"A Bit of Shame or Remorse May Go a Long Way"

Exploring the Social Impact of Discriminatory Practises in Thompson, Manitoba

By Delia Chartrand and Chris Bignell
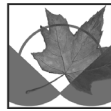
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- Thompson Aboriginal Education Advisory Committee Meeting
- School District of Mystery Lake Principal's Meeting
- The Thompson Boys and Girls Club
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- City Centre Mall
- University College of the North
- University of Manitoba Northern Social Work Program

Abstract

The community of Thompson is a regional hub which provides services to a number of surrounding communities in northern Manitoba. Demographically Thompson presents an intersection of diverse cultures and is unique in that it has the highest population per capita of Indigenous residents in all of Canada. *(TEDWG, 2012a).* Anecdotally we know that divisions of race persist within the community. This is especially clear in reference to issues of homelessness. The following study was designed in order to develop a picture of negative attitudes which stigmatize the community's most vulnerable populations and in turn address how prejudice contributes to the marginalization of homeless people within the city of Thompson. In examining the climate of public opinion on the topics of race and homelessness, recommendations have been provided to constructively reduce the impact of negative opinion and provide pathways for developing a healthy, cohesive community dynamic.

A Historic Observance of Thompson's Early Systems of Race

The community of Thompson, Manitoba was established with the inception of the 1956 Thompson Nickel Agreement, a document which dictated the development and operation of a Local Government District and a townsite near Mystery Lake. The Agreement itself, which was signed between The Province of Manitoba and the International Nickel Company of Canada, Limited (INCO) made no mention of the Indigenous groups already residing in the region (Manitoba, 1956). The agreement was signed despite the fact that the establishment of such a townsite would result in a significant influx of people to the north and the displacement of Indigenous peoples who already used the region for hunting and trapping activities.

Prior to the enactment of the Thompson Nickel Agreement the region had been an area of thriving enterprise. The land on which the mine and city was built was significant to hunters, trappers and fishers who recall stories of tracking caribou where the plaza was later built, or laying trap lines where the Manitoba Liquor Commission would be erected (FemNorthNet, 2013). With the enactment of the Agreement, however, all decisions with regards to, "the location of such a Townsite, and the development and op-

eration of such Local Government District and Townsite," (Manitoba, 1956, p. 11) were left to the discretion of the Mining Company and Province and all, "use of said lands as ...deem[ed] to be in the interest of the District," (Manitoba, 1956, p. 12) were left to the Resident Administrator. This document, through its noticeable omission of local Indigenous groups in the region, set a precedent for the generational impacts of colonization and marginalization in this region.

In a further example of the early divisiveness between Indigenous and non-Indigenous residents, INCO's early hiring regulations displayed overtly discriminatory policies which expressly forbade the hiring of Indigenous workers. By the summer of 1962, however, Indigenous groups successfully picketed the mining company on these hiring policies and by December 17, 1962 INCO announced they would officially be changing their policies to include Indigenous employees. (Community Timeline Report, 2015) The official policy change, however, in no way eliminated the deeply entrenched systemic discrimination. Early practices had established a precedent for how the town functioned.

Thompson became the source of political debate between MP's in 1968 regarding the discrimina-

tory and substandard employment of Indigenous peoples in Northern Canada. In this discussion the Department of Indian Affairs and National Resources proposed a plan that would allow private industries more responsibility in training and relocation programs for Indigenous workers. This was the second session in which the committee of Indian Affairs and Natural resources was told that industries had not been fully employing Indigenous labourers in northern projects. During the debate, Conservative MP Robert Simpson of the Churchill riding used Thompson as a prime example of this discrimination explaining that Indigenous workers employed by INCO contractors were often forced to camp out in the bush due to the lack of adequate housing within Thompson itself. Liberal MP Mark Smerchanski, however, while agreeing that more efforts needed to be made in increasing the capacity of companies to hire Indigenous employees, argued that housing was not an immediate concern. In reasoning which clearly displayed stereotypical views regarding Indigenous peoples characteristic of this era, Smerchanski explained that Indigenous people were familiar with these types of accommodations and that there was nothing wrong with establishing off-site tent facilities for workers. Furthermore he claimed that camp-site tents were usually just as comfortable as hotel accommodations and faulted newspapers for the unfavorable depictions of camp-site, "shanty towns" (Community Timeline Report, 2015).

With examples such as these throughout the history of Thompson it can be suggested that the community's main industries were established and maintained in a way that would sustain generational poverty for Indigenous residents of the region to today. Scholar David Delaney explained how issues of race become embedded in other spatial geographies of power such as economic, political and cultural:

> The problem is precisely why it matters in
> the first place: the role of spatialities in the

maintenance of structures of domination, subordination, and inequality, and how these are experienced in body and being…A portion of what we know about the problem goes by the name of intersectionality. While usually spoken of in the context of identity — the intersection of race, class, gender, sexuality, rurality, and so on — each of these dimensions of the social have their own spatialities. (Delaney, 2002, p. 11)

The community of Thompson is a good example of how these intersecting spacialities play out in the preservation of systemic inequalities on the basis of race. It has long been an accepted sociological fact that the impacts of poverty and discrimination on a particular social or cultural group's well-being are of an overtly negative nature. Indigenous people, particularly in Canada experience, "higher rates of physical and mental disorders relative to their non-Aboriginal counterparts," which can be attributed to the stress of discriminatory experiences that in turn erode general well-being (Bombay, Matheson, & Anisman, 2010). Likewise, the experience of homelessness is a state that "alters a person's sense of self, place, and belonging" (Vandemark, 2007). In many ways homelessness can be characterized as more than a lack of shelter or basic necessities, but as a deprivation of a number of different facets of everyday comfort and health in turn affecting a person's well-being physiologically, emotionally, ontologically and even spiritually (Somerville, 2013). These factors should all be taken into consideration when examining issues of Indigenous homelessness in Thompson.

