



January 2023

Staying Outside is Not a Preference: Homelessness in Edmonton

PREPARED FOR
CITY OF EDMONTON ENCAMPMENT RESPONSE TEAM

PREPARED BY
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The Complex Needs Banning Research Team acknowledges we are situated on land known as Amiskwaciwâskahikan on Turtle Island which is colonially referred to as Treaty 6 territory or Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. This is land occupied, travelled, and cared for by Indigenous Peoples since time immemorial to the present day.

We recognize this is a collective place many share as home. We honour and acknowledge that the inclusion for all who struggle with homelessness and complex needs is an act of reconciliation. We acknowledge these things as a reminder that we are all Treaty People bound to one another by the spirit and intent of treaty.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Edmontonians who experience marginalization because of unstable housing are negatively impacted when they are banned or barred from public spaces and more specifically spaces that provide services. These impacts are exacerbated for those who have complex needs and/or are staying outside.

This research project was a collaboration between the City of Edmonton's Encampment Response Team (ERT) and The Complex Needs Committee, a subset of the Sector Emergency Response Services. This project was funded by the City of Edmonton, Homeward Trust, and REACH Edmonton Council for Safe Communities, and carried out by Mapping and Planning Supports Alberta Capital Region (M.A.P.S.).

Two distinct reports arose out of this research: *Left Outside: The Experience of Being Banned in Edmonton* (n=118), and *Staying Outside is Not a Preference: Homelessness in Edmonton* (n=86: a subset of the 118 listed above). Data was also collected from Human Service agencies staff, City of Edmonton staff involved in encampment response, and mutual aid group workers.

The purpose of this project was to hear directly from community participants with lived experience of being banned or staying outside in the previous 12 months.

- The research team included two research assistants who were known and respected in the community and who had lived experience with being banned and staying outside.
- Outreach workers and a Research Assistant recruited participants who stayed outside to ensure that those who did not access services from data collection sites, were invited to participate.
- Data was collected outdoors when banning was a barrier, and in some cases agencies waived bans for the data collection times.
- To learn from those who work with people staying outside data was collected from agency staff, outreach workers, mutual aid workers and City of Edmonton Staff who respond to encampments.
- Data was collected from June to August 2022.

People are Diverse

While the majority of respondents were Indigenous (3 in 4), within the categories of Indigenous and non-Indigenous diversity in a number of areas was found.

- Overall males form the majority at 61% vs. 39% for females.
- 87% of females were Indigenous meaning that Indigenous females were far more likely to be homeless than their non-Indigenous counterparts.
- While only 1 in 10 had elementary school or no formal education, 3 in 10 completed high school, and 2 in 10 had completed post-secondary education.
- Few respondents were in attached relationships as 1 in 8 people. For this study attachment meant having someone close to you that could be relied upon for support and companionship.
- While 8 participants had stayed outside exclusively for the past 12 months, the majority had stayed in many different types of dwellings. While some moved in and out of institutions or family situations, other transitions between rentals and homelessness.
- While income for the large majority of participants was unstable, some had steadier sources of income such as CPP, OAS, and AISH.

Impacts of Being Banned are Greater if you are Staying Outside

- Staying outside meant living a public life. Carrying out private tasks in public spaces increased one's chances of being banned.
- Participants were more likely, than their housed counterparts, to be banned from spaces used by the general public, such as stores and malls.
- Participants were significantly more likely than their housed counterparts to be banned for reasons of trespassing, fighting, or sleeping, where the rates of being banned for these offences were at least 20% higher.
- Participants who stayed outside were also at least twice as likely to experience a range of negative impacts in many areas of their lives. The most prevalent negative impact was accessing personal care.
- Participants recognized how they were seen and judged in public places and worked at staying clean and tidy so that they could change their lives around, however, given their lack of access to facilities, this process was difficult.

Forcibly Moving People Reduces Opportunity and Dignity

While moving encampments happens in the interests of public safety, the reality is that if people have nowhere to go, difficult situation and challenged lives continue in a new location. These moves make the lives of encampment residents even more difficult. When people are moved:

- They are often forced to leave possessions behind due to challenges with carrying items. For the safety of the staff cleaning up encampments, items left behind are considered hazardous and must be disposed of.
- They may no longer be in proximity to services they commonly use.
- They may become separated from their community.
- Outreach workers have greater difficulty finding their clients in their new location, often resulting in considerable delays, or missed opportunities for health and housing services.
- Moving difficulties are exacerbated when one has mobility, health, or substance use issues.

Motivations and Choices are Diverse

The majority of participants did not see staying outside as a preference, but as a better option than staying in a shelter.

- Many reasons for choosing to stay outside rather than in shelters were offered, the top three reasons, at 50%+, were not feeling safe in shelters, shelters being over-crowded, and the lack of privacy at shelters.
- Reasons for not feeling safe in shelters included being near others with PTSD or addiction issues and being in a loud environment where one is afraid to fall asleep.
- Although only a small proportion of participants reported being in attached relationships, those who were, stated that they preferred to stay outside to be together.
- For male participants choosing spaces outdoors that were in proximity to services, such as food, was important. For others it was most important to be away from crowds in out of the way places as in the river valley or parkland.

- Female participants were more likely to report personal safety as the driving force in choosing a location to stay. While some said that being with a partner afforded them protection, others talked about choosing open locations such as under a bridge, to allow more than one escape route.
- Regardless of gender, many stated that it was safer to stay on the southside of the river where the homeless population was not as concentrated and there was less gang activity, even though there were fewer available services.

Health Issues and Supports

- Participants experienced an average of just over 4 out of 6 areas of health challenge.
- The majority of participants experienced health challenges (Trauma – 76%; Addiction/Substance Use – 74%; Medical illness or condition – 70%; Mental health – 62%; Physical disability – 57%)
- Given the difficulties that people who live outside experience, their challenges of daily survival were exacerbated by health conditions and lack of treatment.
- Health care access was not commensurate with health needs, with those who stayed outside being far less likely to receive care than their housed counterparts.
- Only a minority of participants received treatment for their health problems and only 10% received treatment for the most prevalent problem of trauma.

Mutual Respect and Relationships

Relationships built on mutual respect were key to successfully offering and receiving services. When one could see value in the other, understanding and empathy was fostered for community participants and those who helped them. This attitude was echoed by a large majority of participants.

- 3 in 4 community participants had contact with Outreach Staff, rating these contacts most highly at between *somewhat positive* and *very positive*.
- Rated second most positive, contact with Health Care Staff rated the quality of contact between *neutral* and *somewhat positive*, although only 33% of respondents had any contact with Health Care workers.
- Community participants recognized that they must work for positive interactions and respect those they come into contact with, however, they cited difficulties when they are desperate for service, using alcohol or substances, having mental health problems, or feeling that they are not respected.
- Those who provide supports indicated that the majority of the homeless don't cause trouble and would be relatively easy to house and support if appropriate space were available.

While housing for all Edmontonians is the answer to ending homelessness, the complexity of attaining this goal successfully means strong financial and human commitment. While working to this goal, it is imperative that those who are homeless are afforded fulfillment of their basic needs within a structure of dignity and respect. Suggested avenues to move forward include places and spaces for safe encampments, utilization of Indigenous knowledge, planning and service delivery, and working together for better communication and understanding.

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INTRODUCTION

This report is one of two reports coming out of the Complex Needs Banning Research (CNBR) project, one focusing on banning and the other focusing on people who stayed outside in the prior 12 months and were also banned¹.

CTV News reported in April 2022 that the number of people experiencing homelessness in Edmonton had doubled since before the pandemic in 2020 (CTV News, April 5 2022). In the same news article St. Amand of the Bissell Centre described encampments as *a byproduct of the inability of systems to provide the appropriate support to folks*.

In October 2022, The Alberta government announced 187M over a two-year plan to address addiction and homelessness which included 5M to be spent in Edmonton to create up to 450 more shelter spaces for a total of 1,072 beds city-wide (CTV News, October 1, 2022). As of late November 2022 Homeward Trust identified 2,706 people experiencing homelessness (<https://homewardtrust.ca/data-analytics-reporting>).

While this funding is necessary and helpful to support shelters and addiction treatment, only a minority of the funding is available for low-income housing units and/or operational budgets. Although there is a clear understanding that the standard for success is housing that is integrated with recovery-oriented supports, the current funding announced falls short. The Report of the Coordinated Community Response to Homelessness Task Force points to additional factors

Housing options remain limited, with glaring gaps when it comes to options suitable for clients with complex conditions. Options that used to be available have, over time, been dismantled or converted in response to Alberta's evolving economy. (Task Force, 2022, p6)

Over time, options that used to be available, such as single-room occupancy units, have disappeared or been converted. The resulting narrower continuum of options is undermining the effectiveness of community responses. (Task Force, 2022, p11)

The Complex Needs Committee

The Complex Needs Committee is a subset of Sector Emergency Response agencies in Edmonton. It consists of a group of service providers who meet regularly to discuss trends and identify gaps and potential solutions to issues arising within their sector. Following earlier work in Edmonton that explored the Banning of Youth (OSCMAP, 2017) they were interested in learning about banning practices and their effect on adults in the community; particularly the effect banning has on people with complex needs. From these interests the research project was born. Funding was provided by the City of Edmonton, Homeward Trust, and REACH Edmonton Council for Safe Communities (REACH).

¹ Left Outside: The Experience of Being Banned in Edmonton

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As background to the research project, it was imperative to clearly define this groups' understanding of those with complex needs. They drew on the definition as outlined in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. *People with complex needs include a diverse population that experience multiple barriers to accessing services, fulfilling their basic needs, or otherwise enjoying the basic human rights.* Every person accessing a service will have multiple needs, but it's the interaction of these multiple needs that leads to complexity. Issues people with complex needs may be dealing with are homelessness, substance use, mental health concerns, and physical health issues (such as mobility issues), as well as involvement with justice, racism, disabilities, trauma, and loss, among others.

Research Approach

This community-based research project recognized the strengths and perspectives of all members involved in the research. Community service providers and service users informed the process, vetted, and made meaning of the results. The intent was to facilitate understanding and change.

Guiding Principles

Collectively, the community partners and researchers defined the following guiding principles as the framework for the project:

- Work with an Indigenous Elder and/or Wisdom Holder to integrate Indigenous practice as required in the community and to center our research team.
- Honour the truth of research participants.
- Work with partners to nurture working relationships and emphasize ethical practice in the community.
- Use the 7 Grandfather teachings of the Anishanaabe: Love, Respect, Wisdom, Courage, Honesty, Humility, and Truth as a guide for all activities.
- Work with agencies to appropriately engage with community members.
- Be sensitive to the demands placed on agencies and research participants. This included informing ourselves of other data collection projects to be careful to not over engage the same people participating in other projects.
- Hire research staff who have lived experience and a strong knowledge and awareness of the community.

Setting and Background

Community-based research is subject to change, refocus, redesign, and differential perspectives and understanding. Researchers must be comfortable with ambiguity and change throughout the process and must be able to move outside the realm of expert to stand beside, and be guided and challenged by all involved.

Community involvement is imperative throughout the entire research project. Agency staff brought understanding through many lenses of inquiry, and through their subsequent perceptions and directions. Life experiences shaped the framework for the inquiry from which the project emerged.

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Who was involved?

The Research Team

The role of the research team was to carry out the work guided by the advice, knowledge, and expertise of the community partner agencies. Deborah Morrison has well-established relationships of trust with community members, service providers, and local government and has served as the Executive Director and Partnership Enhancement Facilitator for M.A.P.S. Alberta Capital Region for over 20 years. Since Deborah's retirement during this project, Matthew "Gus" Gusul has taken Deborah's former role. Gus comes to M.A.P.S. with community experience and is known to many of the agencies involved in the CNBR project. Marlene Mulder's experience in research and data analysis, along with her work in the community with the homeless and with refugee sponsorships and settlement, grounds her in the community. Colette Cornejo brings experience interfacing between project teams and their stakeholders grounded in a wide variety of projects ranging from community health evaluations in remote First Nations communities to province-wide stakeholder consultations for Alberta Health. Jennifer Vogl supported the research project through her extensive knowledge of the human services sector in Edmonton as well as by securing A pRoject Ethics Community Consensus Initiative (ARECCI)² approval for the research project. The researchers have all lived and worked in Edmonton for most of their careers.

When hiring Research Assistants we wanted the research team to comprise experience and education. The job ad for research assistants was shared with our community partners. Research Assistant were recruited based on their experience with data collection, working in the community, and/or lived experience. They brought a wealth of experience to the project in Indigenous ceremony, front line work in partner agencies, as well as daily interactions with individuals staying outside. Research Assistants were also selected for their ability and willingness to work as part of a team and align with the approach and tools designed for the data collection.

Given the casual hours of work and the desire to retain staff, it was most important to offer training and experience that was of value to the research staff beyond the immediate project. Training included smudging, Indigenous research protocols, building rapport in the community, interviewing skills, data collection, and data entry. At the training session, time was also scheduled to role play, learn from each other, and build community.

Four research assistants were hired and retained throughout the project. The first was an Indigenous Elder, community knowledge keeper and prayer camp volunteer. This individual described their role in the community as being *to provide emotional, mental and spiritual supports to all*. Another Indigenous RA was well known in the community as *Uncle*, the person who cared and checked in on people. This individual had work experience in shelters and doing data collection with street level populations as well as first-hand knowledge of the inner workings of running encampments, including camp sustainability. The third research assistant was a 2nd year Masters in Counselling student with work experience in Edmonton as both a street team worker and a shelter worker for one of the community partner agencies. The final research assistant was a 5th year University of Alberta student completing a combined degree program towards a Bachelor of Arts in Native Studies as well as a Bachelor of Arts in Elementary Education.

² <https://albertainnovates.ca/programs/arecci/>

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Indigenous Partner

This project was greatly enhanced by the involvement of staff from NiGiNan Housing Ventures. They provided guidance and resources to ensure Indigenous content and protocols were included in a respectful and meaningful way throughout the project. They supported the development of the project methodology and data collection tools and offered suggestions and insight for working in the community. They also helped start off the data collection phase of the work in a good way by hosting a Traditional Nehiyawak Feast in their ceremony room at Ambrose Place.

Community Partners

Representatives from community partner agencies, comprised largely of members of the Complex Need Group, sat on one of two tables for the purpose of this research project. The Project Support Group (PSG) where members helped define the purpose, the potential actions and desired learnings from the research, provided the funding, and proposed project goals and membership. PSG members were from Homeward Trust Edmonton, Hope Mission, The Mustard Seed, The City of Edmonton, REACH Edmonton Council for Safer Communities, NiGiNan Housing Ventures, and the M.A.P.S. Research Team.

The Project Development Group (PDG) comprised people who were engaged with or had direct experience serving people with complex needs. The PDG was responsible for vetting the methodology, ensuring that the goals and scope of research, as defined by the PSG, shaped the question themes, and vetting data collection tools. Some members of this group hosted data collection events and recruited individuals to participate in the research. PDG members were from Bissell Centre, Boyle Street Community Services, Homeward Trust Edmonton, Hope Mission, Jasper Place Wellness Centre, NiGiNan Housing Ventures, REACH Edmonton Council for Safer Communities, The Mustard Seed, and the M.A.P.S. Research Team.

City of Edmonton Encampment Response Team

Early in the project, the research team was approached by City employees on the Encampment Response Team (ERT) with a proposed collaboration. The ERT was working on responding to a recommendation outlined in the 2021 Encampments Response Evaluation Report that *encampment occupants be engaged to help inform the encampment response* and had identified an overlap in the population who are impacted by banning and those who are likely to interact with the encampment ecosystem (Edmonton, 2021). The ERT was also interested in collaborating with MAPS because of their multi-dimensional approach to collaborative planning, which includes community mapping and the development of journey maps.

