

# **“It’s A Scary Place to Come Out”: Exploring How Shelters in Westman Can Be Safer and More Welcoming for Transgender People**

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## **Abstract**

Transgender people face disproportionately high rates of housing insecurity, due to a range of factors that include family-based conflict, harassment, and rejection. Transgender people also experience high levels of discrimination, harassment, and stigma when accessing transitional and emergency housing. This study sought to determine what makes transgender people comfortable and safe in transitional housing settings and what are good practices for creating welcoming spaces for transgender people experiencing homelessness. The study is a community-based undergraduate thesis planned and designed in collaboration with YWCA Brandon, an organization which provides housing supports to people in the Westman region. To answer these questions, I conducted interviews with nine Manitoban service providers, including those who work in housing organizations and those who work in service provision for transgender people. I identified three main themes in this study. First, that there are system level issues that affect the experiences of transgender people seeking to access and utilize shelter spaces. Second, I identify the variety of ways that Manitoban shelters miss the mark in meeting the needs of transgender clients. Finally, I discuss the things that shelters do, and can do to improve the comfort and safety of transgender people utilizing housing services. The themes and recommendations that I identified in this study are relevant to housing providers seeking to better serve marginalized groups and members of the transgender community while highlighting the issues they face utilizing housing services in Manitoba.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

In Brandon, Manitoba, housing costs are rising. Every year more and more people throughout the city and the region of Westman are finding it more and more difficult to find a safe and affordable place to live. This is an especially big problem for the transgender members of our community, who are at a higher risk of homelessness than the cisgender population (Abramovich, 2017). Despite this issue, no services exist locally, or across the province, that offer specific transitional housing services for transgender people. There is an urgent need locally, and across the country for services that seek to help this group (Abramovich, 2017).

In 2021, a local housing organization, YWCA Brandon, recognized this need. YWCA Brandon noted that they were receiving calls from transgender members of the community but that they were not necessarily seeing them represented among the clients that utilized their housing services. So, the organization began to wonder how organizations like theirs can provide welcoming and safe housing for transgender people. In attempting to answer this question, YWCA Brandon, asked me to find out what services existed across the country that offered specific supports for transgender people. The report, which I co-authored with two other students, was the basis for this thesis though this research and this thesis was completed by myself and is ultimately my own. This thesis, in sum, is dedicated to exploring issues surrounding how transgender people experience transitional housing spaces and provides recommendations on how providers can improve these experiences so that transgender people may have better chances at survival, success, and happiness. Within homelessness literature, very little attention has been paid to the specific experiences of transgender people. This thesis seeks to bridge this gap.

Transgender is an umbrella term that is used to refer to people whose gender identity differs from the sex they were assigned at birth and includes identities such as transgender, transsexual, gender queer, transitioned, Two-Spirit, gender non-conforming, non-binary, agender, and others (Rainbow Resource Centre, 2021). Transgender is a definition that includes a broad range of identities so for the sake of brevity when I use the term transgender throughout this document it refers to this umbrella term and broad range of identities. Cisgender refers to people who are not transgender (Rainbow Resource Centre, 2021).

Within the literature, homelessness has been widely covered and while the specific topic of 2SLGBTQ+ people experiencing homelessness has also begun to become more heavily studied in academia the specific experiences of transgender people experiencing homelessness has garnered much less attention. In fact, housing instability amongst transgender people has only just recently begun to become acknowledged in these spheres (Shelton et al., 2018a). In addition to this, homelessness in rural settings has also widely been ignored by academia. In recognizing this there is an opportunity to study the specific experiences of transgender people facing homelessness in both rural and urban settings. This thesis has been developed in an attempt to bridge that gap at least somewhat and was intended to contribute to the literature on transgender homelessness in a rural setting with a geographic focus.

The findings of this study are based on a series of semi-structured interviews with service providers that I conducted between July and September 2021. The service providers I interviewed were located across the province of Manitoba. It was important that I talked to service providers beyond the few located in Westman, the recommendations that I developed in this research were for a local shelter but were also more generalized so that they might apply to shelters elsewhere as well. The results of this study indicate that transgender people have specific

needs in terms of both comfort and safety when accessing housing services such as shelters and that transgender people, generally, face an inordinate number of barriers in attempting to utilize these services. Three main themes emerged from this study. First, there are several system level issues that affect service delivery and utilization. Second, Manitoban shelters are currently missing the mark in how they interact with transgender people. Finally, despite challenges in delivering housing services to transgender people there are several solutions to these issues. Together, the different sections of this study also indicate that shelters and shelter staff are widely under trained in regard to issues facing transgender people, that existing housing services are inadequate in meeting the needs of this vulnerable group, and that few services and programs specifically tailored to the needs of this group exist.

This thesis is divided into five major sections. Following this introduction, Chapter 2 offers a literature review concerning homelessness and transgender people and the conditions faced by this group in accessing housing services. In Chapter 3 I discuss my research methods including background, recruitment, and study instruments. I follow this section in Chapter 4 with a discussion of the results of my interviews with service providers. For context, I provide an environmental scan looking for targeted housing programs that seek to help members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community. I then discuss my conclusions including the contributions this research makes to knowledge and practice, how this project and topic contribute to geography, and I discuss the recommendations that I developed to inform YWCA Brandon and other housing providers.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

This thesis uses a variety of literature to support the analysis of experiences, safety, and comfort needs of transgender people accessing emergency and transitional housing. This review is centered around literature pertaining to the comfort and experiences of transgender people utilizing housing services, it encompasses literature from both Canada and the United States and is derived from sources ranging from the years 2003 – 2021.

To my knowledge, there have been no major Canadian geographic studies that focus specifically on how transgender people experience homelessness or transitional housing. However, geographers have studied both the topics of homelessness and transgender geographies. Some geographers like Petra Doan, a self-identified transgender person, have studied how transgender people experience place and space. These are important contributions to the field from researchers with lived experiences of how space affects the lives of transgender people. For example, Doan (2010), argues that space and place are gendered and effect how transgender people navigate these spaces. Doan contends that ideas of gender influence how spaces are perceived and also what actions and behaviors are allowed or permitted within them (Doan, 2010) . Doan (2010) defines this as “Gendered Tyranny” and argues that it is present in all the places that transgender people live and constrains the behaviors that they display. Examples that Doan (2010) mentions include places like shopping malls, washrooms, and workplaces.

Homelessness on its own has also been covered by geographers. This includes human geographers like Geoffrey DeVerteuil who for example, has criticized modern frameworks of geography that tend to focus solely on the punitive aspects of homelessness and space, such as the tearing down of encampments and other punitive urban policies (DeVerteuil et al., 2009).

Research centered around geographies of homelessness has focused on urban geography, public policy, and welfare reform, but DeVerteuil has also connected geographies of homelessness to health, medical, and mental health geographies, and looked at concepts like inequality, mobility, and poverty (Lowe & DeVerteuil, 2020; DeVerteuil et al., 2021; DeVerteuil, 2015). These are a few of the ways in which geography has analyzed both homelessness and issues facing transgender people.

There is literature from beyond geography that connects these two topics and as such I have included this type of research in my review. This review focuses on three main themes: broad challenges faced by transgender people, housing-specific problems faced by transgender people, and solutions to these challenges. The section pertaining to the broad challenges faced by transgender people includes a discussion of these challenges, systemic transphobia, discrimination and violence, Indigeneity, rurality, experiences that are distinct from the broader LGB community, and exclusion from research. The second section on housing-specific challenges more closely focuses on the challenges faced by this group in shelter and transitional housing contexts and looks at avoidance of shelters, survival strategies and criminalization, gender segregation in shelters, faith-based shelters, and challenges associated with physical space. The final section of this review is solution-oriented and looks at intersectionality, solutions associated with physical space, policy and programing, staff and training, and finally provision of transgender-specific housing.

## 2.1: Challenges Faced by Transgender People

Literature on the topic clearly shows that transgender people face an inordinate number of challenges and barriers compared to the general population. 2SLGBTQ+ people<sup>1</sup>, broadly, face disproportionately high rates of homelessness, suicidality, abuse, violence, and substance use compared to cisgender people (Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Council, 2014).

Transgender people, or those whose gender identity differs from the sex they were assigned at birth, are more vulnerable to physical and sexual exploitation, mental health difficulties, and substance use compared to other members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community (Abramovich, 2017) and are at increased risk of being involved in the sex trade, trafficking, or Child and Family Services, especially if they are Indigenous (Bernas et al., 2019).