Public perceptions of the largely race based class arrangements of Thompson, and the barriers these placed on the region's Indigenous residents in achieving sustainable housing or an equitable quality of life to that of non-Indigenous residents, materialized in various instances. Arguably one of the best examples of the influence of this undercurrent of inequality on the public of Thompson can be observed in the event of the

1979 Human Rights complaint against two local businesses. On October 16th, 1979 the Manitoba Human Rights Commission received a series of complaints against a local hotel and men's apparel establishment in Thompson, Manitoba. The complaints were filed by a number of Manitoba Indigenous organizations, but it was the Manitoba Indian Brotherhood specifically that took a strong stance and became vocal advocates against discrimination in this case.

The complaints had been sparked by the sale of t-shirts which toted blatantly discriminatory imagery as well as a slogan stating that the establishment in question was, "For Natives". The offensive shirts that featured the picture of a person with long hair and moccasins, lying in a gutter and holding a bottle were then distributed by the businesses. Moses Neepin, the vice president of the Manitoba chapter of the Indian Brotherhood noted: "at best this kind of thing is in very bad taste" (*Montreal Gazette*, 1979). In both cases the two establishments charged with discrimination claimed to the Commission that they had in no way intended to insult Indigenous people. Following this, in what was regarded as a show of good faith, all of the remaining merchandise was given over to the Commission voluntarily for proper disposal.

Over the course of this investigation the local businesses also wrote assurances that they had discontinued all further production of the apparel and that any future business promotions or advertisements would comply with the rules and regulations outlined in the Human Rights Act. Additionally the businesses wrote letters of apology to the complainants regarding the incident and the case was effectively resolved (Annual Report, 1979). Although the matter itself was resolved, it represents a significant trend in the community at this time. In this context the "bottle" can be observed as a symbolic representation of racial theories of addiction (Thatcher, 2004) while the subject's juxtaposition against a squalor backdrop could be interpreted as a depiction of homelessness.

The fact that merchandisers recognized that there was potential market value for this subject matter and attempted to capitalize on it reflects a collective attitude wherein the stigmatization of Indigenous people was deemed a socially acceptable behavior among Thompson residents. Ironically, the certain social problems addressed in the cartoon's depiction were created in part as a result of decades of social disparity imposed by such prejudices. This incident demonstrates a prevalent communal mentality to condemn certain social behaviors which in turn promoted social disparity by alienating marginalized populations. As the Manitoba Human Rights Commission explained, "this particular complaint is important because it is an object lesson to all Manitoba citizens who are contemplating using perverted humour at the expense of minority groups" (Annual Report, 1979).

The history of Thompson's relationship with its Indigenous populations is one which can be characterized as tumultuous at times. It is a situation influenced by the community's unique regional attributes and reflective of its geographic, economic, cultural and social environments.

Framing the Data

Thompson has long held title as a regional hub where surrounding communities gain access to various goods and services. It has observed many economic fluctuations over the past decade, which has had a direct affect on the community's population. In 2011, Thompson was home to 12, 829 residents demonstrating a population decrease of 4.6 percent from the previous 5 years (2006 to 2011). Conversely, the surrounding northern regions experienced a significant population increase of 10.5 percent to the number of 34, 198 residents in surrounding communities (TEDWG, 2012a). This is important when noting the regional population's increase despite a local decrease as the two are intrinsically linked.

Within the region there currently exist ten communities that do not offer high school programming for students to achieve their grade twelve. This, in turn, implies that many youth from these communities will often come to Thompson in order to access this level of education (TEDWG, 2012a). This illustrates the barriers many communities in the north face in accessing certain services, as well as the regional discrepancies such barriers create in terms of individual capacity and socio-economic sustainability. Education and many other services

such as healthcare, jobs, government, shopping and housing must be procured through the regional hub of Thompson, a facet of the region that reinforces a consistently transient in and outflow of people.

It is worth noting that a significant proportion of residents are Indigenous within both the local city limits and the surrounding regional communities. In 2006 the city of Thompson itself reported the highest per capita percentage of Indigenous residents at 36 percent, higher than any other city in Canada (TEDWG, 2012a, p. 19). Organizations such as the Thompson Economic Diversification Working Group (TEDWG) have stressed the importance of recognizing these aspects or characteristics of the region when developing programs and services:

> When considering education and training services and resources in both Thompson and the Region, it will be important to consider who is using these services and resources, to ensure programs and facilities are designed in a way that best meets the needs of residents. (TEDWG, 2012a).

Another significant factor to consider when observing the region's mutually dependent distinc-

tions is the issue of housing (MacKinnon & Lafreniere, 2009). According to the TEDWG 2012 report on housing, the state of housing within the region poses a number of challenges for its residents. Among these challenges were; a reported zero percent vacancy rate in the City of Thompson in 2011, the aged nature of the present housing stock in Thompson, most of which was built in the 1960s and 1970s and the critical overcrowding of unsafe or inadequate housing stock which has become the norm in many surrounding communities (TEDWG, 2012b).

It is worth examining the gravest implications of these housing issues on the residents of Thompson and the surrounding region. For example, during the 2015 Point-In-Time Count, a study which was designed to identify and examine a 24-hour picture of Thompson's homeless population, 126 individuals were designated as being homeless. Of these people, 41.2 percent were defined as experiencing 'chronic homelessness' or without a home for 180 days or more in the last year. Of the overall participants defined as homeless, a staggering portion of those individuals identified as 'Aboriginal' at 94.4 percent, while 4.8 percent identified as 'Non-Aboriginal' and 0.8 percent answered 'don't know.' The majority of respondents (57.8 percent) who identified as homeless also reported coming originally from other surrounding northern communities, most significantly Nelson House (17), Split Lake (7), Shamattawa (6), Oxford House (6), York Land-

ing (5), and Lac Brochet (4). Additionally, 32.8 percent of participants reported coming from Thompson, 4.3 percent from Southern Manitoba and 3.4 percent from out of province (Bonnycastle, Simpkins, Bonnycastle, & Matiasek, 2015).

