The Internal Strengths and Challenges of Community Grassroots Committees
Addressing Homelessness in Prince George

by

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ABSTRACT

This research thesis explores the internal strengths and challenges of community grassroots committees addressing homelessness in Prince George. The intention of this research is to provide valuable insight into the perspectives and lived experiences of members of these committees. There is limited research and documented work on community grassroots committees that address homelessness in Prince George and this research will contribute to a greater understanding of this topic.

Nine members of community grassroots committees that address homelessness in Prince George were interviewed. Each participant had different committee experience, and brought a unique perspective to the research. This research employed a hermeneutic phenomenology methodology which was concerned about the lived experiences of the participants. Internal strengths and challenges were identified and analyzed as a result of this thesis.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Defining the Concept

The following thesis will employ concepts and terms with multiple meanings

specific to community grassroots committees and homelessness. The central term requiring

discussion is the concept of "grassroots" in describing its relationship to community based

committees that address homelessness in Prince George, British Columbia. Batliwala

(2002) describes grassroots as "the basic building block of society" where men and women

come together to form the tenets of community or society (p.396). Local communities and

jurisdictions may adopt their own understanding of what grassroots means, while

developing a broader definition that incorporates the power structures and resources that

effect social and political change in communities around the world. A more complete

discussion of the terms employed in this thesis will be discussed in later chapters.

Statement of the Problem

Community grassroots committees have been at the forefront of progressive and

meaningful social change throughout history. These committees have achieved significant

reform and institutional shifts in the social, economic, and political struggles towards a

more just society. Many of these committees have focused on the pandemic of

homelessness, because of the dramatic human and societal effect it has had on our

communities around the globe. Grassroots committees have been working within the

constraints and limitations of continuing federal, provincial, and municipal government

budget cut backs and re-prioritized funds that seek to place blame on the homeless, instead

of addressing the comprehensive structural problems that cause homelessness. This

increased dependency on government funding has created what Mullett, Jung, and Hills (2004) state are "competitive structures within the community and antagonism between agencies that had previously worked together in harmony" (p.146). As a result, this community competition has limited the work that committees across Canada can achieve, because the government has been systematically pitting community groups against each other. Kohn (1986) describes how competition has created Mutually Exclusive Goal Attainment (MEGA) that sees committees in survival competitiveness that seeks to secure funding, at the expense of other community committees.

Banack, Zunz, and LaPointe (2006) define internal strengths of community grassroots committees by their "engagement of a broad spectrum of citizens' experiences and perspectives, ensuring a program's relevance to the community, developing indigenous leadership, creating widespread public awareness of the program, and allowing diverse input about evaluation and accountability" (para.1). Ultimately, community grassroots committees are judged and valued by their ability to sustain program funding to address their overall mission statement and vision (Banack, Zunz, & LaPointe, 2006).

Focus Area

In 2007, I moved from Halifax, Nova Scotia to Dawson Creek, British Columbia in search of meaningful work that would allow me to pursue my passion of youth mentorship and community engagement. By October of that year, I became the executive director of the Nawican Friendship Centre, a not for profit aboriginal organization and the founding chair person of the Housing Response Network (HRN), a committee of concerned community agencies, business people, and local citizens that wanted to address homelessness in Dawson Creek. My experience working with individuals in poverty

and/or within its grasp formed my passion to seek and understand sustainable solutions to homelessness in communities across northern British Columbia. Working with the Housing Response Network gave me the perspective that the solution to this social and economic issue was connected to the capacity building of grassroots committees such as the HRN.

My experience in Dawson Creek and working with the Community Partners Addressing Homelessness in my practicum, have all formed the underpinnings of my thesis focus, which is to explore the internal strengths and challenges of community grassroots committees addressing homelessness in Prince George. This research will be within the contextual framework of a "northern community" which Graham (1990) describes as "situated to the north of economically developed and settled regions of the country and (were) distant from the principle industrial centres" (p.24). Graham (1990) also states that "north" is simply defined as "a function of the tilt of the earth's axis and its orbit around the sun" (p.22), or it is represented by any community or land mass above latitude 55. These definitions would exclude communities such as Prince George because of its size, population density, and access to services. A clear and comprehensive definition of what constitutes a "northern community" is often a subjective reality for each community, group, or individual. For the purposes of this research project, a more inclusive and broader definition of "north" is required and is found within the Northern Health Authority's definition which states its service delivery "covers almost two-thirds of British Columbia's landscape, bordered by the Northwest and Yukon Territories to the north, the BC interior to the south, Alberta to the east, and Alaska and the Pacific Ocean to the west" (Northern

Health Authority, 2010, para. 2). This inclusive definition of "north" incorporates larger urbanized centres including Prince George, Prince Rupert, and Smithers.

Understanding the impact of practice within a northern context requires significant reflection for any individual conducting research in the north. Graham, Brownlee, Shier, and Doucette (2008) in a discussion about the implications of northern practice state that "social work practice in remote northern communities is characterized by conditions distinct from those of practice in more urban centres" (p.404). This remains true for community grassroots committees addressing homelessness that are struggling to offer meaningful resources and services to the Prince George community, but are faced by the challenges and struggles of a northern community.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of my research will be to explore the internal strengths and challenges of community grassroots committees addressing homelessness in Prince George. This involves reviewing the unique community dynamics, community agency co-operation, and inter-committee structure and function of grassroots committees. A review of relevant documents including; newspaper articles, academic papers, and committee work will be conducted to provide a historical context for the researcher to analyze.

Significance of the Research

Research on grassroots committees addressing homelessness from a Northern British Columbian perspective is limited. My hope for this thesis is to add to a growing body of work that meaningfully addresses and reviews the significant challenges and rewards of working to end homelessness from a grassroots level. I will also strive to understand and present a comprehensive view of the structure, function, and challenges of

grassroots committees addressing homelessness in Prince George as they move toward a future that advocates, educates, and informs their community.

Research Question

This thesis will explore the following research question: What are the internal strengths and challenges of community grassroots committees addressing homelessness in Prince George? The question uses the underlying working hypothesis that; community grassroots committees in Prince George have a variety of unique strengths and face challenges in their efforts to address homelessness in their community.

Research Experience

It is important to state from the beginning as a young student, my research experience is limited. In February of 2009, I worked with the Community Partners Addressing Homelessness (CPAH) to complete two research projects; a homeless count review, and community assets and gaps report. The homeless count review was intended to provide a thoughtful critique of the successes and challenges of the 2008 community homeless count completed by CPAH so the committee could move forward with the recommendations for a second homeless count scheduled for the spring of 2010. My role included, completing a literature review of relevant documents, and interviewing CPAH committee members, volunteers, students, and coordinator. My role during the community assets and gaps report was to distribute questionnaires that sought community agencies to provide an inventory of the services they offer, so that we would have a framework identifying the community services gaps in Prince George. Both research experiences were valuable in providing the basis for understanding the challenges and rewards of completing research within a Prince George context in a limited capacity.

Definitions

The Oxford Dictionary (2009) defines grassroots as "the most basic level of an activity or organization, which utilizes ordinary people as the main body of an organization's membership." Grassroots committees or associations help define the important part of the economic, political, and social discourse of our society. They provide the forum and opportunity for average citizens to express their values, beliefs, and concerns about their community. Smith (2009) states that grassroots committees or associations are ''locally based, significantly autonomous, volunteer-run, formal nonprofit (i.e., voluntary [third sector, civil society]) groups that manifest substantial voluntary altruism as groups and use the associational form of organization and, thus, have official memberships of volunteers who perform most, and often all, of the work/activity done in and by these nonprofits'' (p. 1).

This definition implies the necessity of broad participation among a membership base that is composed of individual citizens with a common purpose and goal. Volunteerism, advocacy, and action require a dedicated group of people to build a network of like minded people to carry out the directives and philosophy of the committee. Paul and Tan (2003) define grassroots committees as "groups of ordinary people who make up local sites of collective social, political, and economic action" (p.3). Grassroots committees require a group of loosely based, un-bureaucratic structures that make collective decisions based on their mutual worldview (Paul & Tan, 2003). Implicitly, these committees are also egalitarian and collectivist in nature, requiring consensus in decision making and broad participation in policy development and delivery. Srinivasan and Davis (1991) describe how collective entities are characterized by the consensus decision making

and participation of traditionally marginalized individuals. For the purposes of this research project, community grassroots committees will be defined as groups or collectives of volunteers that are drawn together by their mutual goal of finding meaningful actions to address homelessness in Prince George. These groups are mutually not for profit, and may have a formal structure for membership or a loosely based membership criteria where it is solely defined by participation.

The structure of grassroots committees depends on the internal and external forces that have brought community members together. Smith (2009) contends that grassroots committees are more likely to be informally structured than governmental and profit-based business organizations. This may be indicative of the fact that grassroots committees draw upon a base of volunteers that have limited time and the meetings may reflect these restrictions. Usually grassroots committees begin the process of structuring their committees by establishing fundamental principles as Smith (2009) has outlined;

- member benefit versus non-member benefit goals (or mix of these)

- group style and subculture,

- degree of autonomy from other organizations or networks,

- degree of internal democracy versus oligarchy or autocracy, etc (p. 2).

Structure is achieved by establishing terms of reference for the grassroots committee that outlines the principle terms of membership, philosophy, strategic direction, and goals. These directives are the subject of internal and external controls and factors. Internal factors of committee structure are the variables that influence and manipulate from within the committee membership. Internalized committees determine the structure and

direction of their grassroots movement and can choose to seek external influences and directives from outside the membership.

External factors of a committee's influence may include government restrictions of funding and resources that many grassroots committees face. The government or another external funding source may influence the structure, philosophy, and direction of the committee because of the power governments possess over the allocation of funds. External forces may also restrict the actions and change a grassroots movement can seek to achieve. Mullett, Jung, and Hills (2004) describe a collaborative model for community grassroots committees to combat these external challenges that are characterized by four key principles including:

1. **"collaboration comes from knowing oneself** (being able to critically reflect on one's own practice) and building capacity within one's own agency for collaboration" (p. 163);

2. **"knowing how to behave collaboratively** (internalizing the concept of collaboration, transforming one's own practice, or becoming the embodiment of a 'collaborative community')" (p.163);

3. **"appreciating the developmental quality of collaboration** (rather than viewing collaboration as a set of instrumental relationships that can be created with a contract or some other formalized set of instructions)" (p.163); and

4. **"recognizing the symbolic significance of collaboration for those who engage** in it, that is, the development of self and intersubjectivity, and the ability to see how one's own small gestures translate into a common good for the community" (p.163).

The second term requiring further analysis in this chapter is social change. The Oxford Dictionary (2009) defines social change as, "the structural transformation of political, social, and economic systems, and institutions to create a more equitable and just society." This is achieved by targeting the underlying causes of critical social problems such as homelessness, discrimination, and poverty. Grassroots committees who seek and advocate social change are characterized by their activism, cooperation, persistence, and dedication of their members by working collectively to address issues of discrimination, poverty, homelessness, and others. This is achieved by empowering its members to advocate for themselves and collectively challenging service providers, government agencies, and other institutions ensuring or attempting to ensure equal access and rights for all.

Smith (2009) states that social change committees:

- Build community-based responses, not solutions that affect just a few individuals and leave the underlying social problems intact.

- Change attitudes, behaviours, laws, policies and institutions to better reflect the values of inclusion, fairness, diversity and opportunity.

- Insist on accountability and responsiveness among institutions, including the government, large corporations, universities and other entities whose policies and actions profoundly affect the living conditions of individuals and communities, whether locally, nationally, or internationally.

- Expand the meaning and practice of "democracy" by involving those closest to social problems in determining their solutions (2009, p. 3).

Social change has a broad theoretical framework that draws on a variety of conceptual perspectives that support underlying political, economic, social beliefs, and values. Explanations of social change vary from the principle that it is a manifestation of system re-alignment towards equilibrium to the by-product of class conflict in a society with competing interests. Leat (2005) describes functionalism as the "belief in the established order and structure of society with an underlying principle that society is not an unorganized manifestation of individuals, but a system with actions and outcomes that are imperative to its function and survival" (p.3). Functionalism depends on the predictable outcomes of systematic indicators that signal slow structural change.

Conflict theory is the inherent strains of social structures. This strain in society is the result of class divisions and a scarcity of goods and services. Karl Marx was a leading conflict theorist who made the connection "that societies/forms of social organization are largely determined by economic factors and in particular the impact of industrial capitalism" (Leat, 2005, p.4). Marx believed in the inevitability of class conflict that would result in a transformative period of social change in which power would be taken by the working class away from the established and wealthy elite (Leat, 2005). Conflict theory has considerable implications for those advocates that seek a transformative change to how the government and society responds to homelessness. The philosophical variances determine that social change is a fluid and dynamic concept open to interpretation and meaning. It is a term that implies action with a determined or unintentional result that will change the fundamental fabric of our society, hopefully for the better.

The final term requiring a definition is homelessness. Homelessness is a worldwide pandemic of disastrous political, economic, and social consequences requiring an

immediate and coordinated intervention from all levels of government across the globe. Casavant (1999) defines homelessness as "those living in various degrees of unsatisfactory housing: those without a roof over their heads, those who sleep in temporary shelters or institutions, and those living in unsanitary or low-quality accommodation" (para. 3). This is an inclusive definition of homelessness that describes the various layers of the issue. Others have sub-divided the homeless into three different categories that describe the nature, and extremity of the circumstances of homeless individuals. These 3 categories are the chronically homeless, the cyclically homeless, and the temporary homeless. Casavant (1999) describes the three homelessness variances in her report to the federal government in an attempt to provide an inclusive definition of the term homelessness:

- "The chronically homeless group includes people who live on the periphery of society and who often face problems of drug or alcohol abuse or mental illness.