In the United States, upwards of 30% of transgender people report having experienced homelessness at some point because of their gender identity (Shelton et al., 2018a). In Canada, nationally, despite only making up around 10% of the general population it is estimated that 25-40% of homeless youth in Canada are 2SLGBTQ+ and this is likely still an underestimate of the true proportion (Abramovich, 2017). Transgender people are very often at an even higher risk of homelessness when compared to other cisgender members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community (Yu, 2010). The causes of this disproportionately high make up for transgender people include identity-based family rejection, domestic and family violence, discrimination and harassment in education, employment, and housing, and negative interactions with social services (Sellers, 2018; Ecker, 2017). Transgender people are also more likely than cisgender people to be non-white, socioeconomically disadvantaged, and sexual minorities (Gonzalez & Henning-Smith,

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<sup>1</sup> “The acronym “2SLGBTQ” stands for Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (or questioning). The plus sign represents other sexual identities, such as pansexual or asexual.” (Canadian Virtual Hospice)

2017) meaning that they may face even higher levels of discrimination, harassment, and stigma in their everyday lives.

Because of this variety of socially imposed conditions, transgender people are more likely than other groups to experience harassment, discrimination, and violence from staff and other clients when accessing housing services. This leads to a disproportionately high number of transgender people opting for risky survival strategies such as street-sleeping, couch surfing, continuing to live with an abusive partner or family member, and/or exchanging sex for a place to stay (Ecker, 2017; Sellers, 2018; Yu, 2010). In fact, according to some estimates, up to one in five people who identify as transgender have been identified as in need of or at risk of needing shelter assistance (Mottet & Ohle, 2003). These numbers are staggering indicators of a marginalized community that has been set aside and systematically disregarded by established social safety nets. Housing services (among other systems) are not usually equipped or constructed to deal with the specific needs of marginalized people much less transgender individuals (Shelton et al., 2018a). Perhaps more troubling are the reports that transphobia has become normalized and runs rampant throughout much of the shelter system as these spaces have become sites of normalized oppression (Abramovich, 2017). Transgender people face a diverse range of challenges that need to be addressed in service provision in order to meet their needs and better serve them, so that they can have better chances of survival, success, and happiness.

On top of this, transgender people encounter several more barriers than cisgender people in the context of safety and gender affirming care and support when accessing housing systems (Ecker et al., 2019). This is further augmented by the fact that homeless transgender youth and young adults are on average homeless for longer periods of time than cisgender youth and young

adults, making it harder for them to exit homelessness (Abramovich, 2017; Shelton et al., 2018c). This is compounded by the fact that transgender people are, in general, high utilizers of health and social services where they face high rates of discrimination (Ecker et al., 2019; Shelton et al., 2018c). Despite this, transgender people often report being in worse physical and mental health than their cisgender counterparts (Shelton et al., 2018b). In fact, in an American study as many as 40% of transgender adults sampled had attempted suicide, at least once, compared to 4.6% of the general population (Gonzales and Henning-Smith, 2017). These barriers, experiences, and risks make it all the more important to consider the specific needs of transgender people in assessing housing services and supports.

The transgender community is a community that has, for a long time, had to contend with systemic transphobia. For example, they often experience abuse from medical systems and social service provisioners (Munro et al., 2017). Many social services are informed by traditional western frameworks that deny the existence of transgender people, which leads to social services being unable to meet the needs of this group with safe and affirming forms of care (Shelton et al., 2018a). Gender expression itself has often been criminalized (e.g., being treated as a disorder with emphasis to correct it) and threats to the well being of transgender people exist at every level of society (Shelton et al., 2018a). These forms of societal oppression are rooted in heterosexism, cisgenderism, homophobia, and transphobia and work in tandem to enforce the gender binary (Shelton et al., 2018b). Heterosexism is defined as “discrimination or prejudice against non-heterosexual people based on the belief that heterosexuality is the only normal and natural expression of sexuality” (Merriam-Webster, 2021). Cisgenderism is an ideology that “delegitimizes people's own understanding of their genders and bodies” and involves

pathologizing or “treating people's genders, bodies, and experiences ... as disordered” (Ansara & Berger, 2016, p. 137).

The gender binary is normalized by socializers such as families, religion, institutions, and the media (Mason, 2021). The gender binary is so ingrained in the culture of shelters that staff are often unaware of the ways in which they can, and do, marginalize transgender people (Abramovich, 2017). These structural barriers often severely limit the access of shelters by transgender people (Shelton et al., 2018a). The gender binary, for example, often forces transgender, gender non-conforming, and non-binary people to identify or attempt to pass as a cisgender man or woman to access needed housing supports (e.g., gender-based violence shelters) (Bernas et al., 2019).

Research shows that shelters are sites of oppression for transgender people. For example, Abramovich (2017) revealed that homophobia, transphobia, and hegemonic masculinity<sup>2</sup> run rampant and are normalized in the shelter system which in turn creates barriers to accessible, safe, and supportive services for transgender people. Abramovich (2017) also mentioned that the culture of the shelter system is an overall atmosphere of normalized oppression which makes it difficult for staff to realize when and how to recognize transphobia. These sites of normalized oppression can also be spaces where institutional erasure can happen (Shelton et al., 2018b). This can happen through excluding transgender people from key programs, forms, policies, reporting, and statistics and can limit their program engagement, retention, and successful outcomes (Shelton et al., 2018b).

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<sup>2</sup> Hegemonic masculinity refers to “a societal pattern in which stereotypically male traits are idealized as the masculine cultural ideal, explaining how and why men maintain dominant social roles over women and other groups considered to be feminine” (ScienceDirect, 2021).

Societally, transgender people face much higher rates of violence against them compared to the general population (Ecker et al., 2019). The literature suggests that transgender people are regularly subjected to discrimination and violence in both shelter settings as well as other spaces such as at home (Elver, 2019; Munro et al., 2017; Ecker et al., 2019). Additionally, transgender people face a heightened risk of sexual violence upon entering homelessness (Bernas et al., 2019). In fact, violence against transgender people can be both a cause and result of homelessness (Dénomme-Welch et al., n.d.).

Locally, we see a high rate of violence which has its own effects. Manitoba, for example, has the second highest rates of gender-based violence and inter-partner violence amongst the Canadian provinces (Bernas et al., 2019). This violence is often rooted in colonialism and patriarchy where men have been socialized to be violent due to harmful ideas of masculinity founded in control and violence (Bernas et al., 2019). Due to these disproportionately high rates of discrimination and violence, transgender people often also suffer from high rates of trauma leading to other risks such as addictions issues and suicidality (Bernas et al., 2019). This makes it all the more important that social services are trauma informed and coupled with addictions treatment options (Bernas et al., 2019). This discrimination in social services also often pushes transgender people away from accessing and using the services which are intended to help the most vulnerable people in our society (Bardwell, 2019).

Harassment and discrimination in early life and in schools can lead to a lifetime of poverty for transgender people, and to using survival tactics which might lead to entering the criminal justice system (Sellers, 2018). In fact, one of the most common causes of homelessness amongst transgender and 2SLGBTQ+ youth is gender-based discrimination at home, in education, employment, and notably in housing (Sharpe, 2019). For example, landlord

discrimination against transgender people is exceedingly common (Ecker, 2017). These experiences extend to shelters as well, where discrimination and transphobia is common (Munro et al., 2017). 2SLGBTQ+ and transgender youth often report being subject to violence and discrimination leading to their having trouble finding shelter where they feel safe and respected (Keohane, 2016). This discrimination can be either overt or veiled (Abramovich, 2017) and is very rarely addressed in the shelter system due to normalized forms of transphobia (Keohane, 2016). Transgender people also face more discrimination than any other youth identity category (Bardwell, 2015; Shelton et al., 2018c) and frequently experience instances of name calling, misgendering, and threats of violence in shelters (Bardwell, 2015). Many of these experiences of discrimination in shelter are related to, and a result of, untrained staff (Ecker et al., 2019). Perhaps most troubling is that transgender people often have to contend with discrimination in many of the places that they are supposed to feel the safest, such as in their home with family, one of the first places that someone may come out (Shelton et al, 2018a). Unfortunately, it can also be one of the first places that they are subjected to gender-based discrimination and harm (Shelton et al, 2018a). In many cases, the violence and discrimination faced by transgender people in accessing housing services is often very similar to the experiences that caused them to be housing insecure in the first place (Crossley, 2015).