Out of a shared desire to not overburden this population, the two teams set out to define how questions related to encampment could be integrated into the data collection tools being developed for the research project. As part of the collaboration, MAPS committed to provide analysis and a separate report based on questions specific to the encampment experience to the ERT. The City of Edmonton provided additional funding to enable this work.

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METHODOLOGY

Data collection methods and tools needed to be flexible to meet the needs and situations of community members and supporting organizations, but consistent to ensure that data could be compared and contrasted.

Data collection sites and locations were chosen depending on agency and research participants needs and situations. The majority of data collection was done at partner agencies. To address the challenge of finding individuals that do not engage with the shelter system one data collection event was held at a neutral venue that was neither a human services agency nor a shelter.

This event was meant primarily for individuals that stay in encampments near Whyte Avenue. The idea for the event and a large portion of the recruitment leading up to it are credited to the insight and efforts of one of the research assistants with lived experience of banning and homelessness. He walked areas where those who stay outside had tents or shelters to invite them to participate in the research. Outreach staff from partner agencies and from the host site also spent time in the days leading up to data collection promoting the event in their daily interactions with individuals who may not access services at agencies.

Research staff worked with partner agencies that offered to host data collection events at their sites. Prior to the event research staff visited each host site to collectively decide how to best use the physical space available and to help the community partners understand the approach and format that the research team would be using the day of the data collection. Agencies were also asked for advice about what type of food and gift cards would be appropriate for individuals at their site. These visits provided a good opportunity for research staff to address questions, and to reinforce with agencies the research teams' commitment to accommodate host and participant needs and interests. Sites were also provided with posters to advertise the upcoming data collection events. In neighborhoods with multiple agencies, sites also cross-promoted each other's events.

Research schedule

A research schedule was developed with the goal of interviewing 100 individuals that had experience with being banned.

- October 2021 – May 2022: Seeking funding, meetings with project support group, project development group, and COE Encampment Response group
- June 2022: Traditional Nehiyawak Feast hosted by NiGiNan Housing Ventures
- June 2022: Ethics approval – A pRoject Ethics Community Consensus Initiative (ARECCI)
- June 6 – August 18, 2022: Data collection
- August – September 2022: Development of project maps
- August – October: Data analysis and report writing
- November 2022: Target for completion of Final report and dissemination of data products.

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Data Collection

The study comprised two data collection components. Community participants completed a 9-page survey through a one-on-one in-person interview led by a research team member. This method allowed each participant to have designated time with someone who was there just for them. Following the completion of their survey, individuals were invited to a focus group discussion.

On-site Practices

- Three hours were typically scheduled for data collection and all data collection was done during the day on a weekday. At the suggestion of several host sites, data collection was often done in the morning; when individuals would be more likely to participate. To be respectful of each collaborating agency's needs and nature, the data collection format as outlined below served as a guideline and could be modified as required. Research staff worked with agency staff on site who provided support by setting aside the space for data collection and by recruiting participants.
- Research staff arrived on-site 30 minutes prior to data collection to set up the physical space and be fully available and attentive to community members when they arrived.
- The lead researcher was present at every data collection and led all focus group discussions.
- A refreshment station was set up with tea and coffee for use throughout the data collection event.
- The Elder from the research team offered spiritual care as requested.
- The format and purpose of the research were explained by the research staff and participants were able to ask questions and voice concerns.
- Participants completed their survey through one-on-one interview with a member of the research team.
- Demographic information was collected so that we would be able to understand who is or has experienced banning and so that data could later be analyzed through different lenses.
- At the beginning of the survey, a qualifying question was asked to screen for experience of banning.
- Research staff took notes on observations and reflections at focus group discussions.
- Focus group sessions were audio recorded and subsequently used to ensure the staff notes were accurate.
- Research staff cleaned and organized the space to leave it in the same condition as found on arrival.
- Research team debriefed following each data collection.
- All materials needed for data collection, from hard copies of the survey to disinfectant wipes to sanitize areas used to serve food, were carried to and from each data collection. This was done to minimize the burden on hosting agencies.

Participant Recruitment and Inclusion

For the purpose of this work, we were looking for individuals who had experienced being banned in the past 12 months. Participants were screened based on having had experienced being banned. This determination was self-defined. Individuals with these experiences are referred to in this report as *community participants*. Within this group those who had also stayed outside within the past 12 months were asked additional questions.

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It was effective to depend on the research assistants with lived experience to talk to people, ask the screening questions, and invite them to participate. Because they had lived experience their invitations were authentic and legitimate:

We need your voice.

During this process for two hours, you're helping us.

You'll actually have a thumbprint in change, if that matters to you.

Some individuals were not able to participate because they were banned from the agencies where data collection was taking place, so the team moved their work outside on several occasions.

In the event that a community member was unable to stay long enough to complete both a survey and a focus group, the focus group questions were integrated into the surveys for that person. A major reason for not being able to stay inside the data collection site was concern for personal belongings that were left unattended outside. For these reasons, accommodation was required.

Compensation and Appreciation

- Community participants were given a \$25 gift card to thank them for their time. Choice was offered between a dollar store, a grocery store or a fast-food restaurant to accommodate participant needs and preferences. To meet our funder requirements, community participants were asked to sign for these cards, however, if there was discomfort around divulging a name, pseudonyms were welcomed.
- At whatever point in time seemed best for the participant, they were offered a meal. Often individuals arrived hungry and eating first would make it easier to sit and concentrate on the questions they were being asked. The best food the budget would allow (\$25/person) was ordered and it was always gone by the time the event wrapped up.
- Community participants were also given tokens of appreciation up to a value of approx. \$5/person. Items such as smokes, bus tickets, bus ticket pouches, and rain ponchos were helpful for putting people at ease and offering a small amount of comfort to individuals.

After Care Strategy

When organizing data collection events researchers requested that a staff member plan to be nearby during data collection in case a participant needed additional support during or after they participated in an interview or focus group. Community participants were offered a handout with the name of the staff on site that could be available to provide extra support for them if they felt they needed it in the hours and days following data collection. The handout also included the researchers' names and contact information with directions on how to access research findings.

Community Focus Groups

Focus groups were held to gain the perspective of other groups in Edmonton that work with those experiencing banning and those who live in encampments.

Two focus groups were held for staff that work at human services agencies. The first for staff that work inside the facility, primarily as drop-in or shelter staff and the second for staff that work outreach; meeting people and supporting them wherever they meet them. An additional focus group was held with a mutual aid group that provides outreach support to the street level population in Edmonton. Finally, a focus group was held with City of Edmonton staff that are involved in the various areas of the City's response to encampments. The questions focused on encampments.

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Deliverables

Sharing the Data

All research products will be broadly shared. Copies will be sent to the community partners and will also be available to download at no charge from the M.A.P.S. website at: <https://mapsab.ca/community-based-research/>

Research Documents

- Two research reports:
 - Staying Outside is Not a Preference: Homelessness in Edmonton
 - Left Outside: The Experience of Being Banned in Edmonton
- Executive summary or project highlights
- Infographic for community participants
- Journey maps
 - Research findings
 - Everyday in the Life of Homeless Edmontonians³

RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

To learn about experiences of staying outside, the following entities were included in the research:

- 86 community participants who had been banned and stayed outside within the past 12 months (a subset of the 118 who were interviewed regarding their banning experiences)
- 10 staff from Human Services agencies
- 6 City of Edmonton staff involved in encampment response
- 4 Mutual Aid group volunteers

COMMUNITY PARTICIPANTS WHO ARE HOMELESS

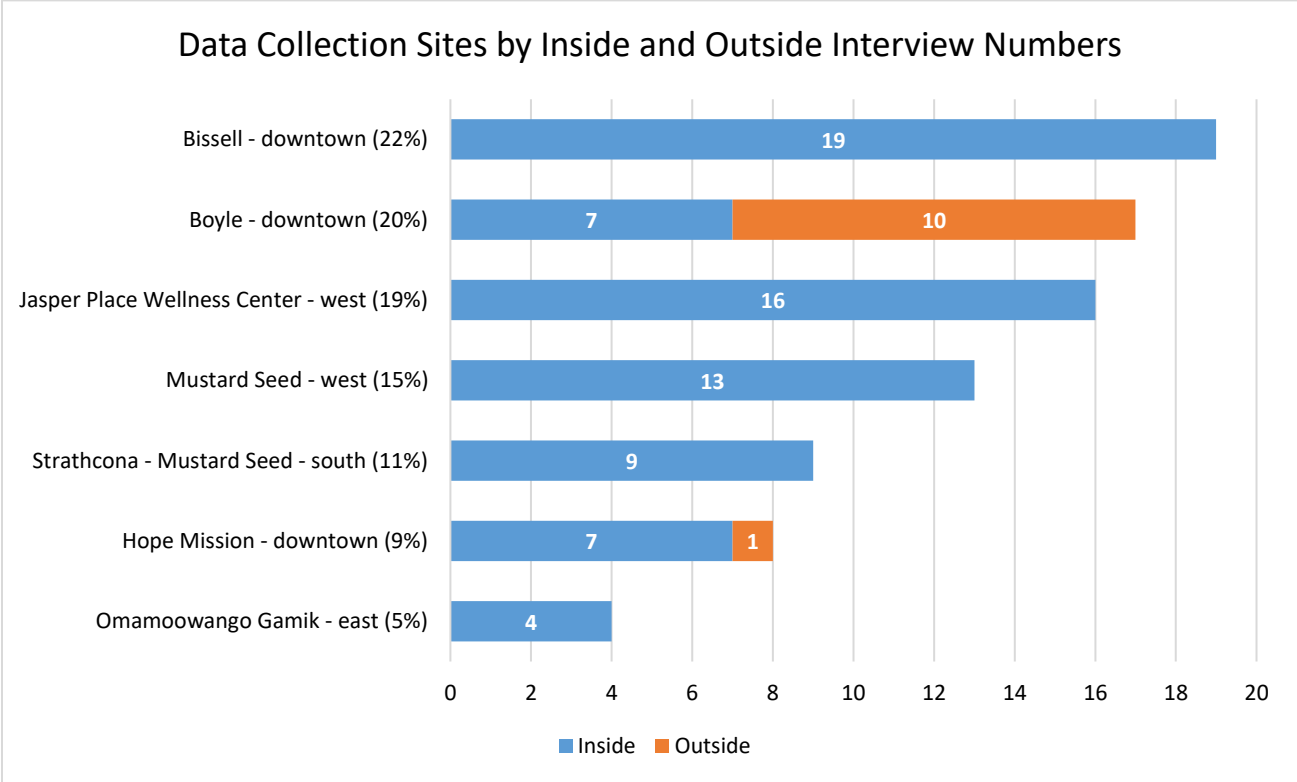
People who stayed outside in the prior 12 months comprised 73% of all community members in the Complex Needs Banning data collection. With the exception on the section including banning comparisons, this report refers to only the 86 persons who had lived stayed outside in the preceding 12 months. It is important to note that proportions and numbers are reported in many areas of this report. When using proportions, especially with low numbers it is prudent to note when a proportion is larger than the number it represents.

In order to reduce the likelihood that people had participated twice in the research the age and gender of all community participants were compared during the data analysis to ensure there were no duplicates. The same group of Research Assistants was used for every data collection event which provided the continuity required for staff to notice if an individual had tried to participate more than once in the study.

³ Jerry McFeeters, an Indigenous storyteller from Cold Lake First Nations Alberta who has first-hand experience living in encampments in Edmonton and supporting those staying outside as “Uncle Jerry” who supports the community.

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Seven agencies hosted data collection events. Because some of the community members, who wanted to participate in this project, were banned from the buildings where data collection was held, data collection was moved outdoors as required. One of the agencies waived all bans for the data collection event. The following table shows the number of community members who participated at each agency, as well as the delineation of those interviewed outside of the buildings.



Demographics

Age, Gender & Origin

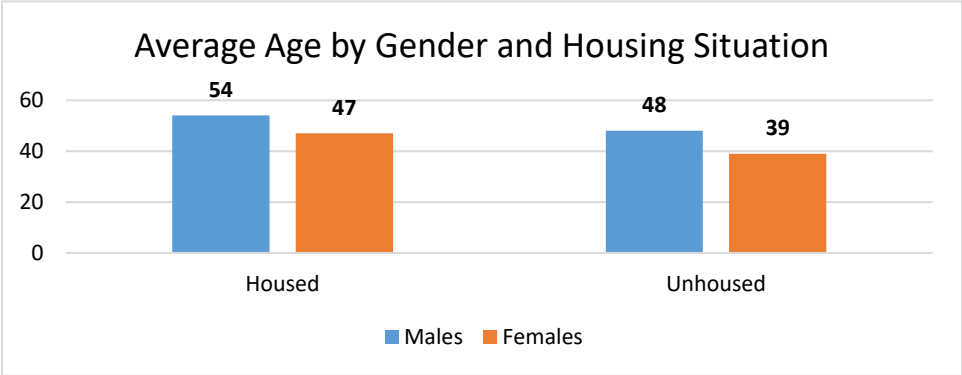
Three in four community members (64) identified as Indigenous. Indigenous participants came from 30 First Nations or communities. The Saddle Lake Cree Nation was most heavily represented with 8 respondents. The majority of Indigenous participants were First Nations – Treaty at 62%, followed by Métis at 25%, Non-status Treaty at 10%, and finally Inuit at 3%. While 2 in 3 Indigenous participants had personal experience at residential schools, day school, and/or the foster care system, almost all had relatives or friends with this experience.

Of the 86 community participants only three were born outside of Canada with the country of birth being reported as Africa, El Salvador, and Somalia. Four in five non-Indigenous participants identified as being racially ‘White’. A small minority reported being ‘Black’ (2), and ‘Latino’ (2).

Approximately 61% of participants identified as male, 37% identified as female, and two respondents identified as being non-binary. Eighty-seven percent (87%) of the females staying outside were Indigenous compared to only 13% who were non-Indigenous.

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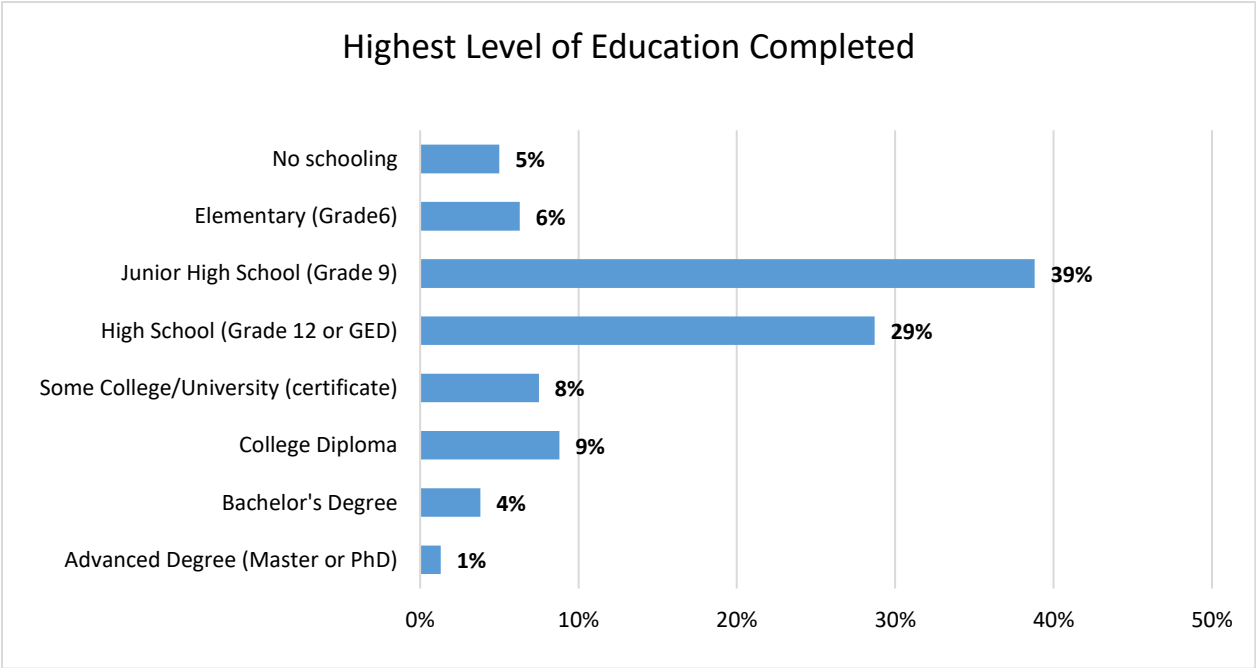
The average age for those who had stayed outside was 44 years with a range of 21 to 73 years old. Females who stayed outside were significantly younger than their male counterparts with an average age of 39 years as compared to the males whose average age was 48 years. A comparison also showed that those staying outside are significantly younger than those with housing regardless of gender.



