Snow Drifters:
Homeless men in Rankin Inlet
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This research project was conducted to gain a deeper understanding of the homeless men in the community of Rankin Inlet in Nunavut. The aim was to hear the lived experiences of those men who are homeless. The issues are complex and the data collected through intensive interviews with each of the four men were categorized into ten main themes. These themes include: sleeping locations, defining homelessness, stigmatization, addictions and mental health issues, scrounging for food, rental arrears, sadness/isolation/loss of identity, positive outlook and action. In the Arctic homelessness is hidden and disguised in overcrowded living conditions. The objective of this research project is to acknowledge that homelessness exists in Rankin Inlet and get the community involved in finding solutions to combat homeless issues, educate the public and work towards building a homeless shelter for men. The voices of the people most directly affected by homelessness must be taken into consideration because as Inuit we are taught to care for those in need, ‘llagiinniq’ (kinship).
# Table of Contents

Executive Summary .......................................................................................................... ii  
Table of Contents ............................................................................................................. iii  
Acknowledgements ............................................................................................................ v  
Dedication ......................................................................................................................... vi  

Section One: Introduction .................................................................................................1  
  Why the research ..............................................................................................................1  
  Purpose of the study .........................................................................................................2  
  My location ......................................................................................................................4  

Section Two: Methodology ...............................................................................................8  
  Introduction ......................................................................................................................8  
  Indigenous methodology ................................................................................................10  
  Qualitative methodology ...............................................................................................11  
  Participant selection .......................................................................................................12  
  Interviews .......................................................................................................................15  
  Data collection ...............................................................................................................17  
  Ethical considerations ...................................................................................................19  

Section Three: Literature Review ....................................................................................22  
  What is homelessness? ...................................................................................................22  
  Types of issues prevalent to homelessness ....................................................................29  
  Historical factors ..........................................................................................................33  

Section Four: Interview Findings ..................................................................................35  
  Theme One: sleeping locations ......................................................................................37  
  Theme Two: defining homelessness ...............................................................................43
Theme Three: stigmatization ................................................................. 49
Theme Four: addictions ................................................................. 54
Theme Five: mental health issues ...................................................... 57
Theme Six: scrounging for food .......................................................... 61
Theme Seven: rental arrears ................................................................. 65
Theme Eight: sadness/isolation/loss of identity ............................... 68
Theme Nine: positive outlook ............................................................. 71
Theme Ten: action ............................................................... 73

Section Five: Recommendations & Conclusion ............................ 75
Access to affordable housing .............................................................. 76
Shelter for men .............................................................................. 77
Safe homes in the community ............................................................. 78
Soup kitchen ................................................................................. 79
Action plan ....................................................................................... 80

References ......................................................................................... 82
Appendix A – Participant consent form .................................................. 85
Appendix B – Consent form for interview .............................................. 88
Appendix C – Interview guide ................................................................. 89
Appendix D – Interpreter confidentiality form ......................................... 90
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To Dr. Leslie Brown my supervisor, I cannot thank you enough for giving me encouragement, guidance, direction, and patience in this journey. I would also like to thank Dr. Pat McKenzie and Mary Irkootee for being on my committee.

I thank my immediate and extended family for supporting me in my journey. Thank you all for being there for me.

Koana, Takohikena
DEDICATION

To my father “Jimmy Moon”, James Niptanatiak who truly believed in me and would not let me quit school and always inspired me to follow my path and my dreams. My father protected me from negative traditional influences and because of him I am eternally grateful. My father did not complete his education, yet this did not dampen his spirits to inspire his children to achieve their dreams and goals, and not to be afraid of the challenges that lay ahead for each one of us. In another lifetime journey, we will meet again Dad.

To my mother Theresa Kiudluit Niptanatiak, who is truly a role model in achieving her goals and dreams. Against all odds she embraced teaching and passed her knowledge to her students who were fortunate enough to have her as their teacher. Today my mother continues to teach me and our families her traditional and cultural values and beliefs; I still hear stories and words of wisdom from her in Inuinnaqtun.

Koanappakaffi.
SECTION ONE: INTRODUCTION

To the Inuit the struggle to survive was a harsh reality, a tremendous test of endurance that would be fruitless and futile without the cooperation and assistance of the spirits. The strong persistent and fearless individual was given the highest respect...and would be highly rewarded in the afterlife. Minor, 1992, pg.39

Why the Research...

As the past President of Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, Jose Kusugak acknowledges that homelessness is a phenomenon known as ‘hidden homelessness’ due to the Arctic environment in which Inuit live. “In the Arctic you can’t be homeless in the winter…you’d freeze to death” (2005 Press Release). Up here in the Arctic, homeless people do not generally sleep outdoors in the cold winter months due to the extreme freezing temperatures. If a person is not protected from the elements, they will perish.

Iqaluit, the capital of Nunavut, has the only homeless shelter for men in the territory. If you reside in Rankin Inlet, you have to find a sanctuary either in one of the local churches if the door is left open or find any open building where space may be available. Advocates on the issue of homelessness in the north are becoming vocal and known. One warrior is Mary Irkootee who struggles each day to find monies to open a shelter for the homeless people of Rankin Inlet. Irkootee estimates there are approximately 30 homeless people in the community and these “invisible” homeless people drift around every day, looking for a safe place to sleep or take refuge (Nunatsiaq News, January 28, 2005).

This research is aimed to hearing the voices of homeless men in the community of Rankin Inlet. These stories will give the reader an idea what it is like to be homeless, how each participant perceives of himself as homeless. My lenses may be clouded as to what
homelessness means to me since I am an educated Inuk woman, having a warm
comfortable home, a space to sleep each night, and a job. Through the lenses of the
homeless men telling their stories, I hope to understand and give the reader a firsthand
glimpse of what these men face each day.

This research will be of valuable to the Hamlet of Rankin Inlet, the Members of
Legislative Assembly, the Nunavut Housing Corporation, Nunavut Tunngavik
Incorporated, other northern communities and readers in general throughout the whole of
Nunavut. Hopefully we can move together to tackle the issue of homelessness in the
North and its impacts.

**Purpose of the Study…**

I live in the community of Rankin Inlet and I constantly heard the word
“homeless” or “hidden homelessness” as it crops up daily in my professional practice and
personal activities. The purpose of this phenomenological research is to describe and give
recognition to the lived experiences of homeless men in the community of Rankin Inlet,
and how social issues are compounded due to being homeless. The focus group of this
research is the homeless single men from the community regardless of their immediate,
extended or adopted family members. I am focusing only on single men due to time
constraints of this project. Ultimately, the goal is to hear the lived experiences of
homeless men and explore how the community can address homelessness. Hopefully, the
research will create awareness of this issue for the community and help facilitate the
development of shelter services for men.
If a person were not encouraged to tell their story, it may never be told or heard. Homeless men are isolated, alone and often struggle to survive each day. Each day they face countless barriers and hurdles as they live in their own community. Many of these individuals have relatives, family and friends, yet they face homelessness each day. Each participant has been affected by homelessness, whether they live with family, friends, or through the kindness of strangers, find refuge in a cabin, in a porch or underneath a building. Individuals are homeless for a variety of reasons. There are many precipitating factors that impact a homeless person’s life. For Inuit; European contact, the colonization and marginalization, along with oppression, play an immeasurable part. These stories are important and so this research aims to give voice to these homeless men and to take into account all of the above factors.

This research is important as current research on homeless men in our Inuit communities is limited or next to non-existent. Normally, non-Inuit and southerners conduct the research, but, as the researcher and being Inuk who resides in the community, I see, hear, and feel what homeless people struggle with each day. There is a limited body of research literature available on homeless Inuit men. The Northern context of homelessness is different in Nunavut than for those living in the south. This research will create potential awareness on the plight of homeless men in the community of Rankin Inlet to Nunavummiut, to the Territorial and Federal governments and to others in our territory who also face this issue and become involved. Hearing lived experiences through the words of those who are homeless and documenting those words will give voice to the invisible or hidden homelessness in this community.
As stated by Mr. Hunter Tootoo “traditionally homelessness was never a problem in our communities. It is a recent problem that only now we are beginning to recognize. In Nunavut homelessness is hidden from view in the form of severe overcrowding.” (February 27, 2002 – Fifth Session of the Legislative Assembly of Nunavut). Finding a definition for homelessness in Nunavut is a challenge and I would like to find a term to define homelessness. How does one define homelessness in the Arctic? How does one survive the harsh winters when the temperature easily falls to –40 to –50 degrees below zero? These are some of the questions the reader will be pondering as one reads the participant’s narrative.

This research aims to provide an opportunity for overall awareness of homelessness in Nunavut communities.

My location…

“Baby birds follow their parents all over the place for some time before they are able to do things themselves. When they are able, the parents leave them alone. Then, even when the parent bird is nowhere to be seen, the young birds have exactly the same ways that their parents had – they follow the examples that have been set before them, just the same way that our parents do for us. The ways of good parents can be followed in order to live a good life, to be able-bodied, and be wise.

Donald Suluk, Paallirmiut, 1987:89

My Inuk name is Takohikena. I am named after my mother’s step-mother and most people know me by my English name, Ann Rose. They also call me as Takok, a shortened version of my Inuk name. I come from the Copper Inuit of the Kitikmeot Region. I was born in an iglu on 13-Mile Island, Kikiktakyuk, as it is known in my Inuinnaqtun dialect. I grew up in the small community of Coppermine, named because of
the abundance of native copper that used to be found in the area. The copper was used by
the Copper Inuit to make various tools and instruments such as ulus, scrapers, needles or
knives. Today, Coppermine is known as Kugluktuk which is its traditional name. It
means, “Water running/flowing down”, referring to the Coppermine River.

Prior to being sent to the residential schools, I lived nomadically with my parents,
siblings, extended family members and others in camps. My dad and mom took me
everywhere they went using our dog team and sled during the winter months, walking
across the tundra and nuna with dogs loaded with our belongings during the summer
months and crossing large bodies of water by boat and kicker or outboard motor in the
later years. When I was younger my Mom and my two older brothers always traveled up
the Coppermine River with a sail boat which also had a small kicker. Once I started
attending residential schools in Aklavik, Inuvik and Yellowknife I lost the ability to
speak my Inuinnaqtun language and had forgotten much of my Inuit culture and
traditional customs (I perceived that I had, in reality it was still in my Spirit). Today I
have begun to embrace my culture and traditional upbringing because I could always
understand Inuinnaqtun when it was spoken to me but could never reply. Today I am
slowly learning to speak my Inuinnaqtun language and I am proud of that. An Elder once
told me, my Inuinnaqtun language is “sleeping” and will come out in voice when I am
ready. That is why this research is so important to me; I will find ways to bring out the
silent voices of the homeless for my people and others. My voice will no longer be
“sleeping.”

I grew up hearing oral stories and listening to the sounds of drumming, singing
and humming. Either my Anaanattiaq Effie or Annie or my Ataatattiaq Papak or Hologak
would be humming and swaying or drum dancing to our traditional Inuit songs. It was during those times that my little feet would be moving to their beat, not realizing at the time I would become instrumental in bringing out the silent voices of men and women so they could be heard.

When I started my Masters program, I did not have a clear vision of what my research project would look like. Then I moved to Rankin Inlet in 2005 to begin my journey as a social worker. Here again I still did not know what I wanted my research project to be until I joined a homeless committee in the community. This committee met at least three or four times that year until it ceased to continue due to the lack of leadership. The committee needed a leader who could take on the committee and be commitment to this endeavor. The committee pondered the aspects of homelessness, how the community becomes involved in the issues and how they might access funding to build a shelter for the homeless.

One of the objectives of this research is the hearing and sharing of experiences by each participant as they share why they are homeless and how they became homeless or are perceived as being homeless. A person who is homeless does not necessarily identify themselves as homeless; the community does that for them through judgments, stigmatization and colonization. Within a community, many people only see their world view and cannot understand how one becomes homeless because they never had to face being homeless. Judgments occur when a person only takes into consideration that anyone can get out of being homeless if only the individual had the will power to stay sober or not use drugs as a means of escaping from reality and work towards stopping their addictions and pay off their rental arrears. The label of homelessness arises for
many reasons that will be addressed further in the research as the reader hear the words from each participant.

As the researcher, this study keeps me connected to my people regardless of the fact that I come from another region or community. Moving to Rankin Inlet, I was looked upon as an outsider because I was not raised in that community or because I had not lived up North for some time. I had left the North when there was only one territory, the Northwest Territories and returned much later after it divided and the new territory of Nunavut was formed. It’s through Inuit Traditional Knowledge (ITK) or Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit the stories of the homelessness will be brought forth by the participants. We have a rich history of oral storytelling in the community of Rankin Inlet, as well as in the rest of Nunavut. In this research project, my research question is: Where do you sleep? Along with the question of where one sleeps, the research paper will make visible the struggles each participant faces each day. They also demonstrate their courageousness due to their homeless situation, how each person copes and lives through this plight and how they and why they encounter difficulties of being homeless.
SECTION TWO: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The aim of this research is to hear the lived experiences of homeless men in the community of Rankin Inlet in Nunavut. Telling life experiences through storytelling, stories passed on from generation to generation has always been the lifeline of Inuit. Today in our modern world we have the use of television, written books and magazines, tape recorders or digital recorders to obtain and record stories or experiences, giving outsiders a better perspective of what homelessness would be like for those men who are facing homelessness each day. What readers learn from these personal experiences will assist in combating stereotypical attitudes and racism and work towards appropriate and effective strategies to address root causes of homelessness. It will also give ammunition to take action rather than just talk, talk, talk. As the researcher it became clear that I was on the right path to listening to the voices of homelessness through the lenses of those who live it each day. It became clearer because various agencies in the community were talking about homelessness and a committee had been established to take action to address this situation. I wanted these men to tell me their life stories and their experiences in order to see meaning in their lives and acknowledge its importance as they know it. As the sole researcher, I also needed to give ownership to these men as these are their stories, not mine.

The stakeholders of Nunavut and the community of Rankin Inlet and Nunavummiut need to hear these men tell their experiences and histories on what it’s like to be homeless, what it’s like to live and sleep couch to couch (couch surfing), digging in garbage cans and eating scraps of food thrown away by others and sleeping under a piece
of plywood for protection from nature’s fury. These experiences and histories were gathered in the form of unstructured conversation with each participant. As a social worker in my own community, it was hard to take that hat off and become just a researcher for my University project and not become caught up in the plight of homeless men as I heard their stories. As I interviewed and participated in observing their stories, I received gifts in return. These participants gave me the gifts; of understanding where they come from, how they got to be in their situations, and how to not become judgmental because of their lifestyles and choices. Oral storytelling is a gift in itself; the gift of giving.