- The cyclically homeless group includes individuals who have lost their dwelling as a result of some change in their situation, such as loss of a job, a move, a prison term, or a hospital stay. Those who must from time to time use safehouses or soup kitchens include women who are victims of family violence, runaway youths, and persons who are unemployed, or recently released from a detention centre or psychiatric institution.

- The temporarily homeless group includes those who are without accommodation for a relatively short period. Likely to be included in this category are persons who lose their home as a result of a disaster (fire, flood, war) and those whose economic and personal situation is altered by, for example, separation, or loss of job. Some

researchers do not consider this group as being truly homeless and exclude them from their studies" (para. 10).

Since the 1990s the development of the term "at-risk" has brought attention to the pressures and vulnerabilities of becoming homeless. Pomeroy (2001) describes "at risk" homelessness as:

> A term in the 1990s to identify families and individuals that have formal shelter, but whose circumstances are precarious. They are deemed at risk for one of a range of reasons – the cost of shelter consumes such a large part of their income that they are vulnerable to rent arrears and eviction; they are temporarily living with a friend or relative but have no permanent place of residence; they are personally at risk of physical or mental abuse; or they have disabilities that may cause them to lose their shelter (p.3).

The term "at risk" expands what it means to be vulnerable to the economic, social, and political realities that force people into homelessness. Pomeroy (2001) contends that there are measurements to help contextualize the number of people who are "at-risk" of becoming homeless which are those who pay more than 50 percent of their income for shelter. However, a simplistic measurement of income versus costs may not always be symptomatic of who are "at-risk" of becoming homeless and academics and policy makers should be cautious when applying overarching systems to explain social phenomenon. Authors including Marpsat (2005) indicate a broad definition that encompasses dimensions including affordability, habitability, and suitability as indicators for being at risk. Ongoing research in this area is required to better conceptualize what "at risk" means.

A global definition of homelessness is difficult because of the underlying political and philosophical significance of this social issue. Defining the problem implies ownership, and the serious political, economic changes, and actions required to make

meaningful reforms to our housing and social support systems. Several authors including Cameron (2010), struggle with the definition of homelessness and its implementation by governing institutions. Other considerations when attempting to define homelessness include homeless count projects that attempt to quantify the number of homeless in our communities as Cordray and Pion (1997) discuss " any estimate of the number of homeless persons involves several definitive issues, including the underlying conceptual definition of homelessness" (p.69). As a concept, homelessness does not have a universally accepted definition and falls within the subjective reality of the individual service provider, community or practitioner. For the purposes of this research, a broad definition similar to Casavant (1999) that incorporates the three levels of homelessness will be applied because of its inclusion of variable factors and phenomenon of homelessness.

To discover the intent of the author, terms must be defined within the context of the research. Grassroots committees, social change, and homelessness are all broad, fluid, and comprehensive terms that are open to interpretation and various meanings. It is important for the reader to understand the intent of this thesis is to broadly uncover the truth behind the words within the ultimate context of the internal strengths of community grassroots committees addressing homelessness in Prince George. It will also be important to understand the historical context under which these personal reflections were crafted.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Community grassroots committees are the foundation of social action and change in our Canadian democracy (Mullaly, 2002). It demands that governments from all levels actively seek and engage groups of concerned citizens to find pragmatic solutions to complicated problems. Community grassroots committees take many different shapes and forms; from those with a high level of influence, to those in their infancy of development. Our history as a nation is filled with examples of how average people have come together to seek social, political, and economic change by forming committees and collectives with a common purpose and a sustaining goal to make a difference. Woman's Suffrage, Civil Rights, and Aboriginal Rights are all examples of the continued march towards a more perfect society that recognizes the intrinsic worth of all people. The struggle continues today as we face the many lingering challenges of our generation (Ramirez, Soysal, & Shanahan, 1997).

The following literature review will provide a foundation for my thesis focused on the internal strengths and challenges of community grassroots committees addressing homelessness in Prince George. The literature review will begin with a description of key terms and their interpretation within the context of this thesis. This overview will provide a greater sense of understanding for the reader creating a mutual understanding of the meaning behind the words used in this research.

The second part of this literature review will examine the role of community grassroots committees from a Canadian, provincial, and municipal perspective, focusing primarily on committees that address homelessness in their communities. This exercise

will provide the framework and context for comparison with other grassroots committees working in Prince George and how they are structured and function. It will also examine the mutual or exclusive strengths and challenges they face from internal forces such as funding short falls, and community driven competition. The final stage of this literature review will examine an overview of the community grassroots committees addressing homelessness in Prince George including the Community Partners Addressing Homelessness (CPAH) and the Urban Aboriginal Working Group; its history, composition, function, role within the community, and the challenges and successes of these grassroots committees.

The limitation of this literature review is indicative of the thousands of community grassroots committees across the world that cannot all be given proper examination and consideration. This thesis will focus on Prince George committees and their structure and function. By focusing exclusively on Prince George, it should not denigrate the value and importance of the need for further research at national and international levels.

Limitations of the Literature Review

This thesis will cover the limited amount of the literature available on the development, formation, and function of grassroots committees focused on homelessness issues from global, national, and local perspective. The vast number of research articles, texts, and manuscripts on social change, grassroots committees, and homelessness requires this thesis to focus the literature search from the very broad, into a narrower overview by the end of the chapter. The literature begins from an international perspective; Europe, Australia, and the United States. This will be followed by a national perspective and what

grassroots homelessness committees are actively working on in our country. The literature will ultimately focus on grassroots committees addressing homelessness in Prince George.

A significant limitation of this literature review is the availability of comprehensive texts created by the grassroots committees in Prince George. This is in recognition that these committees are still a young collection of community agency partners that haven't created a broad portfolio of academic research, homelessness reports, and other texts that highlight the activities and goals. Within the literature available from CPAH and Urban Aboriginal Working Group are these committees' terms of reference, a 2008 homeless count, homeless count evaluation report, and a community assets and gaps report. This gap in the literature will be supplemented and analyzed in future chapters with a summary of committee member interviews that will provide the reader a more comprehensive window into these committees' strengths and challenges. Another significant challenge for this literature review is the numerous definitions of what being "homeless" truly means. From across the globe, there are a number of different interpretations of whom and what constitutes a homeless person. This variation points to a complex term that is rooted in a number of meanings. For example; one grassroots committee could be advocating for absolute homeless people, while others could be fighting on behalf of a more inclusive definition of the term homeless.

Origins of Homelessness

The exact origin of homelessness is subject to debate, with scholars unable to pinpoint the moment this social phenomenon began. As part of the debate, it is recognized that there is a need to have a universal definition of homelessness to categorize the first people who were homeless. What is documented in the literature is that there have been

homeless people for a long time and the levels have fluctuated corresponding with dramatic

historical events including war, economic depression, and major policy shifts in

government (Kusmer, 2002). A brief overview of the historical context in which there have

been systematic responses to homelessness deserves a closer look. In colonial North

America during the 16th and 17th centuries, Elizabethan poor laws governed a community's

response to the homeless (Kusmer, 2002). People were categorized into "settled people"

and those who were without homes. Those without homes were required to petition the

town for the right to settle in the community, and were by definition "homeless" (Kusmer,

2002). In some cases, homeless colonists were given small payments and relocated to

settlement houses.

In the 19th and 20th centuries subsequent responses to homelessness correspond to

shifting economic, political, and social changes. The development of primitive social

safety nets began to define the emergence of the welfare state and how it would respond to

the issue of homelessness. A primary concern for early policy makers was defining who

would benefit from policies by categorizing homeless people into the "settled homeless",

those who lived permanently in a community, and the "transient homeless" who moved

from location to location (Kusmer, 2002). Early services and programs were designed to

help settled homeless people and largely ignore the transient homeless. The 19th century

was also the beginning of the institutionalization of homelessness, with policy makers

working to marginalize homeless people by establishing "poorhouses" that would segregate

homeless people from the rest of society (Kusmer, 2002).

Corresponding with the rise of homelessness in the 19th and 20th centuries was the

grassroots response to this issue. Policy makers were primarily concerned with addressing

the needs of the "deserving poor" by providing food, small grants, and shelter for those

who fit within the definition of someone deserving these services (Kusmer, 2002).

Grassroots efforts from community-based religious groups filled a void created by

government largely ignoring homelessness as an issue that needed to be urgently addressed

(Kusmer, 2002).

The modern welfare state in Canada developed in the years following World War II

with the expansion of the federal government's role in the welfare of its citizens

(Moscovitch, 1983). New social programs including unemployment insurance and old age

pensions were developed or expanded to provide security for Canadians (Moscovitch,

1983). In 1964, amendments made to the National Housing Act established an aggressive

social housing policy that helped Canadians from coast to coast achieve affordable housing

for their families. Subsequent governments during the last half of the 20th century have

eroded much of the progress made during the first half of the century, by cutting provincial

transfers, decreasing social housing units, and passing responsibility to community

grassroots committees and organizations to deliver services (Moscovitch, 1983).

With the development of the welfare state during the last half of the 20th century,

decreased government intervention in addressing homelessness has resulted in the growth

of community grassroots committees. Governments have increasingly turned to grassroots

committees and organizations to provide local services for homeless people because they

have the skill set and knowledge of their local community (Kusmer, 2002). This has

dramatically increased the burden on committees that are under funded, short on staff, and

facing a rise in the demand for their services and supports. Balancing the growing need of

the homeless people and the strains it places on grassroots committees is an ongoing

challenge.

In the 1980s and 1990s, rising deficits and public sector spending forced the federal

government to adopt austerity measures that saw massive cuts to social programs (Jackson,

2010). Between 1992 and 2000, federal transfer payments for social programs fell 1.9

percentage points of GDP and shifted the burden to the provinces to provide the majority of

social programs. Social assistance and programs aimed at homeless or at risk individuals

began to see the gradual erosion of services and supports. Under the formula prior to the

early 1990s, the federal government provided half of the funding of Social Assistance,

which subsequently ended with the introduction of austerity measures brought in by the

Liberal Government of the 1990s and early 2000s (Jackson, 2010). As a result, Social

Assistance benefits have been cut significantly, affecting the most vulnerable, including

those at risk of becoming homeless.

Finn (2007) documented the fall of the welfare state and the steady erosion of the

programs and services for the marginalized of our society. Finn argues that even though

Canada's wealth per capita by GDP, including incomes, foreign investment, and economic

activity, has grown significantly since the 1970s, we are constantly told that we no longer

can afford services and supports for the poor, marginalized, and the homeless. Even more

cause for concern stated by Riches (2002) is that while our federal government budget was

in surplus during the early 2000s, the number of people accessing food banks and other

emergency services nearly doubled.

During the period of the deterioration of the welfare state in the 1990s, the

government ignored the call for affordable housing. The federal minority government of

Trudeau in the 1970s, with the support of the NDP party, introduced the National Housing

Act, which saw massive investments in social housing across the country (Isitt, 2009). Over

one million low income Canadians were subsequently housed as a result of federal and

provincial program partnerships (Isitt, 2009). Any progress made in housing low income

and at risk Canadians during the 1970s quickly ended with the budget cuts during the

1980s and the 1990s when the federal government stopped funding social housing

programs. As a result, costs of providing social housing fell to cash strapped provinces that

could not provide the number of units necessary to meet demand. Currently in BC alone,

there are over 13,000 people on BC Housing's social housing waitlist, and there isn't any

indication that it will decrease with the improving economy (Isitt, 2009).

A brief overview of addiction and substance abuse is important to help

contextualize homelessness in Canada and around the world. Studies including Gafoor

(1997) have worked to develop the link between substance abuse and chronic

homelessness. Other researchers including Kertesz, Larson, Horton, Winter, Saitz, and

Samet (2005) have a different perspective, viewing mental health more closely associated

with chronic homelessness. Regardless, homelessness is associated and/or closely linked

with a variety of social, political, health, and economic indicators that researchers are only

beginning to understand. Finn (2007) links the steady rise in homelessness to the erosion of

the Canadian social welfare system, and the result of federal transfer payments towards

social programs and services. Disturbingly, the literature provided by Isitt (2009) indicates

that social spending in Canada targeting the homeless and other marginalized groups is

decreasing no matter the economic performance of the country.

Mental Illness

Authors including Weitzman, Knickman, and Shinn (1992) have attempted studies

to find the relationship between mental health and indicators for being at risk of becoming

homeless. However, the process of using simple causal relationships is often problematic

and requires further research before directly linking homelessness with mental illness.

Authors including Draine, Salzer, Culhane, and Hadley (2002) describe how the literature

has been focused on simple explanations for complex issues:

> According to these data, problems such as unemployment, crime, and homelessness
> are pervasive among people with mental illness. Thus it is inferred that mental illness
> itself is a prime explanatory factor for these social problems among these individuals.
> However, in most cases these inferences are not valid, essentially because of failure
> to compare the experience of persons who have serious mental illness with that of
> persons in similar socioeconomic situations who are not ill. In the few studies in
> which such comparisons have been made, the impact of mental illness was much
> smaller than that implied in most of the psychiatric literature (p.565).

Susser, Moore, and Link (1993) contend that there are significant risk factors that

do have implications in the broad explanation of homelessness in our communities. Susser,

Moore, and Link (1993) conducted a literature review of risk factors for homelessness

which indicated that "schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, depression, alcohol abuse, and drug

abuse are likely risk factors for homelessness. They suggest that the lifetime prevalence of

each of these disorders is more than twice as high in the homeless as in the general

population" (p.549). With strong indicators of risk, it is easy to fall within the cadre of

those who would seek comfort in establishing a clear list of indicators that inform

homelessness rates in our communities. The problem that remains is, how do we

conceptualize a complex issue like homelessness and characterize the deep structural

inequalities that require further exploration before we can provide causal relationships to

help explain the phenomenon. Research in this area is ongoing and although it is outside the scope of this thesis, it is an important component of a broader understanding of homelessness.