Only one in ten participants reported being in an attached relationship (having a partner). Having an attached relationship can make a big difference in terms of safety. When asked to describe what it is like to live outside alone one participant responded, *Danger... people shooting up and fighting and stealing your stuff. You feel like you're in danger if you are by yourself.*

Education

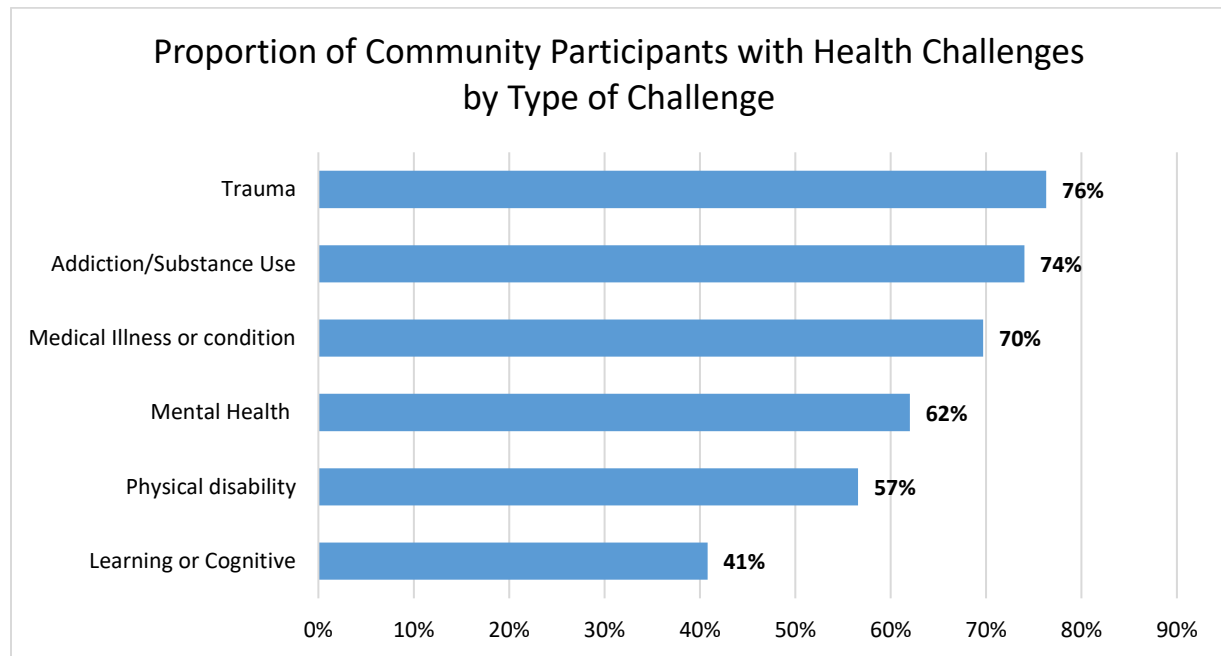
Fifty-one percent (51%) of participants who had stayed outside had completed at least high school or GED, however, their educational attainment is significantly less than those who are housed at 74%.



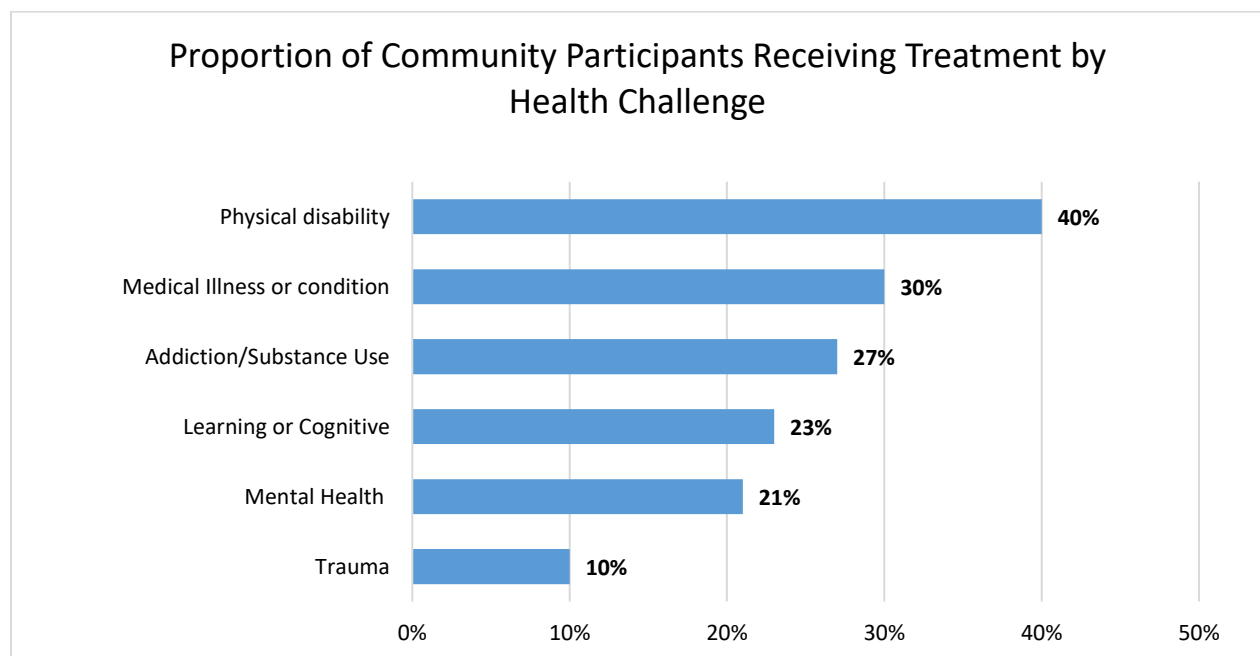
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Health

Seventy-six (76) participants answered the survey questions related to their health. Regarding their self-assessment of health, 20% considered themselves to be 'very unhealthy', and 38% reported being 'somewhat unhealthy'. The following table shows the number of participants with health challenges, (orange bar) and the number who had received treatment or support in dealing with those challenges. Participants were also asked about which type of health challenges they face, and whether or not they had received any treatment or support. The proportions of those with health challenges was high, ranging from 41% with learning or cognitive challenges to 76% trauma challenges.

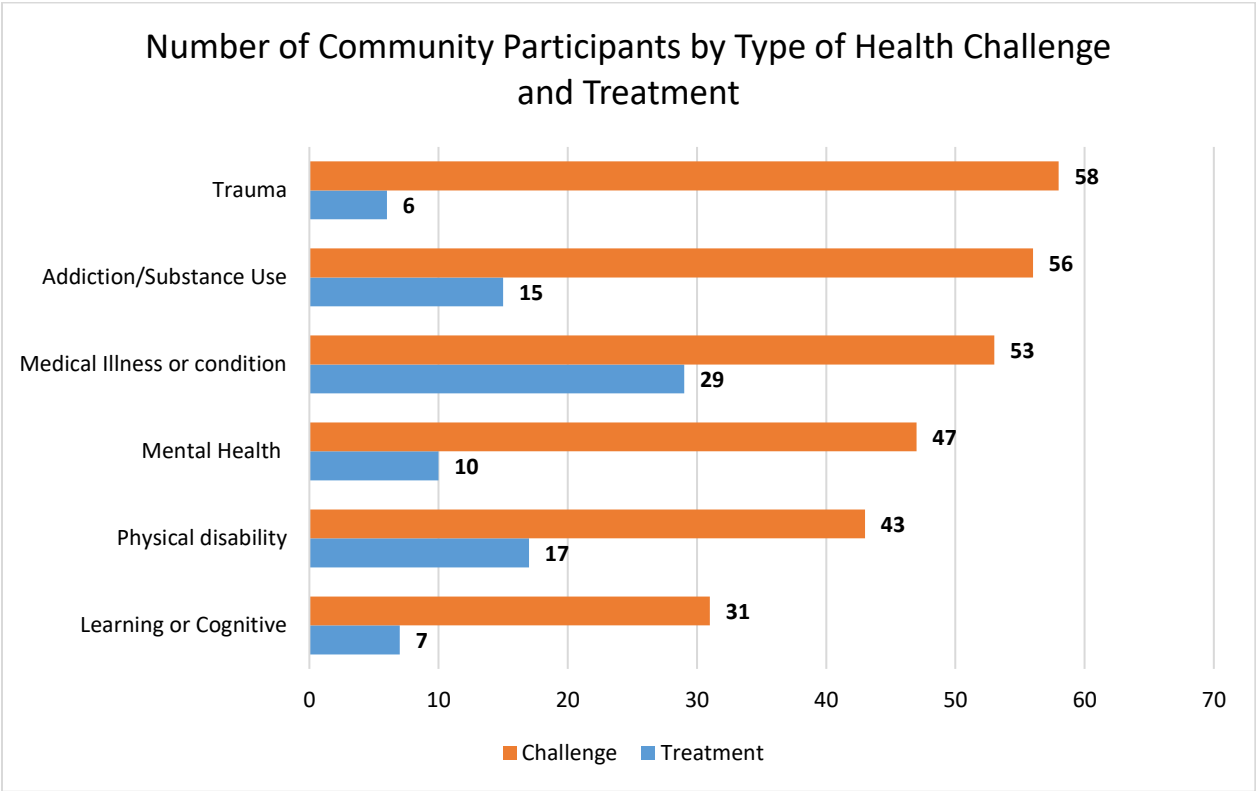


The following table shows the proportion of participants receiving treatment or support by specific health challenge. The highest support is 40% for physical disabilities and the lowest is for trauma at 10%.



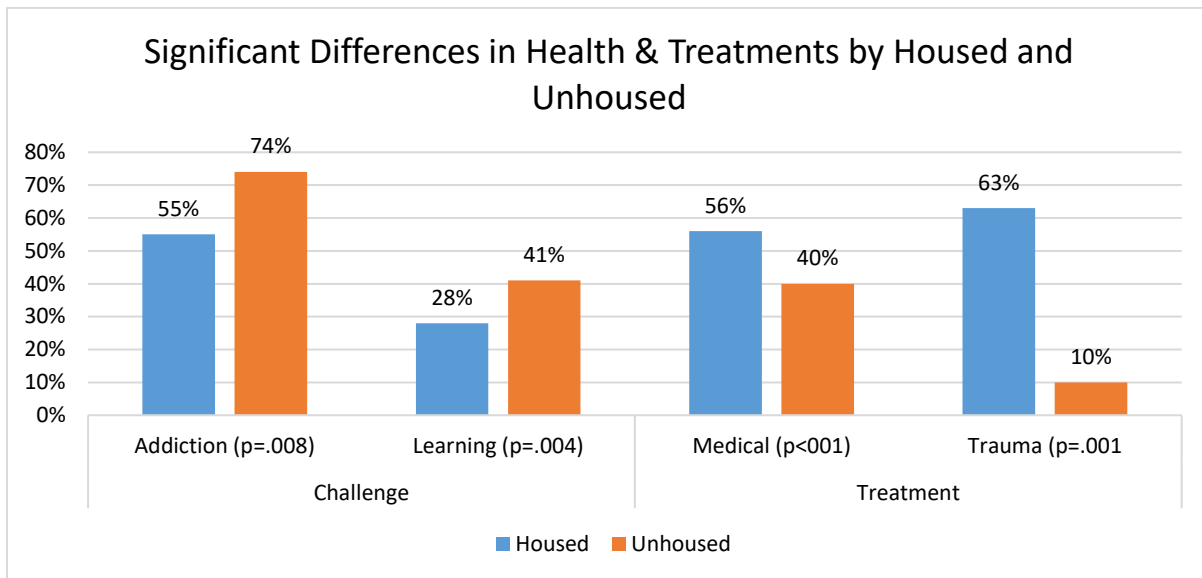
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The following table shows the same health data that is listed above in proportions but is presented in numbers.

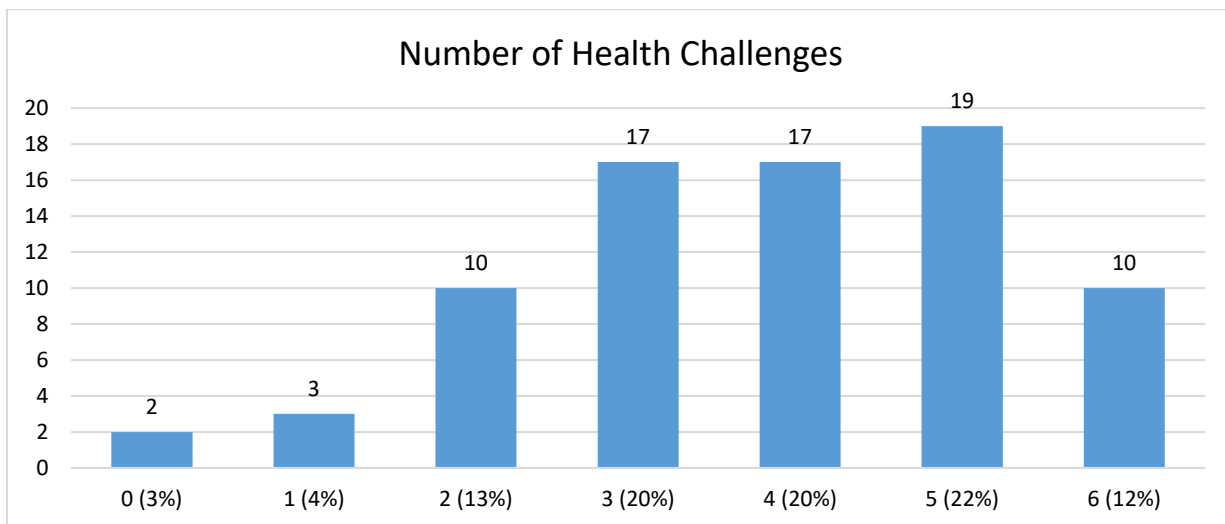


Significant differences between those who stay outside and those who are housed appear in four areas. Regarding health challenges participants who stay outside are more likely to experience addiction and or substance use at 74% compared with their housed counterparts at 55%. Those staying outside are also more likely to have learning or cognitive disabilities at 41% compared with 28% for the housed. Regarding treatment, significant differences are found in treatment for medical conditions or illness at 40% for those staying outside and 56% for the housed. Only 10% of participants who stay outside received treatment for trauma compared with 63% of those who are housed. Given the difficulties that people who live outside experience, there challenges of daily survival are exacerbated by health conditions and lack of treatment.

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Six health challenges were measured. Only two participants reported having no health challenges, with an average number of 4.04 health challenges. This average is significantly more than for those who are housed at 3.38.