The nature of housing challenges in and around the community is of increased concern when we contemplate the region's overall population increases and the migration in and out of the central hub of Thompson. The TEDWG report on housing comments on this regional dynamic, stating:

> The shortfall in quality housing is consequential in a region defined by overall high population growth and high levels of in- and out-migration and affects all residents, regardless of economic means, as well as employers. The limited options—in terms of affordability, unit size, unit condition and tenure options—pose an especially great risk to the well-being of the region's most vulnerable populations (TEDWG, 2012b).

From these findings, it is easy to perceive how issues of race have become embroiled within issues of homelessness and how public perceptions have been skewed in stigmatizing the region's Indigenous residents. Conversely, regional housing factors along with an established pattern of discriminatory practises within the community may contribute, in part, to the overwhelmingly disproportionate percentage of Thompson's large homeless population being Indigenous.

Framing the Current Response

Today the community of Thompson has created several different organizations and mandates aimed at addressing the issues of systemic discrimination for its residents. The Thompson Aboriginal Accord was signed on National Aboriginal Day, June 21st of 2009, and was a document which represented the recognition of the city's formal relationship with not just its neighbouring Indigenous communities, but also its urban Indigenous population. The signing was the culmination of the previous years' discussions and community collaboration with dignitaries from local Indigenous organizations working together to honour the city's connections with the local Indigenous community.

When initial discussions began on how to formalize the city's relationship with its Indigenous population in a respectful manner, one of the main desires for the accord was that it be something purposeful and fluid. It was at this point that a sub-committee consisting of representatives from Keewatin Tribal Council, Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak, Manitoba Metis Federation, Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation, Northern Association of Community Councils and the Thompson Urban Aboriginal Strategy was formed to work with the city on the values

of the accord. This committee eventually made up the group of Aboriginal dignitaries who later witnessed and signed the accord. (Community Timeline Report, 2015)

The accord represents an important milestone in the City of Thompson's development as a community dedicated to cultural diversity and the recognition of the integral role of First Nations, Metis and Inuit peoples within the community. (Thompson Aboriginal Accord, 2009). This historic document signified a turning of the tide for the community and its relationship with the Indigenous peoples of this region. Since its inception, partners of the Accord have expanded to include local industries and businesses, educational and social organizations and various political entities.

Additionally, the community has begun to employ and pilot various models for culturally relevant programs. For example, in 2012 the community took part in a community-based participatory research project between University College of the North and the University of Brandon, which identified Cultural Proficiency as a critical component to ensuring success for youth in and around the Thompson region. This approach was designed to, "build capacity to teach in culturally proficient ways, develop and

implement workshops on Cultural Proficiency in the school District and community, engage students in land-based education, and support knowledge mobilization of research findings" (Circle, November 2015). Initiatives such as these within the community, aimed at creating cross-cultural pathways that promote acceptance as well as the preservation of cultural practises, are increasingly employed within the region. This can be observed as an example of how the community has begun to address issues of cultural acceptance and perceive it as an expressed priority within the region.

Other initiatives, such as the City of Thompson's Downtown Strategy, seek to apply holistic methods in addressing social issues. The Downtown Strategy encourages long-term and collaborative strategies among Thompson as well as neighbouring communities in addressing homelessness. The dimensions of this approach are: emergency, transitional and supportive housing, addictions and mental health, poverty, domestic violence, unemployment, limited life skills and gaps in education. Contrary to previous policies, many of Thompson's recent strategies in addressing these issues are characterized as 'proactive' as opposed to 'punitive.' (Bonnycastle, Simpkins, Bonnycastle, & Matiasek, 2015).

However, with all of the region's emphasis on cultural programming and holistic approaches to addressing homelessness, events within Thompson still take place which harkens back to the Human Rights Commission complaint of years past. While the official and administrative discourse of Thompson presents a more culturally as well as socially tolerant visage than that of previous decades there are still instances which have reminded the community that there is still a significant, albeit subversive division between Thompson's residents on the topics of race and homelessness. There has also been a notable opposition to an increased focus on the development of social programs aimed at addressing these issues.

One event that illustrates this undercurrent of contention was the highly publicized closure of *The Thompson Citizen*'s (Thompson's local newspaper) Facebook page in January of 2013. http://www.thompsoncitizen.net/news/thompson/racist-anti-aboriginal-slurs-and-offensive-comments-prompt-thompson-citizen-to-permanently-close-facebook-page-1.1372321

In a unanimous decision, publisher Brent Fitzpatrick, general manager Lynn Taylor and Editor John Barker decided to dismantle the newspaper's presence on the social media site due to the page being used as a way to spread and post discriminatory comments. As the article the *Citizen* would later publish explained:

> We're leaving because for some time commenters have been posting virulently racist anti-aboriginal comments on our page and tagging photos in a similar way, including our profile photo of the *Thompson Citizen* building this morning. It ends here. This newspaper is not going to stand by and let anti-aboriginal racists and haters spew their evil on a vehicle we're facilitating them using. We can't control Facebook to any real extent, nor can we control what commenters think and say. Nor should we. But we can control where we have an online presence and where we don't. Newspapers, needless to say, are about free speech and the exchange of ideas in a democracy, often hotly contested ones, so leaving Facebook is not an easy decision. But it is the right one. (Barker, 2013).