In a local, southwestern Manitoban context two concepts are important to consider: Indigeneity and rurality. Indigenous, gender marginalized people are more likely than the general population to experience violence, and also less likely to report it because of police mistrust (Bernas et al., 2019). Indigenous people also deal with disproportionately high rates of

homelessness. For example, in Brandon, according to 2018 Point-in-Time counts<sup>3</sup>, 81% of respondents who identified as homeless also identified as Indigenous (Brandon Neighbourhood Renewal Corporation, 2018). In Winnipeg, rates of homeless individuals identifying as Indigenous are similarly high (Bernas et al., 2019). This is important because, in both cities, Indigenous community members also contend with the impacts of intergenerational trauma and on-going colonialism (Bernas et al., 2019). In the context of housing this is a group that experiences high rates of poverty, residential overcrowding, and high mobility (e.g., rural-urban migration) which are all key aspects of Indigenous homelessness (Bernas et al., 2019).

On top of this, Two-Spirited and transgender Indigenous people also deal with daily homophobia, appropriation from the larger LGBT+ community that may include “2S” in an acronym but often does not understand Two-Spirit identities, and organizations subject to Christian doctrines that are generally not accepting of them (Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Council, 2014). The gender binary is a colonial framework that was imposed on Indigenous people in North America and did not exist in many places until after colonization (Mason, 2021). Because of these experiences it is important that the specific needs of Indigenous people be considered when discussing housing systems and services. Some key recommendations in this realm include Indigenous led shelter programs for Indigenous people (O’ Brien et al., n.d.) and teaching non-Indigenous service workers about Truth and Reconciliation, colonialism, and oppression and training them to utilize anti-oppression and decolonization approaches to their work (Bernas et al., 2019).

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<sup>3</sup> “A Point-in-Time Count is a one-day snapshot of homelessness in each community that contributes to a national picture and advance the knowledge on homelessness. It provides a community-wide measure of homelessness, identifying service needs and informing plans to prevent and reduce homelessness.” (Homelessness Learning Hub, 2021).

Rurality also has an impact on the lives and experiences of transgender people. Rurality in the context of this project is important because Brandon, and Westman, is often considered rural, or as part of a rural area. As such, it is important that I include this element in my analysis. O' Brien et al. (n.d.), for example, demonstrates that rural-urban migration of 2SLGBTQ+ people is common and often a result of high rates of homophobia and transphobia on reserves and in rural communities. Quite often, it seems, rural areas lack the resources that transgender people need to live healthy, fulfilling lives (O'Brien et al., n.d.; Travers et al., n.d.). Cities with well known 2SLGBTQ+ communities are also known to encourage and attract migration (Ecker et al., 2019). However, O' Brien et al. (n.d.) argue that the specific needs of transgender people are not being met upon entering urban spaces and more needs to be done to meet their needs and better their experiences. Also, it is important to note that discrimination is not strictly a rural problem but exists quite prominently in urban communities as well. However, these smaller communities often have less resources at their disposal to meet the needs of this community (Bardwell, 2019).

A final overarching theme in the literature is that transgender individuals are often subsumed within the broader 2SLGBTQ+ community. As we have begun to see, transgender individuals face distinct barriers, experiences, needs, and risks. This includes key features that are distinct from the broader 2SLGBTQ+ community making it important that transgender people are not simply lumped into the wider community when seeking to analyze and address their service needs (Crossley, 2015). For example, gender identity is very important in terms of the utilization of housing services because it affects where, in a shared living space, people are allowed to stay, even more so than if an individual is a cisgender, sexual minority (Ecker, 2017). Some of the distinct barriers that transgender people may face in this context include segregation

in housing and discrimination and victimization on the street or in shelters (Crossley, 2015). Just because a program is affirming for LGB people does not mean that it is also affirming for members of the transgender community (Shelton, 2015). The Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Council (2014) also mentions that the larger LGBT+ community largely misunderstand the differentiation and unique experiences of Two-Spirit people.

Despite their distinct experiences, transgender people are not well-represented in much of the existing research (Shelton et al., 2018c; Yu, 2010). Transgender youth and young adults, for example, have very limited representation in previous studies of 2SLGBTQ+ youth homelessness (Shelton et al., 2018c). Quite often, in fact, when transgender people are mentioned in research related to homelessness and housing it is from within the broader spectrum of 2SLGBTQ+ people rather than as a distinct category which some researchers mention renders their gender identity related experiences invisible (Shelton et al., 2018c). As I mentioned, homelessness amongst transgender people is almost always framed in the context of 2SLGBTQ+ people and therefore means that research related to transgender people must be extrapolated (Yu, 2010). What is needed to solve this problem is more, specific, research that focuses on the experiences of transgender people so that it is no longer necessary to extrapolate their experiences from research that is not largely about them (Yu, 2010). These distinctions from the 2SLGBTQ+ community also highlight the need for transgender-specific housing because of these separations from the cisgender, LGB, and straight communities (Travers et al., n.d.).

## **2.2: Housing-Specific Challenges Faced by Transgender People**

Abramovich (2017, pg. 1490) states that “almost all LGBTQ people going into shelters have a fear of them, because it is not a matter of if it is dangerous, but just how dangerous it will

be”. For 2SLGBTQ+, and transgender people specifically, the literature suggests that there are many reasons why they might avoid shelters. For example, they may expect to face challenges such as mental and physical abuse from staff and other clients, they may be asked irrelevant and intrusive personal questions in intake procedures, or staff may require them to show ID (Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Council, 2014; Dénoimé-Welch et al., n.d). Otherwise, they may have difficulty finding shelters that openly support their gender identity, they may be uncomfortable disclosing their gender identity, or they feel unsafe in certain shelters (Abramovich, 2017; Burke, 2020; Ecker, 2017). They might also avoid specific shelters if the shelter is overtly religious, lacks privacy, or because the shelter is segregated by gender (Ecker et al., 2019; Bernas et al., 2019). So, if people are reluctant to stay in shelters how do they get by? According to Shelton et al. (2018a), being effectively denied or limited access to shelters can lead to transgender individuals resorting to street sleeping or engaging in crime to survive. Other strategies may include couch surfing, sleeping rough, exchanging sex for a place to stay, living in substandard housing, or staying with an abusive partner (Nino & Godoy, 2015; Dénoimé-Welch et al., n.d.; Bernas et al., 2019) because they feel safer engaging in these activities than staying in shelters where they fear potential discrimination and victimization (Abramovich, 2017).

Some studies have indicated that up to half of 2SLGBTQ+ participants sampled will opt to sleep rough rather than stay in shelters because of these fears (Bardwell, 2015). This is compounded by the fact that transgender individuals are less likely than cisgender men, for example, to utilize shelter services (Bernas et al., 2019). Additionally, quite often, reporting and statistics often do not factor in hidden homelessness<sup>4</sup> (Ecker et al., 2019). This avoidance is

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<sup>4</sup> “The “hidden homeless” population differs from the homeless population living on the streets or in shelters. The hidden homeless are people who access accommodation but have no immediate prospect of permanent or stable housing.” (Statistics Canada, 2021)

important because these supports are one of the most important factors in helping exit homelessness (Ecker et al., 2019) which is also important because transgender people are on average homeless for longer periods of time than their cisgender counterparts (Shelton et al., 2018a).

The conditions that transgender people face can often lead to their needing to engage in survival strategies to protect themselves both when in shelter and when avoiding it. In shelters, transgender people often report attempting to remain invisible by not interacting with staff and other clients (Dénomme-Welch et al., n.d.). To avoid being outed in shelters, transgender individuals may attempt to pass as cisgender, which can be demeaning and harmful to a person's mental health (Abramovich, 2017). In fact, transgender individuals often mention intentionally not coming out to staff because of past experiences of being misgendered and mistreated; not coming out helps to ensure their safety from other clients and avoid conflict and discrimination (Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Council, 2014; Bardwell, 2015). On passing in women's shelters, Pyne (2011) explained that, despite allowing transgender people to utilize their services, those who appeared more feminine tended to be most welcome in housing spaces. Transgender people will often also opt to street sleep, rely on a peer support network, and by other means avoid shelters (Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Council, 2014; Shelton et al., 2018a).

The resulting lack of housing can also often lead transgender people into situations where they become involved with the criminal justice system (Shelton et al., 2018a). Living on the street can often be the start of many risky activities and behaviours for transgender people meeting their survival needs (e.g., drug use, sex work) (Crossley, 2015). Substance use, for example, can be both a cause and consequence of homelessness which can develop as a coping mechanism making it difficult to exit homelessness and is also quite common amongst

transgender people (Bernas et al., 2019). Because of this involvement in activities such as sex work and drug use, transgender people face increased risks of incarceration (Bernas et al., 2019). Transgender people often face high rates of police harassment as well (Scheim et al., 2013). Within the criminal justice system and through incarceration the harassment and assault of transgender people is well documented (Sellers, 2018). Quite often, transgender people with a history of incarceration will either be released into homelessness or end up there. An Ontario study, for example, stated that almost half of transgender people interviewed who had a history of incarceration were homeless or later became street involved (Scheim et al., 2013).