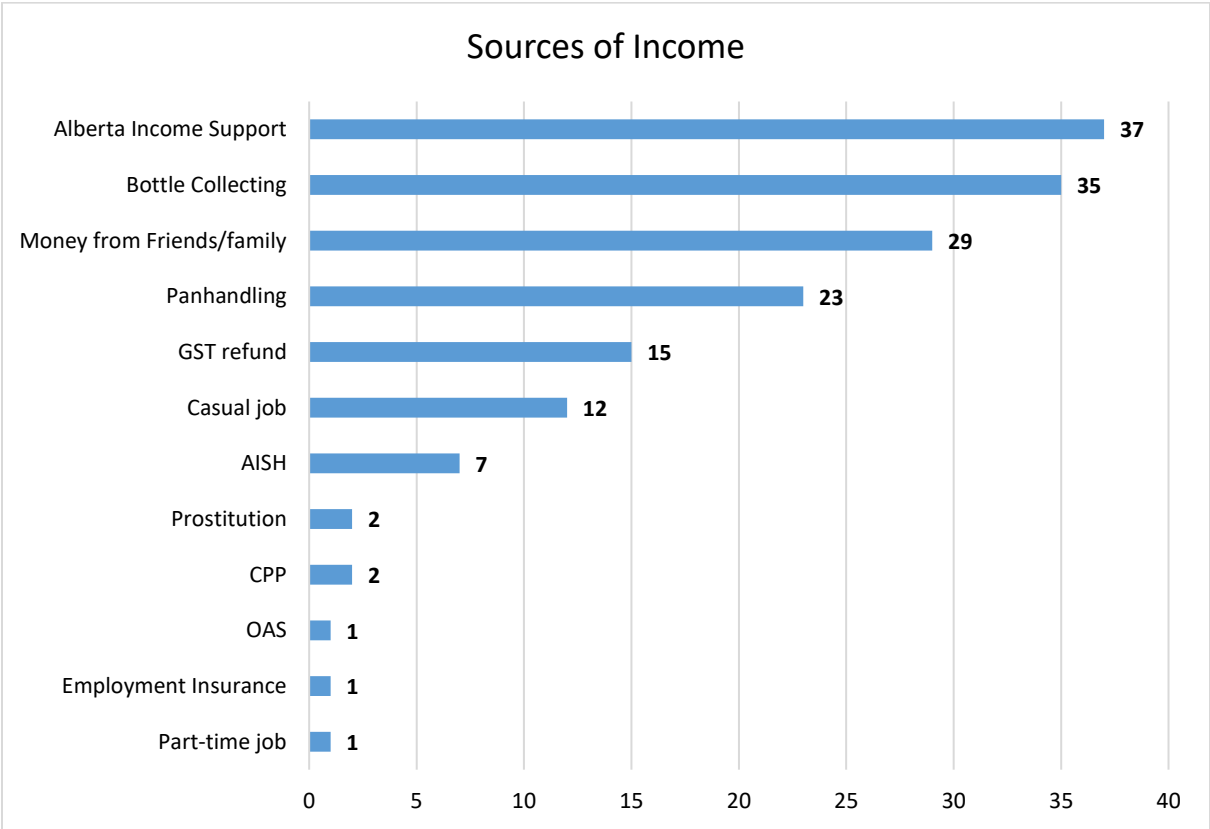
Agency staff talked about how bans are related to mental health issues and how it is often not possible to access help when it is needed. They gave an example of having to wait 5 hours for an assessment for someone with a suicide plan.

Agency staff don't have the resources and hit many barriers when trying to connect clients to mental health resources in the community. It can be really hard when we want to do right by somebody when they don't have the ability to maintain their behaviour in a safe way for everybody else.

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Income

Participants were asked about their income from all sources. Their responses, presented below, show multiple sources, almost none of which are steady or sufficient to cover basic necessities.



Staying Outside

Participants who had stayed outside in the prior 12 months were asked to provide more detail about all the places they had stayed overnight during that time. While many respondents used multiple types of accommodation, eight people stayed outside for the full 12 months. Of those Indigenous participants who reported gender, four were male and 3 were female. Their ages ranged from 23 to 54 years and none of them were in attached relationships. Six out of eight (75%) of these respondents did not stay in shelters because of the lack of privacy and not feeling safe at shelters.

On the other end of the spectrum, considering those who stayed the most places in the past 12 months, 15 people stayed at 5 or 6 places. In this group, 73% (n=11) were Indigenous, and slightly more than half were females (57%; n=8). Only one of the eight people who stayed outside for the whole year was in an attached relationship. The age range for this group was 30 to 55 years. The following list shows a breakdown of the places participants stayed in the past 12 months. Females who stayed outside were twice as likely to have lived in their own rented or owned space in the past 12 months (45% females vs. 22% males).

Staying Outside is Not a Preference: Homelessness in Edmonton

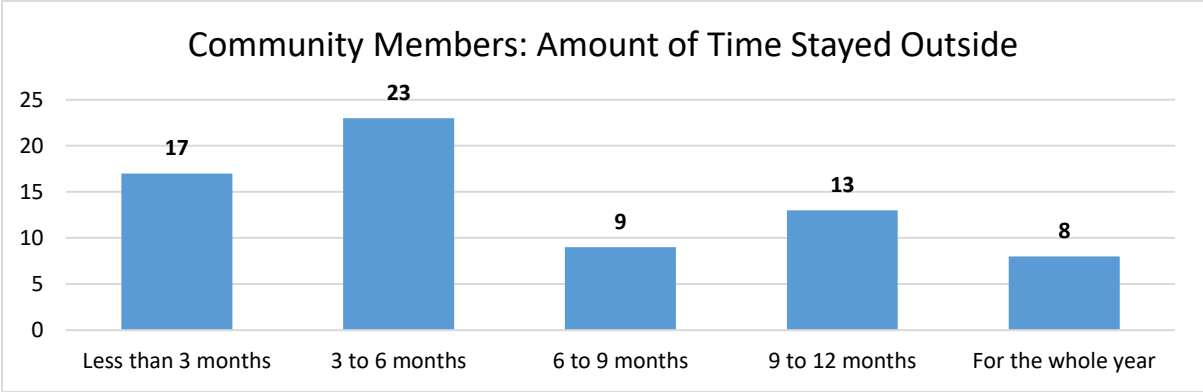
Places Stayed– Past 12 Months

- 8 people stayed outside only for the past 12 months
- 17 people stayed in 2 types of dwellings in the past 12 months
 - 8 (outside, couch)
 - 6 (outside, shelter)
 - 1 (outside, PSH/Harm⁴)
 - 1 (outside, short term)
 - 1 (outside, rent)
- 28 people stayed in 3 types of dwellings in the past 12 months
 - 18 (outside, couch, shelter)
 - 4 (outside, shelter, rent)
 - 5 (outside, shelter, short term)
 - 1 (outside, couch, rent)
- 18 people stayed in 4 types of dwellings in the past 12 months
 - 7 (outside, couch, shelter, rent)
 - 3 (outside, couch, shelter, short term)
 - 4 (outside, couch, shelter, PSH/Harm)
 - 2 (outside, couch, short term/ rent)
 - 1 (outside, couch, PSH/Harm, rent)
 - 1 (outside, short term, rent, family)
- 12 people stayed in 5 types of dwellings in the past 12 months
 - 5 (outside, couch, shelter, short term, rent)
 - 3 (outside, couch, shelter, short term, PSH/Harm)
 - 1 (outside, couch, shelter, PSH/Harm/ rent)
 - 1 (outside, shelter, short term, PSH/Harm/rent)
 - 1 (outside, couch, shelter, PSH/Harm, hospital)
 - 1 (outside, couch, shelter short term, family)
- 3 people stayed in 6 types of dwellings in the past 12 months
 - 1 (outside, couch, shelter, short term, PSH/Harm, rent)
 - 01 (outside, couch, shelter, short term, PSH/Harm, jail)
 - 1 (outside, couch, shelter, short term, rent, hospital)

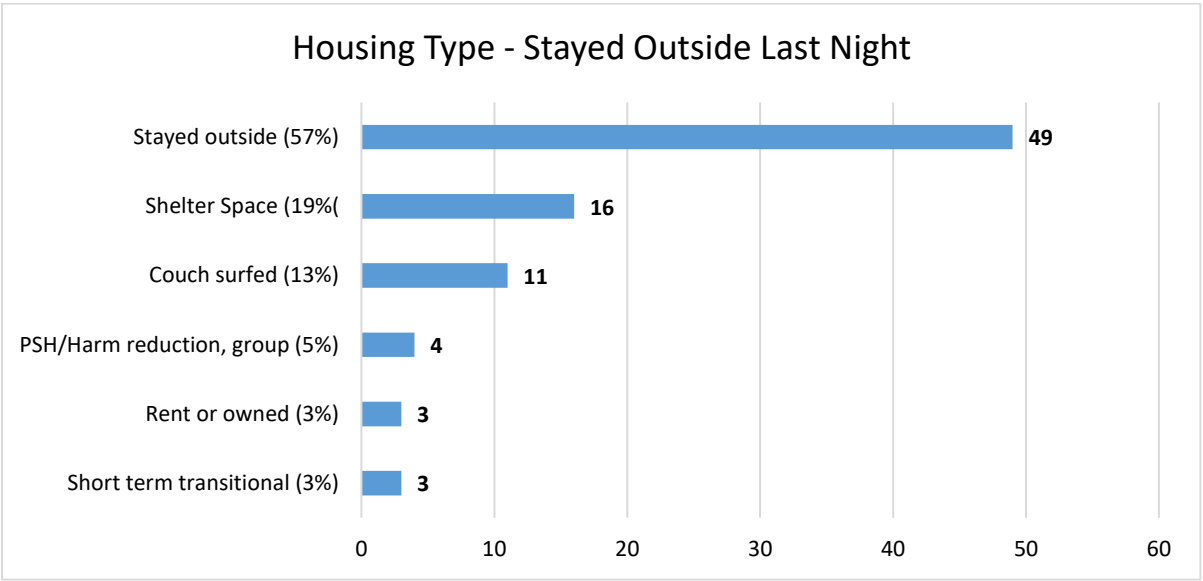
Participants were also asked about the portion of the past 12 months that they had stayed outside. The majority who offered a timeframe for staying outside (57%; n=40), had been outside for less than half of the year.

⁴ PSH/Harm: Permanent Supportive Housing or housing related to harm reduction programs

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Forty-nine (49) persons (57%) who stayed outside in the past 12 months also stayed outside the night preceding data collection.

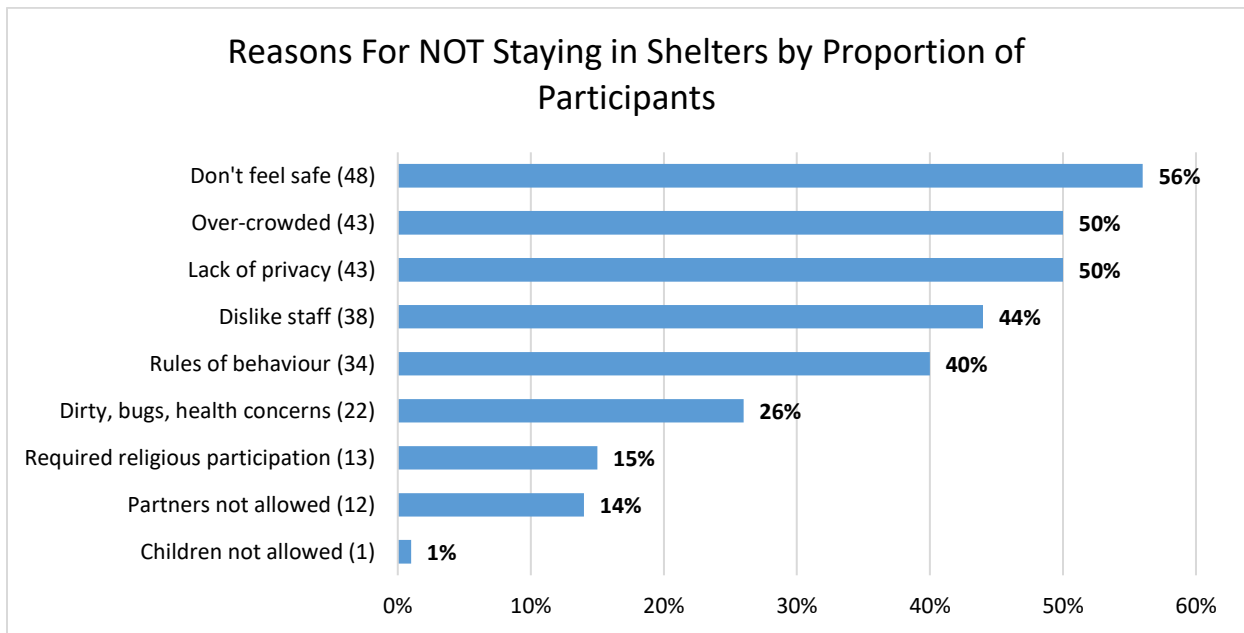


Decisions about Staying in Shelters

In the survey, participants were asked whether staying outside was a choice. Two in three (67%) said that they did not prefer to stay outside. The remaining 33% preferred staying outside.

The principal reasons that participants do not stay in shelters is that they did not feel safe, and that shelters are overcrowded. Note that with the final two reasons shown on the table below, the low numbers reflect that very few participants had a partner or children with them. There were no significant differences in reasons for not staying in shelters by gender or Indigenous versus non-Indigenous participants. Females were more likely than males to say that the reason they did not stay in shelters was because they could not stay with their partners.

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Outreach and agency workers discussed their clients' experiences of trying to seek shelter space as a negative experience that makes some unhoused stay outside.

They're sick of it so they just say 'forget it'. They're being robbed, people are screaming and yelling, the smells, the urine, the poop, and everything else that goes on in there. The bugs, the way they are spoken to by the staff, the other community members that are having mental health issues or psychosis. They don't get sleep in there. The mat program they had was terrible. The Humane Society is a lot more kind with the animals.

They are often treated badly (at shelters). Sometimes their things are 'lost' when stored at agencies. They are continuously told to move. They often don't get what they want or need.