The article went on to explain that with the offensive comments being posted, some readers had begun to believe the paper was in some way responsible for the content of others' posts which publishers maintained they had no control over, as they could only remove posts from their page after the fact. Additionally the article made reference to how some of the most, "virulent, racist anti-aboriginal comments have come from commenters who were more than happy to sign

their real names" (Barker, 2013), rather than by those hiding behind the virtual anonymity which many social media sources provide. This is not to say that controversies of this nature have been limited to merely individualist considerations on social media. Other discussions on race and homelessness within the community would be incited by local businesses in the downtown region in the fall of that same year. For example, a letter was sent to Thompson's mayor and council and subsequently published in *The Thompson Citizen* which contained suggestions such as:

> Moving the homeless shelter closer to the hospital and bus depot, and asking the city to publish RCMP statistics as well as names of people charged with various offences, suggesting that "a bit of shame or remorse may go a long way in rehabilitation (Graham, 2013b). The letter, penned by the president of the Thompson Unlimited Board of Directors and three local businesses (who chose to remain anonymous), would prompt the Keewatin Tribal Council (KTC) to invite representatives of local businesses, media and municipal government to come together for a discussion on racism during their annual general assembly.

These two events provide a significant observation in that they express some level of perceived social acceptability of an anti-Indigenous discourse within the community. In one instance the prevalence of racially charged comments to the degree that a local media's Facebook page was forced to shut-down. Furthermore, the fact that such comments were deemed by users to be acceptable enough that they were in many cases comfortable with attaching their names to the posts demonstrates a climate within the community supportive of discriminatory practises. Consequently the decision to publicize the ideas of local businesses, in their campaign to marginalize Thompson's downtown homeless, communicated that not only are opinions of this nature held amongst community members but that the dialogue is ubiquitous to the level that giving it an official platform was not deemed inappropriate in Thompson, even in 2013.

Conversely, the same month of the Facebook page shutdown, *The Thompson Citizen* published an article relating to the presence of racism in the community, citing debates over the proposition to use three outdoor rink buildings as an overflow emergency shelter during freezing temperatures. The article posed the question:

> How did we as a community in Thompson get to 2013 and find ourselves arguing vitriolically among ourselves about whether we should use our neighbourhood park rink buildings at Eastwood Park, Juniper Park and Southwood Park, if necessary as a very last resort if the Thompson Homeless Shelter was full, to save homeless people from freezing to death at temperatures of -30 C or even -40 C? (Thompson Citizen, 2013).

Similar debates occurred later that same year as well, regarding the development of a federally funded Housing First supportive 'damp' house (term used to describe a supportive house which does not restrict residents from drinking off premise, but does not allow alcohol on premise) (Graham, 2013a). It is important to note here that in discussions regarding racism within the community the topic of homelessness has often become naturally and intrinsically linked to a discourse of discrimination.

Research Methodology

The Thompson Neighbourhood Renewal Corporation (TNRC) is a local organization that works towards community development in Thompson, Manitoba. For the last five years the organization has worked in the community and identified priority areas of: affordable, accessible and suitable housing; community wellness, safety and recreation; cultural awareness and acceptance; and community spaces and environment. Every five years the organization engages in a broad based inclusive consultation process resulting in a renewal plan that guides operations for that period.

The community consultations enable the TNRC to direct existing resources from a broad perspective on neighbourhoods and housing. As part of this process an in-depth study was done to address the underlying factors of homelessness, poverty and discrimination. This enabled the TNRC to develop effective recommendations to support populations effected by these issues. The research examined the underlying issues and impacts of the marginalization of vulnerable populations in the community, specifically indigenous individuals with lived experience in Thompson.

The study initially intended to use qualitative data generated from 50 open-ended surveys that participants filled out, with questions that focused directly on the public's perception of marginalized populations and addressed negative attitudes towards them. This initial approach had to be modified due to only 27 individuals expressing an interest in participating and only 5 surveys being completed. It was felt this was not a significant enough sample size to use and the study adjusted accordingly. The new survey included five open-ended questions wherein participants could answer with suggestions about any prevailing issues they felt were important with regards to community development in general. It was believed that these more generalized questions regarding the community would yield a higher rate of participation. Furthermore this approach would be more objective, as it did not overtly prompt questions of discrimination but instead collected honest and unprovoked comments on race and homelessness by providing participants with an anonymous outlet to freely discuss issues they felt were a concern within their community.

The TNRC's Community Consultations process began in November 2015. The survey itself was developed in partnership through discussions with Community Futures North Central

Development who were contracted to assist the TNRC in this process. The survey consisted of a series of questions to determine the demographic information of the survey's participants with regards to their gender, age, cultural identity and socio-economic status. The survey then asked questions with regards to the participant's current perceived quality of life in Thompson as well as their opinions on how quality of life could be improved in the community. This section used a system which yielded quantitative data by asking participants to rank the importance of the following factors of: Neighbourhood Empowerment, Housing, Cleanliness and Beautification, Safety and Crime Prevention, Recreation, Economic Development, Youth, Cultural Acceptance or Other. Participants were then asked to give suggestions on development for the factors they considered most important. Additionally the survey asked participants to identify the areas of Thompson they believed required the most need for development and the least through a quantitative ranking system.

The TNRC employed cooperative and collaborative methods to carry out a series of survey distributions by taking advantage of various boards' invitations to present on the community consults and distribute surveys to their respective organizations. This method yielded a diverse resource of survey participants from various public sectors as well as local community organizations. Survey distribution and collection commenced on November 18th, 2015 at the School District of Mystery Lake's School Board where surveys were filled out during the Thompson Aboriginal Education Advisory Committee (TAEAC) meeting by TAEAC board members. Surveys were also set up by Community Futures in an electronic format which was circulated throughout Community Futures and TNRC's collective email contacts as well as posted on both organizations' social media pages. In addition to employing cooperative research methods with local community organizations the TNRC set up booths at independent social events and public settings. The following is a list of organizations, locations and events in which the TNRC successfully engaged community members in filling out the surveys.

