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# Northern Housing Networks: Building Collaborative Efforts to Address Housing and Homelessness in Remote Canadian Aboriginal Communities in the Context of Rapid Economic Change

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## Abstract

Canada's northern and remote regions experience unique challenges related to housing and homelessness. As such, there is a need to understand and develop strategies to address housing-related concerns in the North. The diversity of communities across the North demands the tailoring of specific, local-level responses to meet diverse needs. Over the past decade local networks have emerged as a powerful method for governance and development of localized responses to addressing homelessness across Canada and North America. Despite this, there is a paucity of research examining challenges and effective approaches utilized by these local networks or their potential applicability for building housing security in rural, remote, and northern communities. This research examined the experiences of a Northern Canadian housing and homelessness network. The experience of this network points to strategies that can lead to successful collaborative approaches aimed at implementing programs to address homelessness in northern and remote communities.

Keywords: homelessness, collaboration, network, remote, Aboriginal

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## 1.0 Introduction

Canada's northern and remote regions experience unique challenges related to housing and homelessness. As such, there is a need to understand and develop strategies to address housing-related concerns in the North. The diversity of communities across the North demands the tailoring of specific, local-level responses to meet diverse needs. Over the past decade local networks have emerged as a powerful method for governance and development of localized responses to addressing homelessness across Canada and North America. Despite this, there is a paucity of research examining challenges and effective approaches utilized by these local networks or their potential applicability for building housing security in rural, remote, and northern communities. This research examined the experiences of a Northern Canadian housing and homelessness network. The experience of this network points to strategies that can lead to successful collaborative approaches

aimed at implementing programs to address homelessness in northern and remote communities.[1]

To contextualize the unique experiences of remote communities, we begin this article with an examination of existing evidence of housing and homelessness issues in Northern Canada.[2] The small body of literature on housing and homelessness networks is also explored. Next, we introduce our case, one community plan[3] that had been developed in a northern community to assess and respond to housing concerns. We describe the participant observation method we employed to examine the approach utilized by a Northern Canadian housing network to implement the community plan. We also utilized anonymised information on clients provided by agencies that deliver housing and homelessness related services to clients. This enabled us to further understand whether and how the community planning process led to changes in the nature of homelessness. We conclude by summarizing how the experience of this housing network points to strategies that might lead to successful collaborative approaches aimed at implementing programs to address homelessness in northern and remote communities.

## 2.0 Homelessness and Housing in the Context of Rapid Economic Change in Northern Canada

In a report investigating homelessness in the midst of rapid economic growth, Laird (2007) points to Iqaluit as an example of the ways in which northern resource development places significant strain on provision of housing and other essential services. The city was unable to keep up with the influx of workers relocating from southern Canada and from other arctic and northern regions; a trend seen in in other territorial service centres such as Yellowknife and Whitehorse (Abele, Falvo, & Hache, 2012). It is not only the territorial north that experiences these housing issues, but also boomtowns and service centres of the provincial north, such as Fort McMurray (Earley, 2003) and Labrador City-Wabush (Labrador West Housing and Homelessness Coalition, 2011).

There are a few primary issues surrounding housing stress amidst rapid economic development in the north. A first issue concerns the ways in which population and economic growth lead to rapid inflation in housing costs, leaving few to no options for those living on middle, low, and fixed incomes. The situation is most dire for low and fixed income recipients, as provision of affordable and rent-geared-to-income social housing units cannot keep pace with demand. High housing costs can

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[1] For the purpose of this research we define success of a network or coalition as the accomplishment of tasks and goals which the collaborative has set for itself

[2] For the purposes of this research we define "Northern Canada" according to Statistics Canada's delineation of the North; see (McNiven & Puderer, 2000).

[3] The proliferation of community planning processes to address homelessness in Canada can be traced back to work of the National Homelessness Initiative (NHI). Delivery of the NHI involved facilitation of collaborative community-planning processes. These processes led to the development of "community plans" which were intended to direct the delivery of NHI program funding according to the unique issues of individual municipalities. Development of community plans was largely supported in designated communities under two NHI program components: the Supported Communities Partnership Initiative (SCPI) and the Regional Homelessness Fund (RHF). Creation of community plans was supported in some non-designated communities through two additional NHI components: Urban Aboriginal Homelessness and National Research Program.

also impede economic growth by deterring others from moving to these communities. A second issue concerns the ability of public services and the private market to develop housing at all. Municipalities are limited in their capacity to develop land. This can be due to lack of funding to provide services (waste disposal, sewer) to that land or, more significantly, lack of land that is viable for development. The example of Labrador City-Wabush illustrates this concern: no land within city limits, and no adjacent crown land, can be developed due to current or planned industrial developments (Labrador West Housing and Homelessness Coalition, 2011).