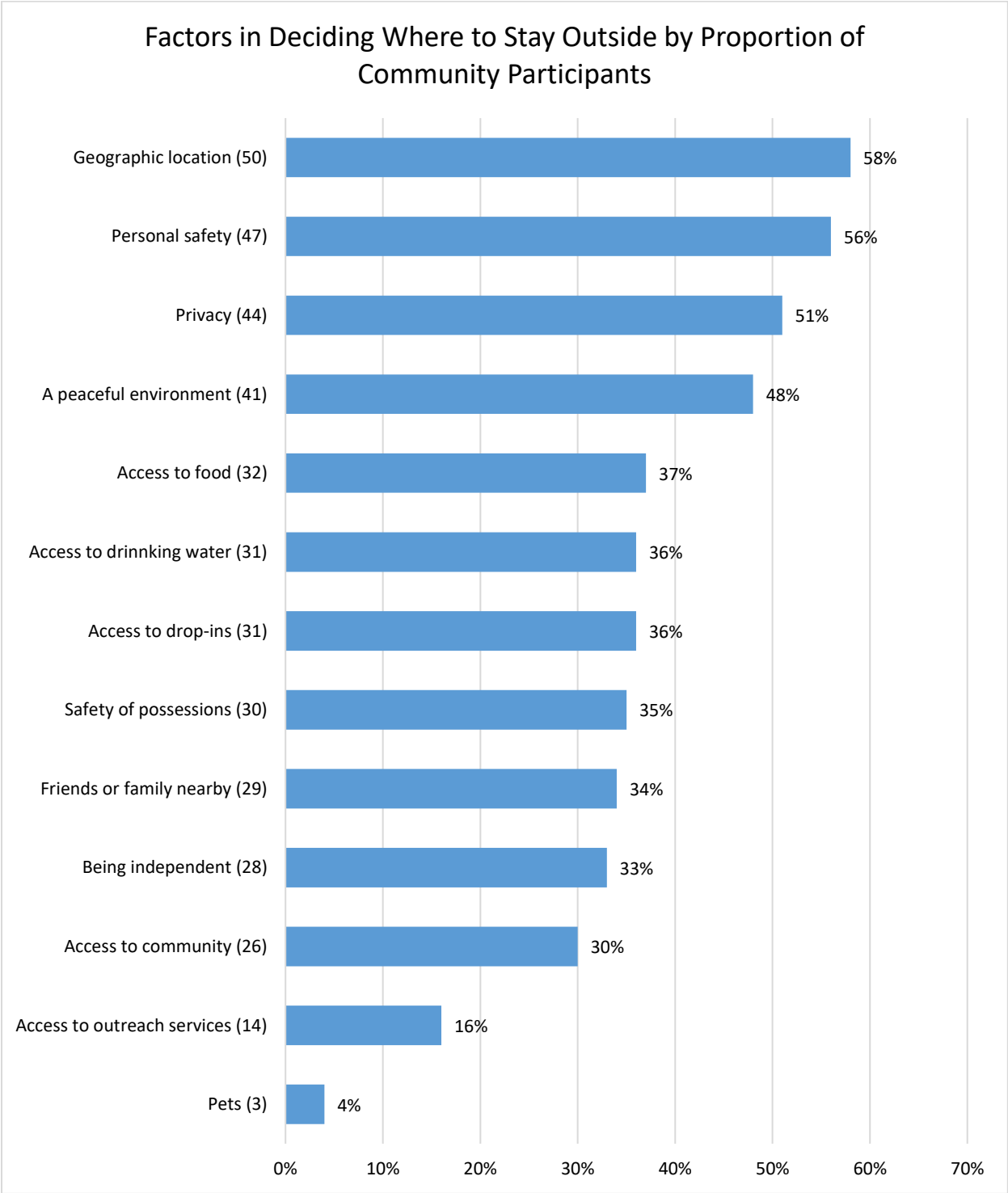
Community participants noted reasons that they do not feel safe in shelters: *I don't know who is around if I fall asleep; Outside line-ups are dangerous – Staff stays inside; Too much yelling and screaming.* Others cited their need for privacy: *My addiction and PTSD make it hard to stay; People weird me out at shelters. You are surrounded by people but outside you get your space.* Although friends or family nearby was not cited by many, this theme arose in conversations. Attachment goes beyond partners and spouses: *I want to stay with my family outside; I worry about my Mom and stay outside so I can be with her.*

Choosing Outside Spaces

Community members were asked which factors they considered when deciding where to stay outside. The most common consideration cited by more than half of respondents, was geographic location. With no transportation, most must walk to access services, *(I) couldn't make it to the location and had no transportation.*

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Significant differences related to gender were found in two areas. Males were more likely to cite being independent as a factor in their decision about where to stay outside at 41% compared with 16% for females. Males were also more likely to say that access to food was important at 45% compared with 19% for females. Regarding Indigenous or non-Indigenous status, Indigenous community members were significantly more likely to say that having a peaceful environment outside was a factor in their choice at 68% compared with 40% for non-Indigenous. There is more than 95% surety that the above-named differences are not due to chance.



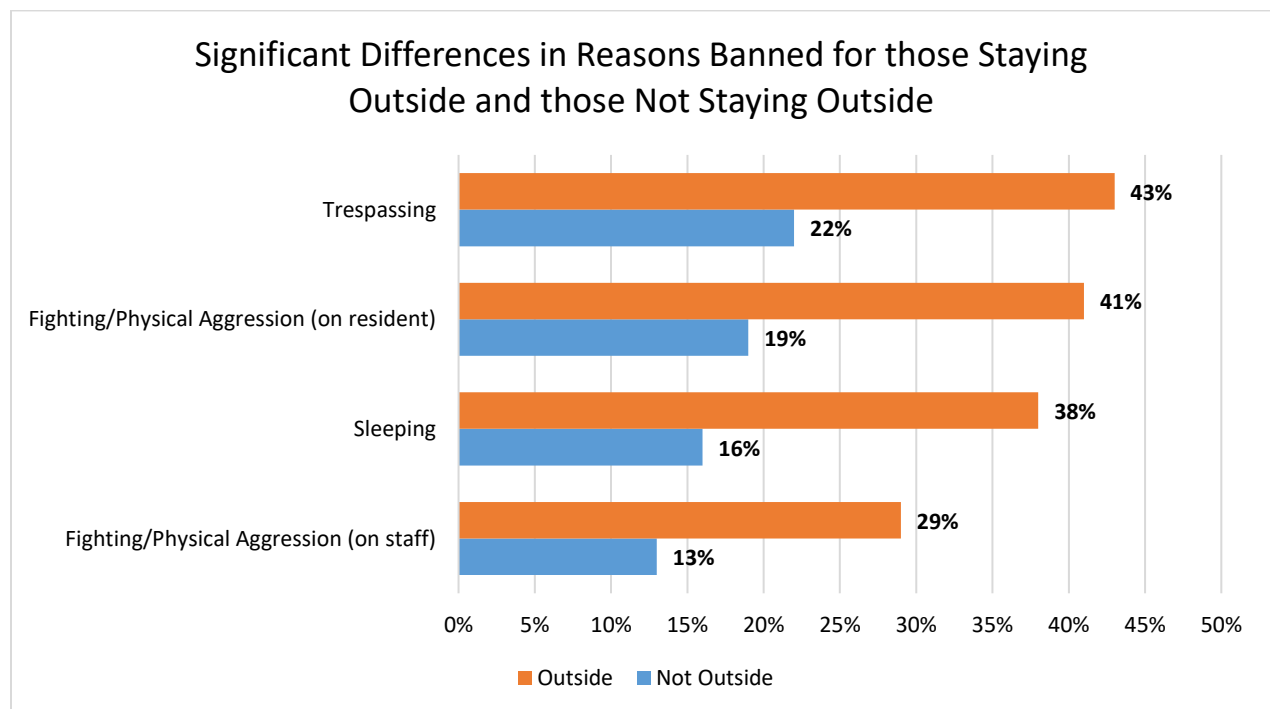
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Banning: Significant Differences Between Those Who Stayed Outside and Those Who Did Not

An analysis was done to determine if there were statistically significant differences between the banning experiences of individuals who had lived outside in the past 12 months and those who had not. This section contains only the data and outcomes for the questions where such a difference was found. Significant differences are reported only where there is 95% or greater surety that these differences are not due to chance. The following table suggests that housing people would result in reduced banning.

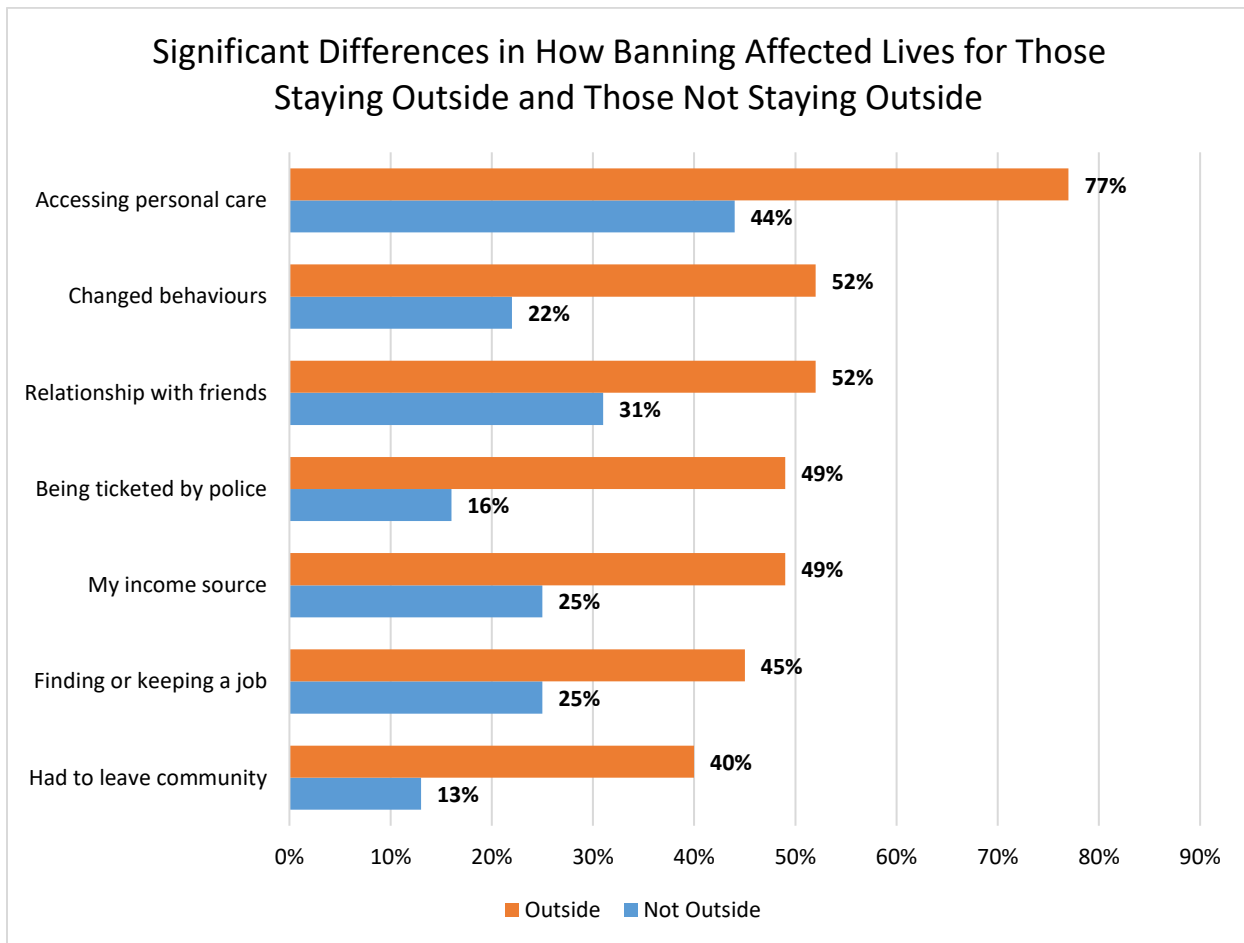
There were four reasons for which participants who had stayed outside in the past 12 months were significantly more likely to be banned than other participants. These reasons were trespassing, fighting/physical aggression against another community member, sleeping, and fighting/physical aggression against staff. There was also a significant difference in the number of places those who had stayed outside were banned from with a mean of 3.81 places for those staying outside and 2.80 for those not staying outside.

They're being banned from all these facilities and resources but they're also being moved every day from their own land. They're banned from the grass so they've got to move, then they're banned from this and the next day they come along and they're banned from this place if they just put up their home. They're being banned from trying to just survive outside. Get up and move. And there's no heart involved when they're moving people.



Participants were asked to consider which areas of their lives had been affected by banning. While all survey participants typically faced a range of negative effects from being banned, those who had stayed outside suffer significantly more than those who do not. These differences are statistically significant as the $p < .05$, meaning that we are at 95% sure that these differences are not due to chance. The following table shows the areas where these differences are the greatest.

Staying Outside is Not a Preference: Homelessness in Edmonton



The proportion of participants banned from stores was significantly higher for those who live outside where a majority (53%) had been banned from stores in the past 12 months, compared with their counterparts who had not stayed outside at 31%. A contributing factor may be that those who stay outside do not have available places for self-care and hygiene or to wash their clothes. One participant talked about her efforts to look clean and tidy:

People say “Why are homeless people SO clean, they live outside, how can that be?” I said “well we don’t want to look the part when we’re trying to change our lives around.”

Outreach workers from both human service agencies as well as mutual aid groups talked about the effects of banning in the unhoused community.

People are not able to look after themselves. People are literally begging for a place to stay. A man who was banned three years ago and went to jail and did his time, is still banned from the shelters. He says “I am going to die out here”.

Lifetime bans where people cannot get in anywhere and they are banned from everywhere. When you are adding all this mental health stuff in there and there is no solution being offered, there is no service, they are getting penalized for their behavioural issues. Where is the help for that? People are acting out for a reason.

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Staying Outside is Not a Preference

Staying outside is difficult for community members because their struggle to meet their daily needs often takes all their time and energy leaving them unable to take steps to better their lives. Staying outside robs people of sleep, and prolonged periods of sleep further limit ones' capacity. Outside of the homeless community there may be the perception that staying outside is a choice, however, people choosing to stay outside do so because they see it as safer and a better option than staying in a shelter. In other words, while community participants want to be housed, they often would rather stay outside than go to a shelter.

Community participants were asked what could be done to make their lives better while staying outside. Many stated that they did not want to answer the question because an answer would mean that they would accept staying outside. The logical and humane solution is housing that works with the needed supports to stay housed but, given the limited number of housing opportunities, it is a reality that many people will be staying outside for some time to come.

Focus group discussions including an Outreach Worker brought attention to a very small number of individuals who are not ready to navigate the systems that would move them to housing.

(There is) a community of military and RCMP veterans who will not come out of the River Valley. They are in the survival mode as real life is too much even with free mental health coverage.

Many voiced their weariness with waiting and wanting to be housed but then not being able to gain housing or the supports to maintain housing. Community participants expressed feelings of hopelessness as they are moved with nowhere to go, only to be moved again in a matter of days.

We are recyclable people.

Give us a place to go.

Offer a solution as to where to go so we are not shuffled around.

Staff and outreach workers talked about how difficult staying outside is for community members.

They hear the word 'no' every second person so after a while it's got to wear you out and like 'Somebody.. help me.... please! So, they get this frustration and it comes out in an unhealthy way. If someone would just take the time to sit and listen to what they have to say and they can maybe compromise. A lot of the times they just get shooed away. "We've already told you get out, just get out." I do hear a lot of community members say they feel like they're treated like second class citizens and less than other people when they are trying to stay at the shelter. And they're mad because they're already dealing with their whole lives outside, they're in survival mode constantly outside and then they come inside, and they're treated not to the best they should be.

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Staff shared stories to illustrate the frustration and desperation they witness when trying to support individuals who stay outside. An outreach worker shared a story of trying to help a client attain housing and by the fourth unsuccessful phone call this client was swearing at the outreach worker and telling her to get lost.

When they are not getting what they want or need they can just explode. It's that "I'm trying to do the right thing and then the system is just bearing down on me" and that just caused an explosion out of nowhere... so they just don't know how to cope and deal sometimes from trauma and everything they've been through.