While avoidance of shelters is a key issue it is connected to the gender segregation that is common throughout the shelter system and carries its own set of issues. Gender specific mandates may marginalize transgender people without directly discriminating against them (Pyne, 2011). For example, in some studies, transgender participants have mentioned being policed using certain facilities making navigating these spaces challenging (Bardwell, 2015). As I have mentioned, transgender people may not use shelters if they do not feel like their gender identity is being represented (Keohane, 2016), which is an especially pertinent point because shelters are almost exclusively gender-segregated spaces (Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Council, 2014; Pyne, 2011). Transgender people very often report feeling uncomfortable in spaces that segregate their services according to the gender binary (Bernas et al., 2019), in fact some have described it as a situation where transgender people feel unsafe in men's shelters but unwanted or unwelcome in women's shelters (Dénomme-Welch et al., n.d.; Pyne, 2011). For gender queer, non-binary, and other people who do not spend all their time on either end of (or within) the gender spectrum it becomes especially difficult to navigate housing systems (Pyne, 2011). As I mentioned, gender segregating spaces can force transgender people to attempt to pass

as cisgender, which can be incredibly demeaning (Abramovich, 2017). Also noted as demeaning for transgender individuals is being forced into using the incorrect gendered facilities (e.g., bedrooms, washrooms) based on staff perceptions of their gender (Sharpe, 2020). In this, gender self-identification is incredibly important to transgender people, sometimes more than other identities such as sexual orientation, because it affects what spaces they can occupy (Ecker, 2017). In terms of exclusion, gender-based violence shelters are often viewed as only welcoming women and excluding transgender people who also suffer from high rates of gender-based violence (Bernas et al., 2019).

So, if gender segregation causes all these noted issues, why does this system still exist as the prevailing way of organizing shelter spaces? This is often done because developers and organizers are attempting to make these spaces safer for cisgender women (Mottet & Ohle, 2003). This results from patriarchal views that see women as fragile and needing to be protected and men as safety risks, which also projects itself onto transgender people in this context, where transgender women are viewed as risks to others (Abramovich, 2017). In these situations, organizers often are concerned about the safety of their cisgender clients but disregard the safety needs of transgender clients who are at an even higher risk of victimization in these settings (Abramovich, 2017). These policies only accommodate cisgender people and make it harder for transgender people to access housing, while also increasing their risk of being victims of gender-based discrimination or violence (Abramovich, 2017).

While gender-segregation is often done to accommodate cisgender people, the research indicates that this can lead to its own set of associated issues. Segregating transgender people into separate spaces, for example, often forces them to out themselves which carries its own set of related risks (Abramovich, 2017). Transgender women also often report facing verbal

harassment or physical and sexual assault when forced to room with cisgender men (Mottet & Ohle, 2003). This highlights the importance of having private options as well as not forcing transgender residents into using one facility or the other. On top of this, gender segregation as a practice “immediately creates a system of surveillance and policing of public spaces based on subjective assessments” of individuals gender/gender expression (Herman, 2013, pg. 77). The point here is not that there should not be safe spaces for cisgender men and women but that women’s shelters, for example, are just as safe with transgender people occupying that space (Mottet & Ohle, 2003). Transgender people are not more likely to assault someone, but they are more likely to be assaulted, so by improving the general safety of a shelter and enforcing rules against violence shelters can make all residents safer and not just cisgender people (Mottet & Ohle, 2003).

Throughout the literature one of the more prominent barriers to transgender and 2SLGBTQ+ people accessing transitional housing and shelters was the predominance of faith-based shelters (Dénomme-Welch et al., n.d.). Faith-based organizations run a large percentage of shelters in many cities and can often be unsupportive of 2SLGBTQ+ individuals (Yu, 2010). Even with inclusive policies, faith-based shelters are perceived as unsafe by transgender and 2SLGBTQ+ people (Bernas et al., 2019) where religious institutions can also act as a socializer that normalizes the gender binary (Mason, 2021). Religious affiliations can be a major barrier to vulnerable people in search of housing supports and services and there are often many historical reasons why clients may think or know that an organization may discriminate against or prohibit transgender people from accessing their services (Dénomme-Welch et al., n.d.). Religious affiliations have sometimes also been used to justify transphobic behaviours in these spaces (Dénomme-Welch et al., n.d.). Some examples of these behaviours include staff praying over

clients as if their gender identity was something that needed to be fixed and being told to sleep in rooms representative of the gender that they were assigned at birth (Sharpe, 2019). These institutions can also be especially challenging for Indigenous people that identify as Two-Spirit or transgender because of colonial forms of homo-negativity connected to Christian doctrine and residential schools (Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Council, 2014).

Problems associated with the physical spaces in shelter environments are, according to the literature, an important consideration in discussing the challenges associated with its use by transgender people. It is also especially important in a geographic context. Some of the more commonly recognized and important areas of any given shelter are the bathrooms, showers, and sleeping areas which tend to be more intimate, private spaces. For example, showers and bathrooms can be dangerous places for transgender people to utilize as they experience high rates of violent victimization in these spaces (Mottet & Ohle, 2003). In this context, shower concerns are quite like bathrooms. Often transgender people have an outright fear of utilizing these spaces because of heightened risks of victimization, exposure, and outing (Mottet & Ohle, 2003). If transgender people feel unsafe and uncomfortable using these spaces in shelters, they will often go elsewhere to use these spaces where they have more privacy (Dénomme-Welch et al., n.d.). Understandably, if people feel more comfortable utilizing these areas of shelters, they will be more likely to stay in and freely use the entire space, which can have a marked impact on their sense of safety and comfort (Dénomme-Welch et al., n.d.; Mottet & Ohle, 2003).

### **2.3: Solutions to the Challenges Faced by Transgender People**

Intersectionality is an important concept to consider in many contexts but especially in ones that focus on housing and poverty and intersectionality is discussed frequently in this literature (Shelton et al., 2018c). Poverty itself is intersectional and differs based on many

different types of determinants such as gender identity, class, race and ethnicity, age, ability, and sexual orientation resulting in different marginalized groups having varying amounts of social power and influence (Shelton et al., 2018a; Ecker et al., 2019). For 2SLGBTQ+ people, having other marginalizing identities augments the risks they may face in everyday life (Elver, 2019).

As we can see, transgender people experiencing homelessness are a diverse group and so are their needs. There is no “one-size-fits-all” approach to ending homelessness and its associated issues (Bernas et al., 2019, pg. 7). As such an intersectional lens is important in this context. Locally, in Winnipeg, studies have shown that having multiple marginalized identities negatively impacts experiences of homelessness (Bernas et al., 2019) especially for Indigenous people who often have to negotiate their marginalized minority racial status on top of contending with stigma surrounding their sexual orientation or gender identity (Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Council, 2014). As people may have to contend with stigma surrounding their sexual orientation, gender identity, and other issues such as racism in the context of housing (Abramovich & Kimura, 2021), intersectionality is critical in addressing homelessness interventions (Bernas et al., 2019; Shelton et al., 2018c). This is especially true given that social service organizations often have trouble meeting the needs of people impacted by these multiple stigmas (Shelton et al., 2018c). Bernas et al. (2019, pg. 7) describes these examples as “intersectional invisibility” or society’s inability to recognize people with intersecting marginalized identities which is especially important in this local, Southwestern Manitoban context.

As I have mentioned, aspects of the physical space of these shelters can work to both ease and heighten the anxiety of transgender clients (Mottet & Ohle, 2003). Safe washroom use, for example, can be vital in ensuring quality of a stay in shelters for many transgender people

(Dénommé-Welch et al., n.d.). To improve the sense of safety for transgender people in these specific spaces, Mottet & Ohle (2003) mention that its important to universalize washrooms, have gender neutral options, and allow people to use the facility that they feel most comfortable using. They also mention the importance of increasing privacy in these more intimate settings which can improve safety and dignity for all users (Mottet & Ohle, 2003). The very same researchers also mention that if a shelter organizer cannot make all showers or washrooms private that having at least one private option or allowing people to organize a time to shower on their own, if they are not comfortable using these facilities with others around, is important (Mottet & Ohle, 2003). Again, however, it is important not to force transgender people to use universal or private options if they do not feel comfortable because this practice can be dangerous and outing for some (Mottet & Ohle, 2003).