Development of Self-Help Groups

Iacovelli (2006) described self-help groups as "a means for people in similar life situations to mutually help each other" (p.2). Self help groups have a long history of developing specialized interventions for target population groups. Examples of self help groups date back to the 18th Century with the development of the Free African Society, Alcoholics Anonymous (1935), the National Network for Woman (1971), and Madurai (1989) to name a few. International developments in the third world have also seen the emergence of self help groups that work to help low income people obtain microcredit to build small business and relieve poverty (Iacovelli, 2006).

The role of the self help group has changed and developed over time. The development of the *term mutual help group* is in recognition of what Silverman (2002) describes as "the helper was often helped as much as the person who was the recipient" (p.25). Mutual help groups have defining characteristics including:

- Social Support - relief from isolation, experiencing the stress-reducing support of others who truly understand.

- Practical Information -what professional services and other resources are available, alternatives, self-care techniques, research, etc. These help people to recognize that they are not helpless.

- Education - primarily derived from the pooling of members' experiences and coping skills, as well as information on and familiarity with professional services; referred to as "experiential knowledge"

- Advocacy - advocating addressing problems or deficiencies that the members cannot resolve within in their group, but exist in the larger society. Historically, these groups are the seeds for the development of many long-standing health foundations, societies, and movements dealing with various illnesses, disabilities, and health concerns (Silverman, 2002).

The development of these collectives and groupings has complemented the rise of community grassroots committees. Often development of mutual help groups has resulted in the formation of committees and vice versa. Both share the fundamental value that input from affected communities and target populations are essential in developing services and supports that are effective and sustainable (Silverman, 2002).

International Perspective

Homelessness is an international issue and various grassroots committees have formed around the globe that seek to address and find concrete solutions to stop this problem throughout the communities of the world. Issues that affect the homeless vary from the lack of rental protections that discriminate against the homeless as outlined by Falvo (2007), to decreased rates of healthy living indicators and outcomes discussed by Hwang (2001). Homelessness and the secondary and associated issues, transcend all borders.

Europe

Europe has an alarming rate of homelessness that is threatening the long term sustainability and health of its peoples. In the United Kingdom (UK), the New Policy Institute conducted a study which estimated that there are between 310 000 - 380 000 homeless individuals who are single, in the UK at any given time (Kenway & Palmer, 2003). This indicates that the UK has an enormous challenge of finding solutions to building suitable housing and supports for hundreds of thousands of its citizens. The New Policy Institute states that single homelessness has emerged as a growing issue because of the lack of supports for single men and women without children, suggesting this needs to be addressed before it becomes a cataclysmic issue (Kenway & Palmer, 2003).

Municipal or borough governments across the U.K have formed grassroots committees to advise on the distribution of services and the development of homelessness programs. One of these committees is the Young Persons Homelessness Group which actively works with the Stockton Borough Council in the United Kingdom. The goals and objectives of this group include:

- reduce homelessness for young people

- increase the range and choice of services which are available when young people become homeless and need them

- improve the services which are already available

- increase the range and choice of accommodation which is available to young people

- make accommodation which is available, safe, secure, and comfortable

- make more people aware of homelessness issues

- make more help and support available to young people who are living in their own accommodation so that they are not lonely or isolated

- make more services available to young people in their own tenancy so that they can manage better and keep their tenancy longer

- make financial support better and easier for young people who are homeless or trying to maintain a tenancy

- make more information about homelessness services available to young people who are homeless or who might need to know about homelessness

- work to get rid of the under 25 rule, which limits benefits for those individuals over 25

- Try to develop more and better resettlement services (Young Persons Homelessness Group, 2007, para. 2).

Young Persons Homeless Group and others throughout the U.K have established autonomous rules and guidelines, as well as their role within the Borough Council governance system. Other studies including Sikich (2008) explore the role of gender in determining access to services for homeless women in the United Kingdom. Studies continue to develop and explore a broad range of topics related to homelessness in the UK.

Western Europe is not immune to the spread of homelessness throughout their borders and nation states. FEANTSA, the European Federation of National Organizations Working with the Homeless, a Brussels-based umbrella body of homeless organizations, states that there are at least three million Western Europeans who are homeless (Ghosh, 2003). FEANTSA is a Europe wide network of not for profit organizations that seek to

address homelessness throughout the continent. Its stated goals are "to prevent and alleviate the poverty and social exclusion of people threatened by or living in homelessness, by encouraging and facilitating the co-operation of all relevant actors fighting homelessness in Europe" (FEANTSA, 2009, para. 1).

Founded in 1989, FEANTSA has grown to over 100 member organizations, from over 30 European countries. Member organizations provide a variety of services including "housing, health, employment and social support. They often work in close co-operation with public authorities, social housing providers and other relevant actors" (FEANTSA, 2009, para. 2). The structure of this grassroots committee requires that they form a general assembly involving all member organizations, an administrative council consisting of one representative from each European Union member state, and an executive committee consisting of up to seven members drawn from the administrative council (FEANTSA, 2009).

FEANTSA's work is ongoing and they are committed to engaging other European institutions to promote effective policy and interventions to address homelessness, conduct research, and to promote and advocate for the homeless people of Europe (FEANTSA, 2009, para. 7).

Europe continues to struggle with the growing human and economic cost of homelessness and grassroots committees have taken action to prevent the spread of this social issue. Throughout the continent, advocacy and voices who have experienced and witnessed this issue on their streets have pointed the spot light to this difficult issue.

Australia

Homelessness has become a significant public policy debate in Australia with the governments' release of the White Paper on the state of homelessness in this nation. On any given day, there are an estimated 100,000 people in Australia without a home (Radio Australia, 2008). Homelessness Australia (2009) states that 1 out of 200 Australians are homeless and that 23% of the homeless are children.

Homelessness Australia was formed in 1998 from a collection of homelessness organizations and committees from across the country. It is a composite body of national homelessness committees that work to prevent and respond to homelessness issues throughout the country (Homelessness Australia, 2009). Its stated goals are to contribute and inform government policy on homelessness issues, increase the Australian people's awareness and understanding of homelessness, and advocate for an integrated response to homelessness in this country (Homelessness Australia, 2009).

Homelessness Australia is an example of other committees forming one larger collective to meet the needs of their mission statement and client groups. Formed from three other standing committees, the Council for Homeless Persons Australia (CHPA), The National Youth Coalition for Housing (NYCH), and the Women's Emergency Services Network (WESNET), Homelessness Australia has drawn strength from its growing membership when seeking funding arrangements from the Australian government (Homelessness Australia, 2009). Budget cutbacks and re-prioritization of funds have made it crucial for homelessness committees to merge resources and work in partnership to advocate towards ensuring the quality of service delivery is sustained.

In Australia, Styles (2009) has outlined the grassroots philanthropic response to addressing homelessness. Homelessness committees formed by grassroots movements have many different shapes and variations. In Australia, a variety of philanthropic funds and programs have been created to respond to the alarming rate of homelessness in their nation. These funds form the basis of grassroots action that feed into a collective solution that responds to the various dynamics and faces of the homelessness issue (Styles, 2009).

The United States

Homelessness in the United States is becoming a growing threat to the worlds' richest and most influential nation. A study conducted by the National Center on Family Homelessness, analyzed data from 2005-06 and found that more than 1.5 million children were without a home (CNN, 2009). Millions of people in the United States are without a home or proper shelter, and the problem is potentially going to get worse as foreclosures and bankruptcies increase dramatically across the U.S stemming from the economic meltdown of 2008. There are a variety of community grassroots committees that have formed in response to the homelessness issue in the United States including; the National Coalition for the Homeless and the National Alliance to End Homelessness.

The National Coalition for the Homeless is a national network of people who are currently experiencing or who have experienced homelessness, activists and advocates, and community-based and faith-based service providers. Founded in 1982, its mission is to end homelessness by creating the systemic and attitudinal changes necessary to prevent and end homelessness. They work to meet the immediate needs of people who are currently experiencing homelessness or who are at risk of doing so. The National Coalition for the Homeless " take as their first principle of practice that people who are currently

experiencing homelessness or have formerly experienced homelessness must be actively involved in all of our work" (2008, p.1).

As a not for profit committee, they focus on four primary roles, housing justice, economic justice, health care justice, and civil rights. Their membership is composed of a 32 member board of directors with backgrounds in academics, social agency service delivery, and at least a quarter of its board is composed of homeless or formerly homeless individuals (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2008).

The National Alliance to End Homelessness is a not for profit committee committed to preventing and ending homelessness in the United States. This committee was formed in 1987 by over 2000 concerned citizens and service providers in response to the growing number of homeless in the United States (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2008). It works to end homelessness by advocating for improved public policy, building community capacity, and educating the public about this social issue. This effort has made "the National Alliance to End Homelessness a leading voice on federal homelessness policy" (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2008, para. 3).

Grassroots committees across the United States are committed to ending homelessness in their communities. Their compositions, structure, terms of reference, and membership reflect their community's unique homelessness and poverty challenges. The United States is at an important juncture in its history, as it seeks to return to economic stability and growth. An important element of this recovery will be its response to homelessness in communities across the nation.

Canadian Perspective

Canada is struggling with the structural problem of homelessness across the country, and in every region. The rate of homelessness is growing in Canada; in Toronto, our largest city, there were over 6500 people accessing shelters per night (Casavant, 1999). Just four years later that number increased to 31 984 people per night, including 4779 children, accessing shelter (City of Toronto, 2003). The number of homeless began to rise dramatically in the 1980s and 1990s because of the lack of affordable housing, social transfer payment cut backs, and no strategic mental health plan to name a few of the important structural setbacks that have allowed this problem to grow to unacceptable levels (Mullaly, 2002). In response to the gap created by government inaction on homelessness, Canadians in all provinces have formed grassroots committees to address their communities' needs.

Housing policy in Canada has been largely dormant for the last two decades as levels of government have reduced their role in providing social housing units to low income Canadians (Bryant, 2003). The affordable housing situation has reached a crisis point and authors including Bryant (2003) state that because of the withdrawal of the federal and provincial governments commitment to fund social housing, it has meant that "Canada now has the most private-sector dominated, market-based system and the smallest social housing sector of any Western nation, with the exception of the USA" (p.52). This has significant implications for seniors, single individuals, students, aboriginal people, and a variety of other Canadians who cannot find affordable housing in their communities.

Housing in Canada is a complex issue that requires the examination of social and economic variables before a clearer picture can emerge. Carter and Polevychock (2004)

contend that over 1.7 million Canadians experience housing problems. This is a strong indication of the challenges Canadians face when trying to find suitable and affordable housing. However, Hulchanski (2005) contends that there is no clear explanation why Canada does not act and ensure affordable housing for all its citizens.

> Canada is able to build safe and adequate housing appropriate to the needs of all its households. That is, there are no physical, institutional, or financial impediments, no shortage of building supplies, construction workers, or mortgage financing to supply adequate housing for all. After the Second World War, improvements in housing finance, residential land servicing and building techniques, materials, and regulations produced high-quality housing for the vast majority of Canadian households. So why are some Canadians still poorly housed or unhoused (Hulchanski, 2005, p.1)?

There continues to be an ongoing debate about the role of the government in providing affordable housing options. However, Bryant (2003) contends that urgent action is needed by government to help end the crisis of housing in Canada, or else Canadians risk placing more people at risk of becoming homeless. Without significant investments in housing and the re-emergence of the federal government as a partner, it is unlikely that affordable housing in Canada will improve in the short term.

The Calgary Homeless Foundation was created by Art Smith, a local philanthropist to build a community-based, multi-stakeholder, leadership group that will work to end homelessness in 10 years. The foundation will work with community agencies, government, faith based groups, and the private sector to develop and implement a plan that will begin to address the issue of homelessness starting in 2009 (Calgary Homeless Foundation, 2009). Composed of 28 members, they believe that it will take $3.2 billion dollars to eradicate homelessness in Calgary by 2018. Without action, estimates of the rate of homelessness will increase to 15000 from the last homeless count of 3400 homeless conducted in 2006 (Richards, 2009).

The Halifax Coalition Against Poverty is an advocacy group based in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Their mission is to "organize to defend individuals from evictions, welfare termination and abuse from employers. We support people in their fight against unjust landlords, social assistance workers and policy, the police, and employers. As well, we launch campaigns against regressive government policy and the institutions that perpetuate poverty. We believe that there is dignity in resistance and that the poor, homeless, and their allies should organize to fight back" (Pov Net, 2009, para 1).

As a grassroots, not for profit committee, it works to advocate on behalf of the poor through advocacy work, political campaigns, fundraising, and community work. It is passionate about helping the poor receive greater treatment and consideration from their government by demanding higher benefits, more affordable housing, and protection from unjust evictions. Committees from across this country have formed to unite common principles and values into one voice, to ensure that the homeless and the impoverished are heard and simple demands to improve their lives are met.

British Columbian Perspective

The province of British Columbia has an estimated 10 000 to 15 000 homeless people, with over 1200 living in downtown Vancouver alone (Chudnovsky, 2008). Our province is in the midst of a crisis that has seen the rate of street level homelessness increase by 364 % in Vancouver since 2002 (Chudnovsky, 2008). The increasing cost of homelessness has been the subject of a growing body of research that has examined the fiscal implications of homelessness in BC. The Government of British Columbia (2001) issued a study that determined "the costs of dealing with the consequences of homelessness, such as increased health needs, must be weighed against the cost of

investing in longer-term housing solutions" (p.2). Homelessness in this province is not limited to the lower mainland, but spread throughout in mid-sized towns, larger cities, and rural communities like Dawson Creek, Prince George, Cranbrook, Comox, Hazelton, Abbotsford, Penticton, Surrey, and Smithers (Chudnovsky, 2008). After a broad, province wide consultation conducted between December 2007 to April 2008, David Chudnovsky, the former NDP critic for homelessness completed a report with 12 recommendations and principles for combating and ending homelessness in British Columbia including: re-establishing the Ministry of Housing, eliminating the homeless crisis in five years, re-investing in a social housing program, supporting local governments and community organizations, focusing on a province wide strategy, expand social housing, adopt the housing first model, maintain and expand the public land bank, protect manufactured home tenants, strengthen security of tenure and rights for tenants, increase income assistance rates and the minimum wage, and increase mental health and addiction services (Chudnovsky, 2008).

Despite a wide range of critics that charge that the province of British Columbia is not doing enough including Klein et al. (2008) and Wallace, Klein, and Reitsma-Street (2006), the government of British Columbia has bragged about their record on addressing homelessness. The following are accomplishments that the government of British Columbia has outlined as accomplishments to their response to homelessness in our province including;

- Investing $2 billion dollars in housing programs

- Growing the homelessness outreach program

- Expanding the emergency shelter program

- And doubling the amount of shelter beds during their tenure in government (Government of British Columbia, 2010a).

While the government has outlined a number of legislative victories from the battle against homelessness, Wallace, Klein and Reitsma-Street (2006) paint a different picture. Over 75% of the homeless of British Columbia have no access to Social Assistance, and have been systematically denied (Wallace, Klein & Reitsma-Street, 2006). The government has purposely "discouraged, delayed or denied people living on absolutely no income for extended periods of time" (Wallace, Klein & Reitsma-Street, 2006, p.53). In response to this reality, British Columbians from all across the province are forming grassroots committees. The Poverty Olympics was a group of concerned citizens and community groups who opposed the 2010 Winter Games because public dollars could be more justly spent on ending poverty and homelessness. They staged their third Annual Games coinciding with the Vancouver Olympics in a form of protest over the perceived wasteful spending on the Olympics, instead of funding sustainable programs to combat poverty and homelessness (Poverty Olympics, 2009).

The Committee to End Homelessness is a Victoria based grassroots advocacy group committed to ending homelessness in their city. They seek solutions for homelessness by advocating for more supportive housing, a variety of social services, and work to lobby the government to shift funding priorities to allow the homeless to escape their poverty (Homeless Nation, 2008).

British Columbians are becoming advocates in the northern region of the province as well. In 2008, a grassroots committee in Dawson Creek composed of concerned service providers, business owners, and individual citizens formed the Housing Response Network

in response to the growing issue of homelessness in their community. Through government lobbying and community advocacy, the Housing response Network was able to secure funding to open an emergency shelter in 2009.

CPAH

The Community Partners Addressing Homelessness (CPAH) was established in 2000 to provide "an inclusive forum for coherent research, planning, education and advocacy" for homelessness issues in Prince George (CPAH, 2005a, p. 1). Composed of community agency staff, municipal politicians, academics, students, provincial ministry, and municipal staff, CPAH brings together a broad perspective of the city of Prince George's homelessness issue to the table. Funded through the Federal Homelessness Partnering Strategy as a designated community, CPAH distributes funding to community agencies to operate programs that benefit the homeless people of the community. This could include soup kitchens, drop-in centres, health service delivery, shelter spaces, and outreach work. CPAH may also allocate funds to sponsor homelessness related research projects; including community wide homeless counts. In 2008, CPAH conducted its first ever community homeless count where 259 respondents self identified as homeless, pointing to the significance of the issue in the city (CPAH, 2008).

In their strategic plan developed in 2005 and revised in 2009, CPAH outlined its committees three fundamental goals and objectives that act as the guiding principles of the committee:

"GOAL 1, A functioning, effective and informed CPAH with active participation and an inclusive, welcoming, safe presence and respected reputation

GOAL2, A well informed, educated and engaged community

GOAL 3, To plan and develop the partnerships and approaches that achieves a sustainable community approach to addressing homelessness" (CPAH, 2005a, p. 3).

CPAH strives to achieve their goals and objectives by having an open and accountable forum for discussion amongst its members and the public. Meetings are open and everyone is welcome to participate and raise questions about the strategic vision of CPAH and how it moves forward. CPAH is grassroots because of the inclusive nature of its membership and how it makes policy and funding decisions to direct service delivery programs, but this doesn't mean that it doesn't have external controls from government. Because CPAH receives funding through the Homelessness Partnering Strategy, an initiative from Service Canada, it has accountability to the federal government for its activities and reporting.

Urban Aboriginal Working Group

The Urban Aboriginal Working Group is another Prince George based grassroots committee addressing homelessness in Prince George. Based at the offices of the Prince George Nechako Aboriginal Employment and Training Association (PGNAETA), the Urban Aboriginal Working Group is mandated to administer the Urban Aboriginal Homelessness Fund through Service Canada (UAWG, 2009). The UAWG strives to "promote client and community self-reliance through the provision of responsive programs and services, gather labour market trends and labour force demands to identify and address barriers and opportunities for aboriginal people, recognize and celebrate success and best practices of clients, programs, and partnerships, and upholding the integrity of our work through measurable results that are financially accountable and transparent" (UAWG, 2009, para. 2).

The UAWG has 13 members, who must be nominated from service providers that have a history and proven track record of providing services within human resource development, labour market development, or homelessness. To become a member, you must supply a letter of support from agencies in good standing, and also be a full-time resident of Prince George (UAWG, 2009). The terms and criteria for membership may seem more constraining when compared to other community committees, but they maintain a well balanced approach by including professionals in the field, as well as youth and elders.

Homelessness Intervention Project (HIP)

The Homelessness Intervention Project is part of a provincial government initiative "making a single government ministry responsible for co-ordinating provincial and community social housing and support services, including health and income assistance for the chronically homeless in five communities", including Prince George (Government of British Columbia, 2010b, para.1). Spearheaded by the Ministry of Housing and Social Development, the HIP in Prince George is composed of community partner agencies including the Native Friendship Centre, Carney Hill Neighbourhood School and Advocating for Women and Children (AWAC). The goal of the project committee is to end chronic homelessness by aligning "several government ministries, health authorities, the non-profit sector and other agencies that address chronic homelessness and establish an immediate integrated homelessness intervention project, which will include:

- Priority access to health and social services for the chronically homeless in five communities (Vancouver, Surrey, Victoria, Kelowna and Prince George).

- The deputy minister of housing and social development, as the executive lead for the cross ministry integrated project.

- A performance and management plan, including performance targets so we can measure our progress across the province in dealing with homelessness" (Government of British Columbia, 2010b, para.3).

The Homelessness Intervention Project is an example of a quasi-government committee structure that incorporates government directives and community led development of services for the homeless. Elements of HIP and its implementation are grassroots because of the partnership of key community agencies that address homelessness from the front line of Prince George. An important example of the grassroots flavour of HIP is drawn from the fact that during the developmental stages of its implementation, HIP adopted the CPAH's (2008) Homeless Count as the indicator of how many chronically homeless were in the community. The existence of HIP and other quasi-governmental committees point to a growing trend towards a more comprehensively structured approach to homelessness committees in Prince George.

Community grassroots committees addressing homelessness in Prince George have an open definition of grassroots that allows for the active inclusion of government participants. Since 2008, the City of Prince George has formed the Homelessness Task Force and the Mayor's Task Force on the Downtown. All definitions of "grassroots" remain a subjective reality that must be examined from the lens of the intent of this thesis topic.

Conclusion

Community grassroots committees across British Columbia and around the world have been collaborating, advocating, and lobbying for the prevention and end of homelessness in their communities. As an issue that transcends the social, political, and economic fabric of our society, people from around the world must demand better from governments, from all levels, to seek solutions to stop the spread of social exclusion, suffering, and the pain of millions of our fellow citizens. Grassroots committees have played their role, working to develop the research, the community capacity, and political will to meaningfully act in a responsible and just way. Northern British Columbia has adapted to considerable government cutbacks discussed in Wallace, Klein, and Reitsma-Street (2006) by forming a number of community grassroots committees that fit the unique community dynamics of their region. This thesis will continue in the following chapters discussing the research I have conducted to reflect on the internal strengths and challenges these committees have within Prince George. It will draw from the literature the values and principles that have built the body of advocacy so far, and develop and inform my understanding as I progress through my research.

Chapter 3

Methodology

This thesis is interested in understanding the internal strengths and challenges of community grassroots committees addressing homelessness in Prince George from the perspective of the committee members. The goal of this research is to create the circumstances to encourage honest discussion of the lived experiences, reflecting on the rewards, struggles, and realities of those who advocate and work to end homelessness in this community. In this chapter, I will outline the research process applied during this thesis, including a description of the methodology, conceptual lens, and rationale for the procedural components. The intention of this chapter is to provide the reader a comprehensive guide and road map of how this research was conducted and why I chose the methods.

This thesis employed a phenomenological research design in an effort to describe the common experiences of members of community grassroots committees addressing homelessness in Prince George. Welman and Kruger (1999) describe phenomenology as "concerned with understanding social and psychological phenomena from the perspectives of people involved" (p.4). There is a broad diversity of different approaches to phenomenological research as Dowling (2007) describes "there are as many styles of phenomenology as there are phenomenologists" (p.131). Each approach, while with comparative components, has distinct features that must be explored and understood (Dowling, 2007). For the purpose of this research, this requires members of community grassroots committees addressing homelessness in Prince George, to reflect on their observed personal realities of the internal strengths and challenges of their committees.

The role of the researcher in a phenomenological research is to "collect data from the persons who have experienced the phenomenon, and then develop a composite description of the essence of the experience of all of the individuals" (Creswell, 2007, p.61). This will be achieved by identifying key themes within the data that will represent a larger experiential reality that will create the foundation of the research findings and conclusions.

The method of phenomenological research used was hermeneutic, which Laverty (2003) describes as being "concerned with the life world or human experience as it is lived. The focus is toward illuminating details and seemingly trivial aspects within experience that may be taken for granted in our lives, with "a goal of creating meaning and achieving a sense of understanding" (p.7). Hermeneutic phenomenology is concerned with how individuals interpret events and situations which are determined by their own "individual background and historicality" (p.8). There are a number of different approaches to hermeneutic phenomenology including Heidegger's, which Dowling (2007) describes is "founded on the ontological view that lived experience is an interpretive process" (p.133). Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology is concerned with the historicality of the individual. Historicality is a person's history or background, which Laverty (2003) states, "includes what a culture gives a person from birth and is handed down, presenting ways of understanding the world. Through this understanding, one determines what is 'real', yet Heidegger also believed that one's background "cannot be made completely explicit" (para.13). Munhall (1989) described Heidegger as having a view of people and the world as indissolubly related in cultural, social, and historical contexts. This understanding has

important implications to research participants, as social elements with a preconceived set of values and beliefs.

Pre-understanding is critical to understanding Heidegger's approach to hermeneutic phenomenology, which Laverty (2003) describes as the "structure for being in the world; this pre-understanding is the meanings or organization of a culture that are present before we understand and become part of our historicality" (p.21). Pre-understanding is not something a person can step outside of or put aside, as it is understood as already being with us in the world" (para.17). Heidegger went as far as stating "nothing can be encountered without reference to a person's background understanding" (para.17). This implies a union of personal reflections on phenomenon and the intrinsic bond we have with our historical and cultural knowledge. Koch (1995) describes this process as "an indissoluble unity between a person and the world. Meaning is found as we are constructed by the world while at the same time we are constructing this world from our own background and experiences" (para.17). The implications of this approach to understanding phenomenon in our lived experiences, fit well with the intentions of this thesis.

Hermeneutic research is also interested in the lived experiences and personal biases of the researcher, which is a considerable contrast from traditional phenomenological approaches which encourage researchers to "bracket" or set aside personal beliefs and values. Laverty (2003) states, in hermeneutic phenomenology "biases and assumptions of the researcher are not bracketed or set aside, but rather are embedded and essential to interpretive process" (para.33). Dowling (2007) takes Laverty (2003) one step further by implying "research is not truly phenomenological unless the researcher's beliefs are

incorporated into the data analysis" (p.136). This provides the researcher an opportunity to become imbedded and inform the research. Accepting our prejudices, pre-conceptions, and perspectives as researchers, allows an element of reciprocal understanding between researcher and participant known as the hermeneutic circle (Moran, 2000).

The researcher must disclose personal assumptions and biases, for the reader to understand the perspective the researcher brings into the research. This requires the researcher, as Laverty (2003) describes, "to give considerable thought to their own experience and to explicitly claim the ways in which their position or experience relates to the issues being researched" (para. 35). Van Manen (1997) states in phenomenological research, the problem isn't that the researcher knows too little, but he or she might know too much, and have already built a strong set of beliefs, assumptions, and biases about the phenomenon at hand. This is why it is important to disclose the researcher's conceptual lens and pre-conceived biases for the readers to evaluate and understand the perspective from which the researcher has approached the thesis. Other methods can include journaling throughout the data collection and analysis section of the research, to codify the thoughts and emerging themes from the researcher's interpretation of elements during the research process.

I will examine historical documents pertaining to the internal operation and structure of each participant's committee. This will provide a historical context in which the researcher will analyze the data. Documents including newspaper articles, press releases, and academic articles will help situate the historical setting in which committee members were placed, and how that may have affected the interpretation of events and phenomenon.

Rationale for Phenomenological Design

The rationale for using a hermeneutic phenomenological research design and methodology is to allow the members of these committees to reflect on their lived experiences in an open forum. Using a methodology that captures individual interpretations of events, is critical when researching diverse groups, including community grassroots committees. It will allow the exploration of thoughts and observations from personal experience and the historicality of the participant, which is crucial when researching the deeply emotional topic of homelessness. This research thesis will add to a limited body of work, that seeks to find truth within experience of the real frustrations and challenges faced by those who seek to deliver services in a Northern British Columbian context.

As a member of a community grassroots committee, I have previous knowledge, experience, and relationships that formed a pre-conceived bias. As a researcher, the rationale for choosing hermeneutic phenomenology was this method's recognition that researcher bias cannot be overlooked or bracketed away. I wanted my experience as a committee member to be valued during the research process, and to allow this historicality to be an informed part of the participant data analysis.