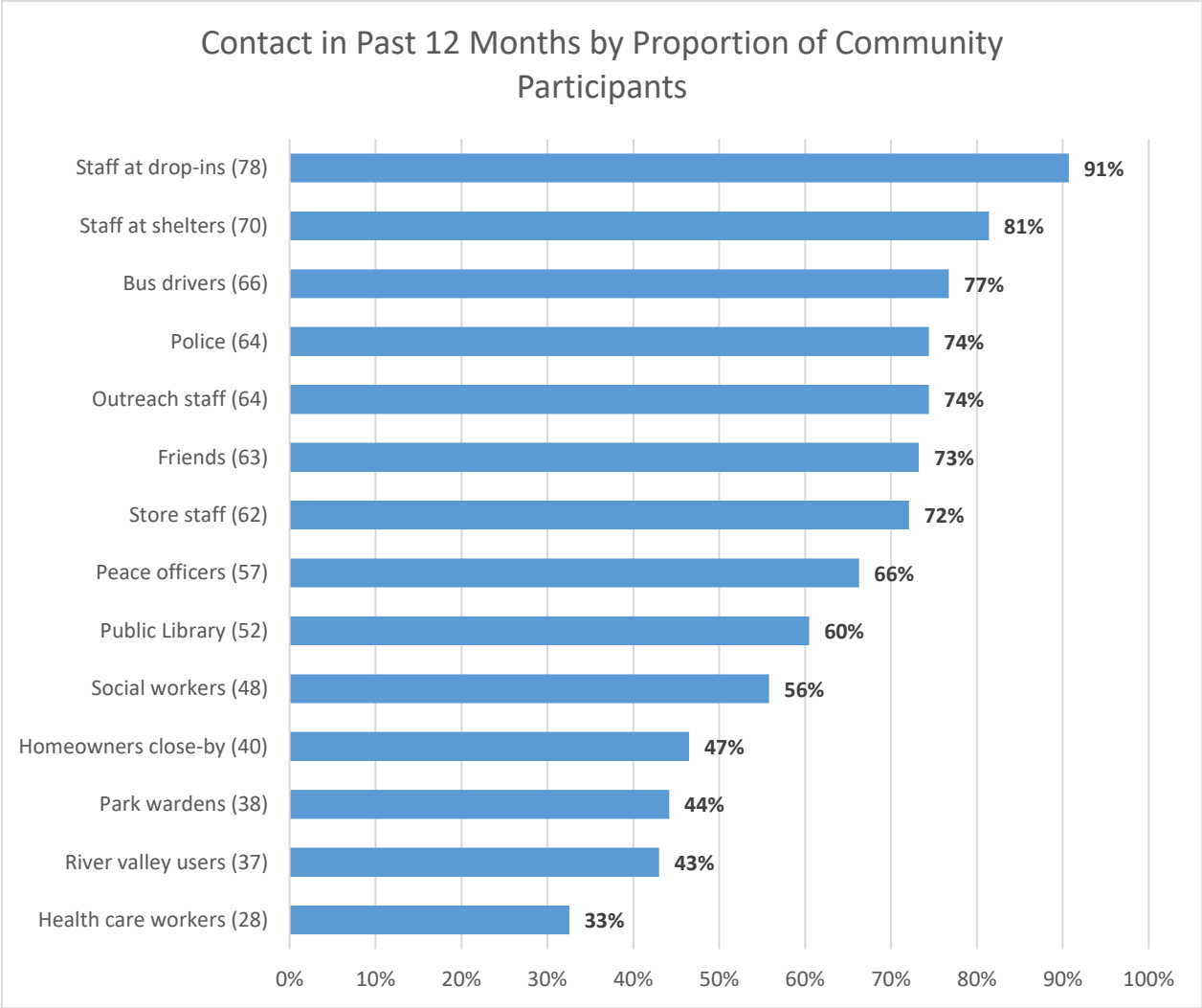
*A lot of people the only way they've gotten things is losing their sh*t. That's their learned behaviour.*

Community Contacts and Relationships

Community participants were asked who they had contact within the past 12 months, and then asked to assess the quality of their contacts within each category. These assessments of quality of contact were done by category, making it impossible to assess the quality of individual interactions. For example, community participants found that offering a single assessment of relationship with police officers was difficult as they often talked about having both positive and negative interactions, depending on the individual officer.

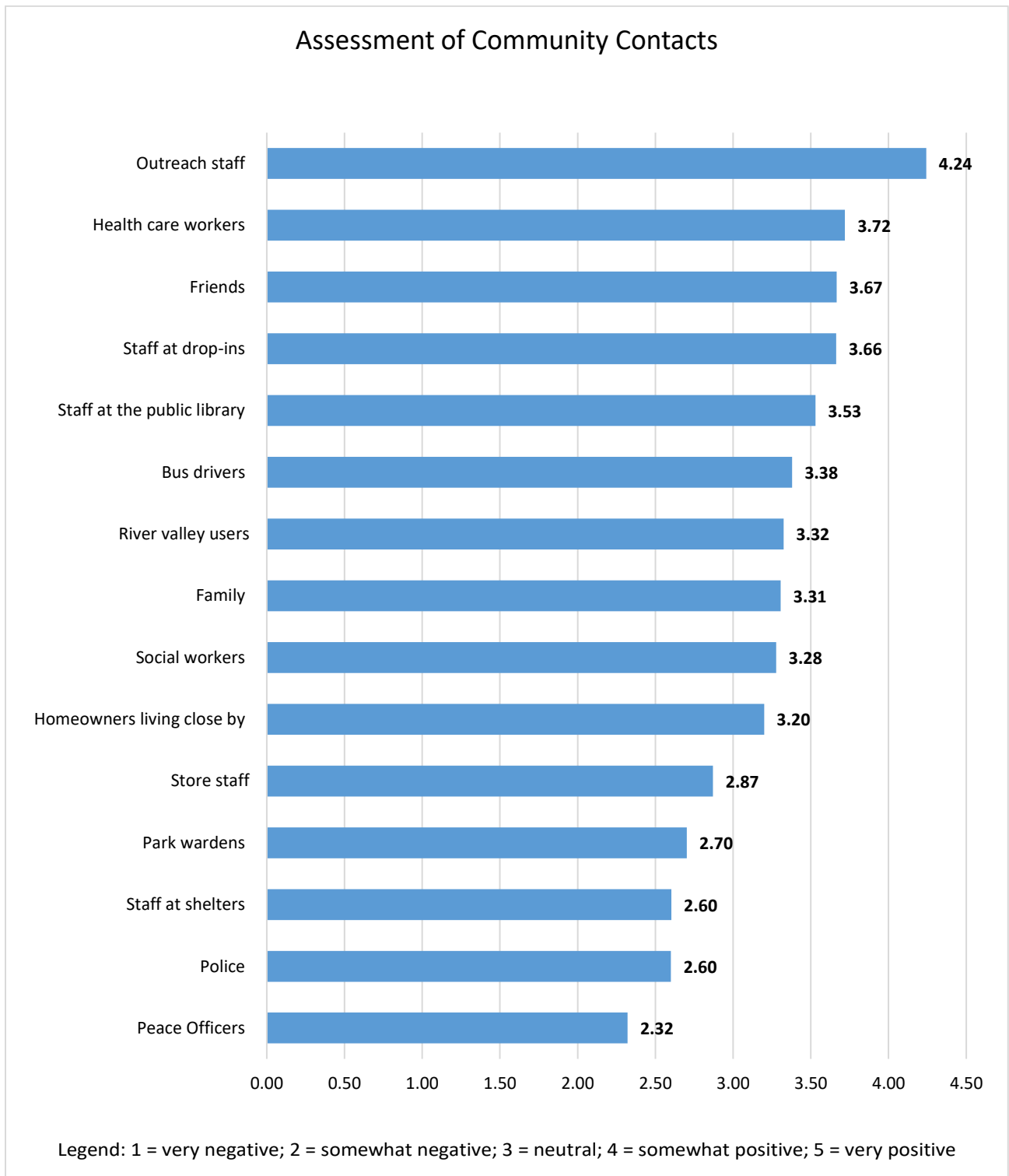
A large majority of community participants had contact with staff at drop-ins (91%; n=78) or shelters (81%; n=70). It is important to note that the least frequented categories have small numbers because not all community participants would have had a reason to make those contacts.

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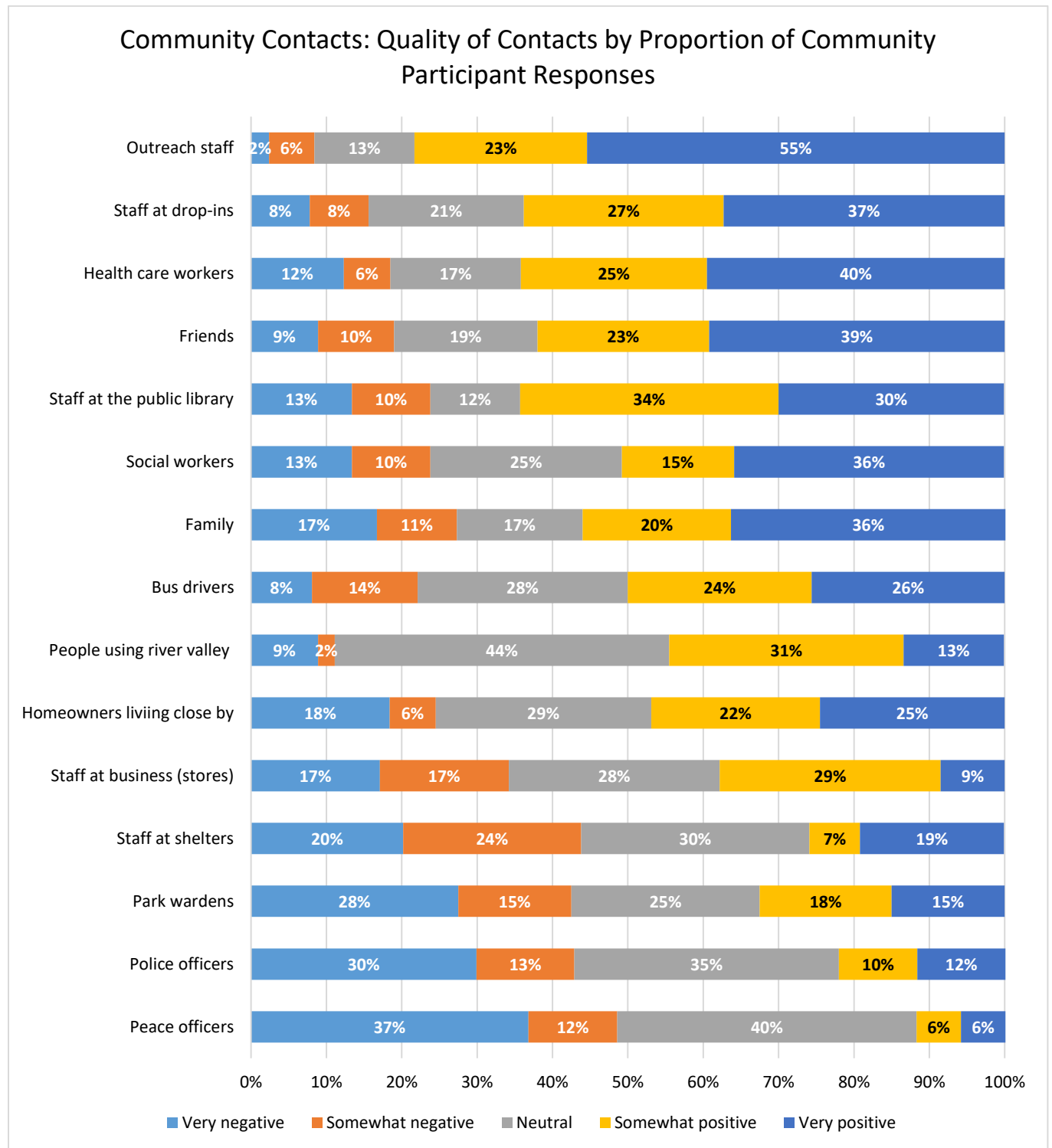


Using a Likert scale of 1 to 5 where 1 means *very negative*, and 5 means *very positive*, community participants were asked to rate the quality of their contacts. Community participants ranked the quality of contact with Outreach Staff the highest at a mean score of 4.24, between *somewhat positive* and *very positive*. On the low end of the spectrum, Peace and Police Officer contacts were the most negative with mean scores of 2.32 and 2.60 respectively, between *somewhat negative* and *neutral*.

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Staying Outside is Not a Preference: Homelessness in Edmonton



Another way to look at the quality of contacts, that gives insight into the range of responses, is to consider the frequencies. This examination shows the nuances in the proportions in each category of assessment. For example, not only do Outreach staff have the highest average assessment rating, but only 2% scored the lowest rating.

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Outreach workers talked about the importance of relationships and the individual differences in relationships with community participants and enforcement officers.

There's lots of emotional support people. Community is everything for our folks.

I've met some good police officers and peace officers. It seems they do have a heart with an authoritative background.

Police or other enforcement do not understand; they do not spend enough time with homeless people.

Let other people handle the move such as outreach or community support workers. Police are nasty.

Qualitative Data: Diverse Perspectives

Addressing and responding to the needs of the homeless is complex and multi-faceted. While the solution to homelessness is housing and needed supports, the reality is that the shortage of affordable housing means the focus of care is on temporal supports. The goal of all who provide services to the homeless is to help people to have a better life, however, some service providers are at liberty to focus only on the needs of the homeless while others work within the larger context, considering the broader community.

Enforcement Officers are challenged to respond to those who are homeless, while navigating conflicting priorities as they serve all Edmontonians. They must enforce City Bylaws, adhere to Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) regulations, and follow Union regulations. The recent Recovery Oriented Housing Model report places wellness for all under the umbrella of safety (Task Force, 2022, p.5).

There can be no wellness without safety. Yet ideological debates have led to encampments taking root in communities, in which criminals are preying on vulnerable people experiencing homelessness. The knock-in effects are rising crime, social disorder, random acts of violence, traumatized staff, ruined business and destroyed lives in surrounding areas – and, troubling, people who need assistance going without it, as a result of fear and victimization.

The Social Development Branch within the City of Edmonton partners and collaborates with community to support and enable citizen-centric approaches to create an Edmonton for All. The Branch strives to ensure that every person, regardless of gender, age, ability, or place of origin, is engaged, included, and afforded equitable opportunities to thrive in their community.

Human service agencies provide supports to those in need. They face the complexity of helping people to meet basic immediate needs such as feeding and hygiene while helping clients work towards better living situations and more stable lives. They build strong communities by addressing social and health-based inequities facing low-income and/or vulnerable neighbourhoods.

Mutual Aid groups comprise concerned members of the community who want to help the homeless, many of whom responded during the pandemic when services were overwhelmed. They often comprise people who were recently housed or have experience with homelessness. While their principal role is to check-in on people and hand out needed items such as food, water, clothing, and harm reduction supplies, they often find themselves in advocacy and monitoring roles.

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Homeless community members may live in all areas of Edmonton, but congregate more heavily in the downtown core where services are most readily available. Many transition in and out of housing, spreading some of their time over different types of temporary or transitional dwellings, or couch surf as opportunities arise. Those who live in tents or makeshift shelters are nomads, moving locations as required by others. They do not have a permanent place to go.

The common thread that serves to strengthen and support the most positive and helpful approaches, is respectful communication and relationship building. An understanding of the positions of others, whether it be community members who live in poverty or experience homelessness, or the larger Edmonton population, is necessary to build empathy and understanding so approaches for the betterment of all may be employed. Throughout this report we see examples of the importance of relationship and trust.

Homeless People are Not All the Same

Homeless people do not constitute a homogeneous group. While they may share the condition of homelessness, the similarities tend to end there. The wide range of ages, educational attainment, and gender differences found in the earlier data, as well as diversity of backgrounds and reasons that community participants became homeless, attest to their differences. Decisions of where to stay outside are also based on individual situations, priorities, and needs. Younger community participants, especially females, were more likely to stay south of the river where services were fewer, and they felt safer. Community participants with mobility issues were more likely to locate closer to services than others. Some community participants chose to stay in isolated areas while others felt safer being in communal spaces. For some, living communally means safety, having someone look after your belongings when you are away, and working together to access needed items. For others, living alone means being able to maintain better surroundings and being away from potential violence.

You can't let anyone know where you are actually... because they bring more people with them, and they tell other people, and more people show up. I've had the camp for a year and a half in the same spot and I've never been bothered there. Nobody has ever told me to move from it. I keep it clean and neat, and I keep it quiet there. I don't let anybody come there. I don't let people come there and start drinking, I just don't allow it. And I gave it to my dad so my Dad's going to stay there because I just got housed and I was on the list for four years.

Complex Health Needs

More than half of the community participants indicated that they were *very* or *somewhat unhealthy*. Given the list of health challenges they experienced, it is likely that the proportion of those in poor health is higher than reported, as their concentration on survival may make them ignore health problems. Trauma was the most reported health challenge. Second was addiction and/or substance use, which likely is an adaptation to cope with the struggle of trauma, mental health issues, poverty, and homelessness. Community participants referred to their substance use in this way. Furthermore, the complexity of multiple health challenges with few supports complicates life for the homeless.

Homeless community members were significantly less likely to receive treatment for health challenges. It is important to note that although community participants gave health care workers the second highest quality of relationship, they were the least likely to have had contact with health care workers.

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Trauma and mental health issues may keep individuals from seeking out care and/or navigating the processes to receive care, leading to those most in need being the least likely to receive help. Not having an address further exacerbated the long processes of accessing funding or care. While access to emergency mental health care was often not timely, community participants found that when they could access care, they were treated with respect and kindness.