Pressure on the delivery of affordable housing due to economic growth is seen across the North. Halseth and Sullivan (2000) outline many of the housing-related impacts felt by northern communities affected by industrial development. Negative housing impacts described in the report indicate implications for low-income earners and other residents who already experience socio-economic marginalization. Pressure on housing also leads to pressure on a variety of other services. Those who require daily living support or have complex needs (e.g. women fleeing violence, persons with cognitive disabilities, seniors) place increased pressure on social service providers. Additionally, as all residents put aside larger portions of their income for housing costs, there is less available for other essential needs, including food. A rise in visible homelessness across the North is tied to these concerns as well a history of inadequate governance and planning for northern housing (Christensen, 2012). As Christensen (2012) indicates, the complexity of infrastructure and support needs for persons experiencing housing stress and homelessness points to a critical need for multi-pronged and collaborative approaches to addressing these issues. However, there exists little in terms of studies that document collaborative approaches used to formulate plans and implement strategies to address homelessness in the North. With the exception of a handful of articles in the scholarly literature focused in the U.S. and U.K, there is also a paucity of information on local-level housing collaboratives in general, or in the varied forms of housing coalitions, networks, committees, and community advisory boards.

## 3.0 Addressing Housing and Homelessness through Collaborative System-level Governance

As a basic and essential need, access to safe, affordable housing is critical to creating healthy and sustainable communities in the North. However, government oversight of housing-related issues is often fragmented, having little cohesive oversight at municipal, regional, and provincial levels. An examination of housing-related governance structures provides some insight into issues associated with fragmented governance. Although provincial-level housing corporations can address a number of housing-related issues, there is significant fragmentation between the various sectors dealing with construction, sales, residential tenancies, social services and other housing-related sectors. All of these various housing-related government and industry bodies create their own policy and regulations to govern their own sectors of these critical systems.

What is created as a result of this fragmentation are policy vacuums, where the absence of collaborative planning for housing leaves gaps, duplication, and inadequacies in decision-making processes. This occurs among decision-making bodies at all geopolitical levels: municipal, regional, state (or provincial), federal, and international. For communities in Canada's provincial north, the situation is

worsened by inadequate funding and capacity at municipal levels to plan for and coordinate housing services.

What becomes apparent is that, despite the significance of housing to healthy development in the North, current governance structures are not able to provide coordinated oversight for growth, changing needs, and circumstances. As such, there is a need for development of new forms of governance which can provide flexibility to adapt to the changing needs and circumstances of diverse and rapidly changing northern communities. There is some promising evidence to suggest that collaborative, systems-level approaches can help to address housing and homelessness (Cloke, Milbourne, & Widdowfield, 2000; Hambrick & Rog, 2000; Ivery, 2008, 2010; Lewis, Boulahanis, & Matheny, 2009; Provan & Milward 2001). The applicability, however, of such approaches in northern or remote communities remains largely unexplored.

## 4.0 Evaluating Homelessness Collaboratives

Recently, a small body of literature has emerged out of the U.S. examining homelessness "coalitions" and collaborative entities in that country. Hambrick and Rog (2000) published one of the earliest comprehensive examinations of coordination in the US homeless sector. They argue that coordination "has been a (if not the) dominant theme at all levels" of government in the U.S. (p. 353). The article identifies service-level coordination (as appears in the form of various case management and service provider team approaches; e.g. "housing first" models) as well as systems-level coordination occurring through homeless coalitions and councils. Much of the subsequent literature discusses homeless "coalitions" or "councils" in the context of the Continuum of Care (CoC) funding stream in the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) which, in 1995, began to mandate collaboration or partnerships among agencies as a pre-requisite for funding (Macgill, 2011).

Macgill (2011) provides an overview of much of this small body of literature. The study compiled applications to the HUD CoC funding stream from 2008. Out of the 457 CoC mandated networks in existence at the time, the study selected a random sample of 30 to evaluate organizational structure and process. This work confirms literature review findings about the elements which create challenge and success in these organizations:

- Lewis et al. (2009) and Ivery (2008) find that larger organizations, due to greater human and resource capital, have more capacity to participate in collaborative processes.
- Provan & Milward (2001) identify issues created when networks become "too large" in that the capacity for the coalition to create meaningful collaboration declines.
- Ivery (2010) indicates the importance of stable leadership and points to the significance of governance structures in creating effective collaborative processes.

