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*Housing Insecurity and Justice  
System Involvement Among Women  
in the Thunder Bay Region*

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# *Housing insecurity and justice system involvement among women in the Thunder Bay region*

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## *Executive Summary*

### **Background/Objectives**

Homelessness and housing insecurity can be both predictors and outcomes of criminal justice system involvement. This study assessed the perceived relationship between these two variables for women in Thunder Bay with the aim of identifying gaps and needs in our community. More specifically, the objectives were to:

- 1.) Assess the degree to which homelessness and housing insecurity affect criminal justice system involvement for women in Thunder Bay, with particular consideration of Indigenous women
- 2.) Identify housing, social, mental health and legal support needs for housing insecure women involved with the criminal justice system, with particular attention to gender-specific and culturally-relevant needs
- 3.) Identify evidence-based approaches/promising practices/innovations for providing gender-sensitive and culturally-relevant housing, social, and legal support for women who are involved with the criminal justice system which are applicable to the context of Northwestern Ontario

As of June 2019, our country became one of the few to indicate that housing is a human right through federal legislation. Canada has recently signalled a commitment to addressing homelessness and housing issues through the introduction of the National Housing Strategy, a 10-year \$55 billion investment into affordable housing. The current research can serve to inform future developments of the unique needs of our community. The National Housing Strategy has identified Northern Canada and Indigenous peoples as priority areas for providing affordable housing and reducing homelessness.

### **Methods**

A mixed method design was utilized involving quantitative (i.e. surveys) and qualitative (i.e. interviews and focus groups) approaches to data collection. Researchers collected information from 25 women who were involved in the criminal justice system by conducting individual interviews in the community and holding focus groups at the Thunder Bay Correctional Centre and John Howard Society. In addition, information was collected from professionals in the legal and social services sector through an online survey and a focus group. Additional data collection involved an environmental scan and gap analysis of local services relating to transitional housing, housing and support services and substance use treatment facilities. Lastly, the bail courts were monitored to determine the influence of housing on bail planning and release. Data were triangulated and analysed to meet the study objectives.

### **Results**

Bail court monitoring indicated that in approximately 50% of cases, housing was an important factor in determining if the woman was released on bail or was remanded into custody. In 47% of cases where housing was a required condition for release, women did not have housing available to them. Therefore, the ability to secure housing is a barrier to local women seeking bail or release.

### **Results Continued**

A survey of legal professionals revealed similar results. Respondents noted that many (50-89%) of their clients are under-housed and that housing is often a very important component of bail and discharge planning. Respondents noted that the inability of women to make bail or be released from jail often leads to other negative consequences such as the loss of their children, housing, or employment and can delay access to important services such as mental health or substance use treatment. Lastly, the legal professionals felt that housing instability is often associated with recidivism.

Women involved with the criminal justice system were asked about barriers to securing and maintaining housing which revealed three themes: discrimination (based on race, previous involvement with the criminal justice system, credit rating, and income source), financial barriers, and availability of affordable suitable options. Barriers unique to bail release involved the restrictions around finding a surety. Women could not use an individual as their surety if the individual lives in subsidized housing or has a criminal record.

This research indicated that homelessness and housing insecurity affects criminal justice system involvement in several ways. First, housing insecurity increases the likelihood of recidivism. Women who do not have a safe and stable home may commit crimes out of need, be unable to access needed treatment, or may return to the circumstances or environments that led to their arrest (e.g. leading to breaches). Similarly, homelessness and housing insecurity threaten the recovery of women who are striving for sobriety following release from a correctional facility. Several research participants expressed a need for mental health and addiction services. Stable housing can provide a foundation for women's recovery, health and wellness. Lastly, the inability to secure housing can threaten women's safety by increasing the likelihood of exploitation, assault or returning to unsafe situations such as violent relationships. All of these situations could lead to further contact with the criminal justice system.

The environmental scan and gap analysis revealed that there is a clear lack of transitional housing options exclusively for women. The shelters that do accommodate only women are focused on women and children in abusive situations. Women who are not in this situation or have abuse histories (as opposed to current) are forced to stay in co-ed transitional housing options which may be undesirable for various reasons. An additional key finding is the lack of service options for women prior to and following substance use treatment. The only local organization to provide this service is Crossroads Centre which is open to men and women.

Women were asked about their needs and preferences for housing and/or transitional housing in Thunder Bay. Although there was some variability in responses, preferences voiced by the majority will be presented in the summary. Cost and location were frequently mentioned. Women need affordable housing in a safe neighborhood. Respondents described the importance of avoiding areas fraught with criminal activity such as drug dealing, human trafficking and violence. This is important for preventing recidivism and relapse but also for the protection of women and families. For transitional housing, women reported that a rooming-house style would be suitable where women have private bedrooms but were open to sharing accommodations such as a common living space, kitchen and bathroom (in some cases). It is important that the transitional housing provides a space where women can visit and play with

### **Results Continued**

Participants agreed that rules and regulations were necessary, but women noted that it was important to have rules balanced with autonomy. A graduated system may be appropriate depending on women's unique situation (e.g. bail conditions). Nearly all participants expressed a desire for additional services to be offered on site including addictions, mental health, case management, legal matters, cultural activities, child welfare, and physical health. Other recommended services included training in life skills such as computers, cooking and job seeking.

### **Conclusion**

Consistent with the aims of the NHS, this research highlighted some significant gaps in services in Thunder Bay. It drew this conclusion through consultation with a wide range of affected parties (i.e. women in the criminal justice system, service providers and legal professionals). There is a need for transitional housing in Thunder Bay that focuses on the unique needs of marginalized women, who have experiences of trauma, poverty and violence, particularly Indigenous women. Understanding that the criminalization of Indigenous women is intrinsically linked to the impacts of colonization, intergenerational trauma and cultural genocide requires support services that are sensitive to the root causes of their lived experiences. A facility that caters to all women could assist in bail and discharge planning while protecting women from the negative effects of homelessness such as increased risk of recidivism, substance use and physical harm. Although this research focused on housing issues, several other important issues were brought to light; for example, the importance of mental health and addiction when evaluating the relationship between housing insecurity and criminal justice system involvement. This research demonstrated that housing is truly the foundation for wellness. Without stable or transitional housing, women are unable to focus on other important aspects of social reintegration. The gender and culture sensitive recommendations in this report reflect the perceived needs of the women from the criminal justice system and professionals who serve them.

## **Housing Insecurity and Criminal Justice System Involvement for Women in Thunder Bay**

### ***Introduction to the Project***

The purpose of this research project was to investigate the relationship between homelessness or housing insecurity and criminal justice system involvement for women in the Thunder Bay region. By including women with lived experience and several key stakeholders, community needs were identified through this project. The research team summarized the needs and recommendations with an emphasis on gender and culture specific factors.

The project was led through a partnership between the Elizabeth Fry Society of Northwestern Ontario (EFSNO) and Lakehead University. Monetary support was provided by the Law Foundation of Ontario - Small Responsive Grants program.

### **Relevant Background**

In urban and rural areas across Canada, many housing insecure and homeless people end up in jail, including those with no prior history of incarceration (Gaetz and O'Grady, 2009; Walsh, MacDonald, Rutherford, Moore & Krieg, 2011). Conversely, it has also become evident that involvement with the legal system and discharge from the correctional system is a significant precipitator of homelessness and post-discharge legal system involvement (Gaetz and O'Grady, 2009). Safe and adequate housing, along with relevant social and legal support may be key to achieving equitable outcomes for this population and reducing pressures on court and correctional systems (John Howard Society, 2019; Gaetz and O'Grady, 2009).

The cycle involving courts, prisons and homelessness is an issue for women and particularly for Indigenous women who are overrepresented in the Canadian correctional system (Walsh et al. 2011). Women's experiences with the criminal justice system and their housing and support needs are unique (Walsh et al, 2011). As such, housing and support programs must be gender-specific (Schiff, 2009). In addition, Indigenous women have unique experiences and needs, indicating the necessity of culturally-safe and relevant housing and supports (Schiff, 2009; Walsh et al, 2011).

### **Gender – Specific Needs**

A review of epidemiological studies by Haywood and colleagues (2000) revealed that incarcerated women are often young, poor, minorities, lacking in education and employment, victims of physical and sexual abuse and suffering from mental health disorders, with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) being the most common. Many incarcerated women also have children. These are some of the factors which indicate a need for gender-specific supports in the community. In order to develop effective programs and models for service provision, the unique needs and characteristics of the population must be considered.

### **Indigenous Women, Housing Insecurity, and the Criminal Justice System**

The Indigenous population is significantly over-represented in both federal and provincial correctional facilities. In 2016/2017, only 4.1% of Canada's adult population was Indigenous, yet



this group represented 27% and 28% of federal and provincial admissions into custody, respectively (Malakieh, 2018). According to the Office of the Correctional Investigator, Indigenous women are the fastest-growing prison population in Canada (Government of Canada, 2016). The swelling ranks of Indigenous women in federal correctional facilities amount to "nothing short of a crisis," according to a recent report commissioned by the Public Safety Department of Canada (Wesley, 2012). For 2016/2017, 43% of all women admitted into federal custody were Indigenous, up from 28% in 2006/2007 (Statistics Canada, 2018).

The over-representation of Indigenous Peoples in prison has been the subject of many academic studies, government reports and justice inquiries. (e.g. The Manitoba Aboriginal Justice Inquiry, Hamilton and Sinclair, 1991; 'Marginalized' prepared by Wesley Group for the Public Safety Department, 2012; and "Aboriginal People and the Criminal Justice System", Report prepared by Jonathon Rudin for the Ipperwash Inquiry, 2005). The high rate of incarceration for Indigenous Peoples has been linked to systemic discrimination and attitudes based on racial or cultural prejudice, as well as the impacts of colonization and continued colonialism including: economic and social disadvantage, homelessness, substance abuse and intergenerational loss, violence and trauma (Wesley, 2012).

In an attempt to address the fact that Indigenous offenders are overrepresented in Canadian prisons, the Criminal Code of Canada's sentencing guidelines were reformed in 1996 encouraging courts to consider alternatives to incarceration. The relevant revision can be found in section 718.2(e) which states: all available sanctions, other than imprisonment, that are reasonable in the circumstances and consistent with the harm done to victims or to the community should be considered for all offenders, with particular attention to the circumstances of Aboriginal offenders (Government of Canada, 2019). The first individual to challenge section 718.2(e) was a woman named Jamie Tanis Gladue who appealed her sentence in the Supreme Court of Canada in 1999 (Supreme Court of Canada, 2012). This led to the introduction of terms such as "Gladue reports", "Gladue court" or "Gladue analysis" referring to the need to consider the cultural backgrounds of Indigenous offenders when assessing culpability and determining sentencing (Justice Education Society, 2012). Alternatives to jail are often advocated for, including restorative justice processes focused on healing that are more consistent with Indigenous culture and justice (Justice Education Society, 2012).

The response by the criminal justice system has not been effective in providing equitable outcomes for Indigenous people in conflict with the law as evidenced by increasing over-representation in Canadian correctional facilities (Statistics Canada, 2018). There has been a growing consensus that culturally sensitive housing, and social and legal supports are critical to reducing inequitable effects of housing insecurity on legal involvement for Indigenous women. It is also generally accepted that Indigenous women's increasing rate of criminalization is related to such factors as poverty, homelessness, racism, the history of colonization, damaging effects of residential schools, addiction, lack of supports and violence against women (Wesley, 2012). In this context, gender and culture specific supports are needed to ensure equitable service and outcomes for these women.

## Defining Homelessness

Despite their widespread use, the terms “homeless” and “homelessness” are fairly new Western concepts introduced in the mid 1900s (Thistle, 2017). Between 1980-1990, there was a significant increase in homelessness associated with cuts to social services for low-income Canadians (Thistle, 2017). This led to a surge in research and political attention on the issue of homelessness that scholars argue had been largely ignored for centuries, particularly with the Indigenous Peoples of Canada (Thistle, 2017).

The Canadian Definition of Homelessness defines homelessness as “the situation of an individual, family, or community without stable, safe, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect means and ability of acquiring it.” (Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, 2019, p.1). As emphasized by the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness (2019), the experience of being homeless is unique to each individual and population; these differences must be taken into account in our efforts to understand, prevent and address this issue in our communities.

In 2012, the Aboriginal Standing Committee on Housing and Homelessness defined Indigenous homelessness as “a human condition that describes First Nations, Métis and Inuit individuals, families or communities lacking stable, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect, means or ability to acquire such housing... Indigenous homelessness is not defined as lacking a structure of habitation; rather, it is more fully described and understood through a composite lens of Indigenous worldviews.” Indigenous homelessness needs to be understood as an outcome of colonization and ongoing racism resulting in displacement of Indigenous Peoples and the disruption of Indigenous culture (Thistle, 2017). For Indigenous Peoples, “home” is not merely conceptualized as a commodity or a physical structure but rather “the anchor of social relationships” or a “feeling of rootedness” reflecting reciprocal relationships between families, communities, places, animals, kin, the land and ancestors (Thistle, 2017, p.15). Due to the influence of historical events, several of these relationships have been disrupted.

Thistle (2017) published a document describing the 12 dimensions of Indigenous homelessness that were developed through nearly two years of consultation with fifty Indigenous Peoples including scholars, front-line workers, community members and individuals with lived experience. This cultural framework provides a deeper understanding of the contributing factors to an individual or community’s homelessness; the dimensions can inform solutions and quantify severity since these related dimensions can be layered and experienced simultaneously (Thistle, 2017). For example, colonialism is associated with the dimensions of “Historic Displacement Homelessness” defined as “Indigenous communities and Nations made historically homeless after being displaced from pre-colonial Indigenous lands” and “Contemporary Geographic Separation Homelessness” defined as “an Indigenous individual’s or community’s separation from Indigenous lands” (Thistle, 2017, p.10).

Although all 12 of the dimensions of Indigenous homelessness are likely affecting homeless Indigenous Peoples in Thunder Bay, three are particularly relevant to the current project. First, “Mental Disruption and Imbalance Homelessness” is defined as “Mental

homelessness, described by an imbalance of mental faculties, experienced by Indigenous individuals and communities caused by colonization's entrenched social and economic marginalization of Indigenous Peoples" (Thistle, 2017, p.10). Second, "Cultural Disintegration and Loss Homelessness" is defined as "Homelessness that totally dislocates or alienates Indigenous individuals and communities from their culture and from the relationship web of Indigenous society known as "All My Relations." (Thistle, 2017, p.11). Lastly, "Escaping or Evading Harm Homelessness" is defined as "Indigenous persons fleeing, leaving or vacating unstable, unsafe, unhealthy or overcrowded households or homes to obtain a measure of safety or to survive." (Thistle, 2017, p.12). Young people, women and members of the LGBTQ2S community are particularly vulnerable to this dimension of homelessness (Thistle, 2017). For a detailed description of all dimensions, see Thistle (2017).

### **Homelessness in the Region of Thunder Bay**

Canadian research has indicated that in urban centres, 1 in 128 people experience homelessness, but this number jumps to 1 in 15 for Indigenous Peoples. Based on these figures, urban Indigenous Peoples are at least eight times more likely to be affected by homelessness (Belanger, Awosaga, & Head, 2013).

In 2018, a point-in-time count (PiT count) of homeless individuals was completed in Thunder Bay as part of a nationwide effort to enumerate homelessness in major Canadian urban centres. According to Thunder Bay 2018 PiT report, 474 people experienced homelessness at the time that the survey was conducted (Lakehead Social Planning Council, 2018). The most recent Shelter Capacity Report for Thunder Bay revealed that there are only 76 shelter beds in the city (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2016). Based on these statistics, the available shelters can only provide beds for 16% of the local homeless population. This lack of shelter space is reflected in the fact that the majority of homeless people who took part in the 2018 PiT Count reported couch-surfing (50.6%), while 36.7% reported living in shelters, and another 7% were living in unsheltered locations such as tents or public spaces (Lakehead Social Planning Council, 2018).

A closer analysis of the demographics indicates that in 2018, 35.2% of the homeless population were women and 66% identified as Indigenous (Lakehead Social Planning Council, 2018). Although it cannot be inferred from this data how many homeless women in our community have been involved with the criminal justice system, there is an established relationship between these two variables (Gaetz and O'Grady, 2009). Therefore, addressing homelessness and housing insecurity in our region may help end the cycle of re-offending by providing women with a stable home, the foundation for wellness. In addition, this initiative can protect women against other negative effects of homelessness such as poor health, low access to education and employment, and social isolation (Gaetz, Donaldson, Richter & Gulliver, 2013).

### **Housing as a Human Right: Canada's National Housing Strategy**

Fortunately, the federal government has recently committed to addressing the issue of homelessness in Canada through the National Housing Strategy (NHS; Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, 2018). The NHS is a 10-year plan that will involve a \$55 billion

investment into the development of affordable housing for Canadians (CMHC, 2018). The strategy aims to strengthen the middle class and the economy by building up to 125,000 new homes and cutting homelessness in half (CMHC, 2018). The strategy emphasizes collaboration between the government (federal and provincial), public, private and non-profit sectors and researchers in order to identify needs and shape the future of housing policy through innovation (CMHC, 2018).

In June 2019, Canada signed into law Bill C-97 indicating that housing is a human right and this legislation included the “National Housing Strategy Act” further strengthening our nation’s dedication to the NHS (Canadian Housing and Renewal Association, 2019). This is the first time Canada has recognized the right to housing through legislation and our federal government is one of the few countries in the world to do so (CHRA, 2019).

Unfortunately, in contrast to Bill C-97, on September 23 2019, Ontario’s provincial government passed an amendment to Ontario Regulation 367/11 under the Housing Services Act, 2011 (Government of Ontario, 2019). The amendment allows a public housing provider to “refuse to offer a unit to a household if a member of the household” was evicted from “a designated housing project through an order of the Landlord and Tenant Board based on an illegal act” within the past 5 years (Duncan, 2019, p. 1). The public housing providers can refuse to offer a unit if they have “reasonable grounds to believe the household would pose a risk to the safety of one or more other people at the housing project” (Duncan, 2019, p. 1). The right to refuse also applies if a previous eviction took place in a different service area of the province and it applies to people who, as tenants, were “named in an eviction order based on an illegal act” even if they were “not directly involved in the illegal act” (Duncan, 2019, p 2). This has the potential to significantly impact populations who are already experiencing housing insecurity, such as women who have been involved in the criminal justice system.

Despite this problematic amendment, the introduction of the NHS and Bill-97 has created the opportunity for communities to advocate for their own unique housing needs. Relevant to Northern Ontario, the priority areas for action include social housing sustainability, Indigenous housing, Northern housing and sustainable housing (CMHC, 2018). Similarly, the NHS has expressed a dedication to providing housing to the most vulnerable populations including women and children fleeing domestic violence, seniors, Indigenous peoples, homeless people, people with disabilities and those affected by mental health and addiction (CMHC, 2018). Consistent with the aims of the NHS, the current research project can serve to inform relevant organizations of the unique housing needs for our region while proposing gender and culture specific solutions.

### *Addressing the Knowledge Gaps*

The fact that there is a reciprocal relationship between housing insecurity/homelessness and criminality warrants further investigation at the local level to identify the particular gaps and needs. The aim of this research project was to identify local needs while helping to create a broader understanding of the challenges faced by homeless women in the context of the legal system. Government reports and empirical research recommend establishing more programs that address the effects of housing on criminal justice system involvement (Gaetz and O’Grady,

2009). This project aimed to provide insight to support the development of evidence-based approaches to address these issues in Northwestern Ontario and provide valuable information for other regions dealing with these challenges.

### **Project Objectives:**

1. Assess the extent to which housing insecurity and homelessness affects women's criminal justice system involvement, with particular consideration of Indigenous women, including risks related to bail, custodial sentencing and post-discharge legal involvement.
2. Identify housing, social, mental health and legal support needs for housing insecure women involved with the criminal justice system, with particular attention to gender and culture specific needs.
3. Identify evidence-based approaches/promising practices/innovations for providing gender and culture specific housing, social, and legal support for women who are involved with the criminal justice system which are applicable to the context of Northwestern Ontario

## ***Methods***

### **Description of Methods**

In order to gain a comprehensive picture of housing and related support needs for the women who were the focus of this study, the research team used quantitative (i.e. surveys and court monitoring) and qualitative (i.e. interviews and focus groups) methods. Prior to commencement of the research, a meeting was held with the project advisory board to obtain feedback on the protocol and make any proposed changes. The project advisory board also provided feedback on a preliminary version of the findings and report.

### **Environmental Scan and Gap Analysis**

In order to assess the relevant services that are currently available in our region, an environmental scan and gap analysis was conducted. As the name suggests, the environmental scan identifies and describes all of the services offered in a region to address a particular issue. For this project, the environmental scan focused on three domains: transitional housing, housing and support services and substance use treatment facilities in Thunder Bay. The environmental scan focused on specifying the populations served, eligibility requirements and a brief description of services for each organization.

Conducting an environmental scan of services allows for the easy identification of gaps in services or specific needs for a community. This information can be utilized to inform future developments, funding initiatives and local policy as intended in this research project.

## **Quantitative Methods**

### ***Online Survey***

We conducted an online survey, conducted between January and March 2019 aimed at gathering perspectives and information from defense lawyers who work with women involved with the court system in Thunder Bay. Invitations to participate in the survey were sent to potential participants by email. A project advisory board member provided contact information for criminal justice lawyers practising in Thunder Bay. The email invited participants to click on a link to the online survey, hosted by SurveyMonkey online software. A copy of the survey questions is in Appendix A.

### ***Bail Bed/Court Monitoring***

With the support of Pro Bono Canada, the EFSNWO was able to engage a second-year Lakehead University - Faculty of Law student to monitor bail courts. Data was informally collected between July and August 2018 to determine whether housing is an issue for women seeking bail.

## **Qualitative Methods**

### ***Focus Groups***

We held multiple focus groups with several different sets of stakeholders: service providers in the social service sector; women who had been involved with the criminal justice system and were now living in the community; and women who were currently incarcerated. The focus groups were intended to elicit information about the housing challenges faced by women who have been involved in the criminal justice system.

The discussion was led by a skilled facilitator who used a script to obtain key information. At the discretion of the facilitator, slight digressions from the script were permitted in order to capture a greater breadth of information. Topics included: housing challenges faced by women who are seeking bail or being released from prison, the relationship between housing insecurity and criminal justice system involvement, how housing issues affect other aspects of women's lives, perceived needs for housing-related services and recommendations for the development of transitional housing for women in Thunder Bay.

The first focus group included representatives from several local social service providers, mental health agencies, shelters and Indigenous organizations. Most participants had direct experience working women have been involved in the criminal justice system and/or are experiencing homeless or housing insecurity. Participants were made aware that the session was audio recorded. A copy of the "Focus Group Guide for Key Stakeholders" can be found in Appendix B.

The second set of focus groups involved women who have been involved in the criminal justice system. One focus group was held at a housing support agency and invitations were placed under the doors of all women currently residing at the organization inviting them to participate. The content and process were the same as described above for the service provider focus group. For this group, the session was audio-recorded and women were provided with a \$20 honorarium as a token of appreciation for their participation. A copy of the "Focus Group Guide for Key Informants" can be found in Appendix C.

The third set of focus groups were held at the Thunder Bay Correctional Centre. After obtaining the required permissions from the Ministry, two separate focus groups were organized. Each focus group was facilitated by three research team members. Due to Ministry policies, focus groups at the Correctional Centre were not audio recorded. Two researchers were responsible for transcribing content and a third researcher facilitated the focus groups. The script was identical to the one used for the focus group at the housing support agency (i.e. see Appendix C). Women in the Correctional Centre were recruited by staff who were working with the research team. As a token of appreciation, all incarcerated participants had \$20 added to their canteen account which they could use to purchase food and basic necessities.

### ***Individual Interviews***

We also conducted individual interviews with women in the community who had recently been released from the correctional facility. The majority were recruited through interactions with the EFSNWO. These women were interviewed at locations that were convenient for them. One of the challenges with recruitment was that the majority of women did not have telephones or a stable, permanent address where they could be contacted. All women were provided with a letter of information before signing the informed consent form indicating their willingness to be interviewed. The individual interviews allowed the researchers to gather more in-depth information about a woman's experiences, housing challenges and how this has affected other aspects of her life. In the interviews, women were asked about whether there was adequate housing for women exiting correctional facilities in Thunder Bay and their preferences for post-release housing. Most individual interviews were audio-recorded and took approximately 20 minutes. In two instances, an audio recorder was unavailable in which case the interviewer took notes throughout the discussion. All women were provided with a \$20 honorarium for completing the interview.

The second set of individual interviews involved legal professionals from the community. It was originally intended that this group of stakeholders participate in a focus group. However, due to practical challenges (e.g. busy or incompatible schedules), it was decided by the research team that an individual interview approach was most feasible. Several legal agencies were contacted for participation including; probation, corrections, legal aid, attorneys and legal representatives from the local Indigenous organizations Nishnawbe Aski Nation and the Thunder Bay Indigenous Friendship Centre. All participants provided verbal consent to participate and were assured that their individual responses would not be linked to their names or specific occupation. These interviews were completed over the phone and were transcribed in real-time by a research assistant. As an interview guide, the "Focus Group Guide for Key Stakeholders" was used (Appendix C).

### **Data Analysis**

All quantitative data (i.e. survey data) was analysed using SAS version 9.4.

The qualitative data (i.e. interviews and focus groups) was coded using NVivo Version 10. The research team met regularly to review and discuss the coding structure. Based on the research questions, the qualitative coding started with five broad parent nodes, inspired by a

social worlds approach (Clarke & Star, 2008), and further informed by recent application of this process to research on homelessness (Pauly et al, 2019). The social worlds framework seeks to understand and create meaning out of people, places and processes organized around areas of mutual concern and action. The original five parent nodes (i.e. social worlds) that were proposed by the research team included: culture, family, health, housing and justice.

For the first wave of coding, two research assistants coded the same five sources (i.e. transcripts of interviews/focus groups). As recommended by Belotto (2018), an inter-rater coding comparison was run through NVivo to determine the percent agreement (i.e. how consistent were the two research assistants on coding the five sources?). Any nodes or text sections that were scored as less than 85% agreement were reviewed by the research team to address any discrepancies in coding. It was determined that in most cases, the lack of agreement was associated with the *amount* of text selected for coding, as opposed to a lack of agreement on the coding structure. In the two cases where inconsistent coding was identified, the research assistants met to clarify the code descriptions. Once the research team was satisfied with the resolution and high inter-rater reliability was achieved (i.e. greater than 85% agreement for all nodes and sources), the remaining qualitative data was coded. At the end of coding, there were 76 nodes in total, organized within a structure of ten parent nodes.

To answer the research questions, a mixed-methods approach integrated data from multiple sources. Specifically, the research team synthesized information from the bail court monitoring, online survey, focus groups, individual interviews and the environmental scan and gap analysis to discuss the relationship between housing and criminal justice system involvement for women in Thunder Bay. The team focused on highlighting themes, issues, barriers and solutions identified by the various sources included in this project. As another analytic strategy, the team explored sources of convergence and divergence between groups (e.g. women in the community and legal professionals).

## ***Results***

### **Participant Characteristics**

All women involved in the criminal justice system were asked to complete a background questionnaire that included information on demographics (e.g. age, marital status, ethnicity, Indigenous identity, education), employment and income, criminal charges (i.e. whether this was her first offense and if she is currently on remand or sentenced) and current housing arrangements (if applicable). A copy of the key informant background questionnaire can be found in Appendix D.

Similarly, participants in the service provider focus group filled out a background questionnaire. This measure was slightly different than the one administered to key informants and assessed demographics, sector of employment and views on the relationship between housing insecurity and women's criminal justice system involvement. A copy of this questionnaire can be found in Appendix E.



In total, the research team spoke with 25 women who had been involved in the criminal justice system. Eleven incarcerated women participated in focus groups at the Correctional Centre, four women participated in a focus group at the housing support agency, and the remaining 10 women were interviewed individually. The women ranged in age from 19-54 ( $M = 38.40$ ,  $SD = 10.66$ ). The table below summarizes descriptive information for the sample of key informants:

	N (%)
<b>Self-identified ethnicity</b>	
Indigenous	19 (76%)
Caucasian	6 (24%)
<b>First language</b>	
English	19 (76%)
Ojibwe	2 (8%)
English & Ojibwe	3 (12%)
<b>Marital status</b>	
Single	21 (84%)
Common law	3 (12%)
Divorced	1 (4%)
<b>Have children?</b>	
Yes	20 (80%)
No	5 (20%)
<b>Education level</b>	
No high school	11 (44%)
Some post-secondary	9 (36%)
High school diploma	4 (16%)
<b>Income source</b>	
Ontario Works	10 (40%)
Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP)	8 (33%)

No income	4 (16%)
Other	2 (8%)
Employment	1 (4%)
<b>Health conditions</b>	
Mental health/addiction	15 (60%)
Physical health	3 (12%)
Mental health/addiction and physical health	3 (12%)
Not applicable (i.e. nothing to report)	2 (8%)
Developmental disability	1 (4%)

\* For descriptors that do not equal N=25, there was missing data \*

Background information was collected for the service providers. In the focus group for social service providers in the community, there were eight participants from diverse backgrounds and service areas. Sectors of employment that were represented include: legal, government, shelters and not-for-profit housing.

Similarly, four local legal professionals participated in individual interviews. To protect the privacy of the legal professionals, specific job titles and organizations will not be listed. However, it is worth noting that legal representatives from local Indigenous organizations were included in the participant pool.

### **Bail Court Monitoring**

Over the course of data collection (July 23-31 and August 13-31, 2018), a total of 95 women attended bail court. For the majority (63 women), housing had no bearing on the woman's ability to be released or obtain bail. However, for the remaining 32 women, housing was an important factor in determining if the woman was released on bail or was remanded into custody. In 53% of the cases where housing was a required component for release, women had housing available. In the remaining 47% of cases, women did not have housing available to them. Assuming all other factors were arranged (e.g. surety, bail plan), the inability to secure housing would prevent women from being released or obtaining bail. These local statistics indicate that housing insecurity is a barrier for nearly 50% of women attending bail court who require housing for bail or release.

### **Quantitative Results: Defense Counsel Online Survey**

Data showed that the survey consent form was accessed 20 times and that 20 individuals consented to take part. Eight individuals were lost to attrition; therefore the final sample included 12 completed surveys.

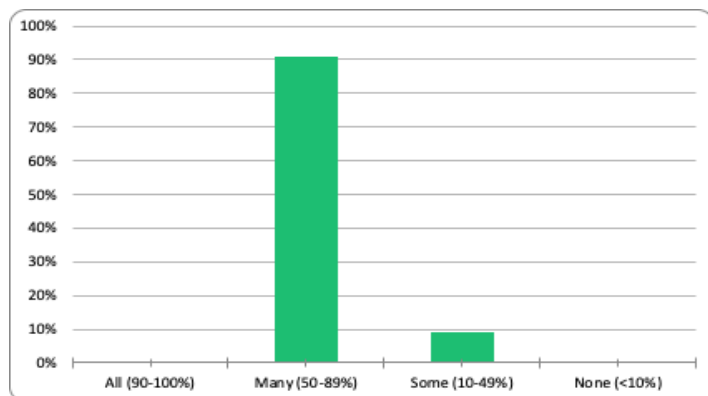
To establish the importance of housing as an issue for women involved with the justice system, lawyers were asked the extent to which they believed that housing was an important factor in determining a woman's bail and discharge plan. All survey respondents reported that housing is either an extremely or very important part of a bail plan for women (n=12, 100%). Similarly, the vast majority of respondents noted that housing is an extremely important (n=7; 58%) or very important (n=4; 33%) part of a discharge plan for women.

Next, respondents were asked whether housing issues with women's potential sureties impacted women's ability to be released on bail. Nearly all of the respondents believed that women's ability to receive bail was impeded if the surety resides in social housing or if the surety has unstable or unsafe housing (n=11; 91%, respectively). Respondents (n=10; 83%) also reported that the opportunity for bail could be impacted if the surety had insufficient space available for the women in their housing. In addition, all respondents who selected the "other" option (n=5) mentioned that if the surety has children living in the home and they agree to house a woman while she is on bail, the police or Crown may threaten, or call Children's Aid Society (CAS) or Dilico Family Services because of perceived risk to the children from the discharged women living in their home.

The majority of respondents reported that help with housing is part of preparing women's bail plans (n=9; 75%). A minority of respondents reported that they do not include help with housing as part of preparing a bail plan (n=3; 25%). The participants who help with housing as part of a bail plan (n=9) named the agencies that assisted their women clients with housing. This included (in descending order): the John Howard Society (n=9; 100%), Shelter House (n=8; 89%), Urban Abbey (n=5; 56%), Alpha Court (n=3; 33%), the Elizabeth Fry Society (n=3; 33%), private housing (n=3; 33%), the Indigenous Friendship Centre (n=2; 22%), and the Ontario Native Women's Association, and the Northwestern Ontario Women's Centre (n=1, 11%, respectively). Respondents added additional agencies under the "other" category as well, including Faye Peterson Transition House (n=2; 22%), Salvation Army (n=1; 11%), and Wakaigin Housing/Beendigen (n=1; 11%).

Figure 1 shows that the majority of survey respondents indicated that 50-85% of their women clients are under-housed (n=10; 90%).

**Figure 1.** Many women clients in the Thunder Bay region are under-housed

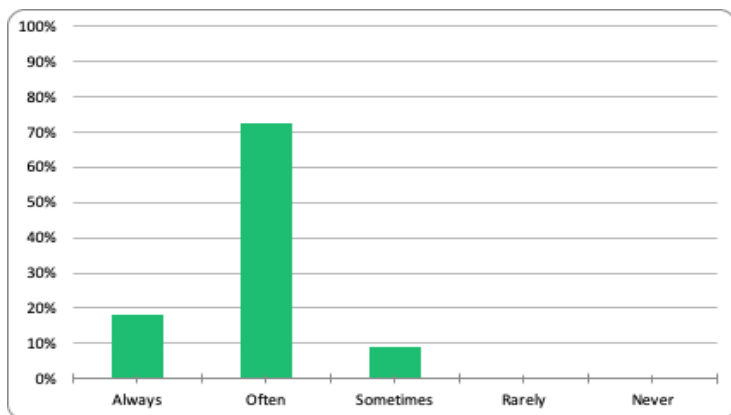


Respondents reported that not having bail reduces the likelihood of going to trial (n=10; 83%) (i.e. women are more likely to accept plea bargains than go to trial for their offence), reduces access to diversion programs (n=10; 83%), and leads to an increased chance for institutional misconduct that may affect sentencing (n=5; 42%). Other respondents indicated that not having bail promotes guilty pleas (n=2; 16%), increases risk of women receiving more severe sentences with a custodial component instead of other sentences that wouldn't result in a criminal record, and has personal implications such as further victimization and institutionalization (n=2; 6%).

Respondents described a range of ways in which women are negatively impacted by having to remain incarcerated instead of being released on bail. These include losing custody of children or other dependents (n=12; 100%), losing housing (n=12; 100%), loss of employment or education (n=11; 91%), loss of income (n=11; 91%), reduced access to mental health and substance use treatment services (n=10; 83%), increased risk of stigma (n=10; 83%), and increased debt (n=6; 50%). Additional respondents reported that women are further victimized and institutionalized (n=1; 9%) and subject to violence and stress associated with imprisonment (n=1; 9%) when they are unable to be released on bail.

Next, respondents were asked how often women's lack of stable housing leads them to re-offend (Figure 2). Respondents reported that lack of stable housing was either often (n=8; 72%) or always (n=2; 18%) an important contributor to recidivism; only one participant reported that it was sometimes a factor.

**Figure 2.** Lack of stable housing leads to recidivism



Finally, respondents were asked if there was anything additional that they wanted to share with the study about housing for criminally-involved women in Thunder Bay. Overall, respondents commented that there was insufficient housing for women in the justice system. Respondents noted that the majority of available resources are used for male offenders. They also noted that services for young women were particularly problematic. Specifically, multiple respondents explained that women ages 16-18 are unwelcome in traditional bail housing and shelters, and that they are particularly vulnerable but with less support from CAS/Dilico than they might need. Respondents also commented that when adequate housing isn't available, women often find space in negative environments putting them at risk for high-risk behaviour such as alcohol and drug use. Respondents highlighted the need for more residential treatment programs and clearer policies from social housing services regarding bail plan orders.

In summary, the survey from local lawyers indicated that housing is a very important component of bail and discharge planning and respondents felt that many (50-89%) women involved in the criminal justice system in Thunder Bay are under-housed. This converges with the bail court monitoring data reported earlier. Respondents noted that the inability of women to make bail or be released from jail often leads to other negative consequences such as the loss of their children, housing, or employment and can delay access to important services such as mental health or substance use treatment. Importantly, the lawyers who completed this survey felt that housing instability always or often leads to recidivism. This data provides support from the legal perspective that more housing options are needed in Thunder Bay for women involved in the criminal justice system.

### **Qualitative Results: Focus Groups and Individual Interviews**

This section will summarize the themes identified through the individual interviews and the focus groups. More specifically, the following information will be presented:

1. Barriers to obtaining housing
  - a. Discrimination

- b. Financial barriers
  - c. Availability
- 2. Barriers unique to bail
- 3. Effects of incarceration on current housing
- 4. Effects of housing insecurity on women
  - a. Recidivism
  - b. Safety
  - c. Addiction
- 5. Summary of reported housing needs and preferences

A wealth of valuable information was collected through the individual interviews and focus groups. However, this section will focus on addressing the project objectives. First, the barriers to obtaining housing will be described according to the themes identified (i.e. discrimination, financial barriers, and availability). Second, the barriers unique to bail will be described. Third, a summary of the ways in which incarceration affects existing housing arrangements is provided. Fourth, the effects of housing insecurity and homelessness are discussed. Specifically, three themes emerged from the data including how housing insecurity/homelessness relate to: recidivism, addiction and women's safety. Lastly, a comprehensive description of identified needs and preferences for transitional housing is provided.

Throughout this section, several quotes and excerpts from transcripts are included to emphasize key points. Following each quote is an identifier in parentheses linking the content to a specific transcript. The identifiers use the following format (X T#). X refers to the group membership of the speaker where W = women involved in the correctional facility, SP = service provider and LP = legal professional. T# simply refers to the transcript number. For the focus groups, individual speakers could not be discerned so the identifiers link to the group transcript. The two focus groups held with women at the correctional facility correspond to identifiers (W T1) and (W T2). The focus group held with women at the housing support agency is linked to identifier (W T3) and the service provider focus group is (SP T13). It is likely that the excerpts from the focus groups represent different speakers although they have the same identifier. The remaining transcripts correspond to individual interviews.

All participants in the focus groups and interviews agreed that there is a lack of suitable local housing options for women who have been involved in the criminal justice system. Both women in our community and professionals from relevant occupations expressed great difficulty transitioning women from correctional facilities into housing options that are conducive to a safe and healthy lifestyle. For women to effectively re-integrate into society, appropriate housing options need to be available.

The identified shortage of housing options in Thunder Bay is particularly problematic for women who are attempting to make bail because, as noted in the online survey for lawyers,

housing is often a key component in these decisions and in discharge planning. The John Howard Society Bail Verification and Supervision Program was most frequently listed as a temporary housing solution for women being released on bail. This program seeks to decrease the number of people held in correctional facilities while awaiting trial, focusing on individuals without the social or financial resources to meet bail conditions (John Howard Society of Ontario, 2019). Although the John Howard Society offers a solution for women on bail, there are only nine bail beds held specifically for women. In addition, there are conditions that must be met in order for women to be approved for placement at the John Howard Society. For example, the woman must not be charged with violent crimes and must be closely monitored to ensure bail conditions are being met (e.g. curfews and drug/alcohol consumption). Participants noted that the staff at John Howard were often helpful in connecting residents with other services (e.g. substance use treatment) and searching for long-term housing options for their residents.

When asked about specific housing support services that are available to them, approximately half of the women with criminal backgrounds were unsure of their options. Stakeholders were more aware of organizations that may provide support in securing housing options for women. Examples reported include: The Elizabeth Fry Society, Shelter House, The District of Thunder Bay Social Services Administration Board (DSSAB), Alpha Court, Kinna-aweya, Beendigan, the Friendship Centre, Mattawa, Faye Peterson, Salvation Army, the Ontario Native Women's Association and assistance offered through specific Indigenous band councils. Despite this list, the majority of stakeholders voiced concerns around the lack of available housing for women and the negative impact housing issues have on court proceedings. One legal professional who was interviewed described how helpful it would be to have a department or individual employed within the court system who could assist in the search for suitable housing and report directly to the court.

## **Perceived Barriers to Obtaining Housing**

### **Discrimination**

Discrimination was the most frequently cited barrier to obtaining and maintaining housing for women involved in the criminal justice system (45 references in 11 sources). Women and professionals from the community identified several forms of discrimination that negatively affect women's ability to secure housing in the Thunder Bay Region. The most commonly cited forms included discrimination based on: criminal history, credit, race and income source.

#### ***Discrimination: Criminal History and Credit Checks***

Participants frequently reported that background checks are a barrier to securing desirable housing options. Women expressed concern around landlords' awareness of their criminal record which may be exposed through requesting a background check, searching the applicant's name on the internet (e.g. Google) or reviewing the rental application. For example, if a woman has been incarcerated for three years, she may be unsure what to report as her "previous address" on

rental applications. One woman explained how even subtle cues such as language can reveal connections to criminality or street culture. She noted:

*“The way you speak to other people isn’t the way normal, like, everyday people talk. You have some slang in there and stuff like that. They really frown, I find landlords really don’t like that” (W T5)*

Similarly, women often mentioned the issue of bad credit scores as a barrier to securing housing. Throughout this project, women spoke about their struggles with addiction and how addiction resulted in criminal charges either directly (e.g. being charged with drug possession) or indirectly (e.g. engaging in theft to earn money for drugs). Similar to the charges, women often attributed their bad credit to substance use.

### ***Discrimination: Race***

Participants often described racial discrimination against Indigenous women as a serious problem in Thunder Bay which impacts housing insecurity. Indigenous women reported feeling judged and stereotyped by landlords because of their race. For example, women described assumptions by the landlord that they would be consuming drugs and alcohol, allowing multiple people to stay at the residence or causing damage to the property. Indigenous women even reported being directly questioned by landlords about their lifestyle.

Multiple participants described how landlords may not even return a call if an Indigenous name is left on the voicemail or if individuals are calling from certain agencies in town (e.g. shelters).

One woman shared her experience:

*“Never had problems [at my previous rental] and I had the maintenance man write me a reference letter. It was out of this world, no problem thinking I’ll get a place just like that. And I was working full time, I got paid weekly. I showed them my statements and everything. I didn’t get a place. And then finally one guy just told me, I’m just being honest with you, you’re native you know. It doesn’t matter, you can show me that all you want, but there’s no way in the world my father will allow it.” (W T3)*

Indigenous women were often well-aware of these discriminatory practices and have even developed strategies for overcoming it. For example, one participant suggested using a woman of white descent to call or aid in securing a house. Another woman admitted that she lied and said she was attending college so she would be evaluated positively by the landlord. The fact that Indigenous women are resorting to such actions highlights the reality of racial discrimination in Thunder Bay. Racial discrimination in housing interferes with women’s basic human rights but also negatively affects community efforts towards reconciliation as evidenced in this quote from a focus group:

*“People say to change and do this and that. When we do that, we’re still not recognized. And being an Aboriginal woman, like all of these missing women that are from Thunder Bay or wherever. Everything is just against us. And now I really don’t believe why*



*people, the people in Thunder Bay, the landlords, housing situations like look down on us. We're all people, nobody is better than each other.” (W T3)*

Racial discrimination is a significant barrier for some of Thunder Bay’s most vulnerable residents, yet this barrier is unnecessary and preventable.

### ***Discrimination: Income Source***

Discrimination based on income source was another barrier for women who were seeking post - release housing. Many women were on some form of social assistance (e.g. Ontario Works, or Ontario Disability Support Program) which they felt was a deterrent in landlords’ screening processes.

Overall, there was a sense of frustration in speaking with women who have been involved with the criminal justice system. Despite women’s efforts and desire to create a better life for themselves post-incarceration, it seems they feel oppressed by systemic factors that are preventing them from doing so.

*“I would much rather-the most frustrating thing you're coming out of jail and you want to start this new life fresh because your mind is fresh and you know you've been clean for a long time. And then, you bump heads with people that won't give you a place to live. You know, you got some money to put down on a place, whatever, and then you just run into obstacles where the landlord doesn't give you a chance. It gets frustrating and it just breaks you down.” (W T3)*

In describing the relationship between criminal justice system involvement and housing insecurity, we need to be careful not to place sole responsibility on the individual. As highlighted through this project, there are systemic processes outside of women’s control that make it difficult to secure housing. In addition, discrimination has damaging effects on women’s mental health and creates unnecessary stress in a fragile transition period.

### **Financial Barriers**

Another frequently cited barrier for women involved in the criminal justice system was financial limitations (40 reference in 16 sources). It can be very costly to secure a rental unit in Thunder Bay, especially when accounting for requirements to pay first and last month’s rent, deposits for utilities, and other moving costs. Following release from a correctional facility, many women have little to no income or savings. As mentioned above, social assistance is typically the main source of income and there may be delays in receiving assistance due to other factors (e.g. lost identification). Women who were on assistance often reported having to use money that was allocated for basic needs towards their high rental costs, leaving them with very little money to support themselves (average of approximately \$150-\$200/month based on responses). Data from the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (2019) and Lakehead Social Planning Council (2018) supports this position. In 2018, the average cost of a bachelor apartment in Thunder Bay was \$666/month, while a one bedroom unit average \$778/month. The average person on Ontario Works (OW) receives \$733 per month and the average for Ontario Disability Support Program is \$1169 per month (Lakehead Social Planning Council, 2018).

Therefore, without subsidizing housing or rent supplements, housing costs consume almost all of an individual's social assistance benefits. This leads to other problems (e.g. inability to afford bills, transportation, childcare, groceries).

Not surprisingly, this research revealed that some women simply could not afford a place to live (or initial costs) so they depend on shelters as a temporary housing option. In addition to shelters, there were reports of women couch-surfing and even sleeping in the bush or bus shelters for safety following release from the correctional facility.

Three women that were interviewed (both in the correctional facility and in the community) reported having arrears related to their subsidized housing through the DSSAB. A couple of individuals shared stories where incarcerated women were charged fees to remove their belongings and have the house cleaned in preparation for a new tenant. These fees in addition to missed rent payments added up to significant arrears owed to the DSSAB. Even if research participants were not directly affected by the issues of arrears, it was a well-known and frequently cited barrier.

Subsidized housing is the most affordable option for many women seeking post-release housing. However, in Thunder Bay, one cannot re-apply for subsidized housing until at least 50% of the arrears have been paid. For many women who have been involved in the criminal justice system, especially those recently released, it is not feasible to pay off a large debt in one payment. This leaves many women in our region in a vulnerable position; they are unable to re-apply for subsidized housing but cannot afford any other options. Consequently, many women end up in shelters, on the street, or resorting to temporary housing options (e.g. couch surfing) that may be unsafe for a variety of reasons. Based on the findings from this research, this barrier is one of the major contributors to homelessness, housing insecurity, and subsequent recidivism in Thunder Bay for women with a criminal background.

A woman who was interviewed at a local shelter summarized these concerns:

*Interviewer: What about affordability of housing in relation to their income?*

*Interviewee: There is so much trouble. This city is very expensive. If you can't get subsidizing housing, you are never going to be able to afford it. Half the time they need to fight to get back on OW or re-apply for ODSP, you are only limited on what you can do there. There is the first and last program but they won't let you rent a place you cant afford. It's just that nasty cycle. And if there's arrears, that's another problem and people don't usually end up in jail because they are taking care of their responsibilities. I see a lot of women trying to buddy up and or room with somebody but birds of a feather flock together so this may not be good for someone trying to stay clean. That's a big problem is that first and last is going right to the person so they get their first and last and go to party town, then they are cut off for two years. So I don't think housing money should ever ever be given to the person." (SP T13)*

Financial concerns are a significant barrier for women trying to secure housing when they have been recently involved in the criminal justice system. Without savings, it is difficult for

anyone to afford moving costs, first and last month's rent, utility deposits and rent for a safe and suitable housing option. One woman reported that she was glad she saved money in jail to afford a motel room with a kitchenette upon release. Otherwise, she would have reportedly been homeless. This woman's story appears to be the exception, rather than the rule.

### **Availability**

All parties who were interviewed identified availability as a significant barrier when women are searching for suitable housing options as part of a bail plan or post-release from a correctional facility (24 references in 12 sources). This problem does not only affect individuals involved in the criminal justice system. Thunder Bay's lack of rental options for students has been highlighted in the media multiple times over the past few years (CBC, 2012, 2014). It appears that there is a general shortage of rental units in Thunder Bay for low income individuals and families. The lack of options is particularly problematic for women being released from jail because now, in addition to the unique barriers described above, the women must compete with several other applicants for any rental unit.

In addition to the lack of affordable rental properties, interviewees described a lack of transitional housing options for women specifically. Most shelters that house women exclusively (e.g. Faye Peterson or Beendigen) tend to cater to women or families with a history of domestic abuse. Even with an abuse history, women who are being released from the correctional centre may not be allowed to stay in these shelters due to the nature of their criminal charges. The most suitable option for women released on bail is the John Howard Society but given this organization has only nine beds held for women, this option may not always be available. By comparison, there are 39 beds available for men. A couple of participants mentioned that the co-ed environment of John Howard Society is not ideal. For example, one interviewee described a situation where a woman's abusive partner was currently staying at John Howard, eliminating this option as a placement for her bail plan. Through our research, women in the community, social service providers and legal professionals all voiced similar concerns around a lack of transitional housing options *exclusively* for women. One social service professional noted:

*"I was also going to add just in general, the services for women are far fewer than they are for men. So when you look at that intersectionality of women that are involved in criminal justice often times there's mental health challenges, substance use challenges, trauma, history of trauma etc. When we look at the treatment system in the community, there's two cycles for every one cycle for women. And then for aftercare, or residential programming afterwards, transitional housing. We have transitional housing for men, we do not have a special space for women. There's a co-ed facility but that's more supported and where do you go for after, more integration into the community. Yeah, even our shelter system is set up that we don't have a specialized homeless shelter for women."*  
(SP T13)

Taken together, there are several barriers that women face when trying to secure housing post-incarceration. These findings point to a clear need for options that cater to the unique gender and culture specific needs of women in our community.

### **Barriers Unique to Bail Release**

The barriers described above affect women who are seeking release on bail and women who are being released once their sentence is complete. Throughout this project, similar barriers were identified across these two groups. However, there were unique barriers related to housing for women seeking bail. These specific barriers related to women's ability to find a suitable surety. Women attending bail court frequently required a surety as part of their bail plan. A surety is someone who agrees to supervise and take responsibility for an individual who is released on bail. According to the bail court monitoring that was conducted in Thunder Bay (July and August 2018), a surety was required in approximately 50% of cases of women attending bail court. For the periods in which our data was collected, 50 women out of 95 required a surety (53%). Of the women who required a surety, only 20% had one secured at the time of bail court.

Through this project, respondents noted that women seeking bail have difficulty finding a surety because the surety cannot have a criminal record or live in subsidized housing. This condition may limit a woman's ability to find a surety and obtain bail or release. Although living with a surety may only be a temporary housing option, these restrictions block that option and prevent women from being released. Without a surety, women cannot pursue their own housing arrangements either. This can drastically increase the number of cases that are remanded or denied bail leading to longer stays for women in correctional facilities.

### **Effects of Incarceration on Existing Housing Arrangements**

As described above, involvement in the criminal justice system can affect women's housing options through several pathways. For example, incarceration and the circumstances leading to it can negatively affect one's financial situation, status with subsidized housing, and ability to pass a background or credit check. Discrimination in many forms was another frequently cited barrier for women searching for housing in our region.

Women who were currently in jail or recently released described how incarceration negatively affected the housing arrangements they had prior to being arrested. For example, multiple women that were interviewed in the correctional facility expressed regret and sadness that they no longer have anywhere to live due to being incarcerated. One woman reportedly owned her own house but lost it due to her one-year sentence. In other cases, circumstances leading to criminal charges may also have affected their current housing. A couple of women tearfully described how their addiction and substance use resulted in the loss of their subsidized housing and the fear of not being able to pursue this option post-release.

Several participants reported losing their belongings as a result of being incarcerated. For example, there were reports of the landlord, family or roommates stealing, selling or throwing away the belongings that were left behind once the woman was incarcerated. One particularly problematic situation involves women losing their identification. This issue was reported by multiple legal professionals as a major obstacle when women are being released on bail or once their sentence has been completed. Without identification, women are unable to access many services including OHIP-funded treatment programs, health and mental health services, social assistance and social housing. For Indigenous women, losing a status card may block access to

additional services that are exclusively offered to Indigenous populations. One legal professional noted that most women have very little money while incarcerated. Understandably, women often use their limited funds to purchase basic necessities in jail and fail to replace lost identification. This participant described efforts to introduce a program within the jail to assist women in replacing their identification while incarcerated. This would facilitate faster access to services post-release and smoother transitions. The uptake of such a program could also be beneficial in securing transitional or independent housing options for women who are released on bail or post-sentence.

### **Effects of Housing Insecurity on Women**

#### **Recidivism**

Recidivism was frequently mentioned in the interviews and focus groups as a negative effect of homelessness/housing insecurity for women involved with the criminal justice system (34 references in 14 sources). The women, social service providers and legal professionals all voiced a similar concern: women who do not have stable housing arrangements are likely to end up on the streets or involved in the same situations that led to their incarceration (e.g. substance use, drug trafficking). Not surprisingly, research participants felt strongly that having a safe place to live was a key component to keeping women healthy and avoiding recidivism. Without a stable home base, it is difficult to imagine how women recently released from a correctional facility are expected to achieve other important aspects of social re-integration such as obtaining a job or reuniting with their children and family members.

A significant factor when considering the relationship between homelessness/housing instability and recidivism is access to services. Several women from this project expressed that staying clean and sober was a main priority upon being released from jail. However, without the stability of a home (and a permanent address), access to services is extremely difficult. In a way, being incarcerated can serve as a catalyst to substance abuse recovery if there are appropriate supports in place to assist women as they transition out of jail. Developing transitional housing that caters to women's unique needs would encourage women to maintain their abstinence from drugs and/or alcohol by providing safety, security and assistance in connecting with treatment facilities or mental health services.

Social service providers and legal professionals (i.e. key stakeholders) reported similar concerns regarding breach of conditions. Women who are homeless upon release from jail (either on bail or post-sentence) are often worried about the risk of breaching their bail conditions if they seek shelter at certain places. For example, some shelters or areas of town may expose women to drugs and alcohol which introduces a major threat to their recovery and compliance with bail conditions. Multiple professionals shared stories about clients avoiding certain locations due to fear of recidivism and/or relapse. For example, two service providers mentioned women attempting to avoid the "Bermuda Triangle" of the south core of town (Shelter House, Oddfellow's apartment building; Royal Edward Arms) because of the severity of crime that occurs in this area. As an example, one of the service providers is quoted here:

*“I daily have discussions with people about how they try to avoid certain areas because certain areas influence their non-compliance with their conditions. Sleeping at Shelter House, had somebody today say “I have to avoid shelter house” like it's the bermuda triangle because they cannot be around there, like it's an influence to drink or if people are having drugs and I've noticed the women too are extremely vulnerable within that side. So if they're even trying to go out for their first social connections too or going for the daily meals there, they try to eat as fast as they can and come back” (SP T13)*

Homelessness and housing insecurity places women back into the environments that put them at high risk for criminal behaviour and relapse.

Research participants mentioned several other ways that homelessness can lead to recidivism; for example - stealing food and toiletries out of need or getting involved in fights with other homeless people while trying to protect themselves from theft or assault. Women who are homeless or transient may commit crimes out of pure need or desperation. Homelessness is a difficult situation that leaves individuals exposed to many elements that are out of their control. One stakeholder illustrated this with the comment:

*“They [homeless people] do not have the ability to leave situations like we do. For example to take a break or get privacy to recover from our own issues or stress of the day.” (LP T15)*

A couple of women who were able to secure housing admitted to engaging in criminal activity to help them cover their cost of living. In one case, criminal activity was reported as a main source of income while another reported selling drugs to supplement their income (e.g. ODSP) to afford rent and other basic needs. On the one hand, it is positive to identify cases where women were successful in securing housing following involvement with the criminal justice system. On the other hand, the fact that women feel pressured to commit crimes in order to afford suitable options is concerning and further perpetuates the cycle of criminality.

The above findings demonstrate several ways in which housing insecurity and homelessness can lead to recidivism or re-offending. People who are housing insecure are more likely to return to the behaviours (e.g. substance use) and circumstances (e.g. shelters) that led to their arrest or threaten recovery. Homeless individuals may simply commit crimes out of desperation or need. Lastly, this research highlighted the fact that women may feel pressure to engage in criminal behaviour so that they can afford suitable housing options.

### **Relation to Women’s Safety**

Several participants in our research spoke about women’s safety (28 references in 11 sources) and vulnerability to abuse (23 references in 7 sources). Transient or homeless women are at high risk for exploitation and abuse as noted by one stakeholder:

*“Women are being taken advantage of for not having housing and being subjected to undertaking criminal activities in order to support having a place to stay. Back to that, being able to maybe stay with somebody but some of the conditions to do that, you might*

*have to go get yourself involved in sex work or be dealing drugs, using substances, you know a whole host of those things.” (SP T13)*

In the servicer provider focus group, participants spoke about how the recent increase in gang activity in Thunder Bay has made young women particularly vulnerable. One service provider shared her experience:

*“A lot of young women under the age of 24 range, just the climate of the city, lots of gang involvement, more so lately. They’ve been kind of living with people who they are working for or who are manipulating them, promising them the world so that’s been their housing before they come to us. And when they are at that age, they don’t have references for renting their own place. They’ve never been on their own lots of time.” (SP T13)*

Although it was unclear if she was speaking specifically about women who have been involved with the criminal justice system, homeless youth are likely at increased risk for exploitation. As described above, having a criminal record introduces additional barriers to securing housing making it more likely that homeless youth will be swayed by options proposed by individuals intending to exploit or manipulate them.

Women who are homeless are at an increased risk for violence and sexual assault. Without a home to offer safety and protection, women are vulnerable. One legal professional noted that homeless women may be at risk for breaching conditions if they carry a knife or any other weapon as a form of protection. Therefore, housing insecurity not only threatens women’s safety directly but can also increase the likelihood of recidivism because women are placed in situations that may require them to defend themselves.

Unfortunately, acts of racism and discrimination can introduce additional threats to women’s safety. One legal professional reported that even taxi companies engage in discrimination by not showing up for calls in certain area. The inability to afford transportation or secure a taxi due to race or location can place women in unsafe situations. This legal professional reported that her Indigenous clients have been victims of violence simply because they were walking down the street. The weight of these acts is evidenced in this quote from the interview:

*“I would never tell an Indigenous woman she is safe [walking] in this town” (LP T15)*

The issue of safety becomes even more significant for women with children. Many individuals voiced concerns that the housing they were able to afford was not safe or appropriate for their children (e.g. shared accommodations or room rentals). Aside from the women in jail, at least five women reported that their current housing situation impacts the ability for them to have their children with them. In the focus group at the correctional facility, one woman was asked if she had concerns about housing post release and she said that finding a safe space is very important so she can split custody of her children with her ex-partner.

When women are unable to find safe housing options, it may interfere with their children’s safety in other ways. For example, one legal professional shared a story about her client who was desperately trying to make parole so she could get custody of her children back.

The children were reportedly staying with another relative in an unsafe situation where food was scarce, and their belongings were often sold or stolen. The mother was struggling to make parole because she could not find a suitable housing option. The legal professional working with this woman noted the difficulty in trying to help this woman protect her children while “jumping through hoops” to find the family a safe and stable home. Therefore, housing insecurity can threaten children’s safety if desirable options are not available or affordable but can also interfere with the ability of a mother to remove children from an unsafe living situation if no other options are available to her.

Finally, this research revealed several ways in which housing insecurity and a history of domestic violence can threaten a woman’s safety. If a woman is released from the correctional centre or on bail, she may feel pressured to stay with an abusive ex-partner if she cannot find transitional housing immediately. As another example, if a woman or her (ex)-partner was charged with domestic violence, transitional housing options may be limited if he is staying at a shelter as well. For example, if a woman was charged for domestic violence and one of her conditions is to stay away from her partner and he is currently staying at John Howard Society, then she will be unable to use this housing option in her bail plan.

This section summarized the many ways in which housing insecurity can threaten women’s safety. Homelessness can increase the likelihood of exploitation, assault or returning to unsafe situations such as violent relationships. Providing safe housing options is a basic human right and even more important to women with children to raise.

### **Relation to Addiction**

As described above, research participants expressed concerns with breaching bail conditions due to sub-optimal living arrangements (i.e. being placed in drug-ridden neighbourhoods, living on the streets, in shelters or couch surfing). Most fears around breaching conditions pertained to drug and alcohol use. Although this relates to risk of recidivism, is it equally problematic that housing issues can interfere with a woman’s substance recovery. The connection between housing insecurity and addiction was a frequency cited concern (24 references in 14 sources).

A large proportion of women involved with the criminal justice system reported struggling with mental health and/or addiction issues. Based on the conversations with women in this project, it is likely that substance use issues are related to untreated mental health concerns and trauma histories. Women highlighted an important point: a key factor in understanding the relationship between involvement in the criminal justice system and housing issues was the need for more intensive addiction and mental health services. They said that the need for these specialized services cannot be ignored. Although treatment for mental health and addiction is being offered locally, with a lack of stable housing and supportive follow - through, many women cannot successfully access or complete treatment programs, and have difficulty with post-treatment transition.

Regardless of how or why an addiction starts, having appropriate housing options for women can facilitate women’s recovery as they transition out of the criminal justice system. As



one respondent noted addiction is a culture and the idea that “*these [other addicts] are the only people that accept me*” can easily drive women back to addiction once they are released. Women were very aware of how their housing situation can affect recovery. As described in the section on recidivism, women are keen to avoid specific neighbourhoods known for criminal activity and drug trafficking. One woman noted:

*“.....they wanted to put me into a building that was full of crack dealers and I can't be around that because I struggled with addiction my whole life and I was addicted to the needle for 15 years and to put myself into that situation would've been horrible for my well being”* (W T5)

As one legal professional stated, women struggling with substance use may have already been homeless prior to incarceration. In these cases, jail provided stability (i.e. shelter and consistent meals) so the unpredictable nature of being homeless again can trigger a relapse. As noted above, these women are likely to face several stressors and barriers as they attempt to secure housing in our region. This speaks to the importance of providing safe housing options and connecting women with appropriate services quickly to facilitate substance use recovery.

### **Securing Housing Post-Treatment**

Although there are challenges with transitioning women straight from the correctional facility and into treatment, this appears to be the ideal scenario according to the legal professionals we interviewed. Due to the risks associated with releasing women back onto the street, it was recommended that women with substance use issues enter a form of residential treatment immediately. However, even if women do pursue substance use treatment right from jail, housing insecurity can be a challenge post-treatment. Unfortunately, this can threaten their recovery in the same manner as described above. The process of re-integration can be overwhelming and many women have previously relied on alcohol or drugs as a way to cope with their distress.

The reality of this scenario can be seen in one informant's direct quote:

*“While I was in the treatment program I did good - but afterwards coming back to no home - I get frustrated - in order to deal with frustration I smoke crack.”* (W T2)

One woman was disappointed that she lost her subsidized housing offer while in treatment because she did not have a cell phone or a number where she could be reached. A better understanding of all barriers (e.g. access to a phone in treatment) can help generate solutions for smoother transitions and services needed to facilitate long term change.

### **Resiliency of Women**

Despite the barriers and challenges described, it is important to highlight the resiliency demonstrated by the women in our research project. When faced with difficult circumstances such as homelessness, the power of connection and community was evident. Women were often able to develop solutions to their challenges and offer support to others in similar situations. Women would utilize the resources available to them in order to keep themselves safe. For

example, women reported staying with friends or family temporarily to avoid the negative influences associated with the streets or shelters. Similarly, multiple women reported that prior to being incarcerated, they had opened up their homes to people who were struggling. The Indigenous culture in particular demonstrates a powerful sense of community and shared responsibility for one another. This cultural cohesion is protective and contributes to individual resiliency by creating a sense of being supported by others in the face of adversity.

In the focus groups, women shared personal stories, struggles and reflections that were often accompanied by intense emotion. The other women in the group were instinctively compassionate, supportive and validating. In other instances, women would share laughs and make jokes about common experiences. As researchers, it was an honour to share in these emotions and experiences with the group and to observe the natural connection among women.

Evidence of resiliency was prominent as women discussed substance use recovery. Women openly acknowledged the negative impact substance use had on their lives and were highly motivated to overcome their addiction. The women we spoke to were insightful and aware of personal triggers and threats to recovery (e.g. locations, social circles). Women advocated for their needs and perceived barriers in terms of accessing appropriate treatment while sharing individual motivations as seen here:

*“My daughter is my motivation. I want her to fulfill her dreams and be successful. I do not want her to blame me or have a life like mine” W T2*

Although this project required women to speak about challenges and hardship, there was an undeniable sense of hope and resilience in many of their stories. Women supported one another, set goals for their future and made valuable contributions to their community project by identifying challenges and proposing solutions for the housing situation in Thunder Bay.

### **Gaps in Housing and Supports**

We conducted an environmental scan in order to summarize the available services in the Thunder Bay area. This environmental scan and gap analysis focused on organizations, services and programs related to transitional housing, housing and support services (including relevant legal services) and substance use treatment. The results are summarized below by category:

#### **Transitional Housing Options**

<b>Organization Name</b>	<b>Population Served</b>	<b>Brief Description of Relevant Services</b>
John Howard Society	Women & Men	Bail verification and supervision program, rehabilitation and community reintegration services for criminal offenders
Urban Abbey Thrive	Women (age 14-25)	Housing for pregnant women

		experiencing addiction
Faye Peterson House	Women	Transitional housing for women experiencing domestic violence
Beendigen	Women & Children	Emergency shelter for women and children in abusive situations
Shelter House	Women & Men	Temporary emergency shelter

### Housing & Support Services

<b>Organization Name</b>	<b>Population Served</b>	<b>Brief Description of Relevant Services</b>
Alpha Court- Substance Abuse Support	Women & Men	Subsidized housing for individuals with substance use issues who homeless or at risk of homelessness; must be in need of case management services
Lutheran Community Care	Women & Men	Case management for individuals with disabilities; tenant support program to prevent homelessness for any individual
Thunder Bay District Social Services Administration Board (DSSAB)	Women & Men	Rent geared-to-income housing, special needs housing; administers the “Under One Roof” program and bi-annual Point-In-Time Homelessness count
Kinna-Aweya Legal Clinic	Women & Men	Focuses on income maintenance and issues related to tenant rights. Can assist individuals with replacing identification. Serves mainly Indigenous populations
Ontario Native Women’s Association	Women	Nihdawin program assists with housing search and provides support once housed
Canadian Mental Health Association	Women & Men	Offers several programs including court diversion service, court rent supplement,

		homelessness initiative program, housing and outreach services
Nishnawbe-Aski Legal Services	Women & Men	Gladue reports and Gladue Aftercare
Lakehead University: Community Legal Services	Women & Men	Community legal services related to minor criminal offences, small claims court and tenant rights
Thunder Bay Indigenous Friendship Centre	Women & Men	Gladue services, court support for Indigenous peoples, coordinates Indigenous Peoples Court, works with community partners to address homelessness

### Substance Use Treatment Facilities

Organization Name	Population Served	Brief Description of Relevant Services
Balmoral Detox Centre (St. Joseph's Care Group)	Women & Men	22 beds, non-medical facility, safe place for individuals to withdraw from drugs/alcohol
Sister Margaret Smith Centre (St. Joseph's Care Group)	Women & Men	Intensive residential treatment for alcohol and drug addiction
Hope House Women's Centre	Women	Intensive residential treatment for addictions
Shelter House (Kwae Kii Win)	Women & Men	Managed Alcohol Program
Ka-Ni-Chi-Hih Solvent Abuse Treatment Centre	Women & Men	12 bed long-term facility for First Nations young adults aged 18-30
Crossroads Centre	Women & Men	Abstinence-based program providing

		intensive support pre and post treatment for substance abuse. Detox must be completed prior to admission
Dilico Adult Residential Treatment Centre	Women & Men	Residential substance use treatment, co-ed

Of particular relevance to this project is the clear lack of transitional housing options exclusively for women. The shelters that do accommodate only women are focused on women (and children) in abusive situations. Women who are not in this situation or have abuse histories (as opposed to current) are forced to stay in co-ed transitional housing options which may be undesirable due to personal safety concerns, including the risk of gender based violence (Timmons, Coomber-Bendtsen, & Zederayko, 2018). This environmental scan further indicates a need for transitional housing options that take the unique gender and culture-specific needs of Thunder Bay's women into account.

An additional key finding is the lack of service options for women prior to and following substance use treatment. The only local organization to provide this service is Crossroads Centre which is open to men and women. Developing a transitional housing option for women with comparable services may fill a need while alleviating pressure on existing service providers. This can reduce the risk of relapse while facilitating smoother transitions into substance use treatment. Women-only facilities have the added benefit of creating spaces for women to feel safe and allowing for specific adaptations to service models that focus on the unique needs of women.

### **Identified Housing Needs and Preferences**

In each focus group and individual interview, participants were asked about perceived needs and preferences for transitional housing in Thunder Bay. Specifically, participants were asked about the type of housing that would be most suitable (e.g. size, cost, shared accommodation, apartments, single homes, etc.), the need for rules and regulations, proposed length of stay and whether or not services should be offered on site if new transitional housing for women was to be developed in Thunder Bay. The results are summarized below.

#### **Housing Type/Size**

The majority of responses indicated a need for transitional housing options for women involved in the criminal justice system (30 references in 15 sources). However, a number of people did report a need for more permanent independent housing options as well (9 references in 6 sources). In terms of the type of housing that would be most suitable for transitional housing, almost all respondents suggested an apartment or rooming house style. Two women recommended that a "tiny house" community could be a viable option for women post-incarceration. These women noted that tiny houses could provide permanent affordable housing options for women reintegrating into society. One woman suggested that a community centre be

developed in the tiny house community to offer services and hold meetings such as Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and Narcotics Anonymous.

In discussing housing type, women frequently expressed a desire for private rooms and access to a kitchen and bathroom. The requests from women involved in the justice system were modest and humble. In many cases, women only asked to have their basic needs met.

### **Shared Accommodations**

Participants in this project were asked about the possibility of sharing accommodations with other women in transitional housing. Interestingly, most responses indicated a preference for shared accommodations (14 references in 10 sources). However, a fair number of respondents indicated that this would not be a desirable option (8 references in 5 sources). Although all women expressed the desire for a private room, most were open to sharing common areas such as the kitchen, living room and even bathroom in some cases. In addition to sharing the physical space, women often spoke about the social benefits of shared accommodations. For example, the ability to cook together or support one another through this shared experience.

Those who preferred not to share space with others listed reasons such as: past negative experiences living with others, differing preferences, and safety concerns. One woman simply said *“I feel safest by myself”* and given the life experiences of some of these women, that is a valid point and concern. For various reasons, some individuals may not feel comfortable living with other women they are unfamiliar with.

One difference was noted between the responses of women who had been involved in the criminal justice system and the responses of key stakeholders (i.e. service providers and legal professionals). When considering the negative consequences of sharing space with others, the women were more concerned with personality conflicts or problems around sharing groceries or responsibilities around the house (e.g. cleaning). On the other hand, key stakeholders were more concerned with the threat to substance use recovery if several ex-addicts were housed together.

Overall though, even though some women voiced concerns, the ones in favour of shared accommodations felt the environment could promote healing and social connection. This excerpt from an individual interview with a woman captures these preferences:

*“Interviewer: But is there anything else that you would want to comment, in particular if Elizabeth Fry were to look at creating or constructing or purchasing housing, transitional housing, what type of housing would appeal to you?”*

*Interviewee: Coming out of incarceration, honestly rooming houses.*

*Interviewer: Rooming houses.*

*Interviewee: Because we are used to being in a small and enclosed space. We are used to being in a room with a lot of other people after a period of time of living like that in a jail, when you get released back into society it was almost like it was a good thing I ended up homeless and at the shelter, because I don't know, I think it might of*

*overwhelmed me, and freaked me out if I had been released into an actual apartment. Or, you know in a place, where you are alone all the time, after being with somebody.*

*Interviewer: So it is the sense of being supported with others.*

*Interviewee: Yeah, but still kind of separate. You have your own rooms. I mean shared kitchens, shared washrooms. Women would be grateful to have just the room itself. I mean honestly cause there is no where, there is no where for us to go.” (W T4)*

Intuitively, it may be easy to assume that women would prefer to be alone after spending time incarcerated. However, this research has demonstrated that moving into independent housing may be overwhelming or lonely for women who have little social support in the community. Therefore, transitional housing offers the additional benefit of acting as a bridge or “middle ground” between jail and independent living.

## **Children**

When participants were asked about housing needs and preferences, respondents frequently mentioned children (24 references in 10 sources). Relating to the above preferences on housing type, one woman noted that although a room would be sufficient for herself, she would need at least a one bedroom or bachelor apartment for herself and her daughter. Again, women with children often emphasized the need for safe neighbourhood when describing housing preferences.

Four women spoke about the desire to reunite with their children who are under the care of relatives or social services. Recognizing that child reunification is a process, several respondents indicated a need for a transitional housing option that is family-friendly, with separate areas where they can visit and play with their children. John Howard is currently the only option for women released on bail but children are reportedly unable to visit at this location. Many shelters do not allow for, or have the space for child visitations and this can be detrimental to women’s well-being and mental state as one legal professional noted in her interview:

*“Women can’t see their kids [at certain shelters]. The light leaves their eyes if they cant. This is very important to all women, especially Indigenous women.” (LP T15)*

One woman noted that if children were able to live with their mothers in transitional housing, it would be beneficial to have daycare or child supervision services available. This is an important consideration because women will likely have several appointments and responsibilities following release from a correctional facility.

## **Safety**

Safety was frequently mentioned in the discussions around housing needs and preferences (24 references in 12 sources). The reported concerns around tended to revolve around issues discussed previously such as avoiding neighbourhoods fraught with criminal activity such as drug dealing, human trafficking and violence. In these environments, women are fearful of being assaulted, exploited or relapsing back into substance use. Having a safe home

base seems to signify the start of a new beginning which women desperately want for themselves and others as one woman stated:

*“Yeah, I wish that for people and I wish the best in security and safety, you know to have your own home is a safety, you feel safer, safe, you know, you have your own place and your own sanctuary.” (W T6)*

The transcript excerpts that were coded under this section demonstrated that women in need of housing are not asking for anything beyond basic human rights (i.e. safety and security for themselves and their belongings). An excellent example is seen in this quote from one woman with past criminal justice system involvement:

*“Like I said when you are just getting out and you got to start over again, just having that, you know a room, thats your own with a door. You know, where you can put your stuff, and you can trust its still going to be there when you come home.” (W T4)*

This sentiment was voiced by at least two other women who expressed the desire to have a stable place that would keep them and their belongings safe. This project has brought to light the harsh reality: homeless or transient women in our community do not feel safe. Without having this basic need met, it is difficult to imagine how women can focus on anything else.

The issues discussed around safety highlight the need for women’s only transitional housing that doesn’t require a history of abuse for admission. In our community, there are several women who have a history of abuse or trauma, even though they may not currently be in an abusive relationship. Abuse that occurred years ago can have lasting and detrimental effects on a woman’s ability to feel safe. Creating a women’s shelter or transitional housing option with more flexible admission criteria would be filling a major gap and need for this community. Given the composition of Thunder Bay’s population and the demographics of women being incarcerated (and released), transitional housing must take the unique needs of women and Indigenous culture into account. One woman empathized with women with trauma histories who need to stay in male-dominated shelters:

*“ Yeah back to your earlier question about, are there any safety issues with having an imbalance of men and women in a co-ed facility, I haven't directly worked in one of those facilities but I can only imagine that if I'm somebody who have experienced some significant trauma that regardless of how I may be able to manage in there, that that is something to consider with the imbalance of male dominated a couple of females in there, if that's your history.” (SP T13)*

The needs and preferences voiced by women in this project focus simply on having a safe place where they can avoid the negative influences of the streets, feel comfortable leaving their belongings and connect with other women with shared experience.

## **Cost**

Concerns around cost are inherently related to concerns for safety. Due to the high costs of living and minimal income, women involved in the justice system are often forced to choose



between a safe and suitable housing option that leaves them with little money to live, or a cheaper option in an unsafe neighbourhood surrounded by crime and a lifestyle the women are trying to avoid.

Although participants were not explicitly asked about cost (i.e. as a prompt) when assessing housing needs and preferences, it was mentioned several times in their responses (8 references in 6 sources). As described in other sections of this report, women expressed a need for affordable transitional and permanent housing options in safe neighbourhoods that promote healthy lifestyles and recovery. Women receiving social assistance (i.e. Ontario Works or ODSP) should not have to spend money allocated for basic needs on rent in order to achieve safety, security and sobriety.

The relationship between cost and safety in housing is also relevant to women with disabilities. Women with physical disabilities face the additional task of using limited income to find a home that is affordable, safe, and accommodating to their physical disability (e.g. with an elevator). For some women, this is difficult to achieve leading to sacrifices in one domain. One woman with a disability shared the reality of her housing situation:

*“It may not be the nicest place but it works for now. It is not safe at all, but it is convenient for me to get a bus, or to get groceries. The building has an elevator which is good for me, with my legs. I have a lot of health concerns about the place, with a great deal of drug use, garbage, feces, urine and blood in the stairwells.”* (W T12)

In the quote above, the woman is justifying the lack of safety by appreciating the convenience and accessibility of her rental unit. It is our assertion however that women should not have to choose between safety and affordability.

## **Location**

When asked about housing preferences, there were several references to location (14 references in 8 sources). The majority of responses related to securing housing options that were in safe neighbourhoods and away from criminal activity. Nine references explicitly mentioned a need to secure housing in a location that does not threaten their substance use recovery. Respondents recognized that the location of housing can jeopardize their recovery by increasing access to substances. One woman stated:

*“I have to be careful about the areas in which I choose to live in. I can’t take necessarily the cheapest and easiest place because it could be in a, you know, a drug neighbourhood or it could be beside a bar or somewhere that would allow me to sink myself.”* (W T4)

Three women mentioned that it would be therapeutic to have nature or green space nearby. Keeping in mind the need to be close to town for appointments and other responsibilities, these women recommended developing transitional housing in an area that was somewhat rural but close enough to town that women could still access services.

Three Indigenous women involved with the criminal justice system expressed a desire for transitional housing to be located on their reserves. All three of these respondents mentioned the

positive influence of dry reserves and how being in the city (i.e. Thunder Bay) makes it easier to obtain substances. Two spoke about the benefits of being supported by family on the reserve and the importance of culture. When speaking of this, one woman stated “*I feel safer on the reserve and I need to rebuild trust*”. This statement highlights the importance of creating a climate of safety and security as we strive to support women in the process of social reintegration. There are important cultural factors and differences to consider as we propose the development of additional transitional housing options in Thunder Bay.

### **Rules and Regulations**

There were 10 references to rules and regulations in 7 sources. The topic of rules and regulations led to slightly different responses based on the group of participants we interviewed. Women who had been involved with the criminal justice system mentioned the need for drug enforcement policies in transitional housing in order to support recovery from substance use (3 references). Within these references, two women recommended having drug enforcement dogs periodically visit the residence in order to enforce the rules and ensure people take them seriously. Two women mentioned the importance of not making transitional housing “feel like jail” with too many rules and restrictions. The women appeared to appreciate the need for rules and regulations but highlighted the need to feel free and autonomous as well. One woman shared her preferences and view that transitional housing should monitor women but encourage the development of coping skills:

*“I don’t want to be micromanaged because I had enough of that in jail. You need 24-hour staff to make sure that women are meeting their conditions if they have any, but really, women do need to learn to cope on their own. I really like the idea of having access to programs, especially life skills. I think that a year in a place like this would really help the transition back to family life” (W T9)*

The responses of legal professionals tended to emphasize the practical aspects when considering the need for rules and regulations. There were four references from legal professionals indicating that rules would be necessary in transitional housing. Consistent with the women, one person advocated against very strict rules that may deter women. Similar to the recommendation provided by women who had been in jail, one legal professional emphasized the need for rules and regulations when it comes to addiction. This respondent conceptualized the transitional housing as a “reward” to committing to substance use treatment. She stated:

*“There should be rules and regulations especially with addiction. Treat it like a halfway house almost for women as they are waiting for treatment. It’s almost like a reward for women who are committing to treatment and wanting to change and improve their life, giving them a safe place to stay. Without that and hope, they will think about their old life and addiction.” (LP T18)*

Most legal professionals suggested that the rules and regulations should be based on the level of need. For example, one participant mentioned that standard rules may be sufficient in a communal living environment but a bail supervision program will require more structure and individuation. Another legal professional agreed that transitional housing would need to take

individual bail and probation conditions into account. Finally, one legal professional recommended a graduated system where women may initially be monitored closely but progress to independent living if she meets her conditions over time.

### **Length of Stay**

There was variability in the responses provided when participants were asked about the length of time women should be allowed to stay in transitional housing (13 references in 12 sources). The proposed length of stay ranged from six months to two years. The majority of responses indicated that a year is most appropriate but that in some cases, exceptions can be made. Interestingly, women who were interviewed in the correctional facility proposed a shorter length of time. In both focus groups at the correctional facility, the women indicated that six months should be sufficient or “less than a year” because a year is “too long to live with others”. This time frame was consistent with the response of another woman who was not incarcerated but had previous involvement with the criminal justice system. In her response, compassion and consideration for other women is evident:

*“I mean six months to a year is a good time for somebody to get on their feet and you know there is so many women going in and out of the jail that you can’t really make it a permanent place because then nobody else will get a chance” (W T4)*

The legal professionals mentioned taking the court process and bail conditions into account. For example, one person noted that addresses need to be updated through the court which takes time and another stated that it would be abrupt to kick women out as soon as their probation ended. The majority of legal professionals seemed to favour a more flexible approach whereas the majority of women recommended strict timelines. One legal professional made a good point that handling the transition well is the most important. This respondent noted “*You aren’t doing them any favours if you kick them out at an inappropriate time*”.

In determining an appropriate length of stay for transitional housing, a number of factors will need to be considered and balanced. Setting no time limit may decrease women’s motivation to find housing, which in turn makes transitional housing less available to other women due to slow turnover. However, rushing women out of transitional housing may lead to recidivism if alternate housing arrangements have not been made or if she is still awaiting services (e.g. substance use treatment).

### **Transitional Housing with Integrated Services**

Research participants were asked if additional services should be offered on-site in transitional housing. All respondents indicated that offering services on-site would be beneficial and provided several reasons for their position (24 references in 14 sources). There was no support for having services off-site (0 references). It appears that when given the option, all participants saw the value of developing transitional housing into a “hub” where women could easily access additional services or be assisted in doing so. Three individuals reported that on-site services would increase access to services and eliminate barriers related to transportation translating to less missed appointments. Participants were asked about the specific types of

services that should be offered on-site and the responses are listed in order of frequency: addictions (23 references in 15 sources), mental health (20 references in 12 sources), case management (15 references in 9 sources), legal (11 references in 8 sources), cultural (6 references in 5 sources), child welfare (5 references in 4 sources), and physical health (2 references in 2 sources). In addition, there were 11 references to services categorized as “other” which will be discussed in further detail below.

### **Addictions**

When asked about the types of services that should be offered on site in transitional housing, addiction services was the most frequently mentioned response (23 references in 15 sources). A few participants offered specific suggestions including offering healing and support circles (3 references) and holding NA/AA meetings on site (2 references). The majority of responses did not recommend a specific type of addiction service, but rather advocated for the need more generally (i.e. a need for support or addiction counselling). One Indigenous woman interviewed in the correctional facility expressed a preference for addiction services that are culturally appropriate and not “traditional faith based”. Other women in this focus group agreed, proposing that the treatment model could be blended, with teachings related to Catholic/Christian faith and Indigenous faith (i.e. the Creator).

Four responses conceptualized the transitional housing as a halfway house where women could receive support while on the waiting list for more intensive addiction services. One legal professional noted the importance of assisting women in the transition out of jail and into substance use treatment:

*“In my mind, the plan should be to transition them right into treatment from court and stay at the housing in the meantime. This way, it would be one smooth transition. Currently, we try to time it so they can go right into a treatment bed.” (LP T14)*

At multiple points in this research, individuals shared stories about the risk of returning to the street or certain shelters and how this can threaten substance use recovery. This fear highlights the need for supportive transitions for women coming out of the criminal justice system who are committed to staying clean. Transitional housing can provide an important link between the correctional and treatment facilities. Unfortunately, wait times to access substance use treatment can be longer than desired so ensuring women are well-supported in the meantime may prevent relapse. One legal professional noted that women who are released onto the street while waiting for substance use treatment are at greater risk for relapse and can also jeopardize pre-arranged treatment if they are unable to provide a clean urine test upon admission. This further highlights the need for supportive transitional options for women.

The fact that addiction services were the most frequently requested service in transitional housing fits with local data in 2018 Thunder Bay PiT count. In this survey, 70% of homeless people reported having an addiction and nearly 50% reported an increase in substance use since becoming homeless (Lakehead Social Planning Council, 2018). Therefore, transitional housing can promote substance use recovery by providing a link between jail and treatment facilities but

also by decreasing the likelihood that substance use will be used as a coping mechanism for homelessness.

### **Mental Health Supports**

The 2018 Thunder Bay PiT count revealed that 45% of homeless people in Thunder Bay reported having a mental health condition (Lakehead Social Planning Council, 2018). Not surprisingly, mental health services were the second most frequently listed need in terms of support services to be offered on-site in transitional housing (20 references in 12 sources). This recommendation was voiced by all three groups of participants including women involved in the criminal justice system, service providers and legal professionals. Participants noted that many women involved with the criminal justice system have trauma or abuse histories that are often untreated. Untreated mental health issues are a major contributor to addiction because women may rely on substances to cope with the distress they are experiencing. One woman in the correctional facility reported on the need for mental health intervention:

*“Our mental health backgrounds often involve abuse. There are many women in jail with missed mental health needs. Some in here are taking ADHD meds for example but there is a lot more going on” (W T2)*

As noted by an incarcerated Indigenous woman, this population has unique needs when it comes to mental health services. Indigenous women are more likely to have experienced multiple traumas including abuse, domestic violence and intergenerational trauma related to residential schools. Culturally-appropriate interventions (i.e. healing circles, sweat lodges) and mental health frameworks (e.g. First Nations Mental Wellness Continuum Model) will be important to consider as supportive mental health services are proposed. Several professionals spoke about the importance of these services to the populations that they serve.

Another woman who participated in the focus group at the correctional facility shared the perspective that many women in jail have been sexually and/or emotionally abused. She described the need to empower women and improve self-esteem to promote recovery. She stated:

*“If you have the supports, you won’t go back to substance use to cover things up” (WT1)*

Despite the fact that this project was focused on the relationship between housing insecurity and criminal justice system involvement for women, it became evident that there is a desperate need for more mental health and addictions services. This problem is not unique to our region. To promote optimal social reintegration and lower recidivism, we cannot ignore the importance of mental health and addiction services. One legal professional agreed:

*“People often reoffend while waiting for mental health or substance use treatment. I always said, if we could properly treat mental health and addiction issues, we would eliminate about 80% of crime and charges” (LP T16)*

From the same individual, earlier in the interview:

*“It’s like a chicken and egg situation. A lot of time they do not have housing because of mental health and addiction issues so it’s all interconnected. Not having housing can*

*further contribute to mental health and addiction issues. Without the stability, you may be more inclined to commit crimes” (LP T16)*

The dynamic interplay of mental health, addiction, criminality and housing issues is important to consider. These are reciprocal relationships and in order to improve housing issues and reduce homelessness, we must evaluate all of the contributing factors and ideally develop comprehensive solutions. Transitional housing for women that provides support for addiction and mental health can help streamline the process and create a sense of continuity in care.

### **Case Management**

Several participants spoke about the importance of case management or having a social navigator on site to assist women (15 references in 9 sources). There are several services and responsibilities that women may need to tend to including but not limited to: accessing substance use or mental health treatment, connecting with child welfare agencies, communication with probation and parole, replacing identification, looking for employment, searching for housing and/or applying for social assistance. For women recently released from jail, navigating the system and organizing these appointments may be overwhelming. Therefore, a case manager can assist with prioritizing these needs on a case-by-case basis. With appropriate support and guidance, women are more likely to complete these tasks that will facilitate independent living.

A case manager can also help to maintain existing connections that women have made with housing or other services. Several women noted that communication or access to a phone is a significant barrier in the pursuit of housing. In transitional housing with case management, women would always have a representative to act as a liaison or point of contact. One service provider advocated for social navigation services in transitional housing that are maintained post-discharge:

*“I think the programs that have incorporated the social navigators or that have true sense of outreach are really, really successful. So any transitional housing needs to have that and then the idea, so say the navigator does-somebody moves into transitional housing, they may be there for a couple of months, manages to find housing with some supports in the community, but there still needs to be that maintained connection. You don't just cut the ties now that they've moved out. That there's still the ability to reconnect with the program in some way so that you could pick up the phone.” (SP T13)*

### **Legal Services**

When women are released on bail or if they are on probation, regular contact with legal professionals is essential. There were several mentions of the benefit of having legal services offered through transitional housing (11 references in 8 sources). In addition to updating parole and probation, two participants reported the need for legal consultation so women are aware of their rights when it comes to housing and personal relationships. One legal professional noted that her female clients often do not understand their legal rights as common law partners so they may unknowingly abandon housing even though they are entitled to it. For example, a woman

who feels unsafe, guilty, or scared to call the police may leave a housing situation she was paying into and has the legal right to stay in.

The most common recommendation was to have a legal professional visit the transitional housing regularly (e.g. every Friday) to consult with women and address their unique needs. One legal professional noted that a women's shelter in Montreal used this model successfully. It was also noted that NAN legal offers a similar service locally so this could potentially be extended to transitional housing if needed. One participant recommended utilizing local law students as volunteers to assist women with legal needs and questions.

### **Cultural Activities**

There were several mentions of creating opportunities for Indigenous women to engage in cultural activities in transitional housing (6 references in 5 sources). The recommendations related to culturally appropriate healing practices (e.g. healing circles, sweat lodges) were discussed above in the sections related to addition and mental health. A couple of respondents did not offer specific suggestions but emphasized the importance of taking cultural needs into account when developing on-site services in transitional housing. Others did propose specific recommendations. One legal professional referenced a shelter for Indigenous women in Montreal that offered cultural teachings, beading workshops and drumming which the residents enjoyed. One legal professional working at an Indigenous organization emphasized the importance of teaching Indigenous women about their history and "where they came from", admitting she did not learn about colonialism until university. Additional recommendations included moon ceremonies and classes where women can make skirts for traditional Indigenous ceremonies.

In addition to the specific cultural activities that were suggested, there were also more general cultural considerations relevant to all services offered on site. One participant noted that Indigenous women recently released from jail may not be fluent in English so offering an interpreter will make women feel more comfortable. Interpreters should not be from the same community as the woman in order to protect her privacy.

One legal professional advocated for more "wrap around care" with a focus on "warm" referrals and handoffs (e.g. case manager being in person to introduce woman to new counsellors). In addition, this participant recommended staffing the programs with women from diverse backgrounds in order to promote deeper connections with service providers due to shared culture.

### **Child Welfare**

There were 5 references to women's need for assistance in facilitating child reunification. For many women being released from jail, reuniting with children and families is a top priority. If the children are staying with family members or friends, then reunification may be an easy task if the transitional housing allows children to stay over or visit. However, in cases where child welfare agencies are involved, reunification is a process and the mothers may need assistance navigating the system. Although no specific recommendations were proposed, this could be modelled after the recommendations for legal services where child welfare

representatives visit the transitional housing on a regular basis (e.g. Fridays) or by request. At a minimum, case managers can help connect women with the child welfare agencies or make calls on their behalf. The importance of child reunification is evidenced in this quote:

*“Interviewee: That is, that is the biggest thing for any woman coming out of jail, I think. You wanted to get started back into your life with your kids, as quickly as possible and there is very few services to help you do that.”*

*Interviewer: I agree.*

*Interviewee: And of course, housing is top of that list” (W T4)*

This quote demonstrates how the inability to secure housing can interfere with other important aspects of women’s lives such as child reunification. In order to get custody of their children back, women will require appropriate housing. Therefore, having housing support services to help search for housing options or resolve arrears with subsidized housing will be an important component.

### **Physical Health**

Two participants mentioned that women may need assistance with medical needs upon release from a correctional facility. Women with chronic health conditions may need assistance ordering and managing prescriptions, locating a family physician or making medical appointments. The other recommendation related to encouraging physical activity by offering classes (such as yoga) on-site.

### **Other**

Participants reported on several needs and recommendations for services that did not fit into the categories described above (11 references in 10 sources). A couple of participants simply recommended offering training in “life skills”, whereas others were more specific in terms of the types of training that they recommended for on-site delivery. Examples include cooking classes, workshops on writing a resume and seeking employment, managing finances, parenting classes, anger management, and computer classes. When appropriate, cultural adaptations should be offered (e.g. parenting classes that are developed around Indigenous practices). Several of these recommendations offer great value. If women will be staying in transitional housing, offering additional training and skill building opportunities can increase women’s self-esteem and decrease the likelihood of recidivism by creating new opportunities (e.g. employment).

### ***Conclusion: Closing Remarks***

The Canadian government now recognizes housing as a basic human right through federal legislation (CHRA, 2019). The National Housing Strategy (NHS) has prioritized northern communities and Indigenous populations in the plan to reduce homelessness and increase access to affordable housing (CMHC, 2018). Consistent with the aims of the NHS, this research highlighted some significant gaps in services in Thunder Bay by consulting with a range of



affected parties (i.e. women in the criminal justice system, service providers and legal professionals).

The women who participated in this research demonstrated such resiliency. In the face of hardship, the participants were hopeful, compassionate, caring, resourceful and exhibited a shared sense of responsibility for one another. Although this research focused on housing issues, several other important issues were brought to light; for example, the importance of mental health and addiction when evaluating the relationship between housing insecurity and criminal justice system involvement. This research demonstrated that housing is truly the foundation for wellness. Without stable or transitional housing, women are unable to focus on other important aspects of social reintegration (e.g. employment). In addition, this research showed how housing insecurity can lead to a host of negative outcomes for women transitioning out of the criminal justice system including recidivism, addictions relapse and threats to safety. Transitional housing would not only fill a need in Thunder Bay but could alleviate pressure on other services including substance use treatment centres, shelters, hospitals, policing, and correctional facilities.

Dissemination of these results can initiate discussions around the issue of housing insecurity for women in Thunder Bay. Involvement with the criminal justice system introduces unique barriers to obtaining and maintaining housing but as demonstrated, not all of these factors are related to the individual. There is need for systemic changes at a higher level. For example, discrimination was the most frequently cited barrier for women trying to secure housing in our region. Property managers and individual landlords should be held accountable for discriminatory practices, in the same way that employers and other service providers are. A potential solution could be developing programs with incentives where local landlords work together with the court system or service providers to create more opportunities for affordable independent housing.

The women transitioning out of jail voiced a preference for transitional housing with private rooms and some shared facilities, as well as the potential for different configurations based on different stages of housing needs; e.g. bail release, probation, or post-sentence. Ideally, transitional housing would offer additional services on site (e.g. supports for mental health and addiction) or at least employ case managers to help women navigate the system as they strive to create a new life for themselves.

As the development of transitional housing moves forward, gender and cultural factors need to be considered. For example, women have unique needs in terms of children and families (e.g. requiring a family room in transitional housing) and are more likely to experience homelessness as a result of leaving unsafe or unhealthy situations (i.e. the Escaping of Evading Harm Homelessness as described in the 12 dimensions of Indigenous homelessness). Similarly, using culturally-appropriate frameworks when assessing health and wellness (e.g. First Nations Health and Wellness Continuum) is critical to understanding Indigenous Peoples' needs and informing interventions. Culturally appropriate interventions should be incorporated as much as possible (e.g. healing circles, traditional ceremonies or cultural adaptations to Westernized parenting programs). Research participants often expressed the importance of offering cultural activities (e.g. drumming, beading) in transitional housing. The benefits of such practice align

with the Indigenous dimensions of homelessness described by Thistle (2017). Engaging with traditional Indigenous practises can work to overcome the negative effects of colonization by working to promote the re-integration of culture and Indigenous perspective of “All My Relations”.

The women involved in this project were a pleasure to work with and their requests were humble and reasonable. Housing is a basic human right and with this information, it is our hope that appropriate solutions can be developed to address the needs and issues identified in this report.

## ***Feedback from the Advisory Committee***

### **Feedback from Meetings with Indigenous Organizations**

Our research team set up two meetings with representatives from Indigenous organizations in Thunder Bay who serve women involved with the criminal justice system in diverse ways (i.e. legal services, housing support, child welfare, healing and wellness). In total, six individuals participated. Prior to the meeting, a draft of the report was circulated and the meeting provided an opportunity for representatives from the community to provide feedback. Through the meeting, our team hoped to identify any relevant “gaps” or key issues that may not have been captured through data collection. Given the fact that the sample was predominantly Indigenous and emphasizing culture-specific needs was one of our objectives, it was important that we met with Indigenous community partners to ensure the needs of the women they serve were well-represented. The representatives shared personal insights, experiences and challenges in working with homeless and housing insecure women from Thunder Bay. Overall, the meetings were positive and valuable in strengthening the utility of this report. We are grateful to those who took the time to provide thoughtful feedback. Where possible, the suggestions were incorporated into the final report. Other suggestions were well-received and will be incorporated into future research including the importance of engaging in more consultation regarding Indigenous research practices prior to commencement.

Key points from these meetings include:

- Highlighting new legislation and Indigenous research relevant to the content of this report
- Identification of one additional service to be added to the environmental scan (i.e. Lutheran Community Care) and the removal of services that have ceased since the beginning of this research project (i.e. Urban Abbey)
- Emphasizing the fact that no transgender individuals participated in this research so more research is needed to best understand the gender-specific housing needs of this population
- The importance of emphasizing cultural considerations in all aspects of the relationship between housing insecurity and criminal justice system involvement. For example, understanding how culture affects homelessness, using appropriate frameworks to conceptualize health and wellness, and implementing Indigenous healing practices and interventions that strive to promote cultural reintegration.

- In contemplating the next steps for transitional housing in Thunder Bay, it will be important to build on the services that are already in existence where appropriate
- Service models will need to take into account current evidence-based approaches (e.g. Housing First, harm reduction models) and integrate this information while protecting residents' safety and accommodating the identified needs and preferences identified through this research
- Women experiencing housing insecurity often have complex health needs; building transitional housing close to a clinic (or in conjunction) could facilitate an integrated care model and would eliminate barriers such as transportation. This approach has been implemented in other metropolitan areas in Canada.
- Participants in our feedback meeting agreed that there was a high need for safe and specialized transitional housing options for women in Thunder Bay; some characterized the current state of housing options in Thunder Bay as “gender discrimination”
- The importance of considering a youth specific transition house/centre was brought up
- Participants shared opportunities to engage in dissemination of our findings

### ***Final Recommendations***

1. Strive for inter-agency collaboration in the advocacy and development of transitional housing options for women in Thunder Bay
2. Streamline existing services into transitional housing where appropriate to ensure efficiency, increase access and maximize continuity of care
3. Develop strategies for streamlining existing services to ensure efficiency and continuity of care through transitional housing where possible
4. Research the optimal evidence based approaches to inform service delivery and implementation (e.g. Housing First, harm reduction)
5. Work to eliminate barriers to obtaining housing identified throughout this report
  - a. Discrimination is a significant and preventable barrier facing women who have been involved with the criminal justice system. Potential solutions may include introducing a platform where incidents of tenant discrimination can be reported or developing incentives for private landlords to rent to low-income individuals
  - b. Increase the availability of affordable options by encouraging local advocacy and development applications through the National Housing Strategy

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## *Appendix A*

### Online Survey Questions

Items:

1. How important is housing as part of a bail plan for women? (choose one)

- Extremely important
- Very important
- Somewhat important
- Not very important
- Not at all important

2. How important is housing as part of a release plan for women? (choose one)

- Extremely important
- Very important
- Somewhat important
- Not very important
- Not at all important

3. Which housing issues with potential sureties impact the ability for your women clients to get bail? (select all that apply)

- Surety resides in social housing
- Surety has unstable/unsafe housing
- Surety has insufficient space in their housing
- Other [Please explain]: [open field]

4. When you prepare client bail plans for women, do you also help them with Housing (e.g., refer to housing provider, refer to agency that can help with housing)? (choose one)

- Yes
- No (If NO, skip to question 5)

4a. If YES, which agencies help to house your women clients? (select all that apply)

Housing Agencies

- Shelter house
- Urban Abbey
- Private housing
- John Howard
- Alpha Court
- Other [please list]:

Social Service Agencies that Help with Housing

- North Western Ontario Women's Centre
- Elizabeth Fry Society
- Ontario Native Women's Association
- Indigenous Friendship Centre
- Other [please list]:

5. What proportion of your women clients are underhoused (i.e., lack stable and affordable housing) (choose one):

- All (90-100%)
- Many (50-89%)
- Some (10-49%)
- None (<10%)

6. How does not having bail impact legal proceedings for your women clients? (select all that apply)

- Reduces likelihood of going to trial
- Reduces access to diversion programs
- Institutional misconduct affects sentencing
- Other [please explain]:



7. How does not having bail further impact your women clients? (select all that apply)

- Reduces access to mental health and/or substance use treatment programs
- Custody of children/dependents
- Loss of housing
- Loss of employment / education
- Loss of income
- Increased debt
- Stigma
- Other [please explain]:

8. In your experience, how often does lack of stable housing lead to recidivism after release? (choose one)

- Always
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

9. Is there anything else that you would like to tell us about housing for women involved in the legal system? [please explain]

10. Please provide your email/telephone if you agree to be contacted for a short interview on these issues: \_\_\_\_\_

## *Appendix B*

### Focus Group Guide for Key Stakeholders

## **Focus Group Guide for Key Stakeholders**

### **Introduction**

Welcome to this discussion about housing and women involved with the criminal justice and legal systems in the Thunder Bay region. Thank you for taking the time to join the discussion. My name is (name) and I'm a researcher working on behalf of Lakehead University and the Elizabeth Fry Society of Northwestern Ontario. This research is supported by the Ontario Law Foundation.

We've invited you today to hear your thoughts and ideas about housing challenges for women involved with the criminal justice system.

Before we begin, I'd like to set some guidelines for today's discussion:

- Though there may be different points of view, I want to stress that there are no wrong answers. Please feel free to share your thoughts, even if it differs from what others have said.
- It's very important to us that everyone feels comfortable and safe when they speak today. Please listen when others are speaking. Feel free to add your ideas once they are done.
- About sharing personal information: Please do not share any personal stories that you hear in this discussion outside of this group. We ask this of everyone, but we cannot guarantee it. If you'd like to share a personal story but you're worried about privacy, you can say "I've heard" or "someone I know" so that nobody will know that the information you're sharing might be about you.

We're tape recording the session because we don't want to miss any of your comments. While we will later transcribe (write down) what has been said, we will not include any names in our transcriptions.

My role here is to ask questions and listen.

So, let's begin.

1. In our conversation today, I'd like to start by asking each of you, in general, do you think that women involved with the criminal justice systems encounter housing-related challenges in the Thunder Bay region?
2. What are some of the specific challenges that women encounter related to housing when they are charged with a crime and waiting for a bail hearing?
  - a. Issues related to affordability, suitability, acceptability or stability of current housing situation
  - b. Issues related to legal or criminal justice system and its approach to housing as a factor in bail sentencing
3. What are some of the specific challenges that women encounter when they are being released from prison?
  - a. Issues related to securing housing prior to release
  - b. Issues related to affordability, suitability, acceptability or stability of current housing situation
  - c. Issues related to avoiding eviction or having to move to different housing
4. Do you think that lack of adequate housing and housing insecurity are factors that lead to criminal justice system involvement or recidivism (committing additional crimes) among women in the Thunder Bay region? If so please describe
5. If a woman is not able to get bail, how does that affect other aspects of her life? E.g., access to SUD treatment, custody of children, etc?
6. Now, I'd like to ask about some special populations of women involved with the criminal justice or legal systems who might have unique housing challenges or needs. Before this session, we made up a list of who we thought might experience unique housing issues. Here is what we came up with:

Seniors (60 and older)

People with mobility challenges

People living with mental health challenges

People living with developmental disabilities

People living with addictions

Youth (under 24)

New Canadians

Migrant workers

Victims of domestic violence

Indigenous people (First Nation, Métis, Inuit, Non -status)

Visible minorities

Single mothers

People on social assistance

- a. Are there special populations that have unique needs and challenges with housing that are not included in this list?
7. What *legal services* are *available* in this area to help women who have housing issues that might impact their bail or court hearings?
  8. What *housing programmes* are *available* in this area to help women who have housing issues that might impact their bail or court hearings?
  9. What types of *support services* do you know of that are *available* in this area to help women who have housing issues that might impact their bail or court hearings?
  10. What types of additional legal, housing, or support services are *needed* in this area to help women involved with the legal and criminal justice systems with housing issues?
  11. If Thunder Bay were to design additional bail and/or transitional housing for women, what should it be like?
    - a. Type of units (house, apartment, number rooms)
    - b. Shared accomodation
    - c. Rules or regulations
    - d. Length of stay
    - e. Legal services offered on site, off site, or completely separate
    - f. Other support services offered on site, off site, or completely separate

*Facilitator thanks everyone for their time and important contribution*

## *Appendix C*

### Focus Group Guide for Key Informants

## **Focus Group Guide for Key Informants**

### **Introduction**

Welcome to this discussion about housing for women who are leaving jail in Thunder Bay. My name is (name) and I work at Lakehead University and the Elizabeth Fry Society. This discussion is for research supported by the Ontario Law Foundation.

You were invited here today to share your thoughts about housing for women involved with the legal and criminal justice systems.

Before we begin, here's how we can make our discussion go well:

- We want everyone here to feel comfortable speaking. Please listen when others are speaking. Then let us know if you have more to add.
- When we talk, there may be different points of view, but there are no wrong answers. Please tell us what you think even if it's different from what others have said.
- Please show respect to everyone here. That means keeping what we talk about here private. Don't share any personal stories that you hear today outside of this group.

We're taping this discussion so that we can later write down what is said.

We will also aim to keep your information private. We will not write down any names. We also ask that each of you not tell others about what we talk about today, however we can't guarantee it.

If you want to share personal information but you're worried that it won't be private, you can always say "my friend" or "someone I know" so that we don't know if a story is about you. You may also have a chance to tell us more after the group.

My role here is to ask questions and listen, and record information for research.

So, let's begin.

1. I'd like to start by asking each of you: Do you think that women find it hard to get housing after leaving the Correctional Centre in Thunder Bay?
2. Tell us some of the housing problems women face when they are waiting for a bail hearing.
  - a. Prompts: complete lack of housing; lack of address to provide the court; Cost of rent, utilities like water or electric, other costs, space for children and family, Thunder Bay Housing Authority, stable housing (housing that you can count on). That they may lose their housing because they have been arrested;
  - b. Whether the court took their precarious or unstable housing situation, or other housing issues, into consideration when considering or denying bail?
  - c. If you are not able to get bail, how does that affect other parts of your life? (E.g., access to treatment, loss of employment, loss of social assistance, loss of housing, loss of children, loss of access to social supports, interruption to school)
3. Do you have any concerns about securing housing when you are released?
 

Prompts:

  - Lack of available housing
  - Income - access to income to pay for rent
  - Affordability - what can I pay for once my benefits are reinstated
  - Unable to afford adequate housing to allow children to be reunited with them
  - Waitlists
  - Lack of stable income for rental applications
  - Credit history
  - History of incarceration for rental applications (discrimination because of criminal record)
  - Discrimination (race, marital status, single parent status, sexual orientation)
  - Saving for security deposit
  - Smoking or pets
  - No ID or no money for ID
  - Previous housing arrears (debts)
  - Don't have/can't get bank account
  - References
  - Other?
4. Do you have any concerns about the kind of housing that you will have after release?
 

Prompts:

  - Safety (neighborhood)
  - Safety (housing condition)

- Location (close to transport/family and friends, shopping/parks/schools)
  - Utilities (cost/lack of heat or other utilities)
  - Landlords
  - Room for children or family
  - Accommodation for my disability or health condition
  - Other?
    - Lack of supportive housing (eg individuals who are struggling with addictions and are afraid of relapsing )
    - Having to return to unsafe environment (eg. Abusive partner) due to lack of housing
5. Do you think that in-prison services will help you find housing for after your release? If so, which services and how will they assist? This could include social workers or rehabilitation officer.
  6. Do housing problems, including lack of affordable housing, play a role in women's trouble with the law in Thunder Bay? If so, how?
  7. What *legal services* help women who have housing issues?
  8. What *housing services* help women who have housing issues when they are released?
  9. What *other support services* help women who have housing issues?
  10. What types of additional legal, housing, or support services are *needed* to help women, who are being released, with housing issues?
  11. Some communities have bail and/or transitional housing. Would you be interested in housing like this? If yes then how should that housing work?
 

Prompts:

    - Type of units (house, apartment, number rooms)
    - Shared accommodation
    - Rules or regulations
    - Length of stay
    - Legal services offered on site, off site, or completely separate
    - Other support services offered on site, off site, or completely separate

*Facilitator thanks everyone for their time and important contribution*

## *Appendix D*

### Background Questionnaire for Key Informants

#### Section 1 - Background Information

1. Age (Year of Birth): \_\_\_\_\_

2. Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

3. What is your marital/family status? *[circle one number]*

- 1...single/unattached
- 2...married
- 3...common law
- 4...divorced/separated
- 5...widowed

4. Do you have children?

- No
- Yes

I gave birth to	
I adopted	
I care for unofficially	
Other	

4.a Where are your children living now? (\*\*look for existing question)

- With me
- With family
- With friends
- Foster / Placement

Other \_\_\_\_\_



4.b Does your current living situation impact your ability to have your children with you?

No

yes

**5. How do you self-identify:** *[check (X) all that apply]*

1. Caucasian
2. Asian
3. African
4. Hispanic
5. Middle Eastern
6. Aboriginal/Indigenous
7. Other \_\_\_\_\_

5a. If Aboriginal/Indigenous: *[check (X) one]*

<b>Aboriginal/Indigenous Identity</b>	<b>X</b>
First Nation Status	
First Nation Non-Status	
Metis	
Inuit	
Other: (Please specify below):	

**6. What language did you first learn as a child?** *[circle all that apply]*

1. English
2. French
3. First Nation language (specify): \_\_\_\_\_
4. Other (specify): \_\_\_\_\_

**7. Were you born in Canada?**

Yes

No

7.a If No, what year did you move to Canada? \_\_\_\_\_

7.b What brought you to Thunder Bay?

- 1.
2. Work
3. Family
4. Health
5. Education
6. Incarceration
7. Housing
8. Other \_\_\_\_\_

7.c If you are not from Thunder Bay, where were you living before coming here?

\_\_\_\_\_

**8. What is the highest level of education you have obtained? [circle one number]**

1. less than high school
2. some high school
3. high school diploma
4. some community college
5. community college diploma
6. some university
7. university degree

**9. What are your sources of income? [Circle all that apply]**

1. Employment\*\*\*Child and/or spousal support
2. No income
3. Social Assistance/welfare (Ontario Works)
4. ODSP (Ontario Disability Support Program)
5. CPP (Canada Pension Plan)
6. EI (Employment Insurance)
7. OAS (Old Age Security)
8. WSIB (Workers Compensation)
9. War Veterans Allowance
10. Private pension
11. Personal Needs Allowance
12. Other (Please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**10. Are you employed** right now?

No

Yes

10a. IF YES, what do you do (or where do you work)?

\_\_\_\_\_

10b. IF YES, how long have you been doing this job (or working for this employer)?

\_\_\_\_\_

**11. What is your approximate weekly personal income?** \_\_\_\_\_

11a. What is your approximate weekly household income? \_\_\_\_\_

11.b How many people depend on this income? \_\_\_\_\_

**12. Do you have a chronic health condition or disability?( Circle all that apply)**

Mental health / Addiction

Physical health

Developmental disability

Other \_\_\_\_\_

12a. Does this affect where you can live?

No

Yes

### ***Section 2 - Involvement with criminal justice system***

**1. Thinking about your current/most recent incarceration - Is/Was this the first time that you have been charged with a criminal offense?**

Yes

No

1.a If no, when were you first charged with a criminal offense? \_\_\_\_\_

1.b How many times have you been incarcerated in the past 5 years? \_\_\_\_\_

**2. Are you currently on remand or sentenced?** (If released then skip to the next question)

Remand

Sentenced

### **Section 3 - Current Housing**

\*\*If currently incarcerated then skip to the next section

**1. What is your living situation now? (check all that apply)**

Bail housing (for example John Howard Society)

Rooming house

Bachelor apartment

One bedroom apartment/house

Two bedroom apartment/house  
Homeless Shelter

Squat  
In a park  
On the streets  
Couch  
Hostel  
Transitional housing  
Motel / Hotel  
Hospital  
Detox centre  
Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**2. What proportion of your monthly income pays for housing?**

1/2

1/4

Other

**3. Who is your current housing provider?**

Public Housing (for example Thunder Bay Housing)  
Not for profit supported housing (for example Alpha Court)  
Not for profit transitional housing program (for example Urban Abbey)  
Private landlord  
Reserve housing  
Shelter  
Own my housing

**4. Do you own or rent your current accommodation?**

Own  
Rent  
Neither

4.a If you own your home, is your name on the title?

Yes

No

4.b If you rent a home, is your name on the lease?

Yes

No

**Section 4 - END**

**Thank you!**

## *Appendix E*

### Background Questionnaire for Key Stakeholders

#### Section 1 - Background Information

1. Age (Year of Birth): \_\_\_\_\_

2. Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

3. How do you self-identify: *[check (X) all that apply]*

- Caucasian
- Asian
- African
- Hispanic
- Middle Eastern
- Aboriginal/Indigenous
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

3a. If Aboriginal/Indigenous: *[check (X) one]*

Aboriginal/Indigenous Identity	X
First Nation Status	
First Nation Non-Status	
Metis	
Inuit	
Other:(Please specify):	

4. What is the highest level of education you have obtained? *[circle one number]*

1. less than high school

2. some high school
3. high school diploma
4. some community college
5. community college diploma
6. some university
7. university degree

**5. Which sector does your current employer represent? [check (X) one]**

- Shelter
- Legal system (counsel, court worker, correctional centre employee)
- Public housing
- Not for profit housing
- Not for profit support services (no housing provided)
- Private landlord
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

**6. Is your employer an Indigenous organisation?**

- Yes
- No

**7. Does your employer focus partly or completely on services for women?**

- Yes - completely
- Yes - partly
- No specific focus on women

## **Section 2 - Perspectives on housing for women involved with legal and criminal justice systems**

**1. Do you consider housing to be an issue for women who are involved with the legal and criminal justice systems in the Thunder Bay region?**

- Yes, always
- Yes, often
- Yes, sometimes
- No

**2. Do you think that housing situations impact bail hearings for women in the Thunder Bay region and lead to remand?**

- Yes, always
- Yes, often
- Yes, sometimes
- No

**3. Do you think that finding suitable, acceptable, and affordable housing is an issue for women exiting the correctional system in the Thunder Bay region?**

- Yes, always
- Yes, often
- Yes, sometimes
- No

**4. Do you think women exiting the correctional system in Thunder Bay encounter difficulties related to housing which cause them to be evicted or move to different housing?**

- Yes, sometimes
- No

**5. Do you think that any of the following are causing housing insecurity for women involved with the criminal justice system?**

- Yes, always
- Yes, often
- Yes, sometimes
- No

**a. If Yes then please check the three most significant factors**

- \_\_\_ Income - access to income to pay for rent
- \_\_\_ Affordability - what can I pay for once my benefits are reinstated
- \_\_\_ Waitlists
- \_\_\_ Lack of stable income for rental applications
- \_\_\_ Credit history
- \_\_\_ History of incarceration for rental applications
- \_\_\_ Discrimination
- \_\_\_ Saving for security deposit
- \_\_\_ Smoking or pets?
- \_\_\_ No ID or no money for ID
- \_\_\_ Previous housing arrears
  
- \_\_\_ References for landlord background checks
- \_\_\_ Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**6. Do you think that any of the following are housing issues for women who have been charged with a crime or who are being released from the correctional centre?**

- Yes, always
- Yes, often
- Yes, sometimes
- No

**a. If Yes then please check the three most significant factors**

- \_\_\_ Affordability
- \_\_\_ Safety (neighborhood)?
- \_\_\_ Safety (housing condition)?
- \_\_\_ Location (close to transport/family and friends/ shopping/parks/schools)?
- \_\_\_ Utilities (cost/lack of heat or other utilities)?
- \_\_\_ Landlords?
- \_\_\_ Room for children or family?
- \_\_\_ Accommodation for my disability or health condition
- \_\_\_ Stability of current housing (Will this be long-term)?
  
- \_\_\_ Other (please specify)\_\_\_\_\_

7. Do you think that housing insecurity is a contributing factor to being charged with a crime or recidivism (repeat offense) for some women in the Thunder Bay region?

- Yes
- No
- 

### **Section 3 - END**

Thank you!