebody that would work and actually understand, you know. Not just be like 'oh this is what you should do blah blah blah' and like you know kind of - I don't know. Like somebody that actually went through the things that we did

NAN Youth #003

I would say a youth centre, slash, shelter.

Facilitator: Yeah.

Almost, kind of like a service where kids in these positions they need somewhere safe to go just like what I needed. A youth centre but also like, find connections for these youth to make friends and to also find like, better services out in the community such as counseling and stuff like that, but also the shelter for night time if there's problems at home, you know, you go home for supper after the youth centre and there's, for whatever reason, something's going on and you don't feel safe there, you could come back to the youth centre, to the shelter part you know? I feel like something like that would be a very great asset to help better the housing crisis for our youth or bringing more awareness to these problems, to help open the eyes of other people who don't see it as a problem.

Facilitator: Yeah, yeah. Do you think that would have helped you when you were younger, just if people understood better what you were going through?

Absolutely.

NAN Youth #022

Conclusion

CONCLUSION

This report has looked to understand the experiences of First Nations youth from the NAN territory and northern Ontario and their experiences of accessing housing. It has recognized that housing goes beyond a basic provision of shelter, and requires a wholistic understanding that housing experiences are personal, are connected with historical events and intersect with multiple institutions including social housing, child and family services, education, healthcare and justice. This understanding of housing is rooted in the learnings from youth participant interviews.

Many youth housing journeys were characterized by their mobility. Youth mobility was impacted by personal, systemic and institutional factors. The lack of appropriate on-reserve housing and infrastructure including health and education infrastructure, displaced or forced youth and their families to be mobile in order to access housing or services. The intervention of Child and Family Services on and off reserve contributed to youth mobility, sometimes through multiple, short term placements within and outside a community or family network or longer term placements, separating siblings and disconnecting youth from their communities. Family breakdowns and exposure to domestic or intimate partner violence pushed youth and their families to access emergency shelters often outside of their community. Throughout their journeys participants' ability to access housing and the choices they were able to make could be enabled or constrained by the resources available to them, their past experiences with service providers and their level of housing precarity. Some youth were able to connect with support or services needed such as social housing or health treatment, others may have continued to navigate housing and other challenges alone or returned to difficult housing situations in order to secure a more stable shelter. It is important to note not all instances of mobility are negative experiences and are also the result of individual choices, aspirations and goals. Youth and/or their families moved for employment or education opportunities, new relationships, to (re)connect with family, to improve their housing and to seek out new experiences or places. Youth mobilities are a reflection of social and family networks across a large geography, personal choices, institutional interventions and the lack of equitable access to housing and other infrastructure.

Youth housing journeys shared through CAHFOY interviews have revealed a range of shared and unique experiences. Taken together, participants' journeys trace the challenges and barriers they and many of their peers have faced and continue to face in search of secure, safe and appropriate housing.

- Current systems of both on- and off- reserve housing leave youth feeling like access to appropriate housing is often out of reach. This has contributed to feelings of frustration and hopelessness in housing and presents real barriers to feeling stability and control over one's housing situation and life.
- The lack of housing and infrastructure on reserve is creating a generation of people who feel they must leave their communities to have a home.
- The lack of affordable and appropriate housing forces youth (and their families) into difficult decisions including staying in violent situations, leaving education early or not seeking treatment or support. The fear and uncertainty of becoming homeless can deter youth from seeking the support they need.
- Access to social housing and associated supports has for many youth and their families provided a first sense of housing security and stability.
- Youth who interact with CFS and the justice system/police from a young age learn to fear or distrust the intervention of these institutions. This can lead to a more cautious attitude to all service providers. This distrust is often part of a larger, pervasive mistrust in colonial systems.