Organizations and Clients Engaged By TNRC:
- Thompson Aboriginal Education Advisory Committee Meeting
- School District of Mystery Lake Principal's Meeting
- The Thompson Boys and Girls Club
- The Northern Manitoba Research Forum
- Thompson Urban Aboriginal Strategy Meeting
- RCMP Thompson Detachment
- Project Northern Doorway Steering Committee Meeting
- Mino-ska-nah-wey-tahk Supportive Housing Facility clients and staff
- Thompson Crisis Centre clients and staff
- TNRC Asset Building Clients
- Thompson Aboriginal Accord Meeting

Public Engagements:
- Thompson's 7th Annual Artists Crafter and Small Business Expo
- Riverside Elementary School's Christmas Concert
- Wapanohk Elementary School's Community Feast
- Juniper Elementary School's Christmas Concert
- City Centre Mall, Mall Intercept
- City Centre Mall, Mall Intercept
- TNRC Christmas Open House
- University College of the North (Thompson main campus)
- University College of the North student housing

- University of Manitoba Northern Social Work Program

The list demonstrates the impact of employing collaborative research methodologies in reference to the variety of community sectors from which data was collected. The respective approach gathered information from a diverse cross-section of individuals including those from low-income neighbourhoods.

The data from completed surveys was organized in a way which determined factors such as trends towards the areas of development which were considered most and least important to various social and economic demographics, as well as which areas for development were considered most and least important overall. In addition, the long answers collected were subjected to a comprehensive text analysis that looked at key words and phrases to discern the climate of public opinion on the subjects of homelessness and culture.

Of the surveys distributed 304 were completed. Responses from the five open ended questions garnered a 14.8 percent occurrence rate of answers regarding homelessness in the community and another 3.95 percent occurrence of mentions to the downtown region. Additionally, survey participants responded with a 4.93 percent occurrence rate of answers directly referencing racism and discrimination as an issue within the community and another 16.78 percent occurrence of comments indicating an expressed need for more cultural awareness within the city as a way to increase cultural acceptance.

This information was then used to develop questions in order to conduct two focus groups with various representatives from community organizations as well as the general public to attend. These were held March 8th and March 9th, 2016. The questions were developed from the priority areas defined by the survey and were intended to guide the groups towards a constructive discussion of how to address the issues of discrimination of marginalized populations in the community. The following was constructed using a culmination of data collected from a preliminary literature review on the subjects of homelessness and discrimination using local Thompson organizational reports, various media sources, the TNRC community consultation surveys and TNRC community consultation focus groups.

Demographics

Demographic data of the survey's participants was determined through an initial series of questions regarding their gender, age, cultural identity and socio-economic status. The data illustrates that, of the 304 participants who took part in the survey, a majority of respondents at 70.18 percent were female, while only 29.82 percent were male. Additionally the survey gathered results from respondents of varying ages with 24.67 percent of participants being between 10–29 years of age, 47.69 percent of participants between 30–49 years and 27.63 percent of participants being over 50 years of age.

In terms of the socio-economic status of those surveyed, most respondents (54.61 percent) answered that their annual household income was above $50, 000. Another 20.14 percent of participants reported making an annual income of between $25, 000 to $49, 999 and 25.26 percent recorded making less than $24, 999. Conversely, the majority of respondents (44.56 percent) reported that 30 percent or less of their total household income went to housing, however a significant number of respondents (13.33 percent) recorded more than 50 percent of their income was spent on housing. The majority of respondents culturally identified themselves as "Indigenous." Included in this definition were "First Nations," "Metis" and "Inuit" of which 59 percent of participants described themselves to be. Another 38 percent of respondents described themselves as "Non-Indigenous" or "Other" and 3 percent of survey participants identified themselves as a "Visible Minority."

The demographic data presented by the survey's participants represents a significant cross-section of Thompson's community as a whole, with a compelling number of varied sociological perspectives encompassed by the sample.

Findings on Emerging Themes Within the Research

The Survey

The survey asked participants to rank the importance of nine categories of community development when considering improving the quality of life in the community. Of the 304 surveys which were answered the highest overall priorities within the community were listed as:

1. Safety and Crime Prevention (7.16 – weighted average)

2. Housing (6.78)

3. Youth (5.90)

4. Economic Development (5.59)

5. Cleanliness and Beautification (5.39)

6. Cultural Acceptance (5.25)

7. Recreation (5.10)

8. Neighbourhood Empowerment (5.06)

9. Other (2.52)

The survey also contained five open ended questions where respondents were afforded the opportunity to answer any prevailing ideas or issues they had regarding community development. Answers contained a variety of subjects; however for the purposes of this study only specific answers pertaining to issues of homelessness, addiction, race and culture were run through a text analysis

for consideration. The analysis of text which used specific key words was then organized in a way which determined prevailing trends in context and attitudes towards the subject matter, bearing in mind that some comments encapsulated more than one of these predominant themes or categories. In examples where this was the case and comments fit into more than one of the prevailing themes these answers were calculated as belonging to both categories.

It should be noted that challenges within a text based review of the data presented themselves through some limitations with the key-word search software employed. One example of these difficulties was the need to use exact phrasing and spelling in searches. In order to account for this, many conceivable synonyms and similar key words encompassed under the topic headings were also applied in the search as well as assumed common misspellings of words so as to explore as many comments within the given subject matter as possible.

Text Analysis

"Race, Racist, Discrimination"

Within the open-ended sections of the survey fifteen comments were isolated which contained the

words "race, racist or discrimination." Within the sample of 304 overall surveys this gave a 4.93 percent occurrence rate of comments which discussed these topics as prevailing issues of importance within the community. Comments were then categorized by the predominant themes they presented.