Assumptions

Identifying and documenting a researcher's pre-conceived biases and perspectives at the beginning of a research project is essential to the hermeneutic approach to research (Laverty, 2003). As a member of a community grassroots committee addressing homelessness in Prince George, I bring a number of perspectives and biases into the research including:

1. *Challenges faced by community grassroots committees addressing homelessness in Prince George.* As a committee member of the Community Partners Addressing Homelessness (CPAH) since 2008, I am aware of internal challenges faced by this group including; membership retention, community engagement, and committee effectiveness to meet goals and objectives.

2. *Strengths of community grassroots committees addressing homelessness in Prince George.* As a committee member of CPAH, I am also aware of the strengths of these groups including; networking and agency engagement with CPAH, information sharing within the community, and the success of community projects including Homelessness Action Week.

The process of journaling could be critical to the identification of assumptions and emerging themes during the data collection and analysis of the research. The process by which researcher and participant engage each other's historicality and interpretation of events is described by Laverty (2003) as the hermeneutic circle of understanding. Laverty (2003) describes this as "the researcher and participant working together to bring life to the experience being explored" (para.46), through an interpretation of the language and texts available.

Throughout the data analysis, journaling informed the development of themes. To ensure that my personal assumptions are solely informing these themes, I referred back regularly to journal notes, historical documents, and provided the reader with supporting evidence in the form of participant quotations from the interview transcripts.

Participants

To ensure a wide body of participants and their experiences, participants were recruited by distributing posters (See Appendix D) to over 20 front line organizations that traditionally address homelessness in Prince George. I employed a purposeful sample, which Rubin and Babbie (2008) describe as selecting "community leaders, experts, and professionals known for their work with and expertise on the problem (p.342)."There was a limited criterion for participation, only that you were a member of a community grassroots committee that addresses homelessness in Prince George. The rationale for this was to allow a broad range of experience and perspectives to guide the research findings. A more limited criteria based on years of experience, extensive sub-committee work, and other requisites to participation, I feared would narrow the scope of my research to a core base of committee members. My assumption was that this core group would reinforce beliefs and values of the committee structure and function, and would impair my research from a broader perspective. There were limited demographic questions embedded within the semi-structured, open ended interview questions; asking only for how long a participant has been on the committee and what was their role. Participants have an experience range of one and half to nineteen years on their respective community grassroots committee addressing homelessness in Prince George. Their involvement ranged as well, with one participant acting as Chairperson of their committee, to other participants who take no active role in the administration and leadership of their committee. There were three male participants and six female participants. Six participants worked at community based organizations, while the other three worked for government organizations.

For the purposes of this research, the goal was to obtain 8-10 research participants, composed of members from a variety of community grassroots committees addressing homelessness in Prince George. A diversified sample grouping, composed of a wide variety of different committees in Prince George would ensure that my research would not focus specifically on one committee. The purpose of this research thesis is to provide a generalized sample of the thoughts and perspectives from a broad sample of committees within Prince George. Consequently, there were 9 participants, from 4 different committees. The first three committees described in this research were noted in Chapter 2. A forth committee was identified by a participant during the interview, but due to the recent development of the committee, there were no documents to review. Before the formal interview, many of the participants identified that they were members of multiple grassroots committees addressing homelessness in Prince George. There were also a number of participants who sat on provincial steering committees, government initiatives, and other formalized collectives that addressed homelessness in Prince George, and around the province. Participants who were interested, contacted me for an interview in a variety of ways including email, phone calls, and on occasion, in person.

Before participating in the research and data collection, I provided a copy of the research information letter and consent form (see Appendix B, C) and covered any questions or concerns the participants had before proceeding. At all times, I re-enforced that participation was voluntary and that participants could withdraw at any time, without consequences. Participants were also given contact information for the thesis supervisor and the Research Ethics Board of the University of Northern British Columbia, in case there were any issues or questions the participants may have had about research ethics, or

the thesis in particular. I also stressed that I would provide a copy of the transcript for the participants review, so they felt comfortable with their contribution to the research.

Data Collection

I used face to face interviews, incorporating open-ended questions as the data collection method. Interviews were arranged over the telephone or by email, and I travelled to a site or location to accommodate the interviewee. Bogdan and Biklen (1982) state that open-ended questions allow for individual variations, interpretations of events, and lived experiences amongst the participants, adding to the overall strength of the research project. This approach to questions, encouraged a rich diversity of opinions, perspectives, and individual interpretations of events and phenomenon. It also enforced the opportunity for a wide breadth of conversation to flow between the interviewer and participant, yielding emerging themes and perspectives that would form the base of the data analysis. I wanted the participants to feel free to interpret the questions within their own framework of understanding and personal interpretation. My concern was participants would not feel comfortable sharing sensitive information, should the questions became rigid or restrictive.

The interviews were recorded using a tape recorder, which Patton (1990) views as an indispensable tool in the research process. I used one tape per interview and itemized the data by labeling the tapes using "tt" to indicate thesis transcript followed by the order number in which the interview was conducted; (example: tt05). All tapes were transcribed verbatim, for member checking and a copy was provided to the participant for approval and final edits before data analysis began. I transcribed all data myself, in an effort to completely immerse myself in the dialogue and to re-visit my initial interview journaling to

compare notes and ideas. It was also important for me, as a researcher, to allow the participants to view their interview transcript before data analysis began. This process allowed the participant to review the thoughts and themes that emerged from the research and also offered another opportunity for participants to withdraw from the research if they felt uncomfortable with the content of the interview. All participants agreed through email to allow their content to proceed, with only a few participants requesting a few lines to be omitted because of the sensitivity of the content. To ensure confidentiality of the participants, the data was stored in a locked file cabinet in the researchers' office, and all electronic files were password protected.

Data Analysis

I used thematic analysis as the method of data analysis which Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006) describe as "a search for themes that emerge as being important to the description of the phenomenon" (p.3). This research project is interested in the committee members lived experience and their own interpretation of perceived strengths and challenges of their community's committee. During the research process, I kept two different journals. The first journal was used for notes I made during the 9 interviews. In this journal, I would write down initial observations and thoughts I had during the interviews and how I thought I could improve the process. Journaling during this stage in the research was useful to clarify my thoughts and the context of this research stage. The second journal was used during the data coding stage of the research. Once all of the interview data was transcribed and approved by the participants to proceed, I applied a series of colour codes to indicate the emerging themes I felt were developing from the data.

A second un-coloured coded copy of the transcripts was then given to the thesis supervisor to initiate her own coded transcripts to ensure a level of reliability.

Coding of the themes was categorized with this analysis framework with inclusion and exclusion criterion. All themes were supported by textual quotes from multiple interview transcripts. Example one illustrates how the researcher developed the code book.

Example One

Leadership

- Transcript tt02 [lines 30-32] "Now for sure I guess because we have a chair that is very well known in the community and seems to really be organized."

- Transcript tt06 [lines 104-108] "I think one of the things that really has helped (Identifying Name) is having at least a little bit of administrative money umm to keep going and to keep organized because very often other grassroots organizations are all going off the sides of somebody's desk and that is where it tends to fall apart."

- Transcript tt01 [line 64] "she's not about the idea, she's about getting things done."

- Transcript tt03 [lines 32-42] "without funding for coordination, someone to head the committee umm and that is always an ongoing thing and it is always a debate, is it worth it, you know, and with the relatively small amount of dollars that is coming in to Prince George, but I think that it is a very, very big component of keeping the committee together."

Inclusion Criteria: Statements about leadership and how it benefits in the operation of the committee.

Exclusion Criteria: Statements that focus on inter-committee conflicts amongst members.

Each theme and sub-theme used this coding format to inform the analysis. Once the code book was complete, the researcher used the media timeline to contextually place the participant. This process achieved two purposes including, grounding the participant in the context of events and providing the researcher with insight into what external forces may be informing the participant's perspective. The result of this process provided a clearer vision of the hermeneutic circle discussed in the previous chapter.

Throughout the coding process, I used the second journal to write down my thoughts about the coding process, and my interpretation of how the themes were beginning to emerge. A comparison of key themes and sub-themes determined the validity of the data findings. Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006) state the researcher must "carefully reading and re-reading the data. It is a form of pattern recognition within the data, where emerging themes become the categories for analysis" (p.4). This was achieved by reading and re-reading the data during the coding process, and by carefully re-examining the notes in my research journals.

Media Informing the Analysis

Another important component of the data analysis was to include the element of historicality, or placing the data within a historical context. Essential to hermeneutic phenomenology is identifying the cultural and historical context in which perspectives and ideas are formed (Laverty, 2003). This was achieved by drawing from the data historical benchmarks of events including homeless counts, homelessness action weeks, funding cuts, and other important events that may have informed the participant's perspective. Newspaper articles, ministry announcements, and other documents were examined during

data analysis to ensure that participants' themes were placed within the context of these important events for community grassroots committees.

The process employed to place participants within the context of significant historical events as portrayed by the media, was through developing a timeline. The timeline was developed during the literature review portion of this research and is composed of newspaper articles, press releases, and other media material that outline the activities of community grassroots committees that address homelessness in Prince George. The timeline was useful in identifying and contextualizing the exposure each research participant had to inform their historic perception of their committee.

In Chapter 4 of the thesis, the historical timeline is employed in the data analysis. It should be noted that the historical timeline is one component of the data analyses, and does not provide the complete picture of the personal perspectives of the research participants. For the purposes of this research, a participant's committee experience was examined to determine if there was a relationship between the amount of committee experience in years, and the responses made during interviews. This was achieved through identifying correlations between responses made during the interviews and the amount of committee experience of each participant. This process of finding relationships helped solidify the coding process by finding commonality among participant responses, and informed the findings of this research.

Each participant, depending on their personal and professional experience, would be exposed to the historical events and media coverage concerning their committee or homelessness in Prince George. The following is a brief summary of the committee experience of each research participant:

- Participant 1: 2 years

- Participant 2: 3 years

- Participant 3: 10 years

- Participant 4: 3 years

- Participant 5: 2 years

- Participant 6: 19 years

- Participant 7: 5 years

- Participant 8: 1.5 years

- Participant 9: 2 years

The broad range of committee experience meant that participants had different exposure to historical events informing their personal perspective. In Chapter 4, the reader will begin to see the picture unfolding about how participant experience may be constructing how they view the strengths and challenges of their committee, and how they address homelessness in Prince George.

Ethical Considerations

The nature of the research creates ethical considerations that need to be acknowledged and understood throughout the research process. Examining the internal strengths and challenges of community grassroots committees addressing homelessness in a community the size of Prince George may instigate or re-invigorate community divides, agency competition, or government resentment. The goal and intent of this thesis is to provide important insight and observations about the internal strengths and challenges of these groups, through the perspective of the members themselves. This could provide meaningful information that could re-enforce their sense of worth, or provide a framework

for continued reflection and improvement. My goal for this research was not to identify phenomenon, perspectives, and observations that could be harmful to the future work of these committees, rather, my hope was that it would begin a dialogue of how community grassroots committees can move forward to better the lives of the homeless people of Prince George.

A critical component of this research was the strict adherence to the principles of confidentiality. Rubin and Babbie (2008) state that confidentiality is when "a researcher is able to identify a given persons' responses but essentially promises not to do so publicly" (p.76). Confidentiality is different from anonymity whereby the researcher is unable to attribute responses to a particular person (Rubin & Babbie, 2008). Since I was a member of a community grassroots committee addressing homelessness in Prince George, I was concerned that anonymity was almost exclusively impossible, since this prior relationship would enable me, as a researcher, to attribute responses to particular participants. A critical feature was that this would create a researcher bias that would overshadow my analysis to my prior relationship with the participants. To overcome this challenge, it was critical that I journalled my thoughts and perspectives during the interview and data analysis, to have a better understanding of how and why I was coding and identifying key themes.

I encouraged participants to raise any concerns throughout the research process, to ensure they felt comfortable with their contribution to this research. To ensure confidentiality, I limited access to the collected data to myself, and my committee members. At all times the data was stored in a locked cabinet, with the transcripts separate from the consent forms, to ensure there would be no features that could identify a

participant. Information that is stored on my computer is password protected and no one has access to these electronic files. After the research is complete, I will destroy all files, both electronic and hard copy.

I learned a lot from the research process and the importance of a detailed methodology. Defining a suitable methodology to guide your research is a critical component to keep the researcher grounded. While there is a wealth of methodologies to choose from, I am comfortable with my choice of hermeneutic phenomenology. My belief that my own personal bias cannot be bracketed away is compatible within the hermeneutic phenomenological framework of qualitative research. It also provided a wealth of perspectives that calls on participants and the researcher to explore personal perspectives that begin to describe the phenomenon. Hermeneutic phenomenology also stresses the importance of personal reflection as a key component of the research process. For these reasons, I have employed this research methodology.

Chapter 4

Research Findings

Introduction

The following chapter will examine the findings of this research thesis derived from the nine interviews completed with the research participants. The goal of this research thesis was to identify the internal strengths and challenges of community grassroots committees that address homelessness in Prince George. This was achieved by using thematic analysis to derive a set of perspectives, thoughts, and themes from the participant's experience. Nine participants were interviewed from four different committees in Prince George that address homelessness. The demographic questions were limited, to allow a broad range of experience and knowledge to be shared during the interviews. The experience of the participants on these committees ranged from one and a half to nineteen years, and their roles and involvement differed from the leadership of the committee to an observing member.

Findings

As stated in the previous chapter, journaling grounded the research by documenting bias and the thought pattern of the researcher throughout the data analysis. Once the interviews were transcribed and participant checking was complete, data analysis began. The process of analysis soon began to yield themes that form the basis of the research findings. There were two primary themes; Strengths and Challenges, with a number of sub themes under each. The themes are as follows;

1. Strengths (Primary Theme): Leadership, Member Dedication, Information Sharing, Collaboration (Sub-Themes).

2. Challenges (Primary Theme): Time Constraints, Recruiting new members (Sub Themes).

Strengths

The strength themes were divided into four sub-themes: Leadership: Member Dedication, Information Sharing, and Collaboration.

Leadership

All participants agreed that leadership was an important component to the function of community grassroots committees that address homelessness. Participant tt01 summarized this point effectively by stating "she's (chair) not about the idea, she's about getting things done" (2010, p.3). Leadership was not a rigid term as described by the participants, and could mean multiple people including a committee coordinator, chair person, or sub-committee leader. Most participants described positive reflections of the leadership on their respective committee, including participant tt02 who, during this exchange, reflects on the leadership of their committee;

> Researcher (28-29) – "So what are the components of your grassroots committee that allow for these strengths to occur?"
> Participant (30-32) – "Now for sure I guess because we have a chair that is very well known in the community and works for (Identifying Name) and seems to really be organized" (2010, p.2).

Leadership was also defined in a less concrete fashion, with participants explaining that leadership was important because it kept the focus of the committee on accomplishing goals and objectives outlined by committee members. Some participants described leadership in terms of administrative capacity, as described by participant tt06 who stated having money to coordinate and facilitate committee activities is critical; "I think one of the things that really has helped (Identifying Name) is having at least a little bit of

administrative money umm to keep going and to keep organized because very often other grassroots organizations are all going off the sides of somebody's desk and that is where it tends to fall apart" (2010, p.5). Participant tt08 reinforces this point by stating when

> "there's somebody in charge of the meetings in charge of the place and putting out emails and making sure the minutes get taking and those kinds of things. I think those committees I think always do better that have some kind of resources attached to them or structure attached to them" (2010, p.4).
> The importance of funds targeted towards the administration of committee work

was brought up by participants in a variety of different transcripts including tt02, tt03, and tt06. This meant funding a committee coordinator to help with the administrative tasks and ensure that tasks were completed.

Since most participants identified leadership as a committee strength, it was difficult to draw historical implications from the data. It was also interesting to document that participants tt02, tt03, and tt06, with participant experience ranging from 2 to 19 years, would place similar emphasis on assigning administrative funds aside for committee leadership and coordination.

Member Dedication

Several participants agreed that the dedication of the members of the community grassroots committees is an internal strength. Committees often function on the efforts of a few hard working and dedicated people who want to make a difference in their community. Participant tt04 summarized the dedication of committee members in this exchange;

> Researcher (37-38) – "What are the internal strengths of community grassroots committees addressing homelessness in Prince George?"
> Participant (39-53) – "Dedication I think, of the participants. Absolutely phenomenal interest, dedication and concern. And they want to come to some solutions. So, I think generally that the people involved are solution oriented and they will do whatever they can to achieve a positive result" (2010, p.2).

Participants really valued the efforts made by their fellow members and gave high

praise for those who gave considerable time and energy to further the cause of the

homeless of Prince George. Participant tt04 shared that "the internal strengths like with

any organization like (inaudible) has a lot to do with the people around the table" (2010,

p.3). People are valued in community grassroots committees and their contribution is

recognized through the reflections of this thesis in almost all interview transcripts. This

indicates a strong internal strength that community grassroots committees addressing

homelessness in Prince George are serving clients because they know the importance of

their work and the urgency it represents.

Participant tt09 conceptualizes how committee members are doing more than

simply sitting on a committee but are serving a greater good for the entire community;

> when you're sitting with a group of people from all different agencies and all
> different organizations in Prince George everybody is there for the same reason and
> so because of that and they have the same passion to end homelessness, to work
> with the homeless and so because of that passion because of that same goal people
> tend to give whatever they can. Whether its time, whether its money, whether its
> expertise, whatever it is, people tend to work together better because of the passion
> that they have. And things get done. That would have to be the biggest strength
> (2010, p.2).

This comment underlines a common theme among participants that members of

these committees are passionate advocates for the homeless of Prince George, representing

a significant internal strength. It also implies that members from all experience levels feel a

collective purpose and want to contribute to the activities and goals of the committee.

Information Sharing

The third sub-theme identified was information sharing among members of

community grassroots committees addressing homelessness. Information sharing could

hold a variety of different meanings, but for the purpose of this research, the inclusion

criteria for this sub-theme were statements about information sharing and learning about other community agencies and how this benefits the committee and community of Prince George. Participant tt03 discusses the importance of information sharing among committee members in this passage; "I feel that over the years that the internal strengths were that we all got to know each agency better through people's participation" (2010, p1.). In addition, participant tt08 explains the concept further by stating;

> "I think some of the strength personally is that I get from being there is hearing what other agencies are doing. A lot of times these programs are up and running and you've heard about them but to actually say; how does that work?" (2010, p.1).

Participants valued the opportunity to discuss programs and services that their individual social service agency offers to the homeless people of Prince George. Many participants felt that being part of a community grassroots committee that addresses homelessness is important because it allowed the opportunity to learn more about their community and how to serve their clients better.

Collaboration

Participants identified collaboration as an important internal strength. Collaboration within the context of this research meant the integrated approach to committee work. Through collaboration, committees achieved better services for the homeless people of Prince George. Participant tt07 summarizes her perspective about how collaboration has improved the access to services for the homeless people of Prince George:

> Were taking this much more integrated approach ... it's almost like people are holding hands right across the... or there's a connectiveness between the islands.. and now there's bridges right? Between the islands and it's not about people having to sort of swim their way across or whatever... People are actually now networking folks through the network of services and helping them get their needs met in a more effective way and then when we have people in the system that present risks

to some of the other people we are serving or those kinds of things there's some mechanisms right? (2010, p.5).

Collaboration is identified by many participants as critical to the proper function and effectiveness of any committee and participant tt08 implies that collaboration is not always possible or practiced in community grassroots committees: "I think that's one thing that isn't done at every table that is a strength at that table and it's really inclusional... it includes people when you do that" (2010, p.5).

Allowing all committee members to share and contribute was an important element that contributed to this internal strength. Participants stated that collaboration was possible because of the open format of the committee structures and how this allowed the engagement of members. Committee members felt valued and their work would be appreciated for the contribution to the betterment of the community.

Challenges

All participants identified challenges for the community grassroots committee that address homelessness in Prince George, and this theme has been divided into two sub-themes, time constraints and the recruitment of new members. While most participants' perspective was that the internal strengths outweighed the challenges faced by their committees, it should be noted that participant tt01 and tt05 believed that there were only challenges faced by these committees and limited strengths. The following dialogue is from the interview transcript from participant tt01;

> Researcher (8-9) – "Ok, so what are the internal strengths of this community grassroots committee addressing homelessness in Prince George?"
> Participant (10-13) – "You know, umm, if there is a strength to it, I don't see it. I have been attending these meetings and I feel very frustrated because first I felt that I have to sit down and absorb and find out what is actually going on but I felt that there is a lot of talk and not much action" (2010, p.1).

This sense of frustration is shared by participant tt05 in this section of her interview;

> Umm, I actually have to be quite honest, I'm not impressed with this committee. And I think one of the things that came out the most, umm, was it the last meeting?, when somebody was questioned about what the goals and objectives of (Identifying Name) were and they said that we couldn't have goals, it was more or less that we couldn't have goals and objectives because so much of the work is based on funding and projects and funding can be pulled so how can we have goals and objectives when so much is resting on that. That quite startled me (2010, p.1).

It should be noted that participants' tt01 and tt05, after a follow-up question probing any internal strength, identified collaboration and information sharing among committee members as a positive strength. Historical implications of their perspective created a dilemma for the data analysis. While both participants' tt01 and tt05 had 2 years experience, possibly implying a common theme, others with the same committee experience did not share their perspective. While there are a number of possible explanations that could be inferred from participant tt01 and tt05's comments, it would require another thesis to explore themes that may address the concerns and challenges raised by theses participants. What is evident again though, is that historical committee experience does not seem to have a significant impact on the participant responses.

Time Constraints

Many of the participants identified time constraints brought on by both internal and external factors that create challenges for the effectiveness of community grassroots committees. Time constraints on funding proposals, facilitation of homelessness activities and events, and the completion of projects like homeless counts were all examples brought forward by participants. Participants also discussed how many committee members were very busy and had difficulty devoting enough time to completing committee work. Participant tt04 describes a committee whose members are spread thin; "I think is that

people get spread too thin. And people... lives are much busier now" (2010, p.5). This

theme is supplemented by participant tt07 who goes further by describing a committee

being stretched to capacity by stating:

> We aren't quite as organized as we should be in advance of due dates and deadlines
> and we find ourselves scrambling a lot at the last minute. And some of that is just
> the nature of the work and people being busy, so I think some of it is habitual...
> within the group and it has to do with people being used to responding quickly in
> crisis mode and so I think that has been a challenge (2010, p.10).

Other participants share the view that committee members are "stretched too thin"

and are "working off the side of their desks" when describing work that is being conducted

by their committees. This could be a reflection of both internal and external factors that

shape the committee dynamics that prevent more methodical and long term strategic

planning. Participant tt07 re-enforces this point when stating "the acuity level of the work,

it just means people are stretched and it's hard for them to be as focused and as you know,

pro-active and methodical maybe as the work could benefit from being" (2010, p.10). This

clearly indicates that time constraints and the increasing level of work faced by committees

can have an overwhelming effect that causes lapses in methodical planning. But most

participants agree that because of the dedication of members of the committee, this

challenge can be overcome.

Recruiting New Members

Another theme that emerged from the data analysis was the struggle to recruit new

members. Most participants expressed frustration about the inability to bring in new

people to the committee to help lift some of the work burden presented by time constraints

and the growing need of the homeless people of Prince George. Participants expressed that

recruiting new members would help re-energize current committee members, bring new

ideas and help shape the future direction of the committee. Some of the following

comments document how participants viewed the challenge of recruiting new members:

> Participant tt04 states; "I think that we have a difficult time attracting new blood in the group... organization and so after a while people get more complacent.. May have lost a bit of enthusiasm that sort of thing so... I think that's a challenge."
> Participant tt07 continues with the theme with; "what you need... is you need new people, new ideas, new approaches, and I think we see very long term people sitting at the (Identifying Name) table that have been there a very long time.. I think that sometimes it would be helpful for them if there was some fresh blood, if some of them felt like they could take a break" (2010, p.6).

Participant tt07 also described some of the barriers to participation and attracting

new members to their committee. Participant tt07 stated that "some times it may be

difficult for lesser involved or outsider organizations to find their way into the place at the

table where they feel that they're equal recipients of these resources" (2010, p.12). These

comments must be taken within the context of a previous theme, member dedication.

While most participants identify recruiting new members as a challenge to the effectiveness

of their committee, most still outline the real strength and value of the current committee

membership. It seems almost paradoxical that these two themes would be discussed by

most participants, but it seems to underline the overall strength that, although most

community grassroots committees that address homelessness in Prince George face time

constraints, and a limited membership base, they are effective in overcoming these

challenges by relying on the passion and competence of their committee members.

Historical implications of how participants prioritized member recruitment were not

evident. Participant tt04 with 3 years experience viewed attracting new members with the

same emphasis as participant tt07 with 5 years experience. Participant responses did not

show a stronger emphasis of recruiting new members for the committee among more

experienced participants. What mattered to participants with all experience levels, was

attracting new people to the committee to ensure the work was shared more equitably among the members.

Theme Worth Further Review

While this theme is not within the scope of this particular research thesis, many participants outlined a lack of government funding as a significant challenge for community grassroots committees that address homelessness in Prince George. The focus of this research was to identify the internal strengths and challenges of committees, and not discuss external factors. While external factors are an important component of community grassroots committees, it would require further research. Participant tt09 states "the biggest challenge is the lack of funding. That seems to be what it always comes back to" (2010, p.4), with the majority of the participants echoing this externalized frustration. Others, including participant tt02, take the theme further by stating "better funding from (Identifying Name) and longer term planning, rather than year to year thing..." (2010, p.4), would help community grassroots committees serve the homeless people of Prince George. The topic of external factors that negatively affect the operation of community grassroots committees addressing homelessness in Prince George deserves further analysis in another research thesis.

Discussion

Central to a hermeneutic phenomenological methodology is defining the historicality, or historical and cultural context in which the phenomenon is experienced (Laverty, 2003). We all interpret the world within the context of experiences, values, and beliefs. During the course of this research, newspaper articles, press releases, and other supporting documents were collected to aid in defining historical contexts in which

participant responses were made. Nine participants were interviewed during this research, with a range of committee experience and involvement. This presents a diversified range of experience and perspectives that have added to the wealth of the research findings.

Thematic analysis was used during the data analysis of this research. While thematic analysis is a method of discovering themes that are important to the description of a phenomenon (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006), it was important to add the component of historicality into the analysis of the interview transcripts. This was achieved by developing a time line of significant events including homeless counts, homelessness action weeks, funding changes, and other important occurrences, from the texts found during the literature review. The hope for this process was to determine the impact it would have on the responses, from new committee members, to the more experienced member.

Two main themes emerged during thematic analysis, with corresponding sub themes. Strengths of community grassroots committees that address homelessness, was the first main emergent theme during data analysis. During my journaling process, I outlined my preliminary thoughts and perspectives before the participant interviews began. In my first journal I wrote in a passage:

> My initial thoughts going into the first interview are that participants will be
> primarily positive. Working with a (name removed) has provided me with a
> positive light of the effective work they do for the homeless of our community and
> the dedication of those involved with (name removed) (Grant, 2010, p.1).

Over the course of the participant interviews, journaling provided the framework to begin exploring the development of the themes that emerged from the interviews. Journaling also documented reactions I had as a researcher to the perspectives that were challenging to me or broke with my perception of the phenomenon. Leadership within

community grassroots committees addressing homelessness was identified as an internal strength by most participants. Strong reactions from participants to the qualities of leaders on their committee surprised me as was evident in this journal passage:

> I am continuously surprised by how participants are saying that the chair or coordinators are really pivotal to the success of the committee. I had a preconceived notion that leadership would be a point of criticism among participants because my experience on (name removed) suggested that a turn over in the chair position would negatively impact participant's notion of leadership. I find it very interesting to learn that a lot of participants have a very positive outlook on the leadership and coordination of their committee (Grant, 2010, p.3).

Participants also identified the importance of provided resources to the administration of the committee. Having money to support the existence of coordination and leadership within the committee structure was seen as a priority, to ensure the smooth operation of community grassroots committees. Participants with a variety of committee experience (one and a half to nineteen years) supported the role of leadership, and there seems to be no temporal association between this theme and informed historic knowledge of the quality of leadership. I had a pre-understanding of the importance of administration funding reflected in this journal passage:

> Money, money, money. This always seems to be the sticking point for all committees in their efforts to provide services. While seemingly controversial during (name removed) meetings, I think it is interesting that participants are identifying the virtues of money for administrative purposes. It will be interesting to see how many more support this notion (Grant, 2010, p.3).

Member dedication was discussed by most participants as an internal strength during the research. This includes the passion and commitment of committee members to ensure that services to the homeless people of Prince George improve. My bias regarding this strength was strongly entrenched because of my participation in a community grassroots committee which I discuss in this journal entry:

A lot of participants are identifying the strength and dedication of the membership. My point of view compliments this perspective. Most participants outline the dedication and the huge amount of work that people are putting in to make committees work. Participant tt09 provides a passionate response that surprises me. I am amazed by the emotional response that gives me pause about the impact of the work committee members are doing (Grant, 2010, p.4).

Participants identified how committee members consistently place the interest of the community above their individual agency or employer's interest. This includes rising above traditional community divides and competitiveness that is a hallmark of most communities. In my preliminary journal entries composed before I began participant interviews, I discussed how I thought competition would take on a dominant role in the development of themes:

I think that most participants will identify community or inter-agency competition for funds, money, resources, etc. My experience dictates the belief that agencies are constantly under the veil of competitiveness. The continued government cut backs have created this "winner takes all" atmosphere that is destructive for the community as a whole (Grant, 2010, p.4).

While competitiveness was noted, it didn't dominate the discussion. This was one of the big surprises of the research and was a direct challenge to my pre-understanding of the committee dynamic of Prince George. Participants were encouraged by how committee members worked together on a variety of different projects and worked collaboratively to improve services and supports. It was identified by many participants that committee members were often very busy and went above and beyond to ensure that committee goals and activities were completed to the best of their ability.

Collaboration and information sharing were also identified as internal strengths of community grassroots committees addressing homelessness in Prince George. Working together and sharing information about individual agencies, services they offer, and what is going on generally in the community was valued by all research participants. For example,

participant tt01 felt that the real benefit she got from attending committee meetings was listening to other people talk about what was going on in their agencies. She felt learning from others and gaining knowledge about community services offered to the homeless, was the real benefit of these committees.

Collaboration for participants was more than learning and sharing information, it was about setting aside perceived historic conflicts and working towards better services for the homeless people of Prince George. Historic conflicts and competitiveness were discussed by participants with more committee experience (five to nineteen years) and seemed to represent a temporal association. These participants discussed how their committees were able to overcome these challenges and work well with community agencies in an open forum.

The second major theme was challenges faced by community grassroots committees that address homelessness in Prince George. My perspective at the beginning of the research suggested that participants would identify more challenges than successes:

> I have the assumption that participants will be positive about the successes of their community grassroots committee. However, I think that many challenges will be identified because often it is easy to list off the many struggles over-extended committees and their members face in their day to day operations (Grant, 2010, p.2).

Most participants however, did not focus on the challenges faced by their committees. As stated above, challenges were categorized into two sub-themes; time constraints and recruiting new members. Participants discussed the impact that time constraints had on the effectiveness of committee functions and how members were often stretched too thin. For example, most participants expressed concern over how committee members were often scrambling to meet funding deadlines and preparing for events. Most

committee members, with a broad range of experience identified time constraints as a challenge, so there doesn't seem to be a temporal association between the two variables.

Recruiting new members was the final sub theme identified during this research. Participants were concerned about the availability of "new blood" or new members to assume leadership roles and to lessen the burden of the work. For example, participants expressed concern that a devoted few were assuming most of the work, and the inability to recruit new members restricted the possibility of developing new ideas and future committee directions. There seemed to be a temporal association, as more experienced members identified recruiting new members as a significant challenge their community grassroots committee faced.

An exciting component in research is discovering new perspectives that challenge pre-existing understanding of phenomenon. Over the course of this research, I had my pre-understanding challenged about community grassroots committees that address homelessness in Prince George. Participants surprised me with their responses, including a more positive perspective that challenged my perception that the interviews would focus primarily on challenges faced by committees. I learned a great deal from the participants and how their perspectives shaped a world view that valued the incredible work of committees and their members. I also learned of the value of journaling in grounding my pre-understandings to provide a narrative of how my perspective evolved from the beginning of the research to the end. Critical to hermeneutic phenomenology is the development of mutual understanding of phenomenon known as the hermeneutic circle (Laverty, 2003). I believe that disclosure of my bias at the beginning of the research, and carefully journaling my progression, shaped the thesis into solid hermeneutic research.

Media Informing Participant Perspectives

As discussed in Chapter 3, this research was concerned about the historical context of participant's perspectives. This was achieved through a review of relevant media that chronicles committee activities, and also through finding relationships between participant responses and their committee experience. Prince George has a variety of media outlets that report local news, both in print and online. The impact of historical committee experience was not a significant determinant in the data analysis. Most committee members, no matter their committee experience, identified almost universal themes that addressed the strengths and challenges of their committees. There are a number of possible explanations for this, but generally it points to a common satisfaction of the direction and activities of participants' committees.

Further research is required to uncover the implications of the historical and cultural understanding of participants and their perspective of community grassroots committees. While this research did not find a correlation between significant committee events and their interview responses, another study could explore further into how personal experience affects worldviews and perspectives on the function and role of community grassroots committees.

Throughout the data analysis and research journaling, participants gave a positive impression about the impact and role their committee was having in their community. Participant responses were both positive, but also cognizant of the challenges they faced as a committee. However, it wasn't clear how participants differed from their perspectives based on historical understanding, or the amount of committee experience.

Limitations

This research is a small contribution to exploration of community grassroots committees that address homelessness in Prince George. Further research is needed to ensure that the important work of these committees is documented and explored. As discussed in the literature review chapter of this thesis, there is a limited base of academic documents that explore the structure, composition, and development about community grassroots committees that address homelessness. There are a number of possible explanations including; the acuity of work does not allow these grassroots committees to develop academic work, preferring to use more convenient mediums like newspapers and websites, etc. What is evident from the research is that there is a role for academics to participate and mentor community grassroots committees to provide insight and support. The literature review uncovered a body of research and documents that highlight the commitment and passion of people around the world who advocate for the homeless of their communities. The participants of this research reflected the same passion in their work advocating for the homeless of Prince George.

Interviewing nine members of community grassroots committees that address homelessness in Prince George provided important insight into the internal strengths and challenges these committees face when providing services to the homeless people of their community. The interviews explored the efforts of compassionate people that want to make an impact in their community. What is important to explore in further research is whether or not a larger sample size would provide a more complete picture of the internal strengths and challenges of these committees. Sample size is important in the

understanding of transferability, and a larger sample size may provide a clearer picture of the phenomenon.

This thesis used a simple random sample, drawing from a variety of different committees that address homelessness, and from members with a broad range of experiences and perspectives. This sampling strategy was meant to be inclusional to extract perspectives and thoughts from members who were both new to their committee and also those with more experience. Further studies may want to employ other sampling methods, including placing criterion on participation. This could provide a data set of more experienced participants, instead of allowing those with only a few years of committee experience. Perhaps limiting the participant sample to only those with extensive sub-committee experience would create richer data? These questions warrant further exploration for a future researcher.

As stated during the introduction of this research, I am a member of a community grassroots committee that addresses homelessness in Prince George. As a result, there were a number of ethical considerations that needed to be addressed before I could move forward with this research. The first consideration was how I would address my internalized bias in a way that wouldn't effect the overall conclusions and findings of this research? This led to the decision to employ a hermeneutic phenomenology methodology, which allows the bias of the researcher to be incorporated into the data analysis. It was also important during the interview process, that I discussed my choice of methodology with the participants during the pre-interview. This allowed the interview to become grounded and informed the participant further about the intent of this research. Further studies could employ a methodology that uses the principles of "bracketing" or setting

aside personal biases to provide an objective view of a phenomenon. This could provide a less subjective thesis that would remove the research from the interpretation and data analysis process.

All research studies have limitations, and the goal of research is to make small steps and gains for future exploration. This thesis represents a small step towards understanding the phenomenon of internal strengths and challenges of community grassroots committees that address homelessness. The challenge will be for future researchers to evaluate and explore the conclusions drawn from this thesis and determine how to move forward with a study in the future.

Chapter 5

Summary and Recommendations

This research has been a positive experience and has fortified my perspective that

community grassroots committees that address homelessness in Prince George are effective

and essential to the fabric of the community. There were a number of things that surprised

me during this research including; the limited literature that explores this topic area, and

the responses from a few participants that felt there were no internal strengths of their

committee. Overall, the majority of participants felt that the internal strengths of

community grassroots committees that address homelessness in Prince George far out

weighed the challenges. Many participants identified that the passion and dedication of

committee members, strong leadership, and the collaboration and information sharing were

the reasons why these committees consistently perform significant work with limited time

and resources.

The outcomes and findings of this research suggest that there is a wealth of

passionate people who want to address homelessness in Prince George in a meaningful

way. They face challenges including time restrictions to complete work and projects, and

the inability to attract new members to help lift the burden of committee work. The

perspectives of the participants in this research suggest that the outcomes are not always

perfect, but because of the passion and dedication of a small group of community members,

services are provided to the homeless people of Prince George.

Recommendations

The first recommendation arising from this research is that strong leadership is

essential to the effective operation of community grassroots committees that address

homelessness in Prince George. Most participants identified their committees' leadership as an internal strength, and it is evident that someone is needed to move committee work forward and guide the development of these committees. Without effective leadership, and the administrative funds to support them, community grassroots committees can be made ineffective because most members of these committees are "working from the side of their desks."

The second recommendation is that community grassroots committees should continue to work with academics and students to help develop the literature that supports innovation and documents the incredible work they do to serve the homeless people of Prince George. Committees are currently acquiring practicum students from the UNBC School of Social Work, and this process should continue and grow. Students are an incredible resource to help with the planning and facilitation of community grassroots committee events. They also add "new blood" and a different perspective on how to improve the overall operation of the committee.

The goal of this research was to explore the internal strengths and challenges of community grassroots committees that address homelessness in Prince George. The topic was narrow in scope to reflect my keen interest in committees that provide a significant service to the homeless people of Prince George. Community grassroots committees often do not have the opportunity to be introspective and conduct evaluations of their strengths and the challenges they face and must address. This is indicative of the overwhelming work they need to achieve, with an increasingly small base of funding. My hope for this research was to allow these committees to reflect on the progress they have made and to evaluate the work that still needs to be done.

I learned a great deal from the research process, both about myself and the subject area of community grassroots committees that address homelessness in Prince George. Research is time consuming, difficult, and requires a large degree of patience. Throughout the process, my research journal reveals my anxiety to properly execute this thesis research. Journaling was critical to keeping my composure as a researcher, and finding the proper way forward by chronicling the process. I also learned a great deal more about community grassroots committees from the research participants who openly shared their stories and lived experiences. For that I am grateful. This thesis was provided with rich detail from talented members of our community, and has added value to this research.

Implications for Social Work Practice

Turner (2002) provides 12 tenets of what is Canadian social work practice including pragmatism which is described as; "flowing from the challenges of size, diversity, and geography. There is a unique quality of social work practice that makes it highly pragmatic and open to new ideas" (p.5). Community grassroots committees in Prince George that address homelessness are the embodiment of this reality. They face enormous challenges that require pragmatic solutions that are cost effective and are accomplishable. Social work practitioners who seek to work within the field of homelessness or community grassroots committees must have a unique set of skills that effectively address the needs of the clients they serve. These skills should include:

- Passion and Commitment: Participants of this research outline the passion and commitment of their members as critical strength. Social workers across the country are required to work above and beyond to ensure that their client's needs are met.

- Leadership: Social workers have a prominent role to play in establishing and facilitating community grassroots committees because of the special knowledge and skill sets they have (Turner, 2002).

- Practical world view: Social workers need to employ skills that outline their practical world view and what is accomplishable for their clients and their community. Practitioners in the field often are faced with limited resources, over worked volunteers, and unrealistic timeframes that put additional stress on social workers. Faced with these realities continuously, social workers have adaptability skills that can be utilized to strengthen and mobilize resources for grassroots committees that want to address homelessness.

This research has implications for social workers to address social issues faced by our community with innovative and dynamic methods that seek positive outcomes. Turner (2002) outlines the challenge for all social workers stating:

> "the current fiscal reality, combined with our ethical obligation to carry out our work for the benefit of our clients, forces social workers across the country to try new and innovative ways of helping and to evaluate the results of these efforts" (p.587).

This research represents an overview of the innovative practices of people working in Prince George, and will hopefully act as the beginning of a reflective exercise that will improve the function and operation of community grassroots committees that address homelessness.

Conclusion

The lasting impression of researching a topic focusing on community grassroots committees addressing homelessness in Prince George is the determination and courage of northern communities in BC. Homelessness is a complex issue, that requires passionate

advocates that work tirelessly to ensure services and supports reach the most vulnerable and marginalized of our communities. Working with and learning from these incredible people has been a critical exercise in developing social work practice principles that will help me throughout my career.

Further research in this area is still needed to provide a more comprehensive examination of how internal strengths can be built upon, and how committees can move forward from the challenges they face. Other studies could also include an examination of the external factors that contribute to the challenges of providing services to the homeless of Prince George. This thesis is a step forward to a greater understanding and will begin a discussion on this important topic for the community of Prince George.

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Appendix A

Information Letter

Researcher: Brandon Grant

Email: bgrant@unbc.ca

Thesis Supervisor: Joanna Pierce, MSW, RSW, Assistant Professor, School of Social Work

Thesis Title: The Internal Strengths and Challenges of Community Grassroots Committees

Addressing Homelessness in Prince George

Dear Participant,

I, Brandon Grant, invite you to participate in a research study entitled *The Internal*

Strengths and Challenges of Community Grassroots Committees Addressing Homelessness

in Prince George. The research is being conducted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of Master of Social Work from the University of Northern British Columbia.

Purpose and Goals of Research: The purpose of my research will be to explore the internal strengths and challenges of community grassroots committees addressing homelessness in Prince George. The goal of this research is to provide these committees information that will build on a developing body of work that reflectively seeks to improve the services and supports for the homeless people of Prince George.

Why you were chosen: You were chosen as a potential participant for this research project because you are a member of a community grassroots committee that addresses homelessness in Prince George.

What you will be asked to do: You will be one of (at least) 8 grassroots committee members to participate in an interview. You will be asked to answer 12 questions that I have carefully developed. You are encouraged to discuss and share your experiences as openly as possible.

Individuals that will have access to your responses: Myself (researcher), Professor Joanna Pierce (thesis supervisor), Professor Glen Schmidt (internal committee members), Professor Kerry Pateman (external committee member).

Voluntary nature of participation: Participation in the research is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw at anytime without consequence. Once a request to withdraw comes forward, the researcher will remove all information connected to the participant from the research study.

The potential benefits and risks: I believe that participation in this research project will help to enhance the discussion and understanding of the grassroots committees that seek sustainable and meaningful solutions to the homelessness problem in our community. By adding your voice to this research project, you are helping enhance the capacity of grassroots committees in your community to build on the thoughts and recommendations you make during the interview process. A potential risk may be that during the interview process, you may feel that your comments may negatively affect the community grassroots committee you represent. All measures and controls to ensure anonymity and confidentiality will be upheld to ensure the integrity of the research and the respect for the participant. At any time though, the participant may withdraw from the research process.

How anonymity will be maintained: The anonymity of the participants will be maintained by assigning numbers to interviews which will be the only identifiable characteristic of the data. Letters of consent and transcribed data will be stored separately to ensure the anonymity of participants.

How confidentiality will be maintained: Confidentiality will be maintained through restricting the content of the interview data to the researcher and the thesis committee. A color coded system will also be employed to ensure that participants' names are not used during the data analysis, so that the content is separated from the participant.

How the information will be stored, for how long and how it will be destroyed: The data and the audio tapes will be kept in a safe locked cabinet in the thesis supervisor's office at UNBC until the completion of the research. The locked cabinet will only be accessible by the researcher and his thesis committee members. After six months all transcripts, any correspondence between the researcher and the interviewees as well as the audio tapes will be destroyed. The researcher will ensure that destroying of the research material will be carried out by a recognized and bonded professional agency that shreds private information and appropriately disposes audio tapes.

How to get a copy of the research: Participants that want to receive a final copy of this research can contact the researcher approximately six months after the date of the interview.

Contact person: Any questions about this project should be directed to me using the contact information provided above.

Complaints about the project: Any complaint that may arise about the project should be directed to the office of Research (reb@unbc.ca or 250 960 5650)

Appendix B
Consent to Participate

I------------------------------------, agree to participate in the outlined research project. I understand that my name will not be revealed. Upon completion of the recorded interview, the data will be analyzed and all tapes destroyed. I understand that the goal of this research is to explore the internal strengths and challenges that community grassroots committees addressing homelessness in Prince George, BC experience. I also understand that I may choose to end my participation at any time.

Signed by, --------------------------------- (participant)

Phone #, ----------------------------

Researcher, ----------------------------

Date: -----------------------------------

This research is under the supervision of Joanna Pierce, professor in the Social Work Program at the University of Northern British Columbia. Phone # 250 960 6521

If you have any further questions regarding this research please direct your question to the Vice President of Research, University of Northern British Columbia, 250 960 5820

Appendix C

Interview Questions

1. How long have you been a member of your community grassroots committees addressing homelessness in Prince George?

2. What was your role on this committee?

3. What are the internal strengths of community grassroots committees addressing homelessness in Prince George?

4. How do these strengths improve the quality of services provided to homeless people in Prince George?

5. What are the components of your grassroots committee that allow these strengths to occur?

6. How are these strengths utilized to meet the goals and objectives?

7. Does your grassroots committee face challenges? (If no, proceed to question 10)

8. What do you believe are the components that create these challenges?

9. How does your grassroots committee overcome these challenges?

10. What would need to change for these challenges to be overcome?

11. During your time as a committee member, have there been more strengths or challenges?

12. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your community grassroots committee that addresses homelessness in Prince George?

Appendix D

UNBC graduate student seeks research participants who are willing to be interviewed.

Are you a member of a community grassroots committee that addresses homelessness in Prince George?

The purpose of the students' research will be to explore the internal strengths and challenges of community grassroots committees addressing homelessness in Prince George. The goal of this research is to provide these committees information that will build on a developing body of work that reflectively seeks to improve the services and supports for the homeless people of Prince George.

What do you have to do?
Contact the student researcher either by email or phone using the contact information provided below to arrange an interview.

How much time will it take?
Each interview will take about approximately 45-60 minutes

Where will the interview take place?
The interview will take place at a location in the community. This location will be decided on by the participant and the researcher.

Information shared for the purpose of this study will be kept confidential and the research participant is able to withdraw at any time.

Contact Brandon Grant at 250-617-2585 or bgrant@unbc.ca

Appendix E

UNBC *UNIVERSITY OF*
NORTHERN BRITISH COLUMBIA   **RESEARCH ETHICS BOARD**

> *APPLICANTS ARE REMINDED THAT RESEARCH WITH HUMAN*
> *SUBJECTS SHOULD NOT BE UNDERTAKEN*
> *PRIOR TO APPROVAL BY THE RESEARCH ETHICS BOARD.*

APPROVAL FORM

Please check [X] one of the following options before completing the rest of the application.

[ ]   This is the protocol statement of a routine <u>undergraduate class</u> project that is usually employed in your class. Please submit 8 copies to the Office of Research for full review by the Research Ethics Board (REB).

[x]   This is a <u>research project</u> and a full Research Ethics Board review is requested. Please submit 8 copies to the Office of Research.

[ ]   This is a <u>joint research project</u> involving the <u>Northern Health Authority</u>
  Please complete the NHA Supplement. Submit 8 copies to the Office   of
Research and 1 copy to the Northern Health Research Review
  Committee.

1. **Researchers Name & Signature**	Brandon Grant		
2. **Complete Address**	2920 Wildwood Crescent Prince George, British Columbia V2K 3J3		
3. **Phone No.**	250-962-0600	**Email**	bgrant@unbc.ca

4. Supervisor's Name & Signature (if Researcher is a student)

Name & Position (Print)	Joanna Pierce- Assistant Professor, School of Social Work piercej@unbc.ca 250-960-6521
Signature	

5. Program

Master of Social Work

6. Title of Project

The Internal Strengths and Challenges of Community Grassroots Committees Addressing

Homelessness in Prince George.

7. Type of Project

[ ] Class Project   (Class projects are normally reviewed by professors after a protocol
has been reviewed by the Research Ethics Board).

[x] Thesis

[ ] Faculty Research

8. Source of Funding (if any)

N/A

9. Is this project a replication of an earlier project or protocol that received ethics approval?

[ ] Yes   (Attach copy of the Certificate or letter and submit to the REB. Please
clarify (on a separate sheet) if there are any changes being made to the previously
approved proposal or if the proposals are identical).

[x] No   (Go to Question 10)

10. Purpose of Research

> The purpose of my research will be to explore the internal strengths and challenges of community grassroots committees addressing homelessness in Prince George.

11. Project Dates:

Expected Start Date	March, 2010
Expected Completion Date	December, 2010

12. Does this project require any physically invasive procedures (e.g. blood tests), potentially harmful physical regimes (e.g. special dieting) or potentially harmful psychological or social experiments (e.g. illusory perception tests)?

[ ] Yes

[x] No

13. Summary of Methods: In the text box below give us a brief summary. Sufficient information must be given to assess the degree of risk to participants.

> This study will use phenomenological research design in an effort to describe the common experiences members of community grassroots committees addressing homelessness in Prince George. Welman and Kruger (1999) describe phenomenology as "concerned with understanding social and psychological phenomena from the perspectives of people involved." For the purpose of this research, this means members of these committees reflecting on their observed personal realities of the strengths and challenges of their committee.
>
> The researcher will use thematic analysis which Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006) describe as "a search for themes that emerge as being important to the description of the phenomenon" (p.3), as the data analysis method.
>
> Data Collection methods;
>
> - The method of data collection will be face to face interviews when possible, telephone interviews if necessary.
> - The research will seek to interview 8-10 participants from community grassroots committees addressing homelessness in Prince George.
> - The researcher will send letters of consent to the participants (See Appendix C) and the research information letter (See Appendix B) that outline the research goals and objectives to the targeted grassroots committees.
> - The researcher will re-enforce that the research is voluntary and that participants may withdraw at any time.
> - The interview will use semi-structured, open ended questions to allow individualized and personal answers reflective of the participants' experience. It is

expected but not required that the interviews will take place over a period of 45-60 minutes.
- The names of the interviewees will be kept confidential using a coded system.
- All data will be kept in a safe locked cabinet in the thesis supervisor's office at UNBC which will only be accessible by the researcher and his thesis committee, until the research is complete. The letter of consent and transcribed data will be stored separately to ensure the anonymity of the participants. After six months, the transcripts of the participant interviews will be destroyed through a recognized and bonded agency that shreds private information.

14. Please append a complete copy of the research project proposal, including any interview protocols or questionnaires.

Attachments:
[x] Research Project Proposal
[x] Interview Protocols
[ ] Questionnaires

15. How will participants be recruited? In the text box below give us a brief summary.

The researcher will recruit participants by distributing posters to community agencies that traditionally address homelessness in Prince George. For the purposes of this research, the goal is to obtain 8-10 research participants, composed of members from a variety of community grassroots committees addressing homelessness in Prince George. Before participating in the research and data collection, the researcher will provide a copy of the research information, consent form and the interview guide (see Appendix B, C) and cover any questions or concerns the participants may have before proceeding. At all times, the researcher will re-enforce that participation is voluntary and that participants can withdraw at any time. Once a request to withdraw comes forward, the researcher will remove all information connected to the participant from the research study.

16. Will participants be competent to give consent?

[x] **Yes**   (Go to Question 17)

[ ] **No** (e.g. Children and cognitively impaired people.) How will the issue of consent be addressed? In the text box below give us a brief summary.

```
[                                                                    ]
```

17. Will participants be compensated?

[ ] **Yes** How?

[x] **No** (Go to Question 18)
In the text box below give us a brief summary.

```
[                                                                    ]
```

18. Will consent be obtained from each participant either in writing or recorded?

[x] **Yes** Please attach a copy of the Consent Form or the questions/statements to be recorded. Each participant must receive one copy of the signed consent form at the time of signing.

[ ] **No** Please attach information which will be provided to participants and/or participant communities.

Note: Checklist of items to be addressed in your Information Sheet or Consent Form is provided at the end of this Approval Form.

19. Does the project involve any deception?

[ ] **Yes** Justify the use of deception and indicate how disclosure finally will be addressed.

[x] **No** (Go to Question 20)

20. What is your plan for feedback to participants? How do you propose to distribute results to participants?

```
Participants and the community grassroots committees they represent will be given copies
of the final thesis research upon request.
```

21. Will the research participants be from an institutional population; e.g. company, agency, schools, colleges, universities, hospitals, prisons, etc.

    [ ]   **Yes**   (Go to Question 22)

    [X]   **No**   (Go to Question 23)

22. If the answer to Question 21 is yes, attach a letter of consent for access from the institution: e.g. company, agency, schools, colleges, universities, hospitals, prisons etc.

    [ ]   Letter(s) of Consent attached

23. Will the research participants be participating as representatives of, or on behalf of, an Aboriginal group?

    [ ]   Yes   Attach letter of consent from appropriate authority, e.g. Band Council, etc.

    [X]   No   Go to Question 24)

24. Does this project require any other ethical approval, e.g. Northern Health Authority (Attach Schedule D), other Hospital, First Nations Band, etc.? If so, please ensure that all guidelines are followed.

[ ]   **Yes**   Please specify the agency ___and attach letter of consent/ethical approval from the appropriate authority.

[x]   No

Research Ethics Board – REQUIRED ESSENTIAL 'CHECKLIST'

Either on the Consent Form and/or Information Letter each participant and/or participant community must be provided the following information;

a) purpose and goals of the research

b) how respondent was chosen

c) what respondent will be asked to do

d) who will have access to respondents' responses

e) the voluntary nature of their participation (including participants right to withdraw at any time) and their information will be withdrawn as well

f) potential benefits from the study

g) potential risks (if any) from the study

h) how anonymity is addressed

i) how confidentiality is addressed

j) how information is stored, for how long, and how will it be destroyed

k) name and phone number of person to contact in case questions arise

l) how to get a copy of the research results

m) indication that any complaints about the project should be directed to the Office of Research (reb@unbc.ca or 250.960.5650)

n) if the participant is being recorded and the recording is not to be destroyed a release for further use of the recording should be obtained