Sleeping areas are another high-risk area in terms of the victimization of transgender people in shelter spaces (Mottet & Ohle, 2003). Therefore, like washrooms, it is important to allow transgender people to self-select the dormitory that they feel the most comfortable staying or to provide a private option for them to lay their heads (Mottet & Ohle, 2003). Possible facility improvements in this regard include single room options and/or making these spaces more open and less tucked away to improve visibility (Dénommé-Welch et al., n.d.). Other more general facility improvements that can ease anxiety here include putting up media, posters, signs, and stickers that indicate an area is a trans-friendly space such as posting specific non-discrimination policies, rainbow stickers, or 2SLGBTQ+ people using the space (Mottet & Ohle, 2003). However, with all these improvements in mind it is important to note that many shelters are on tight budgets that may not allow for major facility upgrades, as such shelters may not have the resources available to make major upgrades (Dénommé-Welch et al., n.d.).

The research indicates that policy and programming are an important factor in improving shelter related experiences for transgender people. Lapses in policy and programming can lead to the erasure of transgender identities in practice and policy, including for example, being misgendered, not seeing identities reflected on intake forms, or being assigned a facility that does not correspond with an individual's gender identity. As such it is important that policy and programming recognizes transgender people and affirms each person's given gender identity (Abramovich & Kimura, 2021). This is exactly why there needs to be policy that allows transgender people to self-select the residences and facilities that make them feel the safest (Bardwell, 2015; Mottet & Ohle, 2003). This is also why some have recommended basing policy and development on current research and the experiences of front-line staff as well as keeping programming informed by transgender people with lived experiences (Dénommé-Welch et al., n.d.).

The literature often suggests that one of the most important ways to improve the quality of shelter experiences for transgender people is through improving, focusing on, and updating staff and training (Pike, 2007). Shelter staff often receive very minimal transgender competency training resulting in a general lack of awareness and understanding, as well as willful ignorance, when it comes to addressing the needs of transgender clients (Abramovich, 2017). A simple example of this is the improper use of names and pronouns and general lack of understanding of the importance of the use of these in the context of service provision for transgender individuals (Abramovich, 2017). Transgender people with lived experiences of homelessness have identified the need for improved training and education amongst service workers which in general can reduce homophobia and transphobia leading to improved safety outcomes for transgender people

(Pike, 2007). Proper training can also help to mitigate invisibility and confusion of certain parts of the community (Pike, 2007).

As well, it is not just clients that think that shelter staff need improved training in this context. Service workers in some studies also mentioned that there was a need for improved 2SLGBTQ+ training, with specific training on 2SLGBTQ+ homeless people (Bardwell, 2015). In this regard, shelter staff are often unaware of how they marginalize transgender people, partly because of how ingrained the gender binary is into the shelter system (Abramovich, 2017). This leads to shelter staff not understanding seemingly basic terminologies or presuming gender identities based on physical appearance or identification (Abramovich, 2017). In this sense, staff having even just a basic knowledge of transgender issues can allow them to act more professionally which can go a long way in improving client comfort (Dénomme-Welch et al., n.d.). For example, participants from some studies have mentioned that being able to discuss things such as hormone replacement therapy or surgery with staff can have profoundly positive impacts on their comfort and mental health (Abramovich & Kimura, 2021). Not only does this improve the comfort of transgender clients but it also makes it possible for staff to inform cisgender clients of transgender issues which can help to improve the general safety of their transgender counterparts (Mottet & Ohle, 2003). It is important also that this training is done regularly to keep up with staff turnover (Dénomme-Welch et al., n.d.).

Training regarding in-shelter conflict is also an important way in which staff and training can improve the quality of a stay for transgender people experiencing homelessness. For example, because conflict is a somewhat regular concern in many shelters (Munro et al., 2017, Abramovich, 2017) it is important that staff know how to properly intervene in situations involving transgender clients (e.g., in cases of discrimination). Shelters need to train staff to

intervene in incidences of homophobia and transphobia and be able to recognize when it is happening (Abramovich, 2017). Doing this can help to ensure that harassment does not happen in these spaces (Mottet & Ohle, 2003). In this sense, it is also important to include incidences of homophobia and transphobia in incident reporting after these related conflicts occur (Abramovich, 2017). However, without proper training it may be difficult for staff to recognize when it would be important to include incidences of gender-based discrimination in these reports (Abramovich, 2017).

Another important consideration in this regard is whether the people on staff match the identities of the people they serve. For example, it is noted that having transgender people on staff or even people who represent the identities of their clients can create a sense of community while providing community representation as well which can have an overwhelmingly positive impact on clients (Crossley, 2015). Transgender service utilizers also often mention that these programs are more successful when the staff is representative of the population they are serving (Bernas, et al., 2019). They also mention that staff seem less likely to be judgemental if they have lived experiences which can help to build trust between clients and staff (Bernas et al., 2019). Important to consider here however is that transgender staff also have unique challenges and needs in fulfilling their employment (Dénomme-Welch et al., n.d.). In this sense, employers need to be able to meet the needs of transgender staff, who can also suffer from discrimination in these spaces, for both of them to be successful (Dénomme-Welch et al., n.d.).

One final, important consideration in the context of improving transgender experiences in shelters is the presence of transgender-specific, identity-based housing programs. In general, shelters are not population specific, nor do they have specialized training when it comes to helping transgender people and this lapse in program design can work to erase transgender

identities (Sharpe, 2019). This is why the literature often highlights the need for, and importance of, transgender-specific, identity-based housing initiatives, programs, and supports (Sharpe, 2019). Traverse et al. (n.d.) has stated for example, that because of the exclusion of transgender people and their specific needs from LGB and straight communities there is a need for this type of identity-based programming and transgender-specific shelters. The lack of affirming services often makes homelessness more dangerous for gender minorities (Yu, 2010). At the very least, it has been cited as important to have 2SLGBTQ+ specific housing because 2SLGBTQ+ people quite often have difficulty finding shelter that openly supports their gender identity (Burke, 2020). In fact, 2SLGBTQ+ specific housing is something that is also often identified as important and needed by members of this same community, especially transgender people (Ecker, 2017). It also represents a safer alternative to other institutions for members of this community (Yu, 2010). Although some shelter options do exist for 2SLGBTQ+ people they are extremely limited and work mostly towards the needs of LGB people specifically (Pike, 2007). In line with this, staff of general population shelters sometimes mention wanting to improve the services of these shelters rather than having identity specific shelters citing that identity specific shelters seem exclusionary (Dénomme-Welch et al., n.d.). However, the need for trans-specific identity-based shelters is widely cited as important and an immediate need (Bernas et al., 2019; Gonzalez & Henning-Smith) as existing shelters often exclude transgender people (Bernas et al., 2019). Compounding this, even in LGBT specific shelters transgender people can face discrimination from clients and staff which further highlights the importance of trans-specific programming (Shelton, 2015).

Transgender people specifically note that these types of programs can be beneficial and carry with them several benefits but must remain informed by this community. Transgender-

specific shelters are often identified by transgender people as important spaces that offer safe, secure, and specific services for transgender individuals seeking housing supports (Bernas et al., 2019). The new development of these types of services are specifically cited as initiatives that can improve safety for this group (Bernas et al., 2019). There are seemingly many benefits to this type of programming including improved comfort, safety, representation, normalization of sexual orientation and gender identity, improved mental health outcomes, and exits to homelessness (Abramovich & Kimura, 2021). These specific services then can have a profoundly positive impact on the well being of transgender people (Shelton, 2016). These types of beneficial programs would, or could, include services related to mental health and trauma, substance use/IV drug use, risky sexual behaviours, and programs that work to affirm and explore one's gender identity (Yu, 2010). However, it is also often mentioned that in the development and implementation of these types of services it necessary to hire transgender staff and to involve transgender individuals throughout the development of this type of programming (Elver, 2019; Ecker, 2017).