The majority of these comments (60 percent) contained assertions that racism was an issue that should be recognized, eliminated or diminished in general. This section contained comments and suggestions such as:

> "Community leaders (mayor, council, executive directors, clergy people, business owners) should role model their own acceptance and speaking against racism at every opportunity."

> "Making the street safe and less racism."

> "Creating a "no tolerance" rule (by-law) regulation for bullying/racism/lateral violence."

> "Racism, prejudice, oppression."

An additional 26.6 percent of comments using these key words discussed racism within the context of entrenched systemic discrimination. These comments referenced various service sectors including law, housing and economy and asserted that discrimination was an issue within these public sectors which needed to be addressed. Various comments included:

> "Wpg. may have won McLeans "most racist" city but Thompson has too many entrenched "discriminating" citizens- evidence in job interviews, housing, gov't. services, students, cab drivers and the list goes on."

> "Racism around the city (the police department)."

> "Provide low-income housing- how does this city expect minimum wage earners to pay rent? STOP supporting out of town landlords gauging locals and discriminating towards applicants."

Finally, of the fifteen comments, 20 percent also included overt assertions that the community of

Thompson specifically had a problem with racism. Examples of comments included within this classification are:

> "Thompson has plenty of racist individuals and we should all be accepting each other."

> "Thompson is a wonderful community with many opportunities, especially for anyone with some initiative. Somehow there needs to be a way to motivate and encourage people within our community by creating a sense of pride. There is too much racism and division still. Not sure how though."

"Culture, Aboriginal, First Nations, Native, Indigenous"

A subsequent text analysis was conducted on the topics of Indigenous cultural identity and culture in general. As "Cultural Acceptance" was listed as one of the topic areas for community development the number of comments using words under this umbrella are understandably higher at fifty-one comments or a 16.78 percent occurrence among all surveys. A framework was developed for how these terms were discussed contextually, in order to observe how these topics impact community opinion.

Of the fifty-one comments, the majority (56.86 percent) contained subject matter regarding suggestions for more cultural events, festivals and other expressions for campaigns that would create an increased cultural awareness within the community. Comments of this nature generally suggested the topic of cultural acceptance as something to be celebrated, indicating a positive opinion of the diversity present within the community. Conversely, the prevailing opinion that the community should hold more of these events would suggest that there is an absence of cultural events presently or that forums to display elements of culture are perceived as inadequate. This category contained answers like:

"Educating the community about our many cultures present in our town, like a culture fest."

"More culturally appropriate get togethers with ALL cultures!"

"Hold cultural day where groups display their culture, music, food, art, etc."

"I think there should be more visible cultural symbols around the city and an increase in cultural activities…"

"Thompson lacks full cultural acceptance! People need to bring more awareness and understanding to each other about different cultures and work together as a community."

Similarly, 35.29 percent of answers referencing this topic contained comments reflecting an expressed need for more cultural proficiency training in work spaces as well as educational institutions. Suggestions grouped within this category displayed answers such as:

"Cultural proficiency training in all businesses, workplaces and education places…"

"More programs teaching cultural proficiency, especially in the workplace so that there is a better environment for Aboriginal workers and customers."

"…Training programs for public and private sectors in cultural awareness."

Another 27.45 percent of comments within this text phrase category referenced culture through a locus of Indigenous identity. Subsequently 7.84 percent of the fifty-one comments directly reference Indigenous youth as being a key component to improving cultural acceptance as a whole. These comments contained a number of suggestions regarding increasing the community's capacity towards cultural acceptance such as:

"More forums/community events/education that showcase Aboriginal culture and acknowledgment of community Elders."

"Having more cultural programs for Aboriginal youth who have lost their connection to language, culture, identity and connection to the land eg. Cultural teaching, dance, crafts."

" More invitations should be sent out to all First Nations celebrations to come join our youth and to show more passion for our cultural inheritance for instance we need more elders to teach the way of the sweat lodge."

"Mean age of indigenous population is significantly lower than Winnipeg and Canada. Empowerment of youth and rebuild intergenerational knowledge/skill would be the key for positive changes in a longer term."

Youth in general was also a compelling topic for discussion, as 25.49 percent of answers referencing culture involved this key word. Teaching the younger generation about cultural diversity and about being proud of their cultural identity was generally seen as a crucial component in creating a healthy, more culturally accepting community. Various comments within this word cluster which specifically referenced youth are:

"Have cultural acceptance- for that [we] need to have guidance counsellors for visible minority so that kids can see their own cultural counsellor to talk about their feelings in schools."

"More open programming that is culturally centred for children and youth in our community affordable, accessible, opened for all!"

"Culture acceptance- maybe more awareness, the younger youth taught at an earlier age."

Additionally 11.76 percent of comments within the "culture" word cluster discussed the need for culturally indiscriminate hiring practises among employers. These comments discussed the need for a culturally diverse or accepting workforce for the benefit of marginalized populations in terms of both employability but also, for those accessing the services within these economic

sectors. It is important to note that the majority of these comments (four out of six) also directly referenced policing or patrolling as community services that need to employ these cross-cultural hiring practises. Comments of this nature could be interpreted as implying a perceived inequity regarding these sectors of law enforcement which may be resulting in the detrimental treatment of marginalized peoples. Examples of comments in this vein of discourse include:

> "Hire more RCMP that are Aboriginal."

> "Cultural awareness being at all levels of government and should be more prevalent in service sectors i.e. malls, restaurants…"

> "More Aboriginal people in middle management and management positions…"

> "More patrol, hire Aboriginal by-laws who speak the language."

> "Have all types of people/cultures walk the street at night/day patrolling."

"Homeless"

Of the 304 surveys answered, the subject of homelessness was deemed a high priority amongst respondents, with forty-five comments directly relating to the subject, giving the concept a 14.8 percent occurrence rate amongst completed surveys. Responses contained a variety of suggestions that were catalogued on the basis of context into three prevailing themes. Again, with comments containing multiple sentiments towards the subject of homelessness, answers were tabulated as belonging to more than one category.

The majority of responses can be classified as generally constructive in that they contained suggestions regarding increased resources, funding, housing and support for homeless people as well as local organizations which service this population. It can be presumed that with an overwhelming 51.11 percent of comments that addressed the topic of homelessness containing

suggestions to increase services or funding for this population that, respondents are implying that current services to this sector are perceived as lacking in their ability to fully provide supports for the community's homeless. A sample of comments encompassed by this category are:

> "Put money used for beautifying the city, and use it for a proper shelter and outreach program—a facility that can accommodate 75–100 homeless people."

> "Use tax revenues to build, manage low cost or in some cases no cost housing –not homeless shelters. Some sort of graduated program."

> "A detox unit within the shelter, with available therapy and counselling, instead of pretending to care and donating or giving such a small fund to the homeless."

> "Homeless shelter, need more advocacy."

> "A women's health clinic, more holistic homeless shelter and access to healthcare and mental health addictions services on site."

> "Supports for homeless, the development of a downtown revitalization strategy."

> "…housing for the homeless in such a cold climate."

The second largest category referencing homelessness, however, was decidedly more negative in its responses. These answers were grouped for their tendency to associate homelessness with crime, addiction and violence. Suggestions of this nature generally followed a discourse of displacement, conveying beliefs that the homeless should be removed from the downtown region or disallowed from occupying public spaces such as malls and parking lots. A staggering 33.3 percent or one in three of responses fell into this division. Examples of these remarks are:

> "Clean up city, detour homeless from downtown malls, more police presence."

"More visible, clean up downtown homeless population."

"Moving the homeless shelter away from the downtown."

"Homeless shelter are 1) children may be scared to walk around that are 2) unsafe, they don't watch where they are walking, walking in front of cars 3) makes Thompson look ugly."

"I think you need to control the homeless people. They need to be oriented and educated so that they won't end up useless people. More job and opportunity so they can survive [on] their own."

"I am tired of seeing drunks on every corner downtown. I would like to see the homeless shelter moved out of downtown."

Finally, a 24.44 percent of comments in this text category were ranked as neutral in that they were not considered overtly constructive or negative and merely recognized the community as having individuals who experience homelessness. Various responses within this group are:

"Need to address homelessness."

"Homelessness, poverty, renovate the city."

"Homelessness needs to be addressed as it is a major issue in our community."

"Downtown, Alcohol, Drinking, Drunk"

A subsequent text analysis for phrases containing key words pertaining to the community's downtown region and issues of addiction was conducted in association to the word search of comments on homelessness. With many of the comments regarding the text search for "homeless" involving these additional subjects, the word cluster was designed to collect any data or comments that may have been missed through the initial text search on homelessness. Based on the context of the responses gathered through this search, an additional eleven comments can also be attributed to the discourse on discrimination of marginalized populations in the downtown area. A sample of these remarks are as follows:

"Social behaviours downtown."

"More supervision downtown, addressing the drunks."

"It's a crime to be drunk and disorderly and turning a blind eye to it doesn't make it better."

"Building more beautiful infrastructure. Coffee shops/ restaurants not surrounded by drunks!"

Focus Group Recommendations

A number of prevailing themes began to emerge during the focus groups. Based on the results of the surveys, discussion was generated and a number of recommendations for community betterment with regards to how Thompson navigates issues of race and homelessness were made. Significantly, recommendations were proposed to work collaboratively with reserves and surrounding communities as a region rather than an isolated city in developing strategies to address these issues. The need to move beyond the mentality that Thompson is itself a solitary community and see ourselves as part of a regional network of northern communities with which there is a reciprocate dependency was seen as a belief that is slowly being adopted at municipal governance levels as well as in the community as a whole.

In terms of cultural acceptance within the community the prevailing assertion was that education and cultural proficiency training was a key to addressing issues of race and discrimination in Thompson. Additionally it was believed that cultural acceptance needed to first be made a priority with the community's leadership as well as the younger generation, as both were viewed as important target groups for educational models which increase cultural understanding.

Among the many recommendations for cultural education were an expressed belief in making programming mandatory with local service sector employees and frontline workers. Examples such as the workshops available to university students at University College of the North (UCN) which employ both class room training as well as land-based educational models, were discussed for their potential to be expanded on and attended by a variety of community workers. Providing more summer camps aimed at increasing cultural sensitivity with youth were methods considered for increasing the capacity of the community's younger generation in developing culturally tolerant attitudes and beliefs. Subsequently, suggestions to increase the presence of events within the community that would promote cultural sharing were made as a way to enhance individual as well as community pride. Provided examples of such events were local pow-wows and cultural festivals. As a means of facilitating an increase in the occurrence of such cultural events suggestions were made to appoint a position for a cultural liaison within the city of Thompson that would coordinate events with performers as well as develop a newspaper or magazine to showcase these events.

Consequently, the prospects of creating projects which recognize that Indigenous people were here long before the mine was built were explored. Alternative histories which deviate from the narrative of Thompson's role as a mining town were proposed and recommendations to revive the FemNorthNet history project which would use murals and a website to showcase a decidedly Indigenous historic view of Thompson were made.