In order to do research in Nunavut I had to apply to the Nunavut Research Institute for a license before I could start my project. My license was granted to proceed with the project. The issuing of licenses to individuals doing research in Nunavut is controlled in order for Nunavummiut to have a say in research projects and theses. Thus Inuit and non-Inuit are not taken advantage of and local key players and community members are kept in the loop as to who does research and why. Tuhiwai Smith (1990) reiterates that we need Indigenous research methodologies because for too long our stories have gone untold, or have been misinterpreted. She says, “We are the most researched people in the world,” yet, we still have not seen the benefits of all this research. Also, Smith recognizes that Indigenous people all over the world have a different story to tell, but have never had the opportunity to tell that story. An example is the issue of homeless which I am undertaking in this research project. Indigenous accounts have been interpreted in colonial, patriarchal, exploitive ways, and Indigenous knowledge has been undervalued and underestimated by dominant worldviews.
Indigenous methodology

While Inuit and Aboriginal researchers are slowly articulating indigenous methodologies and providing profound affects on how research is conducted, I wanted to make sure that my own research would use commonsense approaches and basic concepts such as respect, dignity, harmony, balance, kinship, and reciprocity. Thus, this research utilizes an Indigenous methodology, guided by these worldviews and recognizes the importance of having the Nunavut Research Institute monitor researchers doing research for Nunavummiut.

Graveline (1998) defines worldview as a collective consciousness. It is the assumptions and images as Indigenous knowledge (pg. 19) or ways of knowing. Inuit ways of knowing are grounded in how they have lived as nomadic hunters and gatherers and have through generations told oral stories. It was just the way it was. Further defined by Ortiz, a Tewa historian, an Indigenous worldview is “a distinctive vision of reality which not only interprets and orders the places and events in the experience of a people, but lends form, direction, and continuity to life as well: (Beck and Walters, 1977: 5). Ortiz reiterates Indigenous research and writings as using a distinct set of values and practices, and a sense of continuity with tradition as the experiences of a lifetime (Indigenous Voices Panel, personal communications, February 27 & 28, 2003). It will be important for me in my research to show participants respect when listening to their stories with the understanding that each participant has been taught their own values and beliefs by their grandparents, parents and other Elders. The Inuit culture is oral and has been passed on for many generations where a person is taught to respect the environment, the animals, respect their Elders, share their game, and to help and assist with one
another. It will also be important as a researcher, to make changes when they request it and again, to be able to listen to their voice throughout my analysis, and writing of these findings. The Inuit traditional ways of helping each other shows that we treat each other with respect, compassion and caring; therefore we help those who are in need, such as those who are homeless. Many of our Inuit societal values still carry advice from our Elders who learned these values from their Elders before them; we are a community of consensus.

**Qualitative methodology**

I used the qualitative phenomenology approach, the in-depth understanding of using the lived experiences of homeless single men. This is my opportunity to do research in a community that is predominantly Inuit in population. The strategy that will best answer my research question is to listen and hear individuals’ stories by interviewing them. What is it like to be homeless or how do they feel about being homeless? The answers will lie within the qualitative aspect of each personal interview. I also believe that a qualitative research design is more conducive to a holistic worldview and by using oral traditions. A holistic worldview as stated by Hart (2002) is “when one embraces all aspects of life and giving of attention and energy to each aspect within ourselves and the universe around us” (pg. 41). This is where we get to know individuals, in this case the experiences of those who are homeless.

The aim of using phenomenology is to articulate the lived meaning of a particular kind of experience, such as being homeless, and to determine a meaningful aspect of one’s life. Creswell (1998) states “phenomenological study describes the meaning of the
lived experiences for several individuals about a concept or the phenomenon” (pg. 51).

This confirms that as a qualitative researcher, lived experiences of the homeless participants are equally important to my research project.

Phenomenology asks the simple question, what it is like to have a certain experience, in this case learning about men who are homeless. I want the men to tell me of their life and their experiences. I want to be able to pass on the information to others, to open doors so that the community of Rankin Inlet will be able to read and feel the experiences of these homeless men. Phenomenology attempts to guide the researcher to get to the true meaning of being homeless as these men face it each day.

**Participant Selection**

For this research project I will use the terms, Inuit, Inuk or Nunavummiut for the people of Nunavut regardless of ancestry. My research focused on single men, who are perceived to be homeless. These homeless men could be living with friends or families or with the kindness of strangers, couch surfing because they have no “shelter” or “home” to live in. The men do not own a home or a rental unit; they do not have a place “to call their own.” In Nunavut a person cannot live outdoors without some form of shelter, therefore, the term “homeless” does not fit the context as in southern standards. Many of these men speak English as their second language and their first language is Inuktitut. With utmost respect and dignity for each person that I interviewed I needed to make sure that each participant’s voice was heard.

My aim was to use the Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit (IQ) or Inuit Traditional Knowledge (ITK) because it is important to be respectful of our own culture and
traditions, to understand that Inuit men were once hunters and gatherers who headed their own households. I concentrated on common respect, the Inuktitut language, and the spirit of being Inuit as opposed to southern knowledge. One of the ways was to let the participant’s know that we were working together for a common cause, which is homelessness. As defined in Uqalurait: An Oral History of Nunavut, Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit “means knowledge that has been passed on to us by our ancestors, things that we have always know, things crucial to our survival – patience and resourcefulness (Bennett and Rowley, foreword, 2004).” Due to colonization, residential schools, the slaying of dog teams, and changes such as living in settlements, and as those boundaries changed, the men did not accept change as readily as the women. With Elder involvement, many men are seeking guidance and wisdom from them and moving towards change. As Inuit try to balance between two worlds, one traditional and one modern, they find that they need to move with social changes and learn new trades and skills and access modern technology and yet maintain their ancestral heritage and kinship ties.

I worked with Aqsaaraq Addictions Project to inform potential participants about the homeless project and gave participants information on how to contact me if they were interested in participating. I had left a participant consent form (Appendix B) at the Aqsaaraq office for those individuals interested in the research and a detailed outline of the research project. If a unilingual individual wished to be interviewed, I would provide an interpreter, who also signed a confidentiality agreement (Appendix C). When a unilingual individual participant expressed the wish to participate, the participant signed the consent form regarding his wishes and noting that confidentially would be maintained
by both researcher and interpreter. The interpreter also signed a confidentially form. Interview data was kept with me, the research project coordinator. The interpreter’s job was to translate the consent form, the interview questions and answers. This interpreter was also provided if a participant felt more comfortable speaking in his own Inuktitut language versus speaking in English.

As well, I let it be known to my coworkers at work and other community resources that I was looking for participants for this research project and would greatly appreciate their suggestions and or contacts.

Research intentions were always made known and confidentially would be maintained. It is encouraging to note that each and every person asked to participate in an interview granted consent. Individuals self-identified as being homeless. I did not perceive their situation and as they relayed their experiences we explored the positive and/or negative connotations with the term “homeless.” The qualitative methodology enabled me to learn from their personal experiences.

When a unilingual individual participant expressed the wish to participate, the participant signed the consent form regarding his wishes and noting that confidentially would be maintained. The interpreter also signed a confidentially form. The interview data was kept confidential and would only be accessible to the project coordinator and researcher. The interpreter’s job was to translate the consent form, the interview questions and the answers.
Interviews

I interviewed four men for this project. The men ranged from ages 27 to 40 years of age. They were all of Inuit descent and only two of the participants had children. The men were not currently involved with a partner. Drawing from Anderson & Arsenault (1998), I like the interview process because as the observer I can pick up non-verbal clues, watch facial expressions, and listen to the tone of voice for any discrepancies or discomfort. I chose to interview the participants face-to-face rather than conduct a questionnaire. In this manner, as the researcher, I could observe their body language and listen for their voice tone. The research itself is emotional and personal due to the nature of each person’s situation; being homeless.

It was personal because these are their own stories, full of painful memories. It was emotional because it must have been painful to recall stories where they may have been violated and traumatized in their lives. Thus, I was conscious of reminding each participant to seek additional self-care with someone they trusted, such as an Elder, minister, or a good friend if traumatizing memories arose during the interviews.

Each person had heard about the project and wanted to see some action as to how homelessness could be addressed. They felt that action is needed, not more talk; that there has been enough talking already. I met with each person to explain the purpose of the project, possible inconveniences, benefits, risks and harm to them as participants and obtained informed consent, along with their voluntary participation. Written and informed consent was obtained from each individual (Appendix A), along with the interpreter’s form (Appendix C) prior to each interview and formal approval from the Human Ethics Committee from the University of Victoria. We arranged interviews to be
conducted at the individual’s choice of location, lasting one to two hours in duration for each interview and one follow-up meeting to clarify information or to obtain additional information from the main interview if required.

The interview in itself was an opportunity for the informant to be heard and it also gave the opportunity for the researcher to learn from this individual; therefore the ability to listen was crucial. I had an interview guide of questions to ask (Appendix B), yet I simply chose to ask each participant to help me understand why he became homeless, or more specifically to answer the question “Where do you sleep?” The general interview guide was for my purposes because I wanted the participants tell me their stories in their own words and that I would not be editing or correcting their spoken language or how they described their stories. These interviews were open-ended. An Elder once told me that as a caregiver one needs to allow the person to speak and to interrupt their flow of thought would be disrespectful to the storyteller and it would also break their thought process.

I purposely chose to engage in the interview method rather than using the survey method because survey questionnaires tend to be impersonal and do not draw out a person’s perspective or deepest thoughts. Phenomenology draws out the most in-depth interviews. Drawing from Oakley’s (1990) article on interviewing, she talks about the process of interviews where balance must be met and how interviews are best conducted (pg. 33). She expects common sense interaction, simulated-conversation type interview, pleasantries including warmth and rapport with the participant (pg. 32). From my own experiences with interviewing and working with Inuit, I feel more comfortable listening and observing rather than interrupting or asking questions. In our Inuit culture, it is
disrespectful to interrupt a speaker; it is also rude to ask questions unless one has been given permission to ask.

**Data Collection**

The interviews ranged from approximately one hour to two hours depending on the participant. Interviews were held at the Social Services office due to the sensitive nature of the questions. Each participant was again given the discretion of where they wanted the interviews to be held. The questions were considered sensitive because of the fact that each person did not have a space to call their own where they were staying for that day or evening. All of the participants felt comfortable going to the local area office as this building has other business outlets and participants would not be stigmatized or seen as going to the Social Services office for assistance.

All of the interviews were audio taped with the permission of the participants. I also took field notes for clarification and informed each participant that the interview would be transcribed and typed. As a researcher having firsthand knowledge of how many hours it takes to transcribe one tape, I knew it would be best to limit the number of participants and to remember the need to rent a transcriber due to the amount of time it takes to transcribe tapes! Before turning on the recorder I made sure that each participant felt at ease and I addressed any additional questions that I had not answered prior to taping. I had small chitchats with each person before beginning the recording in order to establish a relationship and to give the participant the opportunity to feel at ease. Data was collected in an informal style free-flowing, uninterrupted, with open-ended
participation; thus allowing every opportunity for each participant to tell their perspectives on homelessness.

All of the taped interviews were transcribed by me. I poured over each transcription to get the feel of what it would be like to be homeless; I was trying to get a sense of interaction and feeling with each participant.

I had a guideline of questions to ask each participant (Appendix C), yet did not want to interrupt as the participant started telling their story. I wanted to make sure that their story was written verbatim and recorded as was told to me, not changing their understanding of the English language or how the spoken word was. Johnson Young (1993) talks about how marginalized voices are interpreted because of whiteness, and the dominant culture of how interviews are misconstrued. Such misconstructions would occur if I began pushing my own agenda, changing the wording of my participants to suite my own needs or interpreting how I wanted the interview to move forward. Young further points out these interviews and questions are not suitable for Black people and “Others” such as Inuit participants due to cultural insensitivity. The ignorance of culture and language is further complicated because white dominant voices tend to distort or reinterpret marginalized voices such as those of the Black and the native people’s voices. Drawing from Young’s perspectives of distorted and written interpretations; many Inuit and Aboriginal voices have been lost because of dominant mainstream society’s way of recording interviews and changing words to suit their interpretive needs. I have read research interviews where Inuit and Aboriginal people’s words were “cleaned-up” thus changing the true meaning of their spoken words. The dialects or broken English languages of Inuit and Aboriginal peoples were ignored or dismissed. So, it is important
during interviews to listen and to incorporate what participants are saying and only edit what they want edited.

Tuhiwai Smith (1999) talked about interpretation problems when interviewing because of academic writing. Will my academic interpretation of Inuit or Aboriginal people’s interviews be realistic? Will I write what was actually being said or what I thought was being said? Will I be influenced or swayed to interpret the voices of my people and change their meanings to suit my needs for my research paper and get a passing paper? In other words would I disrespect and dishonor what was passed onto me and let it dictate the outcome of the interview process. Smith reiterates that Indigenous people have been historically excluded, marginalized, and “Othered” due to the power of non-indigenous people (pg. 34). In my interviews it was critical for me to always be aware of my academic privileges and how this may influence how I interpreted the stories of the Inuit with whom I was dialoguing.

Ethical Considerations

Researchers have identified areas of ethical concerns on Indigenous research (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999; Becker, 1970, Fixico, 1998; RCAP, 1996, Pidgeon & Hardy Cox, 2001, Anderson & Arsenault 1998). Homelessness stems from ongoing unresolved grief and trauma, colonization, forced assimilation, racism, and children being taken away to residential schools or relocated to southern families due to diseases such as tuberculosis (personal experiences of men and women who lost their parent or family members to TB). Without a balanced holistic approach to life, many Inuit and Aboriginal people struggle with stigmatization, isolation, loss of identity, poverty, substance use, traditional
and cultural losses, loss of languages, as well as being alienated from family members and their communities. These are just some of the reasons why men become homeless. Therefore, I had to maintain the confidentiality entrusted to me and keep risks to the participants as minimal as possible.