## **2.4: Conclusions**

In this chapter I have discussed three main themes that are reflected in the literature: challenges faced by transgender people, housing specific challenges faced by transgender people, and solutions to these challenges. This included more in-depth discussions around broader challenges like systemic transphobia, discrimination and violence, Indigeneity, rurality, distinct needs and concerns within the broader LGBT+ community, and exclusion from research. In discussing housing related challenges faced by transgender people I looked at avoidance of shelters, survival strategies and criminalization, gender segregation in shelters, faith-based shelters, and challenges associated with physical space. Finally, in touching on solutions to these

challenges I discussed the importance of intersectionality, solutions associated with physical space, policy and programming, staff and training, and finally transgender-specific housing. The literature pertaining to transgender experiences utilizing social services and supports is diverse and contains many themes from a relatively limited number of authors. It is clear that there is a large literature gap regarding transgender people's experiences specifically and what makes them feel comfortable and safe in accessing these types of housing related services. There is also no transgender-specific literature pertaining to a Manitoban, or a more rural Manitoban context. More research is needed that precisely focuses on the experiences of transgender people and housing service utilization so that it does not have to be extrapolated from studies concerning the broader 2SLGBTQ+ community who may have vastly different service needs and experiences. This thesis attempts to, at least somewhat, bridge this gap. In the next chapter I discuss the methods and the procedures that I undertook in order to examine these issues.

## Chapter 3: Methods

To explore what housing providers do, could do, and have done to better serve their transgender clients in the Westman region of Manitoba I adopted a qualitative research approach. This approach utilized semi-structured interviews with service providers. A sample of nine people participated in this study through eight interviews. My interview guides were developed to assess service provider experiences, thoughts, and perspectives on serving this marginalized group of people. Interviews were conducted online over the course of around two months and were developed in a way in which I could work to empower participants by allowing them to express themselves, exert control over the direction of the conversations, and giving them the ability to have their data anonymized.

### 3.1: Background, Context, and Setting

I arrived at this topic and developed the research questions based on my working relationship with YWCA Brandon, which provides housing support through multiple sites and programs for the Westman region of Manitoba (YWCA Brandon, 2021). YWCA Brandon identified, through anecdotal evidence, that there was possibly a local need and demand for transgender affirming service provision for those seeking transitional housing supports. I volunteered to focus my research on the question of what comfortable and safe transitional housing looks like for transgender people. From this, myself and two other researchers were tasked with generating a report for the organization that sought to help better address service provision for four target groups and that I was to work at researching one of them. I was tasked with generating an environmental scan of housing services for transgender people (i.e., local, provincial, regional, national) as well as a summary style literature review which I could supplement with my own interviews. Through this work I established that my research questions

for this project were “what makes transgender people feel comfortable and safe in transitional housing settings” and “what are best practices in serving this population”. I defined my research questions in conversation with the board of YWCA Brandon, but the project is ultimately my own. This effectively worked out to be one part of a four-part report that myself and two other researchers generated for the organization that was submitted in the Fall of 2021 (Hammond et al., 2021). YWCA Brandon was not given any raw data but received a summary of my preliminary findings. Before I began collecting data I, the primary researcher, chose to take sensitivity and equity training through Rainbow Resource Centre (a Winnipeg 2SLGBTQ+ educational organization) which provided this training at low cost and over the internet (due to limitations caused by the COVID-19 pandemic). I chose to do this as other researchers doing similar research indicated that those participating in research involving marginalized groups should take sensitivity and equity training before doing so (Ecker et al., 2019).

### **3.2: Sample and Recruitment**

My target participants were comprised of housing service providers (HSP) who occupied higher level positions of shelter organizations such as executive directors and shelter managers and transgender service providers (TSP), those who work in the service provision of transgender people (e.g., at 2SLGBTQ+ service organizations). I chose to interview higher level HSPs because of their more in-depth knowledge of the policy and programming of their organizations which would be supplemented by potential front-line experience. I chose to include TSPs because of the insights they had regarding the service provision of transgender people in a non-housing context. Interestingly, I did not actively seek out to interview transgender individuals with lived experience due to the limited scope of my project but some of the participants who met the above criteria did self-identify as transgender in interviews and outreach. All in all,

almost half of the participants self-identified to me as being either transgender, non-binary, or queer.

Interviews were conducted with nine service providers in eight interviews. All the interview participants were located across the province of Manitoba in both rural and urban settings. It was important to interview people from across the province for a few reasons. From the beginning this project the goal was not to focus on Brandon service providers but to gather information applicable to multiple contexts as far as was necessary to answer the research questions. I set out to inform Westman service providers using perspectives that I gathered from within and beyond Westman. Also, service providers were located in both urban and rural settings, as I said, meaning that both had valuable inputs into how each respective type of community can effectively conduct their work. Additionally, non-residents of Brandon also had important criticisms and inputs about Brandon (from having lived in Brandon, travelling to Brandon, or hearing about Brandon) that may not have been recognized by community members. As far as recommendations are concerned, much of what I did and could gather from different contexts could apply and be made to apply to shelters in our area meaning that much of it did not have to be specific to one community or another. Finally, and importantly, I likely would not have reached my minimum sampling requirement if I had not included non-members of the community. There was also some spatial variation in this sense as the group of participants was spread across the province and my participants were not limited to just one region but were spread throughout every health authority (except for Interlake-Eastern).



Figure 1: Map of Manitoba Regional Health Authorities. Retrieved from:  
<https://www.gov.mb.ca/health/rha/index.html>. Retrieved October 8, 2021.

In terms of recruitment, my primary tool was a recruitment letter (see Appendix A) that I had developed to e-mail target participants that I had identified through both my literature review and environmental scans. I also utilized snowball sampling<sup>5</sup> in the interviews to recruit further participants. I also had participants who reached out to me via word of mouth through contacts that I had developed in conducting my research and had members of the housing sector reach out to others on my behalf. In total I reached out to around 30 target participants and had under 10 responses. This seemingly low response rate could be due to (but not limited to) several reasons which might include the fact that I was recruiting during summer which is (anecdotally) when

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<sup>5</sup> Snowball sampling is a non-probability-based method of recruitment which is used to generate potential participants through participant-based referrals.

people are typically out of the office, that service organizations might fear ‘exposing’ practices that might be viewed as something that might risk getting them in trouble (Abramovich, 2017), and the fact that the group of people I was reaching out to are often over-worked and understaffed. Of those who did respond, many cited the importance of trans specific research and how they wanted to better serve and represent transgender and 2SLGBTQ+ people as the primary reasons why they participated in this study.

### **3.3: Procedures**

To answer the research questions, I adopted a qualitative research approach and selected semi-structured interviews as the method. Semi-structured interviews were best suited to answer the research question because they are useful in investigating complex behaviours and opinions, allowed for me to deploy questions “on the fly”, and allowed for me to direct the questions while taking an interventionist position in the interviews (Dunn, 2016). Interviews were identified as a method that empowered participants, it allowed them to have a say in how questions were answered and what information was collected (Dunn, 2016; Hesse-Biber, 2007). Interviews also provided both the informants and me an opportunity for self-reflection through “face-to-face verbal interchange” which is another one of the noted strengths of interviewing (Dunn, 2016, p.150-151). Semi-structured interviews have also been identified by other researchers as good methods used to “gain knowledge of ... individual experiences with the purpose of informing best practices” (Bardwell, 2015, p. 7). This is important as this project was, in part, concerned with compiling best practices. Bardwell (2015) identified semi-structured interviews as a particularly effective way to better understand the experiences of service providers in working with gender and sexual minorities. Other researchers have also mentioned that this methodology is effective in that it allows for participants to guide the interviews and allows for them to talk

about that which is meaningful to them (Shelton, 2016). This was a particularly important insight for myself as I hoped for these conversations to be guided at least somewhat by my participants.

### **3.4: Methodological Limitations**

As mentioned previously the use of this methodology does come with certain limitations as well. Interviewing is both time and resource consuming. Each interview took between 15 minutes to over an hour to complete and took hours to transcribe per interview. It is important also that I acknowledge that because this is a small qualitative study it is therefore not entirely representative of the entire issue.

### **3.5: Interview Design**

I developed two separate interview guides. One was directed towards HSPs (see Appendix C) and the other geared towards TSPs (see Appendix B). The guides were very similar, but some questions were removed from the HSP guide to better fit the guide geared towards TSPs. I built both guides with the intention of having interviews run about 45 minutes to an hour in length and had between 14-16 questions. The shortest interview lasted around 15 minutes while the longest lasted 73 minutes. On average interviews lasted about 38 minutes. The participants I spoke to were all generally very busy people who did not have large amounts of time to spend doing interviews. As such, I asked all my participants at the beginning of the interview how much time they had to comfortably speak. This helped me to determine the pace of interviews and is what accounts for the great range in interview length. Some questions were open-ended and allowed for the participants to speak at length about their organizations and their service provision. Some questions were designed to be short-answer questions with specific answers. Some questions were also probing in design. Because the interviews were semi-structured, I added and removed questions “on the fly” depending on the context of each

interview. This strategy was also useful as some of my participants did not always exist in one category or the other. For example, some had worked in service provision for transgender people but then later worked in housing related service provision or vice-versa.