One unique suggestion which developed from this discourse on alternative histories was the concept of opposing historic symbols in the community between Indigenous and Non-Indigenous residents. The removal of community landmarks which create this divisiveness was discussed. Specifically, an airplane erected as a landmark by the Miles Hart Bridge was questioned with regards to its symbolism for Elders and residential school survivors. The plane is seen as a symbol which reminds Indigenous residents of the planes used to transport white agents to reserves and forcibly take children to residential schools. For Elders having to cross the bridge when entering the community the plane was discussed as a reminder of this trauma. Recommendations were made to educate the community on this negative symbolism and to have the plane taken down as a sign of respect.

Conversely, moving onto a discussion of homelessness in the community, the concept of the privatization of public spaces was another issue addressed during the focus groups. A number of issues were tackled in terms of services which are provided to the community's vulnerable populations. One of the most significant was the accessibility of public spaces and buildings such as malls and health facilities, as well as outdoor spaces, for the city's homeless. Furthermore, observations such as the removal of benches downtown as an attempt to deter the community's homeless were criticized as being inconsiderate and suggestions to reinstall seating in the downtown area were made

as removal of benches only further marginalized the homeless.

The need to address racism and stereotyping within these sectors was discussed and an expressed requirement to have more sensitive service providers was seen as a priority. The assertion being that the community's homeless are treated with little humanity by security guards, doctors and various other members of the service industry and not allowed into the malls oftentimes making them unable to attend healthcare appointments as they do not have access to the building. Recommendations to provide education to service providers on basic human rights and cultural proficiency training so that access to services and buildings is made possible were discussed.

The need to provide a place for homeless people to stay during the day that is accessible and provides opportunities for recreation as alternatives to other activities was suggested. Public bathrooms were another proposal for increasing services to the homeless. The expansion of programs like Men Are Part of the Solution (MAPS) where service providers assist men in transitional housing who are looking for employment were seen as successful models in facilitating independence among clients and allowing them to maintain sobriety.

Additionally a dialogue regarding the location of the homeless shelter took place. As many of the surveys suggested, there is a desire for this facility to be moved away from the downtown area or to the periphery of the community. A need to look at issues such as transportation was suggested, however the lack of funding to purchase a vehicle to drive people to and from a facility located in another area was explored. Moving the facility away from the downtown region was viewed otherwise as a safety concern in cold weather, and according to the discussion of focus group attendees the current shelter location was selected due to accessibility whereas a former location for the facility had failed for these reasons.

One of the main themes with regards to safety for the Indigenous homeless population was the purported abuse of this group, experienced at the hands of local by-law, safety officers and RCMP. There is a discussion within the community taking place with regards to an undetected phenomenon. While the discourse of this phenomena has to date remained unconfirmed by administrative sources, alleged events of people being beaten up, urinated on, driven out of town and left there are being talked about within the community. Conversely, according to focus group members these events have never been reported to the city and cannot be substantiated. The issue has been raised that victims of these cases may not want to report the events as they do not think they will be believed or that anyone will care. Furthermore there may be concerns over victims suffering retributive hostilities for coming forward. A recommendation for the city to take preventative measures and be proactive in addressing these allegations was made. Among these suggestions were strategies such as hiring more indigenous officers and creating more effective training to increase cultural awareness and sensitivity among community law officials.

A further suggestion was made that the lack of substantiated evidence regarding these occurrences within the community may communicate a system which could be considered insufficient in its accessibility is currently being employed. If no reports have been made to date, this was seen as an expression of the need to create more effective pathways which vulnerable populations are comfortable approaching with these grievances. For example, implementing organizations to act as mediaries in reporting such incidents was suggested as a possible means of addressing this issue.

Many of the themes which presented themselves throughout the overall discourse of the focus groups much like the community consultation surveys recognized issues of race and homelessness as being interconnected. In addressing public stigma towards marginalized populations within the community the dialogue generally gravitated towards employing various models of education to increase cultural acceptance. It is clear that in making the transition from viewing Thompson as an isolated community to part of a more expansive regional network an integral part of this process will be facilitated by employing innovative cross-cultural educational models.

Main Recommendations:

- Develop mandatory cultural proficiency training for all service sector employees and frontline workers

- Provide more opportunities for youth programming aimed at increasing cultural sensitivity

- Increase the number of events in the community which promote cultural sharing

- Appoint a cultural liaison position within the community

- Explore proactive solutions to addressing the abuse of homeless individuals

- Explore the implementation of local organizations to act as intermediaries between municipal government entities and homeless individuals

Conclusion- Implications of What the Research Suggests for the TNRC

As an organization poised at addressing urban decay and supporting the foundations of community building, we have to be mindful of the practises that have lead to the oppression of vulnerable populations. Developing neighbourhoods and establishing a sense of community moves beyond the scope of building physical spaces and structures. We have to look beyond the intrinsic values of housing in order to include a focus on providing opportunities that create the fabric of social cohesion.

Alienating vulnerable populations has long been a standard practise within the community. Since Thompson's founding almost sixty years ago, this has accomplished little. If the TNRC is going to take a look at addressing the issues of poverty and homelessness, the organization must study local, national and global strategies. Though solutions to the obstacle of discrimination are complex, the current research has produced a number of recommendations which have the potential to create promising results for community transformation.

Such recommendations are found in *The View from Here 2015: Manitobans call for a renewed poverty reduction plan*. Researchers compiled this report in collaboration with community partners. It presents a renewed package of policy recommendations that should be included in Manitoba's updated strategy for poverty reduction and social inclusion (Bernas, 2015).

Until the community can move out of its organizational silos, it will be impossible to address the crisis, and only continue to enable the situation to exist. The term community, at best, can only be used to describe the population. Instilling a sense of community will be difficult to achieve without being able to create a sense of ownership in the process, implementation and inclusion of all residents. A "head on" approach to addressing racism will only increase conflict and division causing residents to become entrenched in the root of the problem. In order to move forward in providing pathways to a healthy community, collaboration and education are observed as crucial components in devising appropriate strategies to alleviate social stigma.

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