The ethical considerations that raised concerns were confidentiality and risks and harm to the participants. During the initial contact and setting up of interview times while obtaining informed consent, I discussed at length some possible risks to them. I informed participants that they may find it emotionally draining or challenging to describe their homelessness experiences, otherwise I did not anticipate any undue burden during the interview process. I also expressed that if they at any time felt discomfort with any part of the research process, the interviews would be terminated. Participants were informed of their rights to discontinue the interview process at any time, no questions asked. The interviews would not be used in any part of the research or analysis (Appendix A).

As the researcher I did not anticipate risks to the participants beyond “minimal risk” because any possible harm implied on participant interaction will not be greater than talking about their living situations as part of their everyday life that relates to the research project.

I discussed with each participant that all measures will be taken to respect their confidentiality. The anonymity and confidentiality of the participants will be respected. Any quotes used will be presented in a way as not to compromise the identity of the participant. All participant contact will be solely by the researcher. I assured each one of them that their identity would be kept confidential through the use of assigned codes on all material. There will be no identifying information in the transcribed data. All relevant
material will be only accessible by the researcher and my project supervisor. All material will be stored in a locked file cabinet, and all electronic material will be protected by researcher’s computer password. Data from the project will be disposed and destroyed, while all transcribed and coded data will be retained. The raw data will be destroyed within six months of the defense of my research project.

I had to inform each participant the only way that confidentiality would be breached is if they were to disclose such instances of child abuse, suicidal ideation, or severe depression, or illegal activities such as selling drugs or bootlegging which could result in injury to the participant or to others. As an Inuk social worker, I can offer support when requested by participant.
SECTION THREE: LITERATURE REVIEW

“It’s like I coined the phrase, “snow drifters.” We walk and we walk, and we walk and we walk, we walk from one warm place to the next.”

The literature review will address the research on homelessness. Before I can even begin to address the literature review, I will need to provide the audience a definition of homelessness, especially to the community of Rankin Inlet where homelessness is often “hidden” or categorized under “couch surfing” or “overcrowded” or “invisible.”

What is homelessness?

Many of the literature readings that I have read have adopted the United Nations definition of homelessness as either “relative” or “absolute” homelessness, mainly referring to homeless individuals who do not have any type of shelter over their heads (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, article 25, par. 1). The literature also provides the definition that “relative” indicates those at risk of becoming homeless. Homelessness is situational due to one’s mental health factors, poverty, social issues or family circumstances that place this certain person at risk. I believe that “relative” homelessness is difficult to define because the term is so broad. The men’s basic health and safety standards are not even meet.

In the northern context absolute homelessness would be described as being visible. This definition would include the homeless men staying at the local church, in porches, and abandoned cabins or buildings. If Rankin Inlet had a men’s shelter or an emergency safe house, then these men would be staying there for the night.
If I were to define relative homelessness in the north, many people would be excluded who are living in homes that are not suitable for human conditions where individuals are not safe, where homes contain mold and mildew, and where they are unprotected from the elements, such as the harsh -50 degrees Celsius winters in Nunavut. We live in a territory where we need shelter to survive and be out of the cold elements. This would include those men who are evicted from family homes, their rental units or have gone to jail.

In Nunavut, hidden homelessness is prevalent because it gives definition to those who live in overcrowded conditions and those who couch surf at family, friends and strangers’ homes. In our culture and traditions, there is no such thing as hidden homeless because everyone looks after each other and takes in extra people to shelter. We are all taught to share what we have. It’s just the way it is.

The literature on Inuit homelessness is limited. Webster (2006) prepared a report for the Housing and Homelessness Branch, Human Resources and the Social Development Canada which examined the challenges of homelessness in the Territorial North, the lack of quantitative data, lack of research, the lack of information sharing among stakeholders, the socio-economic costs due to geographic factors and costs of construction, along with the types of Northern homeless definitions. The author has many recommendations on the extent of homelessness in the North.

*Information Sharing on Homelessness in the North (Jackson, 2006)* is another report which was designed to help increase knowledge about homelessness in the North and suggested ways to improve and access available information on homelessness in the territories.
It has been difficult to find relevant homelessness literature as most research and findings are mostly addressed to the Aboriginal or First Nations people and many Inuit do not call themselves Aboriginal, only as needed for political reasons. For this research project I will use the terminology; Inuk, Inuit or Nunavummiut for the people of Nunavut.

A report on The Case of Inuit Specific: Renewing the relationship between the Inuit and Government of Canada prepared by Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, April 19, 2004 indicates that “the root of many of the social issues facing Inuit, are directly related to an acute shortage of housing…Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami sees housing initiative as a key element in an overall Inuit Specific integrated social economic policy approach” (pg. 5). The report further reiterates that many pitfalls of social and economic conditions lead the Inuit to live in poverty and overcrowded housing situations, along with a failing educational system for the children and youth; and health determinants, along with unemployment or lack of training.

A report done by the Government of the Northwest Territories titled *Homelessness in the Northern Territories*; dated October 2005 defines homelessness “as men, women, youth and/or families living without shelter, or temporarily at emergency shelters or in government-sponsored transitional housing.” The report states the limitations this definition has because it does not cover those people or individuals who live in overcrowded conditions, or those individuals who couch surf each night or those who spend each night going from house to house as they visit and try to find a place to sleep. I have heard of stories where individuals fall asleep as they visited with others, just trying to stay warm before they have to head outdoors because they have no place to stay.
If one tries to fit Nunavummiut to “relative” or “absolute” homelessness, they are missing the point of the situation. Just because a person cannot sleep outdoors due to unbearable temperatures and the harsh climate, it does not negate the situation of homelessness. There are many people in the community who are at risk of being homeless due to; lack of space, cost of housing, poverty, overcrowding, or those who cannot find accommodation that meet the basic health and safety standards or are offered no personal safety due to housing shortages in Nunavut.

Some of the factors that contribute to homelessness in the community of Rankin Inlet are lack of housing, where the local wait-list for housing is long; for example a single male on the wait-list can be on the wait-list anywhere from three to five years or longer. People face poverty each day, depending on the local Income Support office for assistance; the Deacon’s Cupboard for food and clothing and other resources that are provided for those in need; individuals who have mental health issues; those who have addiction issues; those who depend on drugs to exist day-to-day; domestic violence and lack of employment is just to name a few factors contributing to homelessness.

In Andrew Webster’s report *Homelessness in the Territorial North: State and Availability of the Knowledge*, 2006 he talks about “hidden homelessness” in the context of people living in overcrowded conditions or those with inadequate housing situations. He further states that “literature review, media scan, and informants are consistent that hidden homelessness is a pervasive, widespread, and improperly appreciated problem in the North” (pg. 4). He eludes that researchers should do a specific study into “hidden homelessness.” Since there is no men’s shelter in Rankin Inlet, the men have to sleep in
porches, cabins, floors, abandoned buildings, or with relatives who constantly threaten or create a violent situation.

In my research homelessness means not having your own apartment or house or the ability to afford to rent a unit due to many circumstances of the individual or individuals. One of the participants coined people who are homeless as “snow drifters.” He stated that you can walk for miles and miles as you try and find a place to sleep; you walk, walk, walk, you walk and walk…

It is also very difficult to identify the homeless population in Rankin Inlet due to a lack of compiled data or count or agreement on how homelessness should be measured. For example, in 2005 the homeless statistics in Rankin Inlet were done by contacting local agencies that work with people in the community such as Housing, Social Services, the RCMP, Income Support, local churches, and the Aqsaaraq Addictions centre. The Housing Association reported there are approximately 15-20 people who are homeless due to housing arrears. Tenants are evicted because they do not pay their rent or their house requires renovations due to negligence. This statistic includes transient individuals who are also categorized as being homeless. The Social Services office has written at least 37 to 47 support letters to housing during 2004. The local RCMP detachment reports one homeless individual every few weeks; while Income Support sees an average of 150 clients per month. The Anglican Church estimates that six individuals sleep at the church two to three days per week; while Aqsaaraq Addictions centre stats shows three out of eleven people were homeless for 2005.

In the Nunatsiaq News dated November 10, 2006 they printed an article on “Life on Iqaluit’s mean streets” and one participant who answered the survey stated that
“there’s nothing hidden about homelessness for those who live in the territory…it’s not a good thing when it’s a whiteout and you have some smashed or stoned guy crashing on your couch or the floor… you can call this hidden homelessness if you want but it seems pretty absolute to me.” (Nunatsiaq News, November 10, 2006 – Life on Iqaluit’s mean streets).

Mary Irkootee an addictions counselor in Rankin Inlet has been an advocate for homelessness for many years. She vocalizes the need for a homeless shelter in Rankin Inlet because the community does not have one. The only shelter is for women who face domestic violent issues; they cannot even take homeless women in. Ms. Irkootee visibly tries to find funding and to get other people involved in her crusade. She has been lobbying for a very long time and to date has had no funds from the Government of Nunavut, Nunavut organizations, or the Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated. There was a building that was offered to the committee, but this building would cost a fortune to move to a better location and would also require additional costs to refurbish. Ms. Irkootee feels that no one is listening to the plight of the homeless people in Rankin Inlet. In her interview with Nunatsiaq News on January 29, 2006 she stated that “more than 30 people are among the ‘invisible’ homeless of Rankin Inlet. They drift around every day, looking for different places to sleep, sometimes resting their head in one of the local churches.” (Search Archives Nunatsiaq News, January 28, 2005 – Money short for new homelessness shelter in Rankin Inlet).

Her Excellency the Right Honorable Adrienne Clarkson stated in her Speech from the Throne on February 2, 2004 the following on behalf of the Government of Canada:
“...the conditions in far too many Aboriginal communities can only be described as shameful. This offends our values. It is in our collective interest to turn the corner. And we must start now.”

The Nunavut Housing Corporation and Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated wrote a proposal to the Government of Canada on a Nunavut Ten-Year Inuit Housing Action Plan which plans to take a progressive stand to building local housing for Inuit and their families. Their recommendation is “pursuant to Article 2 of the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement, to ensure that the Inuit of Nunavut benefit from federal participation in provision of housing for Aboriginal peoples in Canada and their priority is to have new social housing constructed to abate the overcrowding crisis in Nunavut, and also allowing for Inuit to be trained in trades and construction. (Nunavut Ten-Year Inuit Housing Action Plan, September 2004, pg. 23).

It has been difficult to find relevant homelessness literature as most research and findings are mostly addressed to the Aboriginal or First Nations people. A report on The Case of Inuit Specific: Renewing the relationship between the Inuit and Government of Canada prepared by Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, April 19, 2004 indicates that “the root of many of the social issues facing Inuit, are directly related to an acute shortage of housing...Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami sees housing initiative as a key element in an overall Inuit Specific integrated social economic policy approach” (pg. 5). The report further reiterates that many pitfalls of social and economic conditions lead the Inuit to live in poverty and overcrowded housing situations, along with a failing educational system for the children and youth; with health determinants, and high unemployment rates and lack of training opportunities.
I will also be including statistics from existing service providers and agencies from the community such as the housing association, churches, income support, addictions centre, probations/parole, social services and the safe shelter. These current statistics will give voice to those who are perceived to be homeless and how important it is to address their plight and use this research project to provide awareness to the outside world of politics and other communities.

The following is a list of current statistics from the community of Rankin Inlet. These statistics were compiled by the committee. The committee consisted of community members who were interested in the plight of homeless individuals. The committee members came from all walks of life and from various agencies in the community.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Issues prevalent to homelessness:</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Loss of job</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Lack of education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Lack of training</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Dropout rates relatively high in Nunavut</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Substance Abuse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Families who do not tolerate addictions of individual and who end up being kicked out of house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Individuals who spend most of their money on their addictions rather than on food or rent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
money

- Arrears as a result of not paying rent, thus kicked out of housing unit
- Limited housing options
- No homeless shelter

Mental Health

- Leads to depression
- Leads to suicide ideation
- Leads to other addictions
- Leads to break-up of families

Domestic Violence

- A huge risk factor causing individuals/families to be at risk for becoming homeless
- No place to go – back to the abuser/safe shelter
- Lack of housing
- Long wait list for housing
- Many women are forced to choose between abuse at home and/or living couch to couch with family or friends
- Isolation
- Financial issues
Barriers to Housing

- Discrimination & racism
- Nepotism
- Large families, over crowding
- Lack of references for housing
- Communication barriers
- Wait-list enormous

The Housing Association statistics are as follows:

- There are 105 people on the wait list for houses
- It is estimated that 15-20 individuals are homeless due to housing arrears
- Many transient individuals are also categorized as homeless, yet are not on the wait list

The Anglican Church reported the following:

- Homeless people have been sleeping in the church for the past two years
- It is estimated that six individuals sleep at the church two – three days per week

Income Support office gave the following statistics:

- Estimated 150-190 clients on a monthly basis
- February 2005 showed 188 individuals
- There were 13 transient individuals seen March 2005

Aqsaaraq Addictions statistics include:

- 11 individuals received services in 2004
Three out of the eleven people are homeless stats for 2005

From Probation/Parole the statistics are as follows

- One individual is categorized as homeless
- Eight individuals are living with extended families
- One person is homeless due to a restraining order
- One transient youth was couch surfing

Statistics from social services:

- The area office has written 37 support letter for housing during 2004
- It is estimated that one letter is written weekly from clientele requesting housing support letters
- It is also estimated that the area office has individuals come into the office twice weekly for counselling because they have inadequate housing, and suffer from over crowdedness
- Our area office reports two people per month due to homelessness

The Safe Shelter reported the following statistics:

- 86 women and 111 children from February 2004 to February 2005
- Figures include women and children from the Kivalliq area
- It is estimated that 20 women stay at the Safe Shelter due to homelessness
- It is also estimated that 20 women are refused services because they are homeless and not under the category of domestic violence
Historical Factors

As a young child living nomadically with my parents and siblings, I don’t recall anyone being homeless. During the winter months Inuit would build their own iglu, thus constructing their own shelter from the environment and land. If an individual did not have a place to stay or place to sleep, relatives and family members would assist each other. There was always room for one more person; no one was left out in the cold alone to defend one self. It was just the way it was.

Inuit slowly settled into community based living with the drawing cards being the Hudson Bay Company, the missionaries, the nursing station, and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. As parents were forced to send their children to residential schools in other larger communities far away from home, many Inuit families started to spend more and more time in communities so that they could sell their furs and trade with the Hudson Bay Company. The Inuit became dependent on store bought items and health care services provided and thus the need for housing became a reality. As an adolescent I can remember when the Government of Northwest Territories started to build prefab houses. In those days they were called “match box houses.” The materials would come by barge during the summer season, unloaded on the docks along the banks of the Coronation Gulf and constructed by the local people with the assistance of construction crews flown in from the south. These houses were poorly built due to their prefabricated state; there was no proper insulation, they were cold and drafty and mould and mildew was common no matter what season it was.