- Social networks which rely on friends and family - both immediate and extended, as well as wider Indigenous community and kinship networks, are important lifelines for youth. These social networks can connect youth to housing and shelter or provide important information and guidance to navigating various institutions.
- Displacement or forced mobility, often from interacting with an institution or due to a lack of housing, can disrupt or weaken important social connections youth rely on for support, safety and shelter.
- Connection to land and culture has proven an important part of wellbeing for youth, including an increased sense of belonging, social networks and contributing to mental, physical, spiritual and emotional wellbeing.
- The lack of consistent, accessible and equitable service provision (eg. education, health, mental health) on reserve forces youth to be mobile, reduces their independence in housing decision-making which can lead towards housing precarity or homelessness.
- Anti-Indigenous discrimination and racism is pervasive. Youth described direct and indirect experiences of racism from non-Indigneous peers as well as authority figures and other adults.
- There are a lack of third spaces or safe spaces for youth on reserve and off reserve in both rural and urban areas. The few youth-oriented or youth-friendly spaces that operate provide space for peer support, accessing information and fostering important and trusting relationships that youth can rely on when in need.

Youth and service provider interviews have also highlighted several areas for action and improvement. As this report demonstrates, accessing housing is not only about the physical form of a house, but also how it changes through life stages and intersects with other institutions. Action is required to address the ongoing housing emergency facing youth. In many cases, these actions create more options for youth in obtaining or improving their housing; more options can mean greater agency for youth. The stories shared by youth that shape this report detail the many barriers they face and the impact it has on their lives. To honor their words, and to ensure that not another generation faces these same barriers, change must come.

> "As Gharabaghi (2019) explains, for young people, having a voice is not synonymous with having an impact. To this end, valuing youth voice must extend beyond giving young people a space to share their thoughts, for example, when awarding them time to speak during a case conference. A youth-centered approach asks service providers across programs and sectors to be open to hearing the voice of young people, but more so to be prepared to act on what they have heard. It is one thing for service providers to say that they care about the voices of young people but, acting on what they have heard does not always translate into practice. Participation aids in the development of advocacy skills in young people, leads to fully informed decision-making, protects young people through the establishment of mechanisms that challenge violence, ensures a peaceful and civil society, and increases accountability and transparency of governments (UNICEF, 2014)." (Finlay et al., 2019b, p.69)

Recommendations

RECOMMENDATIONS

Many recommendations that address issues identified through this report exist as part of other inquiries including Seven Youth Inquest, Truth and Reconciliation Commission and Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Inquiry. Their implementation is critical to the well-being and safety of NAN youth. As Oshkaatisak Council highlighted in their statement there are many factors that impact individual and community wellbeing. Many of the recommendations below look to create equitable access to safe spaces, inclusive programming and an improved standard of service delivery; these are all forms of protecting mental, social, spiritual and physical wellbeing and can be understood as contributing to suicide prevention.

HOUSING & INFRASTRUCTURE

To: Canada & Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation

1.01: End the housing emergency in NAN territory. The construction of 7,500 housing units will meet the immediate housing need but must be accompanied by the development of related infrastructure. Land development is required in many First Nations to accommodate this level of construction, sometimes including additions to reserve. In many cases expansion of existing infrastructure systems – water, wastewater, solid waste and diesel power generation– will also be required. Additional challenges exist for fly-in and remote communities in accessing appropriate housing and infrastructure with climate change impacting winter road seasons, flooding and forest fires which can disrupt construction seasons and increase costs. All of these needs must be addressed to end the housing emergency.

1.02: The housing crisis impacts demographic groups differently, with youth having their own set of unique and diverse needs and challenges as outlined in this report. Housing types constructed should ensure the right to housing is guaranteed for all NAN members, which requires developing housing that supports the unique needs of all across various life stages. This should include the construction of specialized youth housing including, but not limited to, *A Home of Our Own*, the design project completed by NAN youth.

1.03: Improve the quality of housing on reserve to ensure that homes are contributing rather than detracting from health and well-being. The persistence of mould and crowding on reserve has a particularly deleterious effect on youth. An elevated building standard should be employed throughout NAN territory to ensure building practices have minimal environmental impacts while being sustainable and appropriate for the climate, geography and lifeways of the region. Maximum Unit Price and other housing funding mechanisms should be adjusted to reflect the higher standard of building required in the territory.

1.04: Fund the development and ongoing operations of emergency and/or transitional housing in every First Nation in NAN territory. This should include a design process which engages NAN members with lived experience and frontline professionals from within the territory to ensure that the housing developed is relevant for the territory. Operational funding should include all staff and required support services to ensure that emergency and transitional housing provides safe and supportive environments and supports occupants on their healing journeys.

1.05: Ensure that all communities have access to both indoor and outdoor social infrastructure. These safe spaces– including community centres, arts spaces, playgrounds and others– are a critical community resource that support well-being and play an important role in suicide prevention.

To: Canada, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, Ontario & District Social Services and Administration Boards

1.06: Increase the number of Rent-Geared-to-Income and other similar models of community housing units in northern Ontario. Construct or acquire and renovate new social housing units, including housing options reserved for Indigenous youth in urban and rural hubs including, but not limited to: Thunder Bay, Dryden, Kenora, Timmins, Sudbury, Cochrane, Ignace, Iroquois Falls, Sioux Lookout, Geraldton and Longlac.

1.07: Expand the number and type of supportive housing units offered in urban centres. These should focus on providing medium-term housing solutions as well as the required health and well-being support services required by occupants to allow them to transition into permanent housing. This should include, but is not limited to: post-majority care, out-patient care, substance misuse, young mothers and others.

1.08: Develop specialized emergency-focused housing serving NAN youth in urban centres. First Nations youth face disproportionate levels of housing precarity and homelessness without having any dedicated facilities in northern Ontario. Funding should include the development of emergency housing units, long-term operations and maintenance, support services for youth access emergency housing and in-community prevention services to reduce the number of emergency housing uses.

To: Canada, Ontario & District Social Services and Administration Boards

1.09: Develop and implement a social infrastructure strategy through engagement with Indigenous youth, community members, non-profit organizations and service providers in urban centres. This strategy should identify the location, design and programming for youth specific spaces such as community hubs and drop-in centres. Municipalities, with the assistance of District Social Service and Administration Boards, should identify land parcels that can be made available to relevant Indigenous Organizations for the development and provision of safe spaces for youth.

1.10: Fund full-time positions for systems navigation staff to support NAN and other Indigenous community members in accessing the variety of housing and support services programs available in urban centres. Position responsibilities could include providing support for housing applications, coordinating with service providers, connecting youth with other service providers and tenant rights support. Additionally, the position could support homelessness prevention through workshops and clinics aimed at youth on preparing housing applications, accessing social assistance, creating a resume and interviewing for jobs.

1.11: Create relevant and appropriate financial literacy, tenant support and other required housing support materials for NAN youth. Recognizing that many NAN youth have little support in accessing the private housing rental market, create workshops and written materials that can support transitions to independent living, or upskilling to support success in the housing. This could include partnerships with legal-aid, tenant advocacy or other relevant non-profit organizations.

To: Ontario

1.12: Increase housing subsidies for recipients of Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program to address the growing costs of rental housing. The shelter component of each support program should be indexed annually to local/regional rental market prices.

1.13: Extend social assistance office hours (i.e., Ontario Works, Ontario Disability Support Program, District Social Services and Administration Board, etc.) to include some evenings/weekends to increase accessibility of services. In addition, identify alternative meeting options including virtual sessions to ensure that those not able to access physical office locations can obtain relevant services and supports.

CHILD & FAMILY SERVICES

To: Canada

2.01: Upon achieving a Final Settlement Agreement on First Nations Child and Family Services (FNCFS), develop a NAN-wide strategy to ensure NAN First Nations and youth receive equitable access to funds to support a range of initiatives including new housing and renovations of existing housing.

2.02: Ensure all NAN members who are eligible for FNCFS and Jordan's Principle compensation are supported in accessing their payment(s). This should include financial literacy resources for this age group. See NAN *Resolution 24/07 Approval of the Creation of a Coordination and Oversight Team: First Nations Child and Family Services*.

2.03: Engage and consult with Indigenous youth to develop a Youth Accountability Mechanism as part of the establishment a National Child and Youth Commissioner, as called for in the MMIWG Calls to Action 12.9 and the Assembly of Seven Generations (A7G) and Caring Society's report *Accountability in Our Lifetimes* to create greater accountability in upholding the right of Indigenous youth in NAN territory and throughout Canada.

To: Canada & Ontario

2.04: Create greater supports, including housing and mental health supports for youth aging out of the care system. A network of supportive housing options should be created both on- and off-reserve to support youth "aging out". Models for this housing, and its associated programs, should be developed and implemented in collaboration with youth and should have an ongoing mechanism for review and improvement.

2.05: Reduce the inequitable outcomes faced by First Nations youth living with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders including ensuring access to appropriate, long term support services within their community and social network.

To: Canada, Ontario, Child and Family Service Organizations & Nishnawbe Aski Nation

2.06: Work with relevant NAN departments, other internal stakeholders, tribal councils and community leaders towards community control of the child welfare system, ensuring that youth voices collected through this process are heard and remain central throughout the process.

2.07: Work to create greater stability in service provision to NAN youth. Prioritize training and other support opportunities that will minimize turnover in youth-serving positions allowing for the creation of more trusting relationships between youth and service providers.

To: Ontario

2.08: Support the protection of youth rights through the reestablishment of the Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth. Closure of the Office undermines and is contrary to MMIWG Calls to Justice 12.9 and TRC Calls to Action 1. Youth deserve a dedicated advocate that has experience in child welfare, child and youth mental health and youth justice sectors and champions youth voices and will support the long term goal of reducing the number of children in care.

2.09: Eliminate barriers for youth accessing programs or support services as a result of aging out of the care system through the development of an integrated service delivery model and standards for 'transition age' youth 17 to 26 years old for health and social services. Currently, some programs and services require youth to be of majority age to apply creating a lag in service provision between their reaching majority and the application process taking place. Integrated case management should support youth in applying for relevant services in lead-up to their transition to majority ensuring that service delivery can commence immediately at the time of transition.

EDUCATION

To: Canada

3.01: The full implementation of Shannen's Dream, creating equitable education on reserve and ensuring that all NAN youth have access to *safe and comfy* schools. This includes expanding existing facilities, or constructing new facilities to include, in all NAN First Nations the options of: early childhood education; elementary school; high school; and Adult learning centre. Each of these facilities should be developed to ensure that they accommodate a full range of extra-curricular activities including: traditional, cultural, recreational, academic, artistic and athletic activities. In addition, ensure that all schools have the facilities, staff and funding to offer three hot meals to all students. School space allocation formulas should be adjusted to accommodate this full range of uses of schools within First Nations.

3.02: In order to recruit teachers and encourage them to remain in First Nation communities and build lasting relationships with students, provide funding to ensure principals, administrators, education staff and teachers are at least on par with their provincial counterparts in addition to isolation pay for teacher retention on fly-in communities and to help with the high cost of living.

To: Canada & Ontario

3.03: Ensure there are Indigenous education counsellors and mental health workers, with access to dedicated space to provide supports, at every public and on-reserve school as recommended in the Seven Youth Inquest.

To: Canada, Ontario, District Social Services and Administration Boards & School Boards

3.04: Create resource packages for students available at all secondary schools (on-reserve, distance education, adult education, etc) and provide training/awareness campaigns for teachers, counsellors, cultural workers and community centres and organisations including Friendship Centres. This package should include: information on housing options and supports for on-reserve and off-reserve housing applications, Ontario Works, tenant rights and legal aid resources, emergency housing, and youth supporting organisations and hubs. Ensure information is also available through the NAN Services Directory App for Student Safety Workers.

To: Ontario & Ontario College of Teachers

3.05: Make cultural sensitivity training a requirement for all teacher candidates to be eligible for certification.

To: Post-Secondary Institutions

3.06: Ensure there are dedicated residences or spaces within residences, houses or apartment units, etc. for First Nation students on or near post-secondary universities and colleges. Additional supports should be available on campus to First Nations students accessing the private rental market including legal aid, tenant supports and others.

HEALTHCARE

To: Canada

4.01: Increase health care options on-reserve for expecting parents including peri- and postnatal and postpartum care. In addition, reduce barriers to training and fund positions for community-based Indigenous midwives and doulas on and off reserve.

4.02: Support the implementation of findings from NAN Health Transformation's review of existing standard offers and other contractual agreements between First Nations Non-Insured Health Benefits and boarding homes (or other similar facilities) to ensure that NAN youth traveling for medical care have access to safe and appropriate housing. This should include the development and expansion of First Nations-specific boarding homes and services including the full funding of their long-term operations and maintenance.

To: Canada & Ontario

4.03: Eliminate gaps in supports or services delivered across jurisdictions to ensure equity in all forms of health services delivery for First Nations youth regardless of the location they access services. For mobile youth, moving between jurisdictions, a diversity of service points are required including long distance, virtual and out-patient services. This should include continued support for the NAN Health Transformation process which seeks to facilitate First Nations design and governance of the health system.

4.04: Expand and develop new substance misuse treatment facilities and detoxification programs, including funding for their ongoing programming, operation and maintenance within NAN territory as well as outreach to reduce barriers for NAN youth. This should include support for the development and expansion of culturally- and land-based programs ensuring that programs are available in Anisininew, Cree and Ojibway languages.

4.05: Ensure long-term, sustainable funding for Choose Life. This should include provisions within the funding formula for capital funding and the operation and maintenance of adequate and appropriate space for Choose Life programming. In addition, this should include support for other youth-serving mental health programming and services as identified by communities.

JUSTICE SYSTEM

To: Canada & Ontario

5.01: Provide youth with programs and services that support mental, physical, social and cultural health that are proven to be critical forms of prevention and early intervention, keeping youth out of jail. Preventing youth from becoming involved in the justice system is essential to breaking the cycle of incarceration and homelessness.

5.02: Provide restorative justice and Indigenous-based reintegration support and healing programs for Indigenous youth in the criminal justice system. Providing more healing resources in community promotes a stronger focus on healing rather than punishment.

To: Canada, Ontario & NAN

5.03: Require legal rights education and related materials for Indigenous youth in school with material developed for various grade levels, for example the Nishnawbe-Aski Legal Services Public Legal Education program. As Feathers of Hope have highlighted in their report *Justice and Juries — A First Nations Youth Action Plan for Justice* (2016), "This need is critical given the over-representation of Aboriginal youth in the justice system."

To: Ontario & Municipalities

5.04: Increase the use of community-led, rather than police led, first response for those experiencing a crisis. Community-led first responders can include mental health, addiction, peer, youth and Indigenous crisis workers. Community-led first responders can provide culturally safe support, trauma informed care and follow-up services, connecting individuals with appropriate services including housing supports.

5.05: Police should prioritize pre- and post-charge diversion (or alternative measures) to keep youth out of the justice system in working with relevant local organizations and service providers (eg. Youth Justice Committee, Nishnawbe Aski Legal Services, etc). Measures should also be put in place to allow for the supervision of diversion outside of urban centres, including in NAN First Nations. As well, to understand the full impact of pre-charge diversions develop a system for recording rates of diversion and their success in keeping youth out of the justice system.

5.06: Provide discharge planning starting at the first point of incarceration for all young people who are detained for any amount of time before or after a bail decision or sentence. This may also include permissive bail conditions that create conditions youth can abide by and are meaningful, require child and family services workers at all youth court dates, and opportunities to have diversion supervised in other communities such as their home community.

5.07: Ensure youth have government issued ID before being released from a corrections center.

ANTI-INDIGENOUS DISCRIMINATION AND RACISM

To: Canada, Ontario, Municipalities & Public

6.01: Recognize the impacts of anti-Indigenous racism on the lives of First Nation youth through their overrepresentation in the child welfare system and justice system and inequitable access to education, healthcare, housing and infrastructure.

SOCIAL NETWORKS

To: Canada & Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation

7.01: Fund a Youth Housing Summit to provide a range of workshops and presentations such as space for youth to share their housing experiences, learn about housing and related professions, access information, receive support for social housing applications and complete hands-on sessions.

To: Canada & Ontario

7.02: Fund and support the development and ongoing operation of a youth council in every NAN community.

7.03: Support annual NAN-wide recreational events to bring together youth to reduce barriers to sport participation and help build confidence and leadership through a peer support network.

7.04: Create pathways towards certifications, skills development, training and mental health resources that would allow First Nations youth to appropriately facilitate summer, evening and weekend activities for their peers.

To: Canada, Ontario, Municipalities & Public

7.05: Ensure all spaces, services and programming provide a safe space for 2SLGBTQQIA youth and that these spaces and providers visibly indicate they are 2SLGBTQQIA-inclusive.

TRANSPORTATION

To: Canada & Ontario

8.01: Develop a mechanism to repatriate NAN youth to their home communities to avoid homelessness or other dangers. Youth can become separated from their communities and support systems for a variety of reasons and be unable to afford the trip home, where they may be safest and which may act as prevention and diversion from other systems.

To: Ontario, District Social Services and Administration Boards & Municipalities

8.02: Make the local public transit systems free for all ages in Thunder Bay, Kenora, Sioux Lookout, Timmins, Sudbury, Temiskaming Shores and North Bay. A greater range of accessible and safe transportation options within cities and across northern Ontario will reduce barriers to accessing existing services and reduce risks faced by youth.

8.03: Increased regional and intercity transit networks and frequency to create greater connectivity and safe transportation options across northern Ontario. Including funding of local transit connections (on-demand or fixed) between road access First Nations and their nearby municipalities.

COST OF LIVING AND FINANCIAL INDEPENDENCE

To: Canada & Ontario

9.01: Support the findings and recommendation of the *NAN Food Solutions: Homeland Food Harvesters Needs Assessment and Feasibility Study Report* (2022). Additionally, support initiatives to increase access to affordable, high quality and diverse foods off-reserve including reducing costs, eliminating food deserts, increasing access to farmer markets, etc.

To: Canada, Ontario & District Social Services and Administration Boards

9.02: Increase access to youth in obtaining government issued identification, such as birth certificate, health card and status card to be able to access health, employment, housing and education services. Additionally, waive all fees associated with government issued ID for First Nations youth.

To: Ontario

9.03: In order to address cost of living challenges, support the implementation of universal basic income (UBI). A UBI model could guarantee a stable source of income allowing greater access to secure housing and enabling a wider range of choices for NAN youth.

ACCESS TO THE LAND AND CULTURAL CONNECTIONS

To: Canada & Ontario

10.1: Ensure that the land is protected and stewarded for generations to come through First Nations-led initiatives and solutions so that NAN First Nation citizens can continue to access and gain strength from the land.

10.2: Increase and fund opportunities for youth living off reserve to participate in land based activities and cultural programming.

To: Canada, Ontario, District Social Services and Administration Boards & Municipalities

10.3: Advocate for Indigenous youth to have a greater voice in urban planning and design, including park and recreational planning, to create spaces that support cultural activities and traditions. This should include commitments from Thunder Bay, Kenora, Timmins, Sudbury and others to dedicate space and/or allocate land and buildings as required.

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Together Design Lab