Outreach teams were given the highest ratings in quality of contacts by community participants. They described the compassion and care utilized when linking clients to health services and advocating for those who need help. They described being stretched beyond capacity as there are not enough feet on the ground to respond to all the needs.

Agency staff discussed mental health needs of community members.

Our biggest obstacle is the mental health piece. A lot of the times when we do see violent behaviours it is a direct result of mental health. Are they a) able to access those services? and b) willing? A high proportion of our clients have a lot of aversion to mental health and the hospital system and accessing care in that way so it can be difficult to set and assert boundaries around that when they are not ready or in a place to engage but that's directly where the behaviour is coming from.

While Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH) is not within the City's purview, it is important to note that individuals suffer due to the loss of their AISH funding. On several occasions, people shared that they had lost their AISH and were not able to navigate being reinstated. The daily struggle to stay with ones' tent or dwelling and protect ones' belongings, access hygiene, and obtain food, all while dealing with disability and/or health challenges, made it challenging for some to keep appointments for reapplication support, thus, lengthening their time without supports. For these reasons, several people using walkers or wheelchairs found themselves in very vulnerable and unsafe outdoor conditions. Once homeless, with no address, the transiency of being moved, and the difficulty in getting to agencies for application support, the journey back to AISH is exceedingly difficult.

To be back on disability - I applied 3 times and now have been off disability for 6-7 months...This made me homeless.

A sentiment widely heard in the larger community is that homelessness could be easily solved if everyone *Just get a job!* If it were this easy to solve homelessness, the problem would only minimally exist. While getting and maintaining a job is made more difficult while homeless, complex health needs and their underlying experiences and histories further complicate the issue.

Needs to Make Life Outside Better

Suggestions to make life better when staying outside centered on basic needs, with the main focus on having a safe place to go where you would not have to move. Other suggestions included shelter from the elements, access to fire, toilets, showers, food, water, tents, and warmth. Further ideas included medical care, social support, housing workers, mental health support, income, and transition to housing. Some community participants talked about working with the neighbourhood to build better relationships and understanding. The importance and significance of fire for keeping warm, cooking, and as a sacred fire was noted by community participants.

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Many community participants discussed orderly camp sites as a strategy to be able to remain in their encampments longer, however without garbage bags and disposal sites, it is difficult to keep ones' space clean. Participant comments reflected a willingness to stay within certain parameters to show they respected the space they were in, and to reduce the negative interactions with City Enforcement. They also stated that the City could help them to maintain a clean and safer space by providing basic services in addition to garbage disposal such as a safe place for a fire, toilets, showers and potable water.

Relationships of Respect

Community participants stated that better relationships would improve their situations. Overall, they felt that better communication, clear rules, and consistent service would lead to better situations.

Take people aside and respect them. Treat them as you would like to be treated.

Be understanding and empathic instead of direct orders.

Come with compassion and a little empathy and dignity rather than "Get the F out of here".

Some community participants felt that relationships with those in authority had improved.

It has improved - now there is less harassment, whereas in the past my name was run daily. Now they come by only when there is a problem.

The officers are becoming more nice and not rude as they used to be.

Community participants also discussed how they work to co-exist in the community. Those who stay outside rated the quality of the contacts they had with people in the neighbourhood fairly positively. They also explained that they generally try to stay away from people living in the neighbourhood and felt a need for relationship building and understanding. As one outreach worker described:

It is often related to people around who want them to move, and conversations with neighbours would help.

Drug & Alcohol Consumption

Staying outside presents the dilemma of living ones' private life in public. While this situation means no private spaces or facilities for hygiene, it also means no private spaces to consume drugs or alcohol, often relied on to survive outdoor life. People who stay outside have very few to no private spaces, often leaving them in the situation of conducting activities that may not be acceptable in public spaces. Respondents talked about how humiliating it is to defecate outdoors and then to be ticketed when they had no other choice.

If you are homeless, where can you drink without getting fines or getting picked up? Instead of handing out tickets maybe give people a list of where they can go. Maybe there's a spot they can allow people to openly drink. Vodka keeps your innards warm in the winter.

Staying Outside is Not a Preference: Homelessness in Edmonton

There should be more places like [agency name] because they let you in. They know you're drinking. So, if there's more places where people felt safe and they could actually drink... as long as you don't bring it into the building... they still talk with you, not support the alcohol but know the situation because people can't just quit drinking when they're homeless because that's the way they escape.

EPS Officers discussed how, when the weather is very cold, they may hold people overnight so that they will not freeze when they have nowhere else to go.

In those incidents it becomes extremely difficult, especially during the winter months when we can't just let somebody go into the frigid night if they have nowhere to go especially if they're in an intoxicated state. So, it becomes extremely difficult to try and find somewhere for them to go and that is where we end up a lot of times. It's holding people under 1152 under the Indian Liquor Act, so public intoxication. And we expose ourselves to a tremendous of risk by doing that... by holding people in our holding cells just because they're drunk in public. And that is NOT a solution at all. All that ends up happening is that we wait until they're sober and then we kick them out of the door in the morning and it's a terrible, vicious cycle. That particular piece of the conversation we need to figure out a solution to. We need to have that discussion.

Moving Encampments

Encampments are entities that begin, grow, change, and are dismantled or moved, only to emerge in another place if one was not fortunate enough to be housed. All who have a role in encampments from residency, supporting the residents, and those who must manage safety and enforce bylaws must deal with competing priorities while working with the community of the homeless and the housed. Bylaws and policies serve as procedural guidelines to ensure community safety and well-being. Although intended for the safety of all, they often leave the homeless negatively affected and further marginalized with few options to fulfill their basic needs.

The process of moving encampments is complex. Most difficult is the hopelessness of having nowhere to go when told to move on. The logistics of moving may make it impossible to take one's belonging with them. Respondents talked about being given little warning and not having the ability to move their belongings without help. The most prevalent issue was that people are told to move and not given any choices of places to go. Many who stay outside shared stories of constantly being displaced every 24-48 hours.

Being moved means no one knows where we are, and we have to wait for services because we cannot be found.

Give someone time for preparation. You can't uproot somebody who has no next place.

The personal possessions of homeless people are in-fact their possessions. Confiscating, destroying, or failing to return them after storing them, is understood as theft by community members. It is also important to note that if people do not have their essential items, such as identification and medications, with them at all times, they may be lost when their tents are removed.

Don't throw our property in the garbage. Do not throw our carts away... I have no safe place to put my backpack. Do not take our tents.

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Community participants explained that some agencies have a policy of storing personal items for a short period of time when someone receives a ban. Participants shared stories of items often being lost which is especially difficult with medications. Several participants described going back to their doctor or a pharmacy to get more medication and being flagged as drug-seeking and accused of selling their pills. Not having prescribed medications led to further problems. One community participant described how her behaviour in court was negatively influenced by not being able to take her prescribed medication. This situation made her unable to present herself well at court.

Community participants also talked about how having a disability makes moving more difficult and how they would appreciate help and consideration.

Be less aggressive and help those who are physically disabled to find a better spot. Some people are not able to pack up fast and often the officers would end up throwing out their stuff.

Bylaws & Policies

A focus group discussion was held with City of Edmonton (COE) staff that are involved in the response to individuals staying outside. COE respondents described the many reasons that encampments are moved with the most common being that they meet the criteria to be classified as high risk. City staff also provided insight into the liability encampments represent as well as the applicable Bylaws that they, as agents of the city, are required to enforce.

The reason why we move people is because there is a Parkland Bylaw 2202⁵ and it says that while on parkland people shall not build a structure whether temporary or permanent and there are other things in the bylaw about having a fire unattended or disturbing the natural areas so ultimately the reason why people are moved is because of that bylaw. The swiftness in which they are moved depends on the level of risk that an encampment has. The criteria revolve around size and type, whether there are crime or public safety issues or environmental impacts to the area. The higher risk the encampment the quicker they will be moved.

The foremost reason people are moved from encampments is for violence or the perception that there could be violence. That is usually affiliated to weapons, gang members, or number of encampments... Eight structures in one location is deemed to be high risk. There are also a bunch of other reasons we could associate as high risk such as playground, blocking a roadway, attached to infrastructure such as a fence or a building, open fires. Those are the different reasons that we consider it an automatic high risk so then we can close it down immediately or within 3 days. I can't remember the last time we closed one down immediately. We're always trying to give notice and connect folks and get them looped into that group that need help. That's a very short answer to a very complex scenario.

As soon as you start to provide necessities like that you assume occupier's liability⁶ which means if we provide pot-a-potties or showers or even if we give them garbage bags and things to clean up and something happens while they are sleeping on parkland. For example, if we provided a port-a-potty and then someone overdoses and there is a fatality the City assumes occupier's liability because we are essentially encouraging, people through those provision of basic needs, to stay. And so, if someone died their family could theoretically sue the City because they'll say

⁵ City of Edmonton Bylaw 2202 - Parkland Bylaw (Consolidated on February 22, 2021)

⁶ Occupiers' Liability Act, RSA 2000, c O-4. <https://www.canlii.org/en/ab/laws/stat/rsa-2000-c-o-4/latest/rsa-2000-c-o-4.html>

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"You had this bylaw for people not to camp and then you provided port-a-potties and so you're essentially encouraging them to stay."

Biohazard Issues

City staff talked about how the longer an encampment is in one spot the more damage, the more risk, the more biohazard, the more clean-up work, and the more cost.

The longer an encampment is in one spot the more damage that might occur to parkland to the area that it's inhabiting. Also, the more complaints from the neighbours. They will generally increase in size that will bring more biohazard in and more occupants, more tents. It will also cost a lot more manpower, time, and resources to remove encampments as soon as they start getting bigger, so we try to prevent them before they become too big or become tent cities.

Community Relationships

The experiences of moving people from where they are staying outside, including the procedures used and the dynamics around the process were discussed by all who participated in this research; from those who stay outside, to those who work and volunteer supporting them, to those employed to protect and serve the communities that homeless people frequent. This topic yielded a great diversity of perspectives; both within and across these groups. COE representatives, for example, reported that they no longer issue tickets and that the slashing of tents is not a part of their practice, however, community members and mutual aid workers reported that these practices are current.

While in some cases those who provide specific services and support to the homeless feel supported by the officers and wardens who enforce city bylaws that are designed to keep the city clean, limit city liability and promote feelings of safety in the general population, there are many times when their approaches and agendas clash.

Edmonton Police Officers talked about the importance of developing relationships to have more successful interactions when moving people, realizing that when they do their job, they are often unable to offer alternatives.

For the most part it's displacement where we're pushing people on. We realize that... and it's the ugly truth and we see just move them somewhere else and then we see the same person in the coming days and weeks.

The high-risk encampment teams over the last two summers now have really helped develop those relationships and they've really become the subject matter experts and dealing with the same folks every day and developing those relationships and it's all about how we treat people. The people in the high-risk encampment teams, the two of them, are hand picked because they are experienced members that understand the landscape and also understand a lot of the struggles that these folks are facing. That's what it's all about, it's developing those relationships, so we don't have to use force on someone, we don't have to physically remove them from their tent and throw their stuff in the garbage. That's the last thing we want. We realize that these people are down and out, and they need what we can do to steer them in the right direction, if possible. Some people also just choose to live this way. There are some that that's the brutal truth, is they want nothing to do with any resources and then as soon as winter hits they're going to go back to where they're from, to their community wherever that is and that happens a lot through the winter as well. So, it's a very complex issue as I'm sure you are seeing through your conversations.

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Community participants indicated that some of their interaction with enforcement has recently improved but that approaches are different depending on who is moving you.

*I've been at camps where people have said "It's ok, take a day or two to pack your stuff and get going but I need you out by Friday" and I've seen cops tell people "You've got 6 seconds to grab your sh*t and get out of here!"*

Mutual Aid workers discussed their experiences when providing assistance to the homeless, and their observations of police and peace officers' treatment of the homeless.

We see people being abused regularly. When the police see us, their abusive attitude changes.

We had interactions with police officers and peace officers both where they do not realize we are there, and they are being abusive to people. As soon as they see a privileged person walk into their point of view their attitude changes.

We walk around by the LRT line, and we have had unmarked police cars sitting there harassing us because we were interacting with the unhoused. They are sitting there, staring at us or full-on interacting... We asked them to move off the sidewalk so we could get past with our wagons, and they said, "You can go around". I asked if they were asking us to walk on the street with traffic with our wagons into traffic, "Can't you back up half a meter". Their response was "Are you trying to cause trouble?"... If they are treating us like that, we know how they are treating our community members.

Outreach workers shared how difficult it is to build relationships and connect people to services when they are constantly being moved. They ask people where they think they might be camping the next day and often end up spending a lot of time locating them.

I go tent to tent to tent to tent and see if I can find that person that way.

They also described how the work of connecting homeless people to resources such as Income Support or housing teams is severely compromised when something as basic as not being able to locate a person, when their income support phone call finally comes in, can easily send someone back to the bottom of the list.

It makes our job SO much harder.

People constantly fall through the cracks. It is hard to help people when they are moved every few days.

When I ask people "how many times have you been told by the police in the past 6 months to move along?" the numbers are usually like 120. It could be higher but that is the highest number I can put into my computer.

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Dismantling or Moving Encampments

The matter of dismantling or moving encampments is contentious and there are many discrepancies related to understanding of and reporting this phenomenon. Even the terminology is widely dissented and value laden, with some referring to *tent slashing* or *tent cutting* while others refer to more generally to *tearing down* or *dismantling*.

Community participants reported that their tents were destroyed by enforcement teams. City of Edmonton staff explained that tents are only removed after a site has been vacated and that tents may have to be cut open in order to protect the safety of workers as contents are considered bio-hazards. They asserted that tents are not cut for the purpose of making them unusable.

Our team has been accused of slashing tents in the middle of the night so that the next day it is unusable. We have taken a knife to a tent but only in the process of cleaning it up. We're not going to squeeze in through the door. We cut it out from the outside because there's usual hazards in there. The physical act of slashing a tent I wouldn't say happens, but we do cut tents down or we'll use knives to cut down if they're strung up with strings.

With some regularity we have private citizens that will remove encampments or dismantle them and just throw them on the ground beside our trail system and then the expectation is our workers will come and just pick them up and they know if they do that, that will happen but that interrupts the whole clean-up process and the outreach process but that does occur.

The clean-up crew only works in the encampment after it's been vacated and all items remaining are considered abandoned and potentially contaminated and therefore, we remove everything. We wouldn't just slash a tent and then walk away and then come back later. We will slash it and then, I shouldn't say 'slash', we will dismantle it and haul it away as part of our process.

*There are also some citizen groups that are a little bit p*ssed and a little bit frustrated and they are blaming all of their problems on homeless people. So, a lot of them are taking matters into their own hands. We have had incidents where we've have been altercations between citizens and those experiencing homelessness too where we've had to respond to. That is a possibility, I'm not saying it's all that but it's also part of that conversation.*

Mutual Aid workers shared alternate experiences related to possession removals.

Everything is thrown out when encampments are taken down. They actually cut the tents so they cannot be re-used. Slashing still takes place. Community members are taking footage with their own cameras.

So many people say these things are not happening, but they happen all the time. Police, transit and police officers say it is not them, but tents are going down every week, so who is it?

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Location Choices

Community participants and Peace Officers both noted differences in the levels of drugs and violence on the north versus the south side of the river with a marked concentration of these problems in the downtown core. Some community participants described how staying on the south side of the river means fewer services but also less drugs and violence. In contrast, the north side is noted for being more crowded and violent but with more services.

A lot of times what we hear from the clients that are in the river valley is that they want to stay away from the amount of drugs and the amount of violence that is downtown. We see signs of that less out in the river Valley as opposed to the core.

Specifically, young women and/or those with physical disabilities and mobility issues often have concerns about finding places that are safe to sleep and protecting their possessions. One young woman talked about staying on the southside for safety, but even there being reluctant to stay in a tent where she could not escape easily. Her place of safety was a spot under a bridge where she could run in several directions if threatened.

Ticketing

Outreach workers verified that tickets are still being issued at LRT stations and that their co-workers had been ticketed for loitering while trying to help people at the LRT stations, even though they provided identification. They also provided an example of a community member whose continued sleeping outside led to a warrant.

I just did one (a standardized assessment) for a lady that had been picked up 22 times over the winter for sleeping on the ground. It was at the point where it was now a warrant, and she did not know what to do. It's something that we experience often, especially with transit.

City staff explained that the ETS loitering bylaw was removed, however, when people began using the LRT stations as shelter, the bylaw was amended to a more general format to say one cannot use transit spaces inappropriately.

With ETS the loitering bylaw was removed a while ago and so people couldn't be removed from transit stations. Then, as a result of COVID and the decrease in ridership in transit stations as well as people's fear around congregate shelter, we saw more and more people using transit LRT stations as shelter. Nobody had any way to enforce against people using transit stations so they amended the bylaw again and it's more general now to say you can't use transit spaces inappropriately (the purpose of transit spaces is to go in and use transit to get to another destination). For a while there was no ability to enforce on loitering and now, we potentially could see that (the ticketing).

Community participants talked about being ticketed without a cause and being unable to pay outstanding tickets.

Often police ticket people only because they were called even though an offence is not evident.

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City staff shared information about the Community Outreach Transit Team (COTT)⁷ initiative and that the High-Risk Encampment Team had not written a ticket in almost two years.

Transit Peace Officers and Bent Arrow are working together in the Community Outreach Transit Team (COTT) so I think the city is trying to say "we know that this is not people's first choice of place to hang out" and so how can we respond and redirect people to more appropriate places with appropriate resources?

City staff who participated in the research were not in a position to respond to questions about current practices of loitering tickets and warrants.

Not anyone at this table can really speak to that (about certain occurrences with loitering tickets). I'm not sure if the people aren't paying the tickets if they are actually spending time in jail or not. I don't think those types of tickets go to warrant anymore.

Staying Housed

While attaining housing is a single accomplishment, staying housed takes long term effort and support. For those who have been homeless for some time, learning how to be housed may take additional efforts and supportive relationships. Additionally, those dealing with health and addiction issues may also need longer and more intense supports.

Landlords and support workers have a large role to play in building relationships of trust and understanding, realizing that steps to success are incremental.

With the right individual in the role, having the right training, a building manager can provide micro-interventions (such as informal advice, reminders or guidance) that support clients' other recovery-oriented supports and help them maintain their trajectory (Taskforce, 2022, p34).

Community participants offered suggestions as to how they could stay housed.

Clear understanding of the expectations and communication would help to stay housed. Being housed at permanent supportive housing with harm reduction and independent living is best.

Better landlords who understand our situation. Having rent money alone is not enough as I have been homeless my whole life.

Continuation of programs - I have two more months with [agency name] then I am done.

Community participants discussed the challenges of staying housed. They talked about running into problems with landlords. Offering accommodation to homeless friends often put housed individuals in jeopardy of eviction. Others who found it difficult to adjust to the *rules* of being housed found themselves in a cycle of housing and eviction, rendering them homeless, over and over again.

They expect you to stay isolated in that apartment by yourself. It's not a written rule, it's what they expect.

⁷ The COTT's team purpose is to build relationships and connect individuals within the transit system to community support and resources to increase safety and reduce harm.

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Whether the sentiment is balanced or not, some found themselves unable to cope with the rules around being housed and several community participants spoke about abuse at one particular housing facility.

It's semi-prison rules and we're not criminals so why are we getting semi-prison rules?... It doesn't make sense. I mean there's no rules when you live in your residence right? You have family visit. Would you have somebody who mortgaged your house tell you can't have them spend the night? I mean that's the abuse that's happening. And it's individual people, it's not usually a group of people. It's this one lady who runs these apartments and she's very abusive.

A mutual aid worker retold the words of a woman she encountered who felt that there was no hope of housing in her immediate future.

You have taken my sleeping bag, you have cut a hole in my tent, you have cut a hole in it and I have this little bag of clothes and my snack from this morning and I am going to go two blocks down and I am going to get harassed for being in a back alley by a woman who owns a building. It just doesn't end. There is no solution.

STAFFING

The challenges for staff working in drop-ins, shelters, or other agencies that support the homeless are great. This situation was exacerbated during COVID when increased regulations around infection prevention and control added to the complexity of service delivery. Jobs in these areas are generally not well paid, the turnover of staff is high, and even though there may be a structure for training, many employees are working without the tools to deal with day-to-day challenges of this front-line work. Furthermore, because these jobs typically do not pay well and are seen as entry level positions, staff may be starting their career, working on their own journey after being housed, or be newcomers to Canada.

A lot of the drop-ins are understaffed. You would have 200+ (sometimes pushing 300) on a given day in the winter and you have 4-5 staff looking after those people you don't have time to de-escalate a community member. And if you don't nip it in the bud, it escalates other community members and if you don't deal with that you will lose control of your setting.

We are coming from a situation where we had 62 people and 2 staff so there wasn't time to have these sit-down conversations. It was "if you hit someone, go."

There's a communal sense of justice. When an incident happens in the drop-in, everyone witnesses it. People will say: "If I did that thing you'd kick me out right away."... or if we try to make exceptions for certain people. "If you don't bar them, I'll take care of it myself." There's a little bit of peer pressure because community sees how you respond to things and people will call you out if they see things as unfair.

New staff may also include recent graduates of programs related to Social Work or Community Service. These graduates have theoretical knowledge but may have limited experience working with the populations with complex needs including trauma and mental health.

Educate the workers more on the participants they're going to be working with, the expectations. Challenge in hiring: a lot of front-line staff is young, with little to no life experience. You can't just throw someone into a drop-in. It's a challenge to fill those roles.

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*Hiring people that have empathy or at least trauma informed care. You can hire people with, for example, a Social Work degree so technically they have all the right things and then, when they're on the job, someone calls them a b*tch and they want to ban them for two weeks. There seems to be some disconnect between what we are learning and what we're actually doing.*

I've found that when we hire very religious people, I do find that they come in with biases or a saviour complex that ends up affecting these things severely.

When staff were asked what helps them in their work, they focused on approach and relationship building.

You don't want to feel like you are punishing people for their substance use or for their mental health.

I hate banning. I think most of us do. Trying to work towards that restorative piece would be really great.

So much of what we deal with is trying to work with people and show them that mistakes are made but it's not the end of the world. The whole idea of banning is punitive and anything that's punitive you want to be careful with because it only goes so far. You want to maintain boundaries, but you also don't want to be a jerk about it. You don't want to get rolled over, but you don't want to punish people unnecessarily.

It needs to be a 'we' mentality, a community and not an 'us versus them'.

It is a smaller space. We greet everyone by name, and we try to make it a welcoming space where they also want to invest and be part of it.

Agency staff also described how having a good relationship with the area police, the patrols, and the beats can be beneficial in supporting community members.

[Agency name] has our front sidewalk. We have an agreement with the beats team that if we try to keep [gang name] at bay and off our property they kind of let the drinking and using on that front space kind of slide so folks know they can drink out there and use their...

When the community members participate in assessing what happened and choosing their consequence, it can lead to more buy-in and better compliance.

We had a guy fighting with knives out front and he came back the next day and I gave him options for his suspension and asked: "What do you think is fair?" And we sat down and talked about it, and he actually chose a really long suspension because he understood the harm he had done to the community. He then was more strict about upholding it than we were.

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One individual who had worked as both door security for a third-party contractor and later as staff at the same agency, shared the following experience:

As Security you are in a uniform. I found when I switched (roles) and I could wear plain clothes just be me and wasn't just some face behind a uniform it was way easier to develop that relationship and rapport with people. Which sometimes makes it easier because you've got the relationship but sometimes it makes it harder because they've got that soft spot in your heart and asking some people to leave for the day is hard. As Security I found that I got way more push back (because) it's the uniform. Folks have a lot of trauma associated with that and your job is to be the bad guy, unfortunately.

Training

Community participants, agency staff, and mutual aid volunteers expressed the need for training. Training provides people with appropriate tools to build relationships that are honouring and respectful. Agency staff also talked about the need for training and their desire for training. Logistical issues of needing to fill shifts, and high staff turnover, often mean that staff do not receive sufficient or timely training. Some staff shared that training efforts were beneficial.

Staff training and retention is a huge challenge.

They have put staff through Therapeutic Crisis Intervention Training. Having that model of de-escalation and that sit down afterwards.

We have been trying to push our staff to have those intentional conversations and reminding them that these are trauma responses, it's not personal and if you can give them space and come back to it then you are more likely to build that relationship.

*It needs to be a 'we' mentality, a community and not an 'us versus them'. So, hiring people that have empathy or at least trauma informed care. You can hire people with, for example, a social work degree so technically they have all the right things and then, when they're on the job, someone calls them a b*tch and they want to ban them for two weeks. There seems to be some disconnect between what we are learning and what we're actually doing.*

Community participants called for staff training in mental health, trauma, de-escalation, and respectful relationships with some expressing a desire to take training. Many talked about how difficult it is to manage their own behaviour when they are under the influence or being triggered.

Mutual Aid workers related examples of consequences when those working with community members have not received training or are not providing ethical and respectful service.

There is such an untrained staff within the shelters too. That is a real bone of contention with me. I had a tiff with a security guard because she kicked a lady out at -35C. This lady had nothing to cover herself up with. She was huddled up on a concrete sidewalk and could not get into the building. When the security guard came out, I asked why this lady could not get into the shelter. "She swung at me." Obviously, there was no de-escalation training.

Three weeks ago, we saw [agency name] staff laughing at us through the window and closing the door on someone. The person was upset and punching the glass as the staff pointed and laughed at him. This is not the way to treat people in general.

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While agencies typically have policies that govern their staff, at times they are not practiced. Staff felt the differences between policy and practice were due mostly to staff turnover, limited time for training, and a lack of policy.

How does one person know to ban or not to ban is often mirroring somebody who's got more seniority on them and listening/observing to what they say or what they've done in the past. There is new staff orientation which only happens a couple times a year unfortunately. There is a policy booklet but for the most time it's "read it on your own time and if you have questions reach out to your supervisor".

I've never read the policies on banning. I know there's some handbook somewhere that's been floating around. I would say pretty much all of our drop-in staff have never seen that or read that and it's not widely used. Barring has come down mostly to judgements.

COMMON AND DIVERGENT PATHS

Ending Homelessness

All participants in this research; from community members who struggle with homelessness, to mutual aid workers, to agency staff, and City of Edmonton staff agreed that the best solution to homelessness is permanent housing that provides needed wrap-around services to keep people housed. This common goal can only be achieved through coordinated supports.

Outcome-focused outreach will require the use of inter-disciplinary teams with the right mix of skill sets and appropriate training. It will require those teams to be formally linked with the coordinated response. Importantly, it will also require partnerships that enable police to tackle serious crime so social agencies can address the needs of vulnerable citizens (Task Force, 2022, p.17)

The SPDAT (Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool) serves to provide a system to gain an assessment of needs regarding housing (Orgcode, 2022). This tool is employed by many agencies in Edmonton when deciding who to house, with those with the highest score on the tool (the highest need) being housed first. This approach, however, may stretch the capacity of services. An outreach worker suggested an alternate approach.

Out of the people I've met, if you take a pool of everybody that's experiencing homelessness in Edmonton, I would say about 75% of them are probably not hard to house. And to maintain housing they just need that hand up. Get into a place, can I afford my rent, now can you guys leave me alone? That could be done... We could solve homelessness in a span of time... and then when you're not dealing with that other 75% you could have all these awesome workers working with people that are high acuity.

Those who work with the homeless acknowledged the systemic barriers in moving from homelessness to being housed. One COE staff explained:

Lower risk encampments will be focused for a housing focused response in which housing workers and outreach will allow people to stay longer in order to connect them with appropriate housing. But technically our maximum amount of time that someone can stay in an encampment in one place is less than the average amount of time it takes to house someone out of an encampment... thus the dilemma.

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FURTHER OPPORTUNITIES

The following opportunities are borne out of the data and focus groups.

Indigenous-Designed and Led Transition Encampment

A city-sanctioned and supported prototype for an Indigenous designed and led outdoor space as a first step in the journey towards being housed. This camp would provide a safe space where one could rest and begin to consider next steps. It would be beneficial for both the individual experiencing homelessness as well as outreach staff trying to locate them. Provide safe spaces for tents or structures, a source of heat, potable water, toilets and showers, and a sheltered gathering space. This space would also include a sacred fire and the support of community leaders such as Elders, Aunties, Uncles. This effort would require staff to run the camp, policing and security, and housing, health, and social workers. The goal of living in this space would be to prepare for housing with an expectation of being housed within 2-3 weeks.

A Place to go When Moving Encampments

While the above suggested prototype encampments are designed as a first step in the journey to being housed, there will be many who do not have a place to go. If there is no suggested alternative of a new place to set up, every effort should be made not to move encampments. The two conflicting concerns of the homeless are having autonomy and being warm. While shelters provide warmth, being outdoors allows for autonomy. Perhaps set up a site⁸ where people could set up tents or have partitioned spaces, they could call their own. This idea is somewhat like the shelter pods but in a warm place.

Working Together

Mutual Aid groups provide services away from drop-ins and shelters where they serve hard to reach community members. They often have both broad and in-depth knowledge of the community, with many also having lived experience with homelessness. These service providers are integral to helping the homeless but often feel that they are outsiders who are not valued or respected by enforcement teams. All those who work with the homeless should find common ground in their common task of helping the homeless. Relationship building that brings together human service agencies, City of Edmonton staff, and Mutual Aid groups to identify common goals and seek opportunities to work in harmony would go far to benefit the community of those who stay outside.

Conversation Circles and Events

Bridging Events

Offer community events to bring together housed and unhoused community members to build relationships and understanding. Share research findings in an infographic with community members in neighbourhoods experiencing high levels of tension between the housed and unhoused. The intent would be twofold; unhoused community members would see an outcome of their participation and other community members would receive credible information about those who stay outside.

⁸ For example the Coliseum.

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Learning Events that also Bridge

A cross-discipline workshop to work on problem-solving and visioning. This event could be an opportunity to bring together people with lived experience, mutual aid groups, service agencies, and City employees. This activity could be instrumental in building relationships, understanding the perspectives of others, and finding ways to mutually respect and support each other.

Building Strengths & Bonds

Monthly circle conversations to be co-hosted by those with lived experience and service agency staff. This idea came out of the focus groups held during this research project where community participants asked for further conversations and the opportunity to share their own experiences. This would also be a good place to share agency concerns and involve community participants in working towards solutions.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The learnings from this project added the voices of community members with recent homeless experience to the literature already available on these issues in Edmonton. Going forward, the focus should be on providing services and housing people with a research component that includes comprehensive measurements to assess the success of these initiatives.

The following are suggestions for research that could provide further insights into the lives of the homeless, the work of those who support them, and community responses:

- Effects of using contracted security firms versus agency staff for entry to shelters and drop-ins
- Connections of homeless persons to their families, relatives and home communities
- A cost analysis of the suggested city sanctioned camps versus informal encampments
- Forms of Social Capital that are helpful in maintaining housing
- Specific needs of homeless women
- Specific needs of homeless people with physical disability(ies)
- The uniformity of bans across types of services
- Evaluation of the use of community data sharing apps

Staying Outside is Not a Preference: Homelessness in Edmonton

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APPENDICES LIST

The following documents are available for download off the M.A.P.S. website at:

<https://mapsab.ca/community-based-research/>

A1 – Literature review

A2 – Questionnaire

A3 – Focus Group Questions

A4 – Information letter

A5 – Frequencies and Descriptives

A6 – After care sheet

A7 – Left Outside: The Experience of Being Banned in Edmonton

A8 – CNBR Results Infographic

A9 – Banned: Falling Through the Safety Net project map

A10 – Everyday in the Life of Homeless Edmontonians journey map