Magill (2011) indicates another finding: that clarity in structure and process creates a more engaging environment for maintaining members' interest and bringing new participants to the table. This is reminiscent of theory on cross-sectoral collaboration in general (Butterfoss et al., 1993; Backer, 2003; Fishman et al., 2006).

One study out of the UK focuses specifically on systems-level collaboration in the homeless sector and identifies some issues not found in the US literature (Cloke et al., 2000). They discuss the significance of pre-existing discourses on homelessness in dictating the strategies used to address issues. Those with little social or political power who espoused contrary discourses were unable to rework social relations to have their ideas respected in the collaborative process. This meant that those individuals or organizations with power could manipulate the agenda of a coalition to their own interests and understanding of the issues surrounding homelessness. Cloke et al. (2000) conclude that merely repackaging existing resources and social relations will not fulfill goals of creating more pluralist forms of governance. They also point to the need for government investment of human and capital resources to make partnerships work.

Outside of this literature, there is fairly little in terms of examinations specifically of homelessness collaboratives, with a near absence of discourse on or evaluation of Canadian homelessness networks.[4] There is even less known about systems-level homelessness collaboratives in northern, remote, and Aboriginal communities. As such, our research was directed understanding systems-level homelessness collaboration in northern and remote regions.

This research examines the experiences of a housing network in Happy Valley–Goose Bay, a remote community in central Labrador. This network employed a systems perspective to develop a community plan to address housing and homelessness and implement its recommendations. The experiences of Happy Valley–Goose Bay illustrate the nature of housing security–related stress in northern and remote communities experiencing rapid growth. This paper aims to analyze the strategies that were used to develop community-based collaborative approaches to housing and homelessness, as well as programs implemented to address the identified priorities.

## 5.0  Research Approach and Methodology

This research utilized non-ethnographic participant observation as a primary method. Participant observation is a valuable approach when a researcher is interested in gaining access to a "backstage culture" (De Munck & Sobo, 1998, p. 43). Kawulich (Kawulich, 2005) explains five reasons for use of participant observation, as described in LeCompte and Schensul (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010, p. 91):

- to identify and guide relationships with informants;

- to help the researcher get the feel for how things are organized and prioritized, how people interrelate, and what are the cultural parameters;

- to show the researcher what the cultural members deem to be important in manners, leadership, politics, social interaction, and taboos;

- to help the researcher become known to the cultural members, thereby easing facilitation of the research process; and

- to provide the researcher with a source of questions to be addressed with participants.

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4 Schiff (2013) provides a general historical overview of the origin of homelessness collaboratives in Canada and notes the significant lack of Canadian literature in the area.

Use of participant observation as a research approach, according to those rationales, allows researchers a closer and more in-depth understanding of group dynamics. For that reason, and in the case of non-ethnographic applications, the approach is particularly favoured in organizational research (Iacono, Brown, & Holtham, 2009). Iancono et al. (2009) indicate that "sometimes participant observation arises from an ongoing work situation" (p. 42) as was the situation with our research. The researchers were members of this particular housing and homelessness network prior to and following this research. This situation is not uncommon in participant observation research. Iancono et al. (2009) describe typical situations and the value of this methodology in such situations in which members of organizations are called upon to manage problematic situations characterised by indeterminacy, uniqueness and instability. Schon (1991, quoting Ackoff, 1979) appropriately terms such situations '*messes.*' The best professionals are able to make sense of these '*messes,*' discern patterns, identify deviations from a norm, recognise phenomena and adjust their performance. Such processes may be intuitive, tacit, and unconscious. The author terms this 'reflection-in-action.' (p.42)

As such, this paper presents a "reflection-in-action" arising out of a year of participant observation with a housing and homelessness network in a northern, remote community. The housing and homelessness network was an unincorporated organization that was formed during a community planning process. Membership includes representatives of a variety of sectors (such as justice, social services, health, elected officials, and housing services) as well as members of the general public who are interested in housing and homelessness issues.[5] Dr. Schiff is part of this informal network as a community activist and academic engaged in housing and homelessness concerns through project-based activism.

Dr. Schiff, a long-time housing and homelessness activist, became involved with the network when she moved to the region, shortly after the community planning process and report were completed. The importance of research on the innovative and important work of the network was immediately obvious. With the knowledge and support of fellow network members, Dr. Schiff began the participant observation research early on during her engagement with the network. As McCall and Simmons (McCall & Simmons, 1969, p. 1) note, "participant observation is not a single method but rather a characteristic style of research which makes use of a number of methods and techniques." Specific methods utilised in our research included: observation, informant interviewing, document analysis, and participation with self-analysis. To further understand accomplishments and changes in the nature of homelessness since the community planning process, we supplemented these methods with analysis of anonymised information on clients provided by frontline agencies that deliver housing and homelessness services. Dr. Brunger, an anthropologist and experienced participant-observation researcher working with communities in the area, was brought in to contribute to the research by explicitly engaging Dr. Schiff in self-reflective scrutiny of the work of the network and of her dual role as community member/activist and researcher.

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[5] The network is not incorporated and has no legal structure and (at the time of writing this article) had no formal relationships with any incorporated organizations. The network identifies a project and a potential funding source, then identifies an organization with which to partner in a funding application. The partner organization holds the funding, but the network directs how the funding is used. For example, funding for the network coordinator position is distributed directly from the partnering non-profit organization to the coordinator.

Methodologically, this research engages the community in participatory action research, but in this case, the community engagement preceded the intent to conduct research. Research Ethics Board (REB) review was not required for the initial participant observation research. In keeping with the 2nd edition of Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2) (2010), Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) (2008 ) and National Aboriginal Health Organisation (NAHO) (2003 ) guidelines, Aboriginal community consent was not required, as the research was not conducted specifically with Aboriginal communities. However, informal consultation and support from Aboriginal community members of the network was ongoing (in keeping with Brunger & Bull, 2011). This research, like the activism itself, is grounded in an explicit critique of historical relations of power within the region. Constituencies are not represented within the network, but housing issues affect those communities that have been most negatively impacted by a long history of colonialist economic and social policies at various levels of government. Therefore, while the research was outside of land claims areas and not "with" any specific Aboriginal community, the Aboriginal groups predominant in Happy Valley – Goose Bay (NunatuKavut and Nunatsiavut), their associated service providers, and members were deeply involved in the housing and homelessness network in the municipality.[6]

Appreciation of the need for ongoing negotiation of the collective risks of research was a key feature of the participant observation research. In particular we paid attention to moments when possible changes to risks and benefits of the research in relation to particular communities might shift whether and how collective consent should take place (as described in Burgess & Brunger, 2000; Brunger & Weijer, 2007). The authors, through their work with the Labrador Aboriginal Health Research Committee,[7] are constantly engaged in the process of discussing the implications of this and other research for Aboriginal communities specifically and generally: There is an explicit understanding that if results implicate particular Aboriginal communities or groups, those results would be discussed with those communities and disseminated with the support of community leadership.

## 6.0  Community Description

Happy Valley–Goose Bay (HVGB) is a remote, northern town located in the Lake Melville region of central Labrador. With a population of approximately 7,500, it is the largest community in Labrador and serves as the administrative center for the region. HVGB is the only community with a direct link to all communities in Labrador by sea, air, or (unpaved) road. As such, it is a hub for those traveling within Labrador and between Labrador and Canada's major urban centers. Figure 1 illustrates the town's situation within Labrador as a hub for transportation and service delivery.

*Figure 1:* Transportation Map of Labrador.

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6 Although Sheshatshiu Innu First Nation is predominant in the central Labrador region, very few members reside or present with homelessness issues in the HVGB municipality.

[7] The Labrador Aboriginal Health Research Committee (LAHRC) is a group comprised of representatives of all the Aboriginal communities in Labrador to support research activities designed to assist Labrador Aboriginal communities and organizations in their efforts to promote healing, wellness, and improve health services in their communities. The authors are each invited non-Aboriginal members of the LAHRC.

Source: Courtesy of R. Sparkes.

Due to the town's strategic role as a service center, people from other communities within Labrador come to HVGB for varying periods of time to access services. HVGB is a primary location for residents of Labrador to access health and dental care; make court appearances; visit relatives who are located in the HVGB area; commute to jobsites; access retail and banking services; and access other provincial, federal, and Aboriginal government services. Inuit and many Inuit-descendent communities along Labrador's Atlantic Coast, as well as the Innu First Nation communities of Sheshatshiu and Natuashish, rely on HVGB for essential services. It is a primary location for private- and public-sector regional or headquarter offices, including those of the provincial government, Aboriginal governments (Nunatsiavut government, NunatuKavut Community Council), and Labrador-Grenfell Regional Health Authority.

## 6.1  Industrial Development

Happy Valley-Goose Bay also serves as an administrative and transportation centre for mining exploration and development, potential and existing hydro-electric projects, and tourism opportunities. Recent developments, such as the Muskrat Falls hydroelectric project and the lifting of the ban on uranium exploration in the Nunatsiavut Land Claims area, indicate that the town is poised to experience

significant growth over the next decade. Four activities in particular are affecting HVGB: the Vale Mine at Voisey's Bay, the announcement to remove the ban on uranium exploration in the Nunatsiavut Land Claims area, development of iron sands mining and pig iron plant, and development of the Muskrat Falls (Lower Churchill) hydroelectric project. As with other northern communities experiencing this level of growth, there has been accompanying pressure on the housing market and apparent increase in homelessness and housing insecurity.

While many housing issues are generalizable across the North, a diversity of communities and cultures also points to unique issues for individual regions and municipalities. A 2007 report on housing and homelessness issues in HVGB details some specific evidence of their effect in the central Labrador region (Lee, Budgell, & Skinner, 2007). The report describes a number of housing issues, including concerns surrounding absolute homelessness, accessible housing for people with disabilities, and second stage housing for women and children escaping violence, among other issues. The findings of that report are described in more detail below to provide an understanding of the ways in which that community experiences homelessness and housing issues. It also provides context for the development of a collaborative entity to address these concerns.

## 7.0 HVGB Community Plan for Addressing Homelessness and Transitional Housing[8]

In 2006, with the support of the St. John's Community Advisory Board on Housing and Homelessness (CAB), the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing and Homelessness Network (NLHHN) and the Regional Homelessness Fund of the NHI, representatives of various government and community-based organizations formed a working group to draft a community plan. Following the public release of the community plan in 2007, a community advisory board (CAB) was formed to guide its implementation. The HVGB community plan and CAB are often identified by the NLHHN, and self-identify, as the first northern, non-designated community to develop a community plan and CAB, although this claim remains unsubstantiated by other sources.

The Community Plan (the Plan) was created based on a series of consultative and collaborative research processes. It relied substantially on guidance from the St. John's CAB and the HVGB working group. The consultants hired to produce the plan indicate several methods used for data collection: public meetings, focus groups, "secondary research", and key informant interviews (representatives of government and non-government organizations). The consultants also utilised a peer interview process where persons experiencing housing problems were recruited and trained to help design interview tools and act as co-interviewers.

The Plan identifies a variety of issues and makes recommendations on those problems which the researchers identified as most urgent. Specifically, the Plan recommends two priority actions. The first action is the development of a "housing first" approach. The Plan's definition of "housing first" deviates somewhat from widely accepted definitions found in the literature (Waegmakers Schiff & Rook, 2012; Tsemberis, Gulcur, & Nakae, 2004). It describes a "housing first approach" as: the development of accessible, individual housing units for people with multiple

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[8] (Lee et al., 2007)

and complex needs integrated with intensive and flexible community supports and service co-ordination for consumers. In practice, the communities' understanding of "housing first" is often based primarily on the provision of 'wrap-around' services.

The second priority identified in the Plan is to create a housing development/co-ordination position to support collaborative planning among and within government agencies and non-profit homeless service providers. The report identifies six other priority issues: accessible housing for people with disabilities; second stage housing for women and children escaping domestic violence; affordable housing for single men; regulation of boarding houses; human resources to provide information/support/advocacy to people with serious housing problems; and training for tenants.

## 8.0  Happy Valley – Goose Bay Community Advisory Board on Housing and Homelessness

### 8.1  Implementation of the Community Plan

The release of the HVGB Community Plan Addressing Homelessness and Transitional Housing in 2007 led to a variety of actions focused on implementing the primary and secondary recommendations identified in the report.   Upon formation of the CAB, it became apparent that there was a need to address the second priority, creation of a coordinator position, before the first priority could be addressed. In 2008, a "Housing Development Worker" position (HDW) was created at the Labrador Friendship Centre to support the CAB and assist with implementation of the Plan.

In creating the HDW position, the CAB also saw an opportunity to address the first priority: adopting a "housing first" approach through coordinating wrap-around service provision. The HDW began to provide services directly to clients, assisting with finding housing and utilizing a 'wrap-around' approach; an approach identified by the community as a primary component of an HF model. The 'wrap around' approach is primarily realized through the creation of multi-agency support teams. Wrap-around support teams are created for each individual client. They are composed of workers from a variety of agencies; agencies which have been identified as relevant to a particular client's needs and concerns. The teams are intended to create ease of communication about needs and plans for shared clients. In 2011 a "Housing Support Worker" position was created to take over coordination of wrap-around teams.   Together, the HSW and HDW composed the Housing Support Office (HSO) of the Labrador Friendship Centre. People experiencing housing problems could contact the HSO directly for housing-related support.

The CAB also addressed several of the six secondary priority issues identified in the Plan. In particular, it was successful in initiating affordable and supportive housing projects.

Implementation of other priority issues remained a focus of the HSO, CAB, and other community partners. There was an ongoing focus on issues related to the absence of regulation of boarding houses. The CAB and HSO identified possibilities to promote regulatory measures and encourage boarding house owners to provide safe and secure housing for their tenants. Another priority issue, training for tenants in life-skills such as financial literacy, tenants' rights and other areas, occurred primarily through work of the HDW with the support of CAB members.  In 2012,

with the support of the CAB, a local non-profit organization applied for and received funding to create a "tenant relations worker" position to take over this role.

Other initiatives also emerged, focusing on advocacy, education, and raising awareness. These included events designed to work with media and other public partners to provide education and garner public support for programs, services, and policy change to address homelessness and housing issues. The CAB supported an annual Raising the Roof "Toque Tuesday" campaign. Along with other collaborations across the province, the CAB hosted an annual pancake breakfast. Proceeds were used to support housing and shelter projects in the community.

### 8.2  Challenges with Plan Implementation

In 2011, a few changes impacted the HSO and the CAB. Following the creation of the HSW position in 2011, and with the encouragement of provincial and federal funders, the HDW position became regional, with the intent of coordinating and supporting collaborative planning on housing and homelessness throughout Labrador. The HDW position was no longer responsible for providing primary support to the CAB which caused significant concern among the collaboration's members. At the same time, the CAB was encouraged by one of the primary provincial funders of homelessness initiatives to become an incorporated organization. These two changes led to questions regarding the role, vision, mandate and responsibilities of individual CAB members. Out of these concerns emerged an interest in conducting research to provide an update to the Plan, clarify priorities, and create a new strategic plan.

## 9.0  Lessons Learned: Strategies for Success in the Development of Northern Housing and Homelessness Networks

Housing and homelessness networks, committees, and advisory boards often encounter a variety of organizational, procedural, and external factors that can support or hinder success. Many of these factors are documented in the scholarly literature (Cloke et al., 2000; Hambrick & Rog, 2000; Ivery, 2008, 2010; Lewis et al., 2009; Macgill, 2011; Provan & Milward 2001) and a few reports are found in the grey literature (Evaluation Directorate - Strategic Policy and Research Branch - HRSDC, 2008). These works are mutually reinforcing and have created a theoretical basis for understanding the ways in which local housing and homelessness networks operate. The experiences of the HVGB CAB are noteworthy, however, as they reinforce existing theory within a Canadian context and point to additional factors not yet examined in existing literature, particularly with respect to challenges, success and the viability of such organizations in northern, remote, and Aboriginal communities.

The HVGB CAB is particularly noteworthy in the novelty of its activities for a small, northern community. It also provides insights into factors which might contribute to success and challenge with implementing community planning processes in northern communities. The priorities and action items identified in the plan were not insignificant tasks, yet the group was able to address many priorities within a few years of implementation. It is the processes and factors involved in the successes and challenges encountered by this collaborative effort that are particularly noteworthy for providing potential guidance and strategies which might be utilized in other regions for ending homelessness and building housing security.

The experiences of the HVGB CAB point to three critical factors in building capable, resilient, and effective collaborative structures around northern housing and homelessness issues: "stage setting" through community planning; diversity of membership; and flexibility to work with emerging opportunity. What follows is a brief description of these approaches and their benefits for building successful collaboratives, followed by a discussion of some of the challenges faced by the CAB.

### 9.1 'Stage Setting' through Community Planning

The community planning process was critical to building a solid foundation and direction for the CAB's work. The activity surrounding creation of the plan raised awareness throughout the community and created an environment of heightened attention to housing and homelessness issues. Essentially, the community plan process was setting the stage for the cultivation of partnerships, community concern, understanding the issues, and investment in solutions. The community plan clearly laid out a variety of community assets, gaps, and priority issues to focus the CAB's activities. It also allowed for flexibility in how and when priorities would be implemented. The significance of flexibility in plans should not be underestimated: creating definite timelines and structure for interpreting and implementing priorities can lead to disillusionment, disengagement, and disbanding of collaboratives when they are unable to meet the exact goals set by a plan. As highlighted by Macgill (2011) and Burt and Spellman (2007), strong planning processes are critical in the development of healthy homelessness collaboratives and should be characterised by strong leadership, shared decision-making, and ongoing evaluation, as was demonstrated by the HVGB CAB.

### 9.2 Membership Diversity and Cross-Sectoral Engagement

The CAB purposefully sought to ensure a diverse, cross-sectoral membership, engaging partners from a multitude of sectors and from various levels of government and non-profit organizations. Homelessness issues cross multiple domains (e.g. health, education, industry, infrastructure, housing, Aboriginal community services) and levels of government (municipal, provincial, federal, Aboriginal). Therefore, the diversity of membership, brought about through a deliberate cross-sectoral approach, ensured the capacity to implement multi-pronged solutions as suggested by Christensen (2012). This diversity also created space for stimulating innovation and new solutions.

Formal membership in the organization was essentially limited to the public sector; however, there was conscious attempt to engage with the private sector. This approach, engaging with the private sector in ways that maintained public ownership and autonomy of the group, was especially useful in the context of rapid economic growth. Private sector entities, which were embarking on major development projects, were searching for opportunities to invest in public welfare and community health. The CAB recognized opportunities to use private sector interest to obtain funding, resources, and other forms of support for implementing priorities in the community plan.

### 9.3 Flexibility and Working with Opportunity

Having a flexible plan paved the way for another critically useful approach: working with opportunity. The CAB often moulded its activities to adapt to any opportunities as they arose, such as unique funding opportunities, utilizing sudden donations of

in-kind resources, and using community events or news items as opportunities for public outreach and education. The greatest degree of success in this approach came when group members were able to drop an activity that was proving unproductive at a particular point and move on to new opportunities and ideas. A final aspect of the approach involved the willingness and capacity of the group to encourage, utilize, and celebrate the opportunities presented by "champions" (those who are enthusiastic to take the lead) for various initiatives and projects. The group consistently utilized a combination of champions, existing resources, and external opportunities or interest to decide whether to pursue a particular initiative.

A final aspect of success could be attributed to "quick wins". The group was able to identify projects which could be implemented fairly quickly (due either to relative simplicity or support from an external partner or champion) and which had the potential to draw wide public attention. Although the organization was not deliberately focused on "quick wins", working with opportunity led to the implementation of some immediately successful projects. An additional benefit of quick wins is their capacity to create broader public support for a collaborative. Allowing private sector, political, or other external partners to take credit can quickly build valuable political capital. Public and political recognition and support then allows for a shift from programmatic to higher-level policy-oriented solutions.

## 10.0  Challenges

Despite success in implementation of plans, there were some organizational challenges which affected the group's ability to function cohesively and effectively. The organization experienced challenges which manifested in four distinct categories: clarity and communications; staff and members; autonomy; and conflict of interest. These findings both confirm and contribute to existing literature on homelessness collaboratives, especially the work of Ivery (2008), Macgill (2011), and Cloke et al. (2000).

### 10.1  Communications

Communications among CAB members and clarity in vision, organizational structure, and process was a repeated concern. As described by Macgill (2011) clarity in structure and process, as would emerge through efficient communications, creates a more engaging environment for maintaining members' interest and bringing new participants to the table. Many participants in the HVGB CAB felt that there was lack of clarity about the roles and responsibilities of individual members, which is both a structure and process issue. There were also differing perspectives on how to structure the collaborative such that some interviewees called for two groups: one to address policy and strategic concerns and other for implementation of direct service solutions. Overall, the significance of these concerns reconfirms Macgill's findings (2011) and points to an additional potential solution to such situations: a call for the CAB to conduct a strategic planning or visioning session to clarify its mandate, develop structure, and identify new action priorities.