Today some of those old houses are refurbished and still made available to families. Yet, the community of Rankin Inlet still struggles to meet the demands of
growing families who now reside permanently in town. New housing construction is delayed due to the lack of qualified workers, creating a backlog of houses for the local people; therefore putting a strain on individuals who cannot afford to buy their own homes, or pay outrageous rents to private home owners. In other words, the current state of homelessness is exacerbated because of this situation.
SECTION FOUR: INTERVIEW FINDINGS

Due to colonization, residential schools, the slaying of dog teams, changes in living in settlements and as those boundaries changed, the men did not accept change as readily as the women. With Elder involvement many men are seeking guidance and wisdom from them and moving towards change. As Inuit try to balance between two worlds; one traditional and one modern, they find that they need to move with social changes and learn new trades and skills and access modern technology, yet maintain their ancestral heritage and kinship ties within their communities.

The four men that I interviewed were at first reluctant to be interviewed because of what their community might think of them, the potential stigmatization from their own peers and culture, and being ashamed because they are homeless. These men blamed society for discriminating against them, and labeling them as “lazy” because they were in situations where it was felt that they did have the choices to make changes. The men ranged between the ages of 27 to 47 years of age and all were Inuit. Three of the men were currently single; one had not been in a relationship for some time and the other young man had broken up with his girl-friend. The third respondent said he could not be involved in a relationship because he still had too much baggage to deal with from a previous relationship; he was also trying to do right for his children who were being raised by extended family members. Only one young man had a girl-friend, yet he struggled to maintain that relationship because he did not have a place of his own, and was either living in an abandoned cabin or tent. The relationship was difficult because of what the girl’s parents thought of him, they just considered him as another loser who couldn’t hold down a job.
My data findings will include and focus on the analysis in the data that I obtained through the interview gathering process, and as presented in Chapter Two the interviews were coded into sub-themes and then categorized into main themes. The list below describes the overall themes that I focused on from the storytelling of the participants and will present the themes using direct quotations from each participant. This is where I struggled to interpret and give voice, so that what they say will be heard. Some of the men had common threads, reoccurring themes, differences and negative and positive outcomes of being homeless. I used direct quotations to illustrate their lives and experiences and I refrained from telling their complete story because their story will be recognized by community members. Direct quotations are organized into themes so that each participant remains anonymous. I use italics to frame the words of each participant. Hopefully, I have brought to light the experiences of these homeless men and thus, able to give them a voice.

Some of the themes that emerged from these interviews are:

Theme One: sleeping locations
Theme Two: defining homelessness
Theme Three: stigmatization
Theme Four: addictions
Theme Five: mental health issues
Theme Six: scrounging for food
Theme Seven: rental arrears
Theme Eight: sadness/isolation/loss of identity
Theme Nine: positive outlook

Theme Ten: action

Even with some of these common themes, it was not easy for these men to tell their story, as each person struggles to survive each day. It is not easy to face countless barriers each and every time they put one step forward, it comes with discussing homeless as a stereotypical attitude, what the community sees and perceives as being homeless. Rankin Inlet does not even have a homeless shelter or soup kitchen. The only shelter that is currently operating for homeless men is in Iqaluit, which is the capital of Nunavut. Rankin Inlet is approximately 1000 kilometers from Iqaluit, where there is a women’s safe shelter in the community, but none for men. There are no safe homes for men in the community unless a compassionate family lets them sleep in their house.

THEME ONE: sleeping locations

“I will see how long I last in the tent; hopefully nobody throws rocks at my tent this time. Right now I am in a cabin, tomorrow I should be in a tent.”

The first theme is sleeping locations. This common theme can become ambiguous because most of us sleep in our own homes and in our own beds. When one is homeless that becomes another matter. Society perceives that each man can become independent, hold down a job, have a wife and family, and overall survive each day living in comfort. Sometimes men will find a girl-friend or return to an abusive relationship just so they can have a place to sleep. When one is homeless, the predominant question becomes where and when will this individual find a space for himself.
Looking at the statistics in section three, there are many causes for homelessness. Homelessness can be due to social or mental problems and due to the lack of housing in Nunavut, where the wait-list can be anywhere from 4-10 years for a single male. In most communities within Nunavut, the housing wait-list is long, where single males can wait up to anywhere from 3 to 8 years or more for a unit. The Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK), 2004, suggests, “The root [causes] of many of the social issues facing Inuit, are directly related to an acute shortage of housing. Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami sees housing initiative as a key element in an overall Inuit Specific integrated social economic policy approach.” (Report prepared by ITK, April 19, 2004). In the territory shortage of housing is also “hidden” from view because many people so call couch surf, or live in overcrowded conditions where homelessness statistics are harder to compile.

It’s not to say that social issues will fade away or not crop up, but it would give males the opportunity to find their own identity, increase their sense of worthiness, self-esteem and well-being. It is further complicated by the fact that homelessness is “hidden” due to overcrowded conditions, individuals couch surfing and due to the shortage of housing units in Nunavut.

Rankin Inlet faces the challenges of homeless men and we do not expect people to survive sleeping outside during the cold winter months. How did these men end up in their situation? Looking at the statistics in section three, there are many precipitating factors for homelessness. Some of the social issues include addictions, mental illness, and the lack of housing, lack of proper education, lack of job training, domestic violence and barriers to housing qualifications.
A theme that emerged was the sleeping locations for each homeless man. Here is what one respondent said:

“...I sort of came into some luck, there’s a vandalized cabin down past the dump and I am to make it liveable for the lady who owns it, so that she can stay in there...go there during the summer, and I get it for a year...”

“Its wood heated, I have to do a lot of work but previously I’ve been going from house to house and staying with friends places...yeah, from place to place”

As I continued to ask each participant what sleeping arrangements they make, it becomes clearer that our society finds ways to blame the individual. For example one of the respondents’s talked about his job, and how difficult it was to maintain his job because he was homeless. Just because he did not have a house or rental unit of his own and only living in a cabin or tent he felt that society still looked at him with pity. Maybe for this person he was lucky because he felt he was safe. He had a roof over his head for the time being and out of the harsh elements, so to him it did not matter what the community perceptions were.

Whether a male has social issues such as alcohol or drugs dependency or mental health issues, homelessness occurs because of poverty and lack of housing. Being homeless can cause males to turn to alcohol or drugs, not just because they have social problems. Also due to poverty many cannot afford the rent, falling behind and incurring rental arrears because of their addictions or mental health issues. Historically, the Inuit have learned to be dependent upon the state, thereby, forcing dependence on income assistance and affordable housing where the rents reflect the income and waiting for federal dollars to build much needed housing. As reported in the *Nunavut Ten-Year Inuit Housing Action Plan* (Government of Nunavut, Nunavut Housing Corporation & Nunavut Tunngavik Inc., September 2004, i) “the Inuit of Nunavut are locked in a
housing crisis that is worsening daily as the population booms and existing housing stock ages.” Therefore, the Federal government has to honour their part in solving the crisis housing situation, along with the Government of Nunavut.

Her Excellency the Right Honorable Adrienne Clarkson stated in her Speech from the Throne on February 2, 2004 stated the following on behalf of the Government of Canada:

“...the conditions in far too many Aboriginal communities can only be described as shameful. This offends our values. It is in our collective interest to turn the corner. And we must start now.”

The other three men that I interviewed responded and were candid about where they could find shelter or a safe haven.

“I usually sleep somewhere, anywhere I could think of any shelter...I used to sleep house to house. Couple of times I slept at the ________ building on the floor, kind of at least eh? I kind of got used to it...”

This individual was tenacious enough to find shelter under a local building and this protected him from freezing to death in minus zero weather.

Other participants react in a similar manner saying like it is:

“Right now I am sleeping at a cabin, tonight I will sleep one more time at the cabin, overnight at the cabin and after that I am moving into a tent to the other side of town, just past ______, ...so I am going to move to the other end of town. I will see how long I will last in the tent; hopefully nobody throws rocks at my tent this time. Right now I am in a cabin, tomorrow I should be in a tent.”

“First I thought it was my friends ________ cabin, but I happen to be in ________ cabin; then ________ figured out that I was in his cabin and he came to see me...he asked me “are you the one who is sleeping in my cabin”? , and I said, “oh, that’s your cabin”? I thought it was my friend’s cabin, and he said “no that’s my cabin”, oh, okay I guess I have to move out... “No,” he said, “you can stay in there” but he’s going to sell the cabin sometime. That’s why he bought me a tent, just in case he sells that cabin. And ever since then, I’ve been mostly in that cabin.”
“...I was staying with my girl-friend at her house until ________ started accusing me of stealing stuff and blaming me [a family member in the house accused him of stealing]. Then after that, I said screw this and I’m not going to deal with your bull shit any more, I’m just going. That’s when I packed up and just moved out. I am not going back, just to say hi to ________ and say hi, how’s it going with you, see how’s she’s doing.”

“Yeah, I sleep pretty much out alone in the cabin that I sort of borrowed; I borrowed a cabin from a friend. Even though I have family members, but I tried asking family members to use an empty space but there is always a little interruption [excuses], like they need the space. Other than that they are a bit too busy, should I say [to] care about someone, I guess they are a little bit too busy to...yeah when you are in your early thirties and all that kind of getting into manhood; every individual person or persons need, gonna need a privacy and I respect that, that’s why I always have to make sure they [family, friends] have more space than I do because it’s their property, it’s their...they are paying the bills and I am not. I am just like a visitor. That’s why most of it, I try sleep a couple of days, stuck in the cabin.”

“I usually sleep somewhere, anywhere I could think of any shelter...I used to sleep house to house. Couple of times I slept at the ________ building on the floor, kind of at least eh? I kind of got used to it, because when you are homeless it was kind of, it was challenging, but you deal with it, you learn lots like when you start to say try to get my own thing, my own house, my own roof; then I could look behind and say I have done that, I have done everything. I’ve been in the bottom of my shoes. Now, it’s just to climb up – go on top of my – but it takes – it takes a snap of the finger, it’s an awful thing to fall down again. It’s not that easy where you are coming from. But beyond that, yeah I was sleeping in house, to house and cabin to cabin, cabin floors, inside the porch...Sometimes I get a little break, so okay, one of my friends would say come and stay, sleep with, there’s a little place, and after sleeping in the wild, and going to try and sleep in the bed, a big difference. Yeah...”

For this next respondent it was difficult for him to talk about it; he felt he was being thrown away by his family, his mother, his sister and his brother. Many times he struggled to find the words to express how he was feeling and what was going on for him. There was a lot of silence. He would use his hands to express himself, either pointing
towards his chest because he felt the heaviness and numbness of being homeless. This is how he verbalized his situation.

“I stay anywhere...family or relatives each day. I sleep with family or relatives each day. With relatives I sleep on the couch. “

“It's just too heavy what to say how I feel – I feel numb, I feel nothing, I feel alone, I feel helpless, everyone is avoiding me, no one is talking to me. I feel like people don’t think I exist here in my own hometown.”

Many people in our community take it for granted that they will have a nice clean warm bed to sleep in. Homeless men struggle to find a spot in town so that they don’t cause undue hardship on others, where they are not in anybody’s way, and where they can have a little privacy from pitying looks or scornful disgust. One young man explained his situation:

“I ended up staying underneath the ______. I went close to the sewage pipe line, dug myself a hole in there in the snow, put my tarp on the bottom of the snow and my clothing on top of the tarp and wrapped the tarp over me and that’s when I fell asleep for probably for a couple of hours, woke up had a cigarette and went back to bed. I woke up three times that night.”
THEME TWO: Defining homelessness

“It’s like I coined the phrase, “snow drifters.” We walk and we walk, and we walk and we walk, we walk from one warm place to the next. You try to get work wherever you can, odd jobs, it’s very difficult to get anything full-time because you just don’t know where you are going to be sleeping that night.”

The above caption describes what homelessness feels to one of the participants. It was difficult for many of the men to define or give an exact definition of homelessness. The men just knew that they were homeless; they don’t have the words to describe their situation. One man describes sleeping in his brother’s porch, trying to keep warm underneath an old piece of plywood, just to keep the wind away from him. These men know they have no home to call their own; they don’t have a rental unit, and the men aren’t even on the wait-list because the wait list is so long they don’t bother filling out an application form for the local Housing Association. If an individual is new in town, the Housing Association has a policy that you have to live in town for at least three months prior before you can even apply to be placed on the housing wait-list.

“It’s easier to kick somebody when they are down. But I have to admit that everyone of us men and women who are homeless, we are ultimate survivors because we just keep going and going, and going and going.”

“It’s just too heavy what to say how I feel – I feel numb, I feel nothing, I feel alone, I feel helpless, everyone is avoiding me, no one is talking to me. I feel like people don’t think I exit here in my own hometown.”

Most of the men described being homeless and have turned to their family and friends for help; hoping they would have been supported by their families, instead of being kicked in the teeth because they are homeless. Many homeless men were also expected to “pay” for staying at a house. Some of the payments included doing the dishes, keeping the floor swept, and baby-sitting children. Most of them felt that they
were ignored because they didn’t have a house or rental unit, and were only living in a cabin or tent or under some dilapidated piece of plywood, or under a building. This is the definition of homelessness as described by the participants, no unit to rent or house to own, and therefore you are considered worthless, you are a ‘snow drifter.’ As a homeless person you are visible, but your situation is hidden from view and you are disregarded by the community.

Each respondent has been subject to being treated ‘like a slave’ because it is expected of them to somehow pay for staying one night or nights if they were lucky enough to be provided with a roof over their head.

“When we are staying with somebody we end up getting abused in most cases, quite often verbally and you become subservient, you try to do whatever you can to please the person that you are staying with and the abuse just escalates, as we all know it, and it escalates if left unchecked. It gets to a point where the people that you are staying with just need their own space, which is understandable. I have thanked many people in the past over here in Rankin for being patient with me and let it be known that if they ever need some help and that I will be there for them too, if I was able to do that.”

One other individual stayed with his Auntie because his cousin told him to. This participant felt that his Auntie did not want him to stay in the first place. Regardless of how helpful he was at this household, he was yelled and screamed at by his relative because his helpful ways were not good enough.