I separated the interview guides into two sections. I designed the first section to assess the participants role within their organization, the goals and duties of said organization, to assess service provider's experiences in working with trans people, their self-identified level of knowledge pertaining to trans issues, and their self-identified comfort and competency levels in working with trans clients. I dedicated the second section to determining what housing providers do, could do, or have done to make trans people feel more comfortable and safer in shelter settings. I used the questions in this section to assess whether HSPs had these issues in mind when designing and fulfilling their programming and policy, what they thought the challenges trans people faced in finding housing were, how they might better accommodate trans clients, and how other clients interacted with trans people. This section also included questions pertaining to the physical space of their organizations including questions surrounding bathrooms, bedrooms, and showers. One question that was in both interview guides asked whether any of their staff or service providers were openly transgender. This question was not utilized to out the participants or their co-workers. In the literature, in fact, having transgender people on staff was deemed important as one of the strategies to improving the comfort levels of trans people in service provision (Munro, 2017; Pike, 2007) and thus this question was utilized to further determine comfortability in service provision, locally. I centered the final questions around the participant identifying ideas that they think might be helpful to trans people seeking housing locally and an open-ended question about whether they had information they thought I should know so that I could collect information about something that I may have missed in the

guide. The final question in the guide was used for the purposes of snowball sampling and was used to recruit further participants. This question fulfilled its intended purpose and did identify some further participants through these referrals and was useful as it often can help to identify potential participants that I may have missed.

### **3.6: Timeline of Data Collection and Medium**

Interviews were conducted between late July 2021 and early September 2021. Interviews were conducted over Zoom video conferencing software. Zoom was chosen over other providers as it was generally more accessible to myself and my participants and provides video and audio recording built into the software which made recording, for the purpose of transcription, easier. As well, anecdotal evidence suggested that because of the COVID-19 pandemic, people in general had become more comfortable using this style of software. I also chose to conduct interviews online as opposed to in-person because the COVID-19 pandemic was ongoing throughout the entirety of this project. The onset of the pandemic presented me with the opportunity to reach out to participants across the province which meant that I was not restricted to interviewing participants that I could only reach in-person. As such, to work around changing public health orders and to protect the physical safety of myself and my participants, online video conferencing was identified as the best way to conduct these interviews.

### **3.7: Ethics and Participant Control**

Transcripts were sent back to participants after being anonymized. This allowed participants a say in whether the transcript represented what they wanted to say and allowed them the opportunity to edit the transcripts if they chose to. This is a process known as “member checking” which is when “data or results are returned to participants to check for accuracy and resonance with their experiences” (Birt et al., 2016, pg. 1802). I did this for two reasons. It gives

participants the ability to confirm whether or not what was in the transcript represented what they meant. It can also help to limit researcher bias and to “validate, verify, or assess the trustworthiness of ... results” (Birt et al., 2016, pg. 1802). About half of the participants of this study sent back feedback about their interview transcripts. Some confirmed that they were okay with what was in the document, some noticed minor spelling and grammar errors, and a couple of participants asked that I remove information to more fully ensure the anonymity of the data associated with them.

Additionally, participants were given the opportunity to be assigned a pseudonym to protect their identity and given a choice of name. If they wished for a pseudonym but did not provide one, they were assigned a gender-neutral pseudonym. I confirmed whether participants wanted a pseudonym used to protect the data associated with them and confirmed this again when transcripts were given back to them to review. I utilized pseudonyms due to the associated potential risk of employers and organizations becoming upset that an employee spoke critically of their organizations. My focus in this regard was on informed consent and protecting the anonymity of the participant. In my consent form I included a segment stating that I had not sought the permission of the participant’s employer. Throughout this project one of my main goals was to give the participants significant control over what they said and how. I wanted to respect the words and thoughts of the participants of this study and so if they had wished to be critical of their employer then it was my duty to do all that I could to ensure their anonymity. Participants were each given a \$10 gift card to a large, box store and grocery chain. This store was chosen with the thought that it gave participants the option to use it for themselves or for their organizations but that it did not limit this choice either way.

### **3.8: Transcription and Coding**

After I completed each interview, I personally transcribed each interview using an AI-based transcription service (Trint) which transcribed the entirety of the interview. I then went through the transcripts individually to edit them and ensure accuracy in transcription. In this regard much of the time spent transcribing was spent correcting errors in the AI's transcriptions. I found Trint useful because of the layout of the transcripts that it created, and it made my job easier in that it greatly reduced the amount of time that I would have otherwise spent transcribing the data. Interviews were transcribed to ensure the confirmability and trustworthiness of the data and collection method, to allow for ease of coding and the member checking process described above.

After I completed conducting, audio-recording, and transcribing the interviews I went through and coded each interview. I compared the interviews against each other to identify common themes. The common themes I identified throughout this process are what make up the findings of this research. The themes that I highlighted in the coding process were both deductive and inductive. I coded for themes that were similar to what appeared in my literature review and also coded for ones that were unique to my findings and distinct from the literature. This process was guided by my research questions, and key themes included ideas such as: safety, staff & training, rurality, faith-related issues, and solutions.

To delve into housing providers' thoughts and experiences on serving transgender clients in Westman I used a qualitative research approach to answer the questions "what makes transgender people feel comfortable and safe in transitional housing settings" and "what are best practices in serving this population?" To explore these questions, I interviewed nine service providers online using two-part interviews designed to assess their thoughts, experiences, and

comfort levels in the context of serving this marginalized group. These are the results of these interviews.

## Chapter 4: Results

In this chapter I discuss the results of my interviews with service providers. Before I begin this discussion, I think it is important to reiterate that some of the participants of these interviews are not only service providers but also transgender and 2SLGBTQ+ individuals with important lived experiences, information, and insights when it comes to how transgender people experience housing-related service provision. For added context, when asked the question “How often do you get transgender clients?” amongst all the participants of this study, two responded saying they do not often have transgender clients, two replied that they do sometimes, and the remainder stated that they get transgender clients at their organizations often or all the time.

This chapter is specifically designed to mirror the layout of the literature review section as the themes that emerged from both the literature review and the results of these interviews were similar. The three major themes that emerged from the interviews were: system level issues related to housing people who are transgender, specific ways that shelters are unsuccessful at creating positive experiences for transgender clients, and successful strategies that can and do improve transgender client’s comfort and safety. The first main section of this chapter includes findings on the general challenges faced by transgender people in the housing sector, including their discomfort in accessing faith-based housing services, difficulty finding housing, and the impacts and perceptions of rurality on service delivery and utilization. It concludes by discussing why service providers think it is important to be trained on issues facing transgender people.

The second section of this chapter focuses on the ways in which Manitoban shelters miss the mark in how they work with transgender people. It discusses how staff, management, and executives are not trained well enough to deal with the needs of transgender people, how intake procedures can be harmful and unnecessary, how referrals can be harmful for transgender people

when handled improperly, and problems associated with the gender segregation of shelters. I also discuss how organizations sometimes scapegoat other clients when discussing issues of discrimination against transgender people.

The third section of this chapter looks at how interviewees recommended improving both the comfort and safety of transgender people in shelter settings. It details how organizations could use 2SLGBTQ+ symbols and signage to identify their organizations as a safe space, the power of transgender-specific identity-based spaces, staff training, and staff identities matching their clients' identities. In this section I detail how these methods improve the comfort and safety of transgender people who use these spaces. Finally, I finish this chapter with a discussion of what housing services exist that specifically seek to help members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community.

#### **4.1: System Level Issues Related to Housing Transgender People**

In this section I look at the ways that system level issues related to housing transgender people challenge service delivery and utilization. I review issues faced by transgender people in accessing faith-based accommodations, the impact of rurality on service delivery and utilization, and why service providers think that it is important to be trained on issues related to transgender people in the context of housing.

A common question that I asked my participants was whether or not they had heard of transgender people having a difficult time finding housing. The answers to these questions were polarized and seemed to depend on whether the participant was an HSP or TSP. When I asked HSPs whether or not they had heard of transgender people having a difficult time finding housing most of their answers were centered around *everyone* having trouble finding housing. HSPs answers here make sense in the context of Canada's tiny social housing sector. Canada,

and Manitoba specifically, have relatively small social housing sectors while also lacking in quality, affordable housing. Because this system, as well as the people who work within it, are severely overworked it makes sense that it would be difficult for HSPs to identify transgender-specific issues where housing is concerned as they must deal with a vast array of concerns from all kinds of vulnerable people in this busy sector.