### 10.2  Staff and Members

Concerns about staff and members related primarily to consistency and inclusion. There were significant concerns about the effects of staff turnover on CAB membership: when a CAB member left their position with an employer, new hires were often not mandated to or interested in participating on the CAB. This is

reminiscent of Cloke et al.'s (2000) discussion of the need for government investment of human resources to make partnerships work. The issue of member turnover was highlighted as a particularly significant concern for remote communities where staff turnover and "burnout", especially in social service professions, is significantly higher than in urban centres (Muecke, Lenthall, & Lindeman, 2011).   Staff turnover, and consequent changes in collaboration membership created a "disjointed" feeling within the organization. This is also reflective of Ivery's (2010) discussion of the significance of stable leadership for homeless collaboratives. Many CAB members suggested a need to re-engage with organizations that no longer had representatives at the CAB table. There was also the suggestion that the CAB needed to engage more with the private sector, especially with private landlords and industry.

## 10.3  Autonomy

Autonomy was a significant concern for the collaborative, especially in light of the recent changes in the HDW position and process of incorporation. A number of interviewees were concerned about the CAB's ability to be autonomous in its decision-making process and to have control over how to apply for and use funding. This feeling of being controlled and dominated in decision-making processes is certainly consistent with a general discourse in Labrador on neo-colonial oppression at the hands of the provincial government.[9] It is also reminiscent of the discussion of Cloke et al. (2000) with respect to the significance of power relations within homeless collaboratives and between those groups and outside stakeholders. Cloke et al. (2000) found that those with little social or political power who espoused contrary discourses were unable to rework social relations to have their ideas respected in the collaborative process. This meant that those individuals or organizations with power could manipulate the agenda of a coalition to their own interests and understanding of the issues surrounding homelessness.  Cloke et al. (2000) conclude that merely repackaging existing resources and social relations will not fulfill goals of creating more pluralist forms of governance. Other than establishing a firmly independent agenda, the HVGB CAB had no suggestions on how to address this issue. Incorporation might allow the organization to diversify its fundraising efforts and thereby provide some degree of autonomy in decision-making processes.

## 10.4  Conflict of interest

A final concern focused on conflict of interest, transparency, and accountability. With the diversity of organizations represented on the CAB, there were disagreements about conflicting priorities and interests between agencies. This also resulted in confusion and disagreement as to whether the organization should function at a systems-level or service-level of planning and program implementation. Transparency of communications among CAB members outside of meetings and confidentiality of discussions during meetings arose as concerns. These can be significant and devastating issues which have the ability to fragment organizations and ultimately can lead to disintegration and disbanding of organizations.

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[9] See, for example, Bisson for a discussion of on-going processed of colonialism in Labrador: (Bisson, 2012).

## 11.0 Conclusion: Toward Flexible and Collaborative Governance for Northern Housing and Homelessness Networks

The experiences of the HVGB CAB reinforce much of the findings of Macgill (2011), as well as Ivery (2010) and Cloke et al. (2000) , in relation to homeless collaboratives. However, our findings related to the HVGB CAB also point to important implications for homeless collaboratives in the Canadian context and particularly in the North. Specifically, there are significant concerns regarding the lack of support from funders to create effective, stable, and autonomous organizational structure and process.

Reflecting the findings of Ivery (2010) and Magill (2011) in relation to US homelessness collaboratives, the CAB experienced challenges with stable leadership and clarity in structure and process, issues that led to concerns around transparency, mandate, and conflicts of interest. This suggests a need for ongoing support for organizational structuring, coordination, and strategic planning. These particular issues are not unique to homelessness collaborations in Canada. Future evaluations of CABs are needed to investigate the pervasiveness of such issues in the Canadian context.

A significant issue arose in this research which has not appeared elsewhere in the literature on homelessness collaboratives: balance of autonomy and support from provincial and federal funding bodies. The HVGB CAB, and CABs across the country, have no formal mandate or support from their funding agencies (e.g. HPS) to conduct organizational evaluations. Although community plans investigate issues of infrastructure and service provision, they do little in terms of identifying the organizational challenges experienced and strategies needed for CABs to effectively address challenges in systems-level collaborative efforts. This suggests a need for support from funders to implement independent organizational evaluations to ensure effective and inclusive collaborative efforts in homelessness planning.

At the nexus of these issues is the role of staff in implementing community plans. Many Canadian CABs, and especially those in rural and remote communities, lack staff apart from the support provided by HPS employees in developing proposals and funding agreements. Staff often fill a pivotal role in providing leadership and direction for systems-level homelessness collaborations. Support for CAB coordinators, with authority that is independent and autonomous of HPS, might be critical in terms of supporting effective implementation of community plans and ability to make decisions based not on funders' goals, but on those defined by communities.

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