“…then after two weeks my Aunt decide to ask me to clean the utquhik [cooking pot]; and I asked her really nicely and kindly “where is the cloths” and then all of a sudden she started screaming and yelling at me...you don’t want to clean. She got all pissed off at me because I kindly asked her where was the cloth. Then after that she got even more pissed off and I said screw this, I’m out of here. I am not going to deal with your bull shit and after that she was like saying “I didn’t want you here in the first place.” Good, I am not coming back here then; I am never coming back here then. Good, good enough. And ever since then I won’t go back and that night I ended up staying underneath the ______.”
Andrew Webster, in Homelessness in the Territorial North: State and Availability of the Knowledge, October 26, 2006 indicates that hidden homelessness such as couch surfing “is pervasive, widespread, and improperly appreciated problem in the North” (pg. 60). He further argues that absolute homelessness is not a consideration in the North lands as it is disguised as living in overcrowded conditions. He also defaults the problem directly as a housing issue due to lack of proper management, building solutions or lack of supplies and funding and lack of sharing information within each sector such as the Federal government or Government of Nunavut. Everyone wants to keep the information for their own uses and lacks the willingness to share resources. As one respondent stated the obvious:

“...and I see nothing being put into being made for the people who got them elected because I am sure that if you go to every family in every community, they got a least one family member that is homeless. And you know I don’t know whose fault it is, it doesn’t really matter whose fault it is, you know, the point is not to lay blame but the point is how do we fix this.”

One thing for sure, when the Inuit population was nomadic and did not live in the settlements now called hamlets, the Inuit did not have homeless issues. The people built iglus in the winter time and in the summer had skin or canvas tents where everyone shared the responsibility of looking after each other. As a child growing up I don’t recall anyone being homeless, people automatically took you in; it’s just the way it was. Here is how one respondent expressed his situation.

“Number one, get me a housing to change my situation; two probably get me a good job; three just provide for myself and my girl-friend; and four keep my dog alive.”
“…and that’s when I wanted to live my Inuit traditions seeing since I was outside, I might as live out on the land. I lived in the van during the winter months.”

“I went close to the sewage pipe line, dug myself a hole in there, in the snow, put my tarp on the bottom of the snow and my clothing on top of the tarp and wrapped the tarp over me, and that’s when I fell asleep for probably a couple of hours, woke up had a cigarette and went back to bed. I woke up three times that night.”

When this next respondent tried to explain what homelessness was to him, he felt that society just judged him. He tried to articulate what was happening for him, how the community let him down because they would not give him a chance or notice the changes he had made after not living in the community for some time. He wanted society to know that he had made amends and he was not the same person when he left town. He just felt betrayed that no one could forget his past transgressions from his previous stay in the community.

“…you only can say those words because you’re not in my shoes. If you were in my shoes, you would probably know things that you never knew, what I am going through, what I am feeling, how desperate I get. Some people just say to me, even if they have a lot of room in their building, they ending up saying you’re dirty, you’re not welcome, you’re too smelly, because they think they are better than me.”

As I tried to understand what he was saying, I realized how homelessness affects so many people, yet the Government of Nunavut does not have the capacity to find a way to help these individuals. Being homeless costs money for our society in terms of social assistance, refurbishing damaged rental units, money for courts to attend to the community because families are separated and many of the local resources such as the RCMP, addictions centre and the social services department do not have the authority to
find accommodations for those who are wandering around without a place to sleep, yet spend considerable time indirectly dealing with this issue.

One participant even talked about going back to his common-law because he had no place to stay, regardless of the verbal and emotional abuse that he was getting. I also recall one young man telling me that his friend had saved his life because he had passed out on the snow bank. His friend pulled and dragged him all the way home. If this homeless man was sleeping in the outskirts of the community, the outcome would have been totally different; he would not be here today.

Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami reiterates that Inuit face the highest level of overcrowding and inadequate housing in all of Canada. Overcrowding is linked to family violence, mental health issues, alcohol and drug abuse, lack of employment, children not attending school and various socio-economic issues that can lead to individuals being homeless or at risk for being homeless (Backgrounder on Inuit and Housing, November 1, 2004.).

“It’s like I coined the phrase, “snow drifters.” We walk and we walk, and we walk and we walk, we walk from one warm place to the next. You try to get work wherever you can, odd jobs, it’s very difficult to get anything full-time because you just don’t know where you are going to be sleeping that night. Carrying around an alarm clock is probably not at all practical. You have no place to wash so you can’t make yourself look presentable for potential employers or working with you fellow employees. And quite often with family you can’t even take a shower there; you can’t wash your clothes.”

“This is where you really rely on friends, friends really come in and they help you out because some day they may need your help.”

“I have no clue…it’s like nobody is talking to me, like nobody is coming to me, looks like these people out there are just watching and listening, and shocked...I don’t know.”
“...growing up, yup...it started off with my dad, now my dad is in the graveyard since ____ now. But the way my life is going, looks like same thing, I get kicked out, get kicked out everywhere I go. Yup...every time...pretty heavy stuff, it look like I got no family, no brother, no sister, and no nothing while they all live in the town.”

“It’s just too heavy what to say how I feel – I feel numb, I feel nothing, I feel alone, I feel helpless, everyone is avoiding me, no one is talking to me. I feel like people don’t think I exit here in my own hometown.”
THEME THREE: Stigmatization

“Now, it’s just to climb up – go on top of my – but it takes – it takes a snap of the finger, it’s an awful thing to fall down again. It’s not that easy where you are coming from.”

Another common theme that all four men encountered was stigmatization. Many of these men felt they were being judged because of their “homeless” situation. Even if they had not been homeless in the past, judgments were hard to eradicate because people just don’t forget your past. And by the same token, society expected these men to get out of their situations by getting counseling or support and looking to other resources in the community. These men were looked upon as being able bodied, with two good legs and a heartbeat, therefore they could find employment or housing without barriers. These homeless men were expected to get off their butts and find a job. As one respondent added,

“People turn around and gossip and say look at this person, he’s such and such, look at him. Gossip hurts everyone, it pisses me right off. Like I said, they’re better than me [people in the community]. They are wealthy, they have luxury homes, beautiful clean properties, compare to me, I have nothing, really nothing. Family feud, it sucks. Some of my family members are against me because of personal problems from the past. The past always comes back and people don’t forget...

“If you were in my shoes, you would probably know things that you never knew, what I am going through, what I am feeling, how desperate I get. Some people just say to me, even if they have a lot of room in their building, they ending up saying you’re dirty, you’re not welcome, you’re too smelly, because they think they are better than me.”

Changes also occurred as the role of Inuit hunters and gatherers began to diminish and people started earning wages. Along with the financial gains and positive benefits of a modern society come the negative social issues of increased use of alcohol and drugs, gambling, suicides, child neglect, crime and violence. Today we still have below average
levels of education, with school dropout rates being high in Nunavut. Inuit face also housing shortages, with multiple families living together, which create overcrowding and stress. Here are some captions verbalizing how each individual feels:

“It sucks to say you are homeless. It really sucks to say I live in a cabin, that I live house-to-house. I live under buildings, I have experienced them all – under the ______ Store, under the ______ building, inside large buildings, like I say if there’s a gap to get in, I don’t hesitate to warm up.”

“And it just that when you are trying to get yourself out of the hole, gossip in small towns runs rampant and it’s gotten to the point that I am being called “gay”, I’ve done time [in jail] – you know it’s like I am being slandered and you know it’s like that song says kick them when they are up and kick them when they are down. Uh hum.”

“When we are staying with somebody we end up getting abused in most cases, quite often verbally and you become subservient, you try to do whatever you can to please the person that you are staying with and the abuse just escalates, as we all know it, and it escalates if left unchecked. It gets to a point where the people that you are staying with just need their own space, which is understandable.”

“Life’s lessons, it teaches you about life’s lessons, all about being independent, and it teaches you who you’re real friends are and who are your enemies. You know, people start getting pissed off at you because you are visiting too much, and they say it’s time to go ______, and you say to yourself this name is another that I have to cross off the list, I can’t come here anymore to warm up or to eat, use the bathroom, or whatever.”

“Some people say that some people has to get out of this town. They are still in the same channel, the same life, meaning they are into their booze and drugs. Yeah, people say things against me because I am homeless. It’s just some people has to be, it’s just that some people has to get out of this town. They are still in the same channel [mind set], the same life. If they see somebody that in the past, if they, if we had a little dispute, some people, when trouble goes into their ear, they won’t go out right away, it’s going to stay and stick with them for years. It’s not going to happen, but some people can just say okay, yeah I forgive you, just don’t let it happen again.”
“...I am alone now, these people [the town] is ignoring me. They are getting bored at me [people get tired of being asked for spare change], like they say, he’s boring, he should go somewhere, don’t help him, whatever they are saying.”

“I feel that people judge me, think I am disgusting and look at me with pity. Like yesterday was Friday, I tried to go ask ________ if I could help at the evening bingo, say to sell the Nevada’s or bingo cards, they said no, we are okay, we don’t need any help, just go. I guess the person in charge didn’t know that I was starving, and I needed something to eat...I just ignored that and started walking around hoping something will come up...”

“I’ve have been called a dog by my family...then at first it upset me to be called a dog. I guess it’s all a matter of a definition of a dog, they were saying it in a derogatory way but when I was by myself I turned it around and thought to myself that a dog is called a man’s best friend... and it doesn’t matter how much you beat that dog, that dog will always wag it’s tail and come up and lick you, and love you. Uh hum...”

“When you are homeless it’s kind of sucks, it sucks. I always wonder where am I going to sleep. Where am I going to drink coffee if I get up? All of these kinds of things that you start to worry and when I talk to some people – they just ending up saying – go back to where you were [back to alcohol, drugs]. And I don’t want to go back to where I was, I am tired of running, I am tired of being scared. I am tired of everything.”

“Some people find me disgusting, some make fun of me, some have compassion, some have pity, and some think that you are an extremely strong person and then some people think you are extremely weak. You really go from one end of the spectrum to the other. With regards to most people’s reaction, I’ve even had one family member tell me if I was in our shoes I would have killed myself a long time ago, and I thought to myself so what are you saying ...I just turned around and walked away, I wasn’t exactly sure what he was meaning by that – then I had approached him a couple of days later and I told him, I said “Uncle, listen you would be surprised what you would do to survive.”

“There are many homeless people who are in my shoes, some of them are even worse than me, some people cannot speak English properly, their education is very low and the only support they can find is income support. I am just the same as them; I am not higher or lower than them.”
One of the participants was living in his tent during the summer and was asked by the Hamlet of Rankin Inlet to move his tent. He said that the By-law officer wanted his tent moved and this young man asked why? His reply was the fact that tourists were starting to arrive in our community and the Hamlet wanted the community to look good. This homeless individual felt that he was a disgrace to the community and did not want his situation reflected to people who would leave their dollars in the community. If the community felt compelled that a homeless man would make the community less attractive to tourists, why did they not try to assist him, why did they not refer him to other resources in the community?

“I had my tent near by the Inukshuk (a large landmark in Rankin Inlet) but the by-law told me to move just because the tourist were coming into town, that’s when I moved all the way over by ________, I thought ________ was too far so I had to move back into town and that’s when I moved across from the __________.”

Some of the men who had experienced stigmatism felt they were targeted due to their situation of being unable to access housing, getting a job, being able to clean up their acts with issues such as staying sober or using drugs or getting any type of counseling for their well-being. This respondent’s statement rings true for many homeless men.

“Some people don’t like me, some people like me. Whoever don’t like me, I don’t care. I just mind my own business and do what I do; I just hang out with my friends. Because I don’t need negative attitude coming my way, especially where I am at.”

Each and every person that spoke about stigmatization felt affected by this. These men live in a community where prestige and social status is important to some of the people and each day as they go about their daily struggles, they face stares, innuendos, hostility, pity and even remorse because of their state. As described by these men:
“I feel that people judge me, think I am disgusting and look at me with pity.”

“You know when you haven’t eaten for two days, and you haven’t showered for a week, you know people look down at you because you don’t have a home and you have had problems before in the past and they just continue to ridicule you because of those, not understanding that there’s a different person inside, and there’s a person with feelings, and very often we get out feelings hurt.”

The next statement shows that regardless of what people think of you or your situation, people are not going to beat you down, there is always hope in every situation and you grab what you can to face these challenges. As this homeless man stated he acknowledges to the world that he is only a human being:

“Not much, they still talk to me and all. I still have a good time even though I may be homeless, that doesn’t mean that I am not perfect.”
THEME FOUR: Addictions:

“And you can sometimes start feeling down and you start thinking about any type of drug or alcohol abuse, it can start coming back to mind and depending on where you are in your mental health situation, because my alcoholism was beating me on my lack of mental health and in order to curb the alcoholism I had to get better up stairs in my head. That took quite a bit of therapy and that took two years to reverse the childhood abuses that I was subjected too.”

Our society looks at homeless men who are down and out as skid row type individuals because perception is difficult to change. When a homeless man is labeled as a drunk or drug user, they are frowned upon. What if the same man was an alcoholic, yet maintained a job, had a rental unit and provided for his wife and family, would he be labeled? Here is what some of the participants had to say:

“I have just recently become a grandfather. I am fairly well educated so to say that this doesn’t happen to educated [people] is not true because it can happen to anybody.”

“I have not drank alcohol for seven years. It’s just the situation that I am in. I don’t think I have an alcohol problem [not anymore], I don’t go to peoples and ask for their bottle, saying gimme it, or I will pay you, I don’t go about it about being drunk.”

“It was mostly addictions, like alcohol and drugs. It’s a very easy thing to get up here when you grew up here and people know you. When they start to see you they start to invite you, but to be honest I am still clean to this very day.

“If you are a homeless drunk and I don’t mean that in a derogatory way...you would be hanging around with somebody that’s got a house that is a drunk. As long as the booze is there you can crash there, but as soon as the booze stops, you have to get out.

“I can’t say for myself because I have been really working on myself because I have not been drinking the last couple of years and I’ve had some slips but what I have been finding because I am trying to sober up, if I am staying with a guy that is partying, or who likes to party that causes a lot of tension within the household. And it doesn’t matter how much you do the dishes, how many times you wash the floor, if you don’t drink everybody else is drunk, everybody else is looking at you
and saying “what makes you so special” and say I have a problem with alcohol (laughing out loud) and it’s hard to explain that to somebody who is all drunk.”

“With my particular addiction, alcohol was even more important than my kids, it was more important than my life – I was literally trying to drink myself to death.”

The above caption says it all. Addictions are a struggle for many people, yet if you are homeless it becomes extremely difficult to maintain sobriety, it is easier to drink or use drugs to escape the reality of their own situations.

The other factor is where do these men go for treatment for their addictions? As one of the second largest communities in Nunavut, Rankin Inlet still has to send men down south to treatment centers, and one of the comments is the fact that many programs don’t cater to their Inuit culture; there are no translations from English to Inuktitut and they don’t have the content that would reflect living up north.

Many Inuit and non-Inuit people have different views regarding addictions and its impact on the role of homelessness. Would one person be correct in saying that addictions causes homelessness or would someone else believe that having an addiction is a result of their becoming homeless? Maybe a homeless person uses addictive substances as a means of coping because they are living in crowded conditions, sleeping from house to house each night, or sleeping under a tarp or underneath a building or underneath a piece of plywood. Unfortunately, many of our native people have turned to alcohol and drugs just to survive, having lost everything including family, children, status, and their own self-esteem or as a means to escape responsibility.

“I don’t know, I guess at that point in my life, I didn’t really care because I was drinking quite heavily. You get to a point in your life where, you know if you can
just survive from day to day, that’s all you can ask for, any material things is just extra. I don’t have pictures of my kids anymore, but I’ve got the memories upstairs in my head, that’s all I need.

“I see a lot of... I have more expectation in my deep heart. But before I was, when I was an alcoholic, when I was all that drug addict, my patience wore out, it was really small, I was craving for alcohol every Friday. [I used] Drugs almost every day. But ever since I came from ________ for the addiction [treatment] now I can say something like, “I can drink coffee” and smoke cigarettes, not cigar weed [marijuana]. you know what I mean? Yeah...”

“It opened my eyes, I went to addictions in ________; it really woke me up. I saw a lot of picture way like in the addiction; they talked about what drugs can do to us and what alcohol can do to us, through film and through words. I really then kind of said no, I don’t want that life now anymore... very powerful. It is very powerful and very learning experience. When I try to convince my friends in Rankin, they kind of say, I’ll do that next day, but they won’t do it, I know that.”
THEME FIVE: Mental Health issues:

“I am kind of scared in many ways, scared for myself; physical, mental, spiritual, yeah because I am not going to know which hand they are going to come up with – meaning will they help me or strike against me. I am not going to know. I don’t know if it’s a friendly hand or a mean hand, both ways. Because I know some friends like when they are in a friendly hand, they say, “come in, come in” and the next thing they turn around and poof, gone. You know what I mean?”

Mental health issues affect everyone in our community. For those who are homeless it is compounded even further due to isolation, hardships and daily struggles of trying to fend for oneself. Each day each of these men’s emotional, mental, spiritual and physical state is further impeded because they have to work harder just to get by. Who do they turn to if not to their family and friends? If there is no family or friends to turn to, where do they go? Many of these homeless men are ostracized by their own community members, let alone their own peers, family or friends. As this man stated:

“It is hard starting off because one year I wanted to live off my Inuit tradition back home, like go out on the land and live in an iglu during the winter time and kind of live in a tent during the summer time, but my mother didn’t allow that because she thought I was going crazy, so she decided to call the RCMP and so the RCMP sent me to the hospital. And then from the hospital I got claimed at being mental, I just wanted to live my Inuit tradition and they ended sending me to the __________, ________. I was not depressed; I just wanted to go live the traditional way, that’s how it all started.”

Here we have a very capable young man who faces challenges because he wanted to live in his traditional life style. He wanted to find his own survival skills and see if he could make it on his own using the skills that were taught to him. As he silently cried and drops of tears streaming down his face he said:

“I wanted to go and see my daughter and grandmother; I can’t go there right now. My daughter is in ________; also my grandmother.”

The community of Rankin Inlet is fortunate they have the local resources to assist individuals if they are depressed, feel isolated, experience their first psychotic episode, or
need mental health services. If an individual’s state of mind is beyond the limitations of our local resources, individuals are usually sent down south to Winnipeg. Many of our Inuit men feel shamed if they have a mental illness because of the stigma attached to it. As a man you are expected to be a provider, a good hunter, and be able to stand tall on your own two feet. There are also those men who have pride and do not want outside interference such as mental health or social services involvement. As one respondent said:

“And beyond that, one time I was in, like I said I was in _______ for five months, total. It gave me a big break, but I should have looked ahead and say what am I doing, everything is going to come to an end. All these courses, all theses medical things, will come to an end. And that’s why I go home and say, “Where’s the home?”

Many men give up hope and end up homeless; therefore they have to depend on good Samaritans. They depend on family, even if they have difficult relationships with their family members. The generous hearts of friends can only last so long; tension increases because of over crowdedness in the homes they are staying in. Since many of these homeless men sleep couch to couch, they can only stay one night and have to start all over finding another place to sleep the next day. Suicide ideation is another common theme amongst these men. Many have hit bottom and contemplated suicide. Here are some excerpts of suicidal thoughts or other aspects of their mental health and well-being:

“Suicide does come across your head every once in a while because you don’t know how much more you can take. You know when you haven’t eaten for two days, and you haven’t showered for a week, you know people look down at you because you don’t have a home and you have had problems before in the past and they just continue to ridicule you because of those, not understanding that there’s a different person inside, and there’s a person with feelings, and very often we get our feelings hurt.”
“When we are staying with somebody we end up getting abused in most cases, quite often verbally and you become subservient, you try to do whatever you can to please the person that you are staying with and the abuse just escalates, as we all know it, and it escalates if left unchecked.”

“It gets to a point where the people that you are staying with just need their own space, which is understandable. I have thanked many people in the past over here in Rankin for being patient with me and let it be known that if they ever need some help and that I will be there for them too, if I was able to do that.”

“It’s not easy, I feel like giving up every day.”

“I sometimes think about giving up on myself, I would think about it but no, no, no – that’s not the answer. No, I just think harder how to change my situation, walk around the street, and look for something.”

Men feel hopeless and helpless many times due to their situations. As one man pointed out it is easier to put him down because he is homeless:

“It’s easier to kick somebody when they are down. But I have to admit that everyone of us men and women who are homeless, we are ultimate survivors because we just keep going and going, and going and going.”

Yet, the man sees the brighter side of being homeless, he is also a survivor. When he was telling his story about how it all started about four years ago, he told his story in such a way that I could just imagine what was going on for him, I felt for him and I empathized with his situation. It has been a tough road for this individual, yet somehow he managed to get help in order to beat his addictions and demons.

“I got into a deep state of depression and started drinking quite heavily...so I get myself out of the hole but it’s pretty difficult.”

Another respondent voiced his gratitude that he sought help for his mental illness, otherwise if he did not get help, he would not be where he is today. He further stated that:
“…it really opened my eyes, it really woke me up. I saw a lot of picture way like in the addiction; they talked about what drugs can do to us and what alcohol can do to us...I really kind of said no, I don’t want that life now anymore…”

“I see a lot of... I have more expectation in my deep heart. But before I was, when I was an alcoholic, when I was all that drug addict, my patience wore out, it was really small, I was craving for alcohol every Friday. Drugs almost every day. But ever since I came from _______ for the addiction [treatment] now I can say something like, “I can drink coffee” and smoke cigarettes, not cigar weed [marijuana], you know what I mean? Yeah…”

Other participants expressed how they felt:

“With my particular addiction, alcohol was even more important than my kids, it was more important than my life – I was literally trying to drink myself to death. By the grace of God and some caring people managed to get me into some sort of mental health, I didn’t realize that I had so many issues. I have since then dealt with my childhood issues and I have left them in the past where they belong, but not forgetting, but learning to forgive. Uh hum, yes.”

“So, you know it all boils down to how you are mentally, because if you are not strong mentally you cannot be strong anywhere else, and if you don’t know to love and respect yourself, you can’t respect anybody else, and nothing else matters.”
THEME SIX: scrounging for food

“And when you know when you haven’t eaten for three or four days, you are on the brink of passing out because you are so hungry. You know somebody’s half a sandwich with cigarette ashes on it, it doesn’t matter, and you’ll eat it. You’ll scrape the sand off of something, and you’ll eat anything.”

A common theme among the men was to find food. In our society food is a basic necessity, yet when you face homelessness you can go for days without food, you take what you can get, even if you have to dig in the garbage can after someone has just discarded a food item. Here is where pride becomes a non-issue, you have to eat or else pass out due to hunger. Each one of us takes food for granted each day; we also take for granted that we will have a warm comfortable home to return to at the end of each day.

As I listened to these homeless men, it reminded me when I was young when my family was still nomadic and running out of store bought food because my dad was not yet a wage earner and we were so poor. My dad would take us back to the settlement and ask the Hudson Bay Manager for credit to purchase food for his family. Yes, we had our traditional food such as caribou, char, seal, ptarmigan, but needed staples such as flour, lard, tea and sugar. It made me think, how readily would our local stores give credit to those who are homeless because it may take them many months to pay off their debts.

The men were candid about getting food:

“I survive out there by going to relatives, brother-in-laws, drink a cup of coffee, at least once, or one bite, or whatever is left over; I am usually the last one to eat... I do this every day. I don’t feel afraid for me, for my safety, I know everyone in town, in the community.”

“I don’t get any food...only coffee.”
“Some days I probably not eat for a couple of days. I just drink water. There’s always a little bit of desperation. Some days I felt like going to the dump and just be, look for anything, a dime, a penny, anything. I think of doing a lot of things like go to family or friend and say can I borrow this or can I borrow that? They ending up saying that “get a job, get a house, get a girlfriend.”

“I wanted to have coffee; they always give excuses to why I can’t have any. If I get social assistance and if I buy a little food for me and if I ask to borrow their oven, they say it’s broken. There’s always a little excuses. Can I borrow the microwave, it’s broken, it can’t work. There’s always rejection and excuses. They value material stuff, not people; or should I say they value others but not their own blood.”

Out of the four men that I interviewed, three of them smoked cigarettes; smoking is another way to curb their appetite and helps them ignore their empty stomachs. The cigarettes help diminish their craving for food for a short period. The men can utilize the food bank but it’s hard because they feel stigmatized and can’t access it each day. They don’t have the small fee to collect another box of groceries, and most of the time their pride also gets in the way. Many of these men do not have the money to buy additional staples; they scrape enough money to buy a package of cigarettes to help curb their growling stomach.

As I listened to this one participant, the tenacity of his will to survive struck me; being homeless did not stop his will to survive:

“Everything that you have, it has to be able to freeze. You cannot have any salads in your cabin, you cannot have any eggs, you can’t have any milk, you can’t have anything that will freeze and that will get ruined. You have to have stuff that will freeze and thaw, freeze and thaw, freeze and thaw. I am the person before at times have gone to the dump looking for wood or looking for something, I have found food in the garbage and have actually taken it home to wherever I was sleeping at, because I didn’t have the money or I was still dealing with the alcoholism, the addiction itself when I first got back to Rankin.”
One of the participants wanted to go back living traditionally, yet he needs the money to purchase food for his dog and to build his komatik (sled), to buy ammunition for his rifle or use the traditional bow and arrow and to have the means to cook his food, as drift wood is extremely scarce during the winter months.

“Well, I just walk around and see what I can find. Mostly, I would go to the airport where food was made, go and see the ________ there and hope to see if they got any food stuff lying around that they don’t need any more, or almost ready to throw out something. Say in a city I was going down to this food bank to get me some food and there I would only be getting non-perishable foods like crackers, soup, just like camping gear stuff – camping food stuff.”

Other’s responses from the participants were described this way:

“I don’t get any food...only coffee..._______ expects something in return for me staying the night. I survived out there by going to relatives, brother-in-laws, drink a cup of coffee, at least once, or maybe one bite, or whatever is left over; I am usually the last one to eat...I do this every day; every day.”

“Food is secondary when you are homeless, warmth is the utmost importance”...

“And when you are starving, you will eat out of the garbage, believe me you will. And it’s the best food you ever tasted.”

“And when you know when you haven’t eaten for three or four days, you are on the brink of passing out because you are so hungry. You know somebody’s half a sandwich with cigarette ashes on it, it doesn’t matter, and you’ll eat it. You’ll scrape the sand off of something, and you’ll eat anything.”

“I have found food in the garbage and have actually taken it home to wherever I was sleeping at, because I didn’t have the money or I was still dealing with the alcoholism, the addiction itself...”

“And quite of often I’d get the stuff that is ready to go in the garbage. Over at my friends place, it’s not good enough for them, but it’s darn good enough for me.”
“Some days I probably not eat for a couple of days. I just drink water. There’s always a little bit of desperation. Some days I felt like going to the dump and just look for anything, a dime, a penny, anything. I think of doing a lot of things like go to family or friend and say can I borrow this or can I borrow that? They ending up saying that “get a job, get a house, get a girlfriend.”

“I wanted to have coffee; they always give excuses to why I can’t have any. If I get social assistance and if I buy a little food for me and if I ask to borrow their oven, they say it’s broken. There’s always a little excuse. Can I borrow the microwave, it’s broken, it can’t work. There’s always rejection and excuses. They value material stuff, not people; or should I say they value others but not their own blood.”
THEME SEVEN: rental arrears

“*I did at one time have a rental unit, but kicked out as usual.*”

A common theme for the four men was housing. Living in Rankin Inlet is no different than living in any other community in Nunavut; there is a huge wait-list for rental units due to a shortage of housing. These men can wait up to anywhere from 4-10 years for a rental unit due to arrears. They owe money because of payment defaults, damage to their units or because they were evicted for other reasons such as going to jail. The housing wait-list for most single men is horrendous because the Housing Association normally allocate houses to couples, or a single parent with children. Here is what some of them shared:

“*Everything, I fell behind.*”

“*Yeah, because the fuel was piling up, so all these petroleum, everything was just jumping.*”

“...*and can you take your stuff before we warn you, I didn’t want them to warn me [to be evicted]. So I just left, one, two, and three [notices] and on the third notice I probably get arrested or something. Because as soon as they said that, a friend of mine said, ____ you better move before they warn you by person or by the telephone. So I kind of woke up the next day and said, “Oh darn” so I kind of packed everything and just left.*”

It struck me that when a homeless man has no permanent address to call his own; he is further marginalized in our community. If one does not have a permanent address, he may not be eligible for services that we take for granted such as water delivery, pick up of garbage and waste refuse disposal. A homeless man does not even have a telephone
number or a house number for services to be delivered. In our society today, many
government and federal forms require you to have an address, especially a street or a
house number.

Here is what some of the men conveyed:

“In the first place the house was under our name, me and _________. So, it didn’t
work out, our relationship never worked out.”

“I guess I couldn’t handle it anymore, maybe from people getting drunk or buying
booze and come up to my house. I couldn’t take it anymore. I left myself from this
house. I also had power bills to make. I was behind in just my power bills.

It was so hard, paying my rent house and my power bills and trying to get some
groceries – all of this blew up. I could not pay any of this anymore – it just blew
up. Now I am like this now [meaning homeless], walking around, looking for
cash, trying to get full, trying to get some stomach food, trying to get clothes, and
I am hoping that Income Support would help me.”

How can men get ahead when no one wants to give them a rental unit? Yes, the
Housing Association has been burnt from past tenants due to rental arrears and damages.
Yet if a single male is to get ahead in life, he needs a home, a house. If this same person
had a girl-friend or common-law, where would they live; with relatives who are already
facing overcrowding, creating more emotional distress on couples and families? I know
of one single father who has three children; his sister lived in the house and she moved so
that he could raise his children under a roof, while the rental unit was still listed under her
name. One of the respondents was told:

“They ending up saying that “get a job, get a house, get a girlfriend.”
One of the men even thought of going back to his ex-partner, just to have a roof over his head, just to have a place to sleep, just to be able to look at people in the face without being judged.

Another commonality was being judged because of your past, which created animosity and difficult relationships with families and friends. Men who returned back to the community were ostracized and their names would not even be placed on the housing list until their rental arrears were dealt with. That was also true if and when a man returned from jail or was evicted from housing. Once a man is jailed, their name is taken off the rental unit and their common-law’s name is then entered, thus having no place to live upon returning to the community. The waiting then begins:

“I plan on paying it off [rental arrears]; it’s just that you know people are continuing to live in the past and it’s been hard for me to get steady employment or get employment where I haven’t been harassed.”

“I used to pay rent…it was so hard, paying my rent house...all of this blew up.”
THEME EIGHT: sadness/isolation/loss of identity

“It’s just too heavy what to say how I feel – I feel numb, I feel nothing, I feel alone, I feel helpless, everyone is avoiding me, no one is talking to me. I feel like people don’t think I exit here in my own hometown.”

The homeless men that I interviewed shared their emotional pain; and each and every one of them described what it felt like to be homeless. The commonalities of feelings of loneliness or sadness were shared by all participants. Most of them felt that their community did not understand or even try to comprehend what it is like to be homeless. From each participant’s reaction and answers, they felt they were seen as beggars; begging for food, cigarettes or money to buy food. They were just walking the streets because they had social and addiction issues and did not know how to make better choices. Many of the participants felt that their community, family and friends were tired of them asking for a place to sleep for one night or to use their washroom facilities. Here is how some of the respondents verbalized how they felt:

“When you are homeless you cry every day. Cry, cry, cry and pray. I put tears on my bed and my couch. I mourn, I weep. When you are homeless it there, the hatred, the lonely…”

“…you only can say those words because you’re not in my shoes. If you were in my shoes, you would probably know things that you never knew, what I am going through, what I am feeling, how desperate I get.”

“I feel that people judge me, think I am disgusting and look at me with pity.”

“And it just that when you are trying to get yourself out of the hole, gossip in small towns runs ramped and it’s gotten to the point that I am being called “gay”, I’ve done time [in jail] – you know it’s like I am being slandered and you know it’s like that song says kick them when they are up and kick them when they are down.”
“People that are homeless, yes they do have issues, they have gotten to the point where they don’t see any hope. And if you give them a place where they can...for a lack of a better term...help them get their shit together to figure out their priorities, like you know it’s hard to get your priorities straight when you are always either intoxicated or when you are hung over.”

“And you are intoxicated because you are trying to make this pitiful life you have a little bit better, to help you laugh. And unfortunately, you are a lonely drunk hanging out with a bunch of lonely drunks.”

“It’s just too heavy what to say how I feel – I feel numb, I feel nothing, I feel alone, I feel helpless…”

“To myself, pretty heavy (placing his hand over his heart area). It looks like I got no family, no brother, no sister, and no nothing while they all live in the town.”

“People that are homeless, yes they do have issues, they have gotten to the point where they don’t see any hope. And if you give them a place where they can...for a lack of a better term...help them get their shit together to figure out their priorities, like you know it’s hard to get your priorities straight when you are always either intoxicated or when you are hung over.”

“I think people look at me like dirt, I am not sure. Like when I am saying, if I really need a job, I tell this guy, if I tell him that I am living nowhere, I need food, I need money, I need this maybe he would let me work; and this guy would start feeling it in his body – respect [compassion]. Myself I would get hurt too about respecting me, he is hurt too. This guy is feeling my pain because this is how I am living right now; I think he would feel that too.”

“My people [the Inuit] they think they are better than me; spiritually we are just the same. They think they are cleaner, but their inside parts are full of evil. My identity is still going to be the same.”

“I am kind of scared in many ways, scared for myself: physical, mental, spiritual, yeah because I am not going to know which hand they are going to come up with
meaning will they help me or strike against me. I am not going to know. I don’t know if it’s a friendly hand or a mean hand, both ways."

Here is how one of the participant’s described what alienation means to him:

“My children are ashamed of me at times because of the gossip that has been said about me. It even comes to some point where they don’t even look at me or talk to me. I try to tell them that I love them every time I see them, but again with the gossip and them having a young impressionable minds, and some adults play stupid games.”

“I am hoping that someday that the truth will come out and I just want to let them know eventually that I am not as bad as what people say that I was.”

Another commonality for some of the men was regarding their identity as an Inuk individual. The men believed that regardless of their situations or social issues, their identity and being will never be compromised; they will be true to their heritage and know who they are, that is being an Inuk. As the following respondent’s stated:

“... because the only experiences that I want is our Inuit heritage, that’s pretty much, I don’t want none of this education stuff, just our Inuit heritage, that’s all I want to learn is my Inuit heritage. See, if I can live my Inuit heritage right now I would. I could live out on the land, live off the caribou, seals and whatever I can eat out there.”

“I see myself as a regular human being but other people look at me as dirty, I’m an insect to others. My identity is not going to change me, I’m Inuk, I’m always going to be Inuk. When you are experiencing life like this, its very hard, a very hard life.”

“And you are trying to move on to the future but people still living in the past and they will bring that up and throw it in your face, even though they have nothing to do with it, they will throw it in your face. I walk away from people like that, because I know that we are the easiest people in society to be picked on because we have no defense. We have no one to defend us.”
THEME NINE: positive outlook

“Hopefully I can go to my grave with a smile on my face.”

When I started my interviews, I was not sure what the outcome would be, I knew that I would be hearing their lived experiences, yet I did not realize the courage and strength of each individual. These men inspired me to look into asking each person if there are any positive aspects of being homeless. I was surprised by some of their responses. Each person has dreams and goals, and that’s no different if you are a homeless man.

The above caption puts into words “I can go to my grave with a smile on my face” knowing that he has lived his life to the fullest, and continuing his journey towards making peace with his past life and looking forward to changes in his current situations. Some of the responses by participants say it all:

“Yes, I do as a matter of fact, obviously there are some negative impacts, but there is also a lot of positive things about it. You learn to not be materialistic, because whatever you have, you have to be able to carry. And because you have no place to put anything, you have no storage; whatever you have you carry it on you. And life becomes very simple. You realize how little it takes to survive.”

“The positive thing that I could think of is that we learn lots, learn lots, big time. I’ve learned how to protect myself, I learn how to watch people, the way they act and read them; I learn how to be more gentle before I enter a building. I kind of learn how to, should I say ah be more hospitable.”

“... In fact we are probably some of the strongest people in our society because it takes an awful lot to put us down. And again you will be surprised what you can survive on. You just don’t take anything for granted. You don’t take showers for granted, you don’t toilets for granted, you don’t take clean clothes for granted, and you don’t take friendship for granted.”

“Life’s lessons, it teaches you about life’s lessons, all about being independent, and it teaches you who you’re real friends are and who are your enemies. You
know, people start getting pissed off at you because you are visiting too much, and they say it’s time to go ______, and you say to yourself this name is another that I have to cross off the list, I can’t come here anymore to warm up or to eat, use the bathroom, or whatever.”

“You mean what kept me going? My grandmother and my daughter kept me going, just praying every day just to see them once again and I will - someday.”

“First and lastly, you don’t take life for granted, you try and enjoy life, you make the best that you can out of it and I have found that some of the happiest people that I know have almost next to nothing that’s because they have learnt to enjoy life and you know people will try to say well you are not happy because you are poor... well I know a lot of unhappy people, I’d rather be poor than happy and rich than be unhappy...”

As homeless men struggle each day to survive and try and maintain their dignity, it is humbling to hear positive expressions and how it impacts their own daily survival.

As one participant articulates:

“Yes, you know you’re homeless yet you still have lots of friends and family around you; it can still keep you going. Some other people may say yeah you have nothing in your life because you are homeless but you just have to look around; you have friends and family all around you.”

Another respondent feels that regardless of who is facing homelessness, he feels and senses that those around him also face many challenges in their own lives.

“There are many homeless people who are in my shoes, some of them are even worse than me, some people cannot speak English properly, their education is very low and the only support they can find is income support. I am just the same as them, I am not higher or lower than them. Many people [Inuit] think they are better than me; spiritually we are just the same.”

“...and when you have a safe place to live your live pretty much unfolds, you work, you live with your girl-friend, you are part of the community – but without that safe home, you do the best you can.”
Theme Ten: Action

“I see nothing being put into being made for the people who got them elected because I am sure that if you go to every family in every community, they got a least one family member that is homeless.”

The men I interviewed wanted action; they were tired of people doing research and the lack of proper research regarding homeless men in Nunavut. The men wanted to see action, not just words; they were tired of talk by the Federal Government and the Nunavut Government, and said “it’s time to do something about this now. “

“You know we live in the harshest conditions in the world and these are the things that I see; I see Nunavut government cups, I see pens, I see sewing kits, I see expensive company vehicles, I see exuberance, overpaid people, and I see nothing being put into being made for the people who got them elected because I am sure that if you go to every family in every community, they got a least one family member that is homeless. And you know I don’t know whose fault it is, it doesn’t really matter whose fault it is, you know, the point is not to lay blame but the point is how do we fix this.”

“I have come up with a sort thing of a thing that I have put across to my political friends and it will cost between 75,000 to 100,000 dollars to build a one-bedroom home just for one person in a row house, of let’s say nine or ten, or whatever. For that same money, 75,000 up to 100,000 dollars you could build quite a few 12 x 12, very well insulated cabins and house a bunch of homeless people for the interim, because we will not be able to catch up for at least 10 to 15 years. And I don’t even want to think about what can happen to people in those 10 to 15 years, where they will be freezing to death, starving to death, or suicide.”

“Uh…a temporary place to stay so that I can get, at least people in my situation could at least, you know you have a place you can lie down, rest; a place where I can take a shower, a place where I can prepare my own meals, not given food but a place where I can prepare my own meals and a place where I can do my laundry, give me my dignity. And after that the job falls into place because you start feeling mentally better about yourself. Now, I can’t say anything for men and women out there that don’t want to work, because I do know people that don’t want to work and I also know people that can’t work because of their mental instability of having mental depression.”
“...nothing long term, but you know at least it will take a guy a couple of days to be able to find a place to stay for the interim, in between places to stay - L0L.”

“You are not out there trying to sneak in somewhere it’s warm, you don’t want to walk into a restaurant around here and use the bathroom, well you know you didn’t buy anything. Or there are a lot of places now where you loiter, so where do you warm up? And this is why I say you walk, and you walk, and you walk, and you walk, and you walk, and you walk, you never stop walking. Even in your dreams you are walking. And as a matter of fact, in your sleep, it’s one of the very few times that you can escape the world you are in...Yep.”

“Yeah, I would really feel happy about that, then I would eat and have a place to sleep for the night. I would feel happy and much more than just walking around town. I would want to see that homeless shelter for men’s.”

“This is how I see it, some are shy to say the words, some people are ignorant. I hope this community will get a shelter, something like in Iqaluit; I lived there for a while. It’s a lot rougher over there than here because it’s a bigger town than here. You can’t leave your bag, next minute it’s going to disappear; somebody will take your stuff, especially our wallet.”

“And speaking of being homeless I’m bound and determined to get cremated because I don’t ever, ever want to be cold again, I don’t want to be buried in that cold ground. No way. Rock and ground just sucks the life out of you.”
SECTION FIVE: RECOMMENDATIONS & CONCLUSION

This research project was to address homeless men in the community of Rankin Inlet and how homelessness impacted each participant. From the interviews articulated, homelessness stems from social and mental health issues, along with addiction and community perceptions. Through the lenses of the homeless men, they give the reader a better picture of what it’s like to live in Rankin Inlet, the second largest community in Nunavut. What this research brought out was the lack of responsibility from the community itself, along with the Government of Nunavut, Territorial government and the local Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated and Housing Association. Each participant was left to their own devices to figure out how to survive in a community where income earners make large salaries, where the economy is booming, and access to resources in the community is easily obtainable with a support system.

The following are recommendations from this research project, inclusive but not limited to accessing safe affordable housing, a shelter for men, a soup kitchen and access to safe homes in the community. Also there is a need for more action and less research, unless the research is specific to count homelessness in Rankin Inlet.

As stated by federal Auditor General Sheila Fraser “many Nunavut residents with the most need of public housing aren’t always the ones getting it, because local housing authorities aren’t always following proper procedures” (CBC news, 1200 Nunavut Residents waiting for public housing: auditor general, May 23, 2008). She further states that many Inuit are not getting housing because the Housing Associations lack accountability; fail to monitor those who are most in need of a unit. This is reiterated by the participants that were interviewed and how favoritism and nepotism works really well
in the community of Rankin Inlet, it’s who you know and who you are related to. Here is how one participant voiced it:

“_and you know I don’t know whose fault it is, it doesn’t really matter whose fault it is, you know, the point is not to lay blame but the point is how do we fix this.”

The interviews conducted for the purpose of this project have important implications for the community and the Hamlet of Rankin Inlet, the Federal Government, the Government of Nunavut, Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated, Nunavut Housing Corporation, local community resources and the community members. The homeless men of Rankin Inlet have voiced their lived experiences and histories and want to see changes in accessing housing and resources in their community. Homeless issues have to be brought up by many of the stakeholders in the community; these facts cannot be ignored any more. Today Rankin Inlet is booming, that means more people will face homelessness each day if no action is taken. People have to start lobbying to make changes within the community.

The following suggestions aim to improve homeless men’s situations and what the community can do to improve community well-being and work in consensus with the community members.

- **Access to affordable Housing**

  The Housing Association in Rankin Inlet can work with individuals who are in most need of housing and work on reducing rental arrears by making payment plans. If the Housing Association can connect with community members who have rental arrears, it greatly benefit both parties to work towards a solution of how to pay of the arrears. If the
process is ignored by both parties, it leaves the individual at risk of being homeless and collecting arrears becomes a difficult and frustrating process for the housing staff, thus those with housing needs end up being ignored.

The Nunavut Housing Corporation, Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated, along with the Federal Government has a responsibility to the Inuit people of Nunavut. The Nunavut Ten-Year Inuit Housing Action Plan (Nunavut Housing Corporation, September 2004, ii) reports that in order to relieve crisis situations; 3,000 new units have to be constructed in order to reduce overcrowding, while 1,000 existing units need renovations to reduce overcrowding and improve long-term utility of units; in addition to 2,730 new units constructed to keep pace with Inuit population growth.

If a significant number of these housing units were built, how many people would benefit? It would directly help reduce the homeless situation for the community. If these housing units are built, what are the chances of low income earners accessing them? How can the Housing Association help ease the growing homelessness situation?

- **Shelter for men**

A homelessness committee needs to start advocating on behalf of those men who are homeless. This committee will address homelessness issues in the community and use the knowledge based on lived experiences of these homeless men and other’s that live in the community of Rankin Inlet. This committee would be aware of language barriers and of local cultural practices, which are so often ignored by well meaning professionals. Use the lived experiences of these men to hear what would be good for the community, rather
than engage in more research studies. If any research is to be implemented, listen to the homeless people, go out and find them. Talk to the people who need houses the most.

Inclusive but not limited to other resources, have community members who are interested in social change to work together; such as the RCMP, local churches, Housing Association, Hamlet, NTI, local health centre, social services, safe shelter, probations, wellness centre, addictions centre, justice department, as well as community members. Talk to those who advocate for homeless people and get involved.

This committee would be able to find local and outside supports, educate the public on what homelessness is about, create awareness and talk about it, and apply for grants through proposal writing. The committee can also find a suitable location for a shelter and purchase an existing building, and get it fixed up by local contractors or volunteers. If people in the community were to brain storm and work together social changes will occur. Changes have to start somewhere, even if small baby steps are taken. All that homeless men want is a safe place to go to.

- **Safe homes in the community**

If no shelter is available for the local men, set up local safe homes in the community for those men who need a place for the night. Costs can be covered by Government of Nunavut, something like the foster care system where a per diem is paid. These safe home providers will have access to training and support from local existing resources such as the Health & Social Services and/or local Wellness Centre. Safe home providers will be screened in order to have the necessary documentation to become a safe home. There would be guidelines and rules for the men to follow such as those established by
existing safe homes and shelters in other communities. Most men are looking for a safe place to spend the night, have a warm meal and get cleaned up.

As stated by this young man:

“Uh… a temporary place to stay so that I can get, at least people in my situation could at least, you know you have a place you can lie down, rest; a place where I can take a shower, a place where I can prepare my own meals, not given food but a place where I can prepare my own meals and a place where I can do my laundry, give me my dignity. And after that the job falls into place because you start feeling mentally better about yourself.”

- **Soup kitchen**

If one of the local churches or the Wellness Centre or any other interested party could run a soup kitchen; this soup kitchen can run two or three nights per week, have volunteers cook the meals or get those who are homeless to help out. The community of Rankin Inlet has access to kitchen use, for example at the local arena or in one of the schools or Nunavut Arctic College. These local facilities have open type seating arrangements. Volunteers can set up tables just for those nights where meals are served. The community can approach and ask for donations from organizations such as the Hunters & Trappers Association for country foods or collect donations provided by other community and organizations. The community of Rankin Inlet has avid hunters and many local people still hunt to provide food for their families. Another way to collect from the community is to ask each person to bring a food item to donate to the soup kitchen at the regular bingo nights.

This soup kitchen would provide some relief for homeless men and others who often go hungry. Far too often as the research project has indicated, homeless men live in
isolation, face discrimination and struggle to survive every single day. Many of these homeless men are alone and feel that the community does not care about them.

- **Action plan**

One of the respondents envisions how the community of Rankin Inlet could help the homeless situation.

“I have come up with a sort thing of a thing that I have put across to my political friends and it will cost between 75,000 to 100,000 dollars to build a one-bedroom home just for one person in a row house, of let’s say nine or ten, or whatever. For that same money, 75,000 up to 100,000 dollars you could build quite a few 12 x 12, very well insulated cabins and house a bunch of homeless people for the interim, because we will not be able to catch up [rental arrears] for at least 10 to 15 years. And I don’t even want to think about what can happen to people in those 10 to 15 years, where they will be freezing to death, starving to death, or suicide.”

One of the biggest hurdles that homeless men need to overcome is the prejudice and attitudes they face each day. More people in the community need to be educated on homeless issues. Today, many are homeless for various reasons as indicated by this research. The community needs to utilize their local radio station to bring up the subject of homelessness and discuss it. As more people become aware of how homelessness affects everyone, it will give voice to support one another.

This research project has been an eye opener; it has broadened my understanding of what it is like to be homeless in the Arctic. I have worked with many homeless men in the south, but their environment is completely different due to the climate and having access to local shelters and the Salvation Army. In the Arctic homelessness is hidden and disguised in overcrowded living situations. The community of Rankin Inlet needs to
address this issue so that each person can maintain respect and lives in harmony. As Inuit, we are taught to care for those in need, ‘llagiinniq’ (kinship).
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Local Researcher Contact:
Ann Rose Kerkovius, BSW, MSW Candidate
867-645-5064
akerkovius@gov.nu.ca

Supervisor Contact Information:
Dr. Leslie Brown, Ph.D
University of Victoria – 250-721-6275
lbrown@uvic.ca

Where do you sleep?

You are being invited to participate in a study entitled: Where do you sleep, which is being conducted by Ann Rose Kerkovius. Ann Rose is a graduate student in the School of Social Work at the University of Victoria and you may contact her if you have further questions by at 867-645-5064 (W) or 867-645-2208 (H) or by email at akerkovius@gov.nu.ca.

As a Graduate student, I am required to conduct research as part of the requirements for a degree in the Master of Social Work. It is being conducted under the supervision of Leslie Brown. You may contact my supervisor at 250-721-6275 or by email at lbrown@uvic.ca.

The purpose of this research is to recognize the lived experiences of homeless men in Rankin Inlet, Nunavut and how to address social issues that pertain to being homeless. My research will focus on single males. Ultimately, the focus is to hear the lived experiences of homeless men or those perceived as being homeless and how the community can address homelessness and create awareness for the community. The potential implication of this research is to work towards building a homeless shelter in Rankin Inlet.

The research project is important because currently limited research on homeless men has been done in our Inuit community. The context is different living in Nunavut with Northern experiences than those living in the south. This project will give potential awareness to the Nunavut, Territorial and Federal governments to become involved in the plight of homeless men in our community of Rankin Inlet and an opportunity to provide overall awareness of homelessness in Nunavut communities.

You are being asked to participate in this study because of your experiences and knowledge of being homeless. This is the rationale for how and why you were chosen to participate.

If you agree to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will include interviews only with your consent and permission. Face-to-face interviews will be audio-taped, lasting 1-2 hours with a possibility of a follow-up for clarification. All interviews will take place at a designated area chosen by you and a time convenient to you.
Participation in this study may cause some inconvenience to you, such as the interview time, which I will rearrange to suit your time frame, otherwise I do not anticipate any undue burden during the interview process.

You may find it emotionally draining or challenging to describe your homelessness experiences. To prevent or to deal with these risks the following steps will be taken: interviews will be terminated if you feel uneasy or decline to answer any questions or if you require access to personal counselling, I will provide you with a name of a professional social worker or support worker. *If for any reason you feel stressed or overwhelmed, you can also contact the following professionals: Kivalliq Outreach Centre at 867-645-4878 and speak to an outreach worker or the Pulaarvik Kablu Friendship Centre at 867-645-2600 and speak to a support worker.*

The potential benefits of your participation in this research is the sharing of your personal experience of homelessness to our community and thus help to identify the potential need for a homeless shelter in Rankin Inlet.

As a way to compensate you for any inconvenience related to your participation, and in keeping with protocol and teachings of the Inuit traditions and culture, *it will be respectful to meet with you at the end of my research findings to share with you the results of this research, and to thank you for participating in this research.*

Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation. If you do withdraw from the study your data will not be used, I will dispose and destroy any data, including electronic, audio-taped or transcribed material.

To make sure that you continue to consent to participate in this research, I will inform you if the research is extended and remind you that participation is still voluntary.

In terms of protecting your anonymity I will protect all transcribed material by assigning a coded number on all material. There will be no identifying information in the transcribed data. All relevant material will only be accessible by the researcher. However, I intend to interview a relatively small number of participants, and given the small size of the community of Rankin Inlet, there is a slight chance your identity may be unintentionally recognized.

Your confidentiality and the confidentiality of the data will be protected by not being accessed by anyone outside this research. As above there will be no identifying information during the collection, transcribing, and analyzing of the raw data and material will not be available to anyone outside of the research project. All material will be stored in a locked file cabinet; all electronic material will be protected by the researcher’s password.

It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with others in the following ways. The analyzed data will be written up as part of my research project requirements and made available to the general public through the University of Victoria library.
network. Other plans to use this data include academic papers related to Inuit Social Work, possible papers for Nunavut Arctic College or other academic First Nations/Aboriginal journals or the Nunavut Research Institute. The analyzed data will also be used to provide awareness of homelessness to the Government of Nunavut, Federal and Territorial initiatives.

Data from this study will be disposed and destroyed, while I will retain all transcribed and coded data while the raw data will be destroyed within six months of the defence of my research project.

In addition to being able to contact the researcher and the supervisor at the above phone numbers, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Associate Vice-President at the University of Victoria (250-472-4545).

In addition to being able to contact the above, you can also contact the Nunavut Research Institute if you should have any concerns about the research by contacting them at the Nunavut Research Institute, P. O. Box 1720, Iqaluit, NU, X0A 0H0, telephone number is 819-979-4115, fax number is 819-979-4681, or email: exdnri@nunanet.com.

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researchers.

_________________________  __________________________  ________________
Name of Participant      Signature                           Date

A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.
APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORM FOR INTERVIEW

Local Researcher Contact:  
Ann Rose Kerkovius, BSW, MSW Candidate  
867-645-5064  
akerkovius@gov.nu.ca

Supervisor Contact Information:  
Dr. Leslie Brown, PhD  
University of Victoria – 250-721-6275  
lbrown@uvic.ca

I have been asked to participate in an interview for a research project being conducted as part of a Master of Social Work degree at the University of Victoria. I will be asked to answer questions about my experiences and provide information relating to my homelessness situation.

The information gathered by myself will be used to understand individual experiences of being homeless in Rankin Inlet, Nunavut and how to address social issues relating to those experiences. The focus is to hear the lived experiences of homeless men and how the community can address homelessness and create awareness for the community.

My participation is strictly voluntary. I understand that the interview sessions will be audio-taped. The interview will take approximately 1-1.5 hours. At any time during the interview, I may decide not to participate. I may refuse to answer any of the questions at any time. I will receive a telephone call or personal contact from the project coordinator to determine a time and location for the interview. The researcher will type up what was said. The material will be done using a computer which will be password protected.

All personal information such as my name, address, telephone number, will be removed from the data and will be replaced with a number. There will be no identifying information in the transcribed data and stored in a locked filing cabinet.

CONSENT STATEMENT

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT:
I have read the information provided. I have had the opportunity to ask questions, and all of my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this project. I understand that I will receive a signed copy of this form.

_________________________________________  ______________________________________  ____________
Signature of Participant Printed Name Date

_________________________________________  ______________________________________  ____________
Signature of Researcher Printed Name Date
APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. Where do you sleep? Tell me about where you sleep, at a friends’ couch, on an extra mattress, with extended family, etc.?

2. What do you consider being homeless?

3. Do you consider yourself to be “homeless?” Do you want to change your lifestyle, if so how? Or are you happy with things the way they are?

4. What are your thoughts being labeled as a homeless man? Are you discriminated?

5. Can you describe your “homeless” situation?

6. What are some of the positive aspects of being homeless?

7. What are some of the issues that you face? Describe your support system. Does your family support you, your friends?

8. What would you say would be the most important things that you need to be able to get off the “homeless” situation?

9. If we have a follow-up to present the findings of this research would you be willing to attend?
APPENDIX D: INTERPRETER CONFIDENTIALITY FORM

Local Researcher Contact:
Ann Rose Kerkovius, BSW, MSW Candidate
867-645-5064
akerkovius@gov.nu.ca

Supervisor Contact Information:
Dr. Leslie Brown, PhD
University of Victoria – 250-721-6275
lbrown@uvic.ca

I have been asked to interpret in Inuktitut for unilingual individuals who wish to participate in the Where do you Sleep research project interview being conducted as part of a Master of Social Work degree at the University of Victoria; this research project is conducted by Ann Rose Kerkovius.

The purpose of this research is to recognize the lived experiences of homeless men in Rankin Inlet, Nunavut and how to address social issues that pertain to being homeless. My research will focus on single males. Ultimately, the focus is to hear the lived experiences of homeless men or those perceived as being homeless and how the community can address homelessness and create awareness for the community. The potential implication of this research is to work towards building a homeless shelter in Rankin Inlet.

Any information during interview translation of the lived experiences of individuals will be strictly kept confidential among research project coordinator, interpreter and individual being interviewed.

As the interpreter I will translate the Consent Form for Interview to the participant, making sure that the individual understands what is expected from his participation. I will interpret all interview questions and translate and relay back unedited answers to the research project coordinator.

CONSENT STATEMENT

SIGNATURE OF INTERPRETER:

By signing below I agree to keep confidential all information I am made aware of through my role as translator/interpreter in this research project.

Signature of Interpreter _______________ Printed Name _______________ Date _______________

Signature of Researcher _______________ Printed Name _______________ Date _______________