I think the other tricky bit, though, is that in [their community], probably throughout the province, but more so here, housing is impossible for almost anybody. So, it's hard to identify transgender-specific concerns and that when everybody is being turned down. (Dawna, HSP)

Despite this, some HSPs were able to identify the ways in which transgender people might find it difficult securing safe, affordable housing. Ang, for example, stated that, despite, everyone having trouble finding housing that each and every identity-related issue a person might have could negatively impact their chances of finding and securing safe housing.

I've heard about everybody having trouble finding housing, I imagine that anything more, even like even the clients that we have, have trouble not only finding affordable housing, but safe housing. I imagine that every extra complex item that a person has in their life would make it even more difficult to find housing. (Ang, HSP)

While it might be difficult for HSPs to identify transgender-specific concerns in the context of finding housing all of the TSPs I asked had stated that they had heard of this group experiencing specific challenges accessing housing. Importantly, some participants in this study were able to speak from personal experience in trying to access and secure housing as transgender persons. They and other TSPs very clearly indicated that transgender people as a group, and throughout the province, experience an inordinate number of barriers when it comes to securing accessible, comfortable, and safe housing. For example, Levi said, "Yes. All queer,

all people have. Where people just in general have like troubles finding any kind of housing, but it becomes much more complicated for trans folks”. Some service providers such as Hank mentioned how because transgender people are more likely to be underemployed or unemployed, that they are more likely to end up in more precarious housing situations. Hank also mentioned that the transgender community suffers because of discrimination from landlords and neighbours as well as having difficulty accessing housing resources. In addition to this, Hank reiterated that gender segregated services and Christian shelters are not often trained in how to work respectfully with this community stating that it results in the group getting, “treated in a sort of shitty way by people or they fear they will be”. Other TSP participants mentioned that even when transgender people are able to acquire affordable housing that it is often not fully adequate or safe housing. TSPs also recognized, like HSPs, that there is an affordable housing shortage across the province and that housing security for all people is a concern. However, TSPs generally, made it very clear that adding transgender status into this mix exacerbated the issues that individuals might have to contend with.

Yeah, absolutely. I think that we know housing is in short supply at the best of times around [their city/town], especially affordable housing. And I think, you know, those barriers only increase for minority groups and that includes ... folks who are trans or non-binary as well, those barriers just kind of go up. (Jaden, TSP)

A prominent theme throughout my interviews was the discomfort that transgender people have in accessing faith-based housing services. As many of the major shelters locally and across the province are run by faith-based organizations it is important to consider how transgender people experience these spaces. Service providers provided a variety of reasons as to why transgender people might have reservations accessing housing services run by faith-based organizations. My participants also stated that transgender people may take issue with having to

out themselves to organizations that they perceive as unsafe and that work against the well-being of transgender people.

Interestingly, when I asked some housing service providers (HSPs) employed at a faith-based shelter whether or not they thought that “the Christian foundation of their organization might dissuade transgender people from accessing their organization” they responded by saying that it should not be a barrier because their service delivery was tied to compassion and care. However, when I spoke to transgender service providers (TSPs) about this issue they almost universally stated that a shelter being overtly religious was very frequently a barrier for transgender people. I also found that transgender people sometimes had reservations when it came to accessing religious shelters because the shelters had not considered how they have historically interacted with members of this community. I heard that some religious organizations, as a whole, have worked against the interests and equality of 2SLGBTQ+ people for a long time and so simply stating that now ‘this place is trans-friendly’ is not a far enough step in the right direction. In this sense, it seems important that religious organizations account for the damage they have done, work to repair their relationships with transgender communities, and involve them in the implementation of new types of services that concern them.

Some participants noted that a client’s entry into faith-based housing settings is entirely influenced by the client’s past experiences with Christianity (Levi, TSP). If a client had had more negative experiences with Christianity, religion, or other faith-based institutions, then their future involvement with faith-based organizations will be negatively influenced. This is an important insight in the context of service provision for transgender people because, as I mentioned in my literature review, the transgender community has for a long time had many negative experiences with religious organizations and institutions leading to pre-conceived notions about the safety of

these spaces. This widespread and historical discrimination was something that was often noted by participants. Because of historical harm, religious spaces may be viewed as unsafe and uncomfortable for transgender people and other members of 2SLGBTQ+ communities. Participants also mentioned how some religious organizations interacted with 2SLGBTQ+ and transgender people and pointed out that many of these interactions were exceedingly negative. Some people who were openly transgender and interacted with faith-based organizations noted that they often felt dehumanized and judged in their interactions with faith-based organizations (Hank, HSP).

Participants also suggested that homeless individuals are often uncertain as to whether they will be welcome in certain spaces or shelters if they are people who are visibly 2SLGBTQ+ and/or non-Christian. Finding shelter can be a stressful, time-consuming activity. This is important because added stressors such as lack of acceptance at faith-based shelters might push transgender people away from trying to access important housing services altogether. Some shelters were also viewed as more-or-less overtly religious than others and this had a noted impact on the reputation of these spaces as safe or unsafe for transgender people. This was noted by participants as something that transgender people might therefore consider before using certain shelters.

I get asked all the time ... like "I'm not a Christian person, can I go to Siloam Mission?" I think the Y has a little bit of a space between ... than like Siloam Mission or some of the other like very overtly Christian organizations here, and I'm not really sure why, because of the origins of the organization, but I imagine that it's just like a little bit older and more sort of like culturally entrenched and that we don't think about, like what the Y means when we refer to it. (Charlie, TSP)

Some participants also indicated that the more overtly religious organizations also tended to have histories of mistreating members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community (Charlie, TSP).

My environmental scan revealed that a faith-based shelter in Winnipeg had recently tried to open a specific section devoted to housing members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community. The only evidence of this program having existed was in media reports, it was not stated on the shelter website and there was no clear indication of whether or not this program was still running. In my interviews, one participant brought up this program to illustrate the ways in which faith-based shelters in the community had failed. This program, the participant noted, had “fluttered out” because the organization had failed to consult the community it was supposed to help and this led to major programmatic barriers. These issues included client discomfort with outing themselves to the organization because of distrust fostered by the historical harm caused by this organization (Hank, HSP). Hank also noted that in the implementation and delivery of this program that the organization seemed to only offer the program to certain ‘types’ of transgender people and that other transgender people seemed to not have been offered the program.

I think to sort of summarize there's ... some sort of counter-push a bit with the sort of religious opinions about our right to exist and ... even if agencies like Salvation Army are trying to do this new thing, they did it in the wrong way and also weren't accounting for the impact of the historical harm they've done. So, just because they were trying to do things differently, they didn't really comprehend why people weren't trusting them immediately, because they've done bad things to people for decades and so just doing something for one day in a better way doesn't actually mean that people are going to be like super comfortable identifying themselves as queer to you. (Hank, HSP)

Hank argued that the clearest solution to resolving these issues is that organizations should consult members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community with lived experiences of homelessness and account for the harm that they have caused in the past, before implementing these types of programming. Many of the people that I interviewed suggested that it was very important to

consult the 2SLGBTQ+ community and its members before trying to develop programming with a 2SLGBTQ+ focus.

The people that I interviewed indicated that rurality has a noted impact on both service delivery and utilization. It seems, in rural places there are disparities in terms of the availability of gender affirming services and there is a tendency to view rural places as less progressive and more conservative areas which leads to a perception of the shelters in these places as unsafe for transgender people. These points are important because Brandon and the Westman area are often considered to be more rural areas of the province. Brandon is a sort of ‘rural city.’ It has a population exceeding 50,000 people meaning that it meets the Manitoba classification of a city as a community with more than 7,500 people (Government of Manitoba, 2022; Statistics Canada, 2021). Yet it is also often perceived as rural by members and non-members of the community, including participants of this study. This characterization of a community as a “city with rural character” (Coen et al., 2013, pg. 96) is not unique to Brandon and has been used to describe other areas in the country as well such as Prince George, British Columbia. What defines an area as rural is a topic that is still debated within the field of geography (Coen et al., 2013) and Brandon is a community that represents the debate. For example, definitions, conceptualizations, and imaginations of what makes a certain place rural differ (Woods, 2009). Rural geography itself is a discipline that has evolved greatly decade by decade for the last half century (Woods, 2009). Woods (2009) has stated that the dividing lines between what makes a place rural or urban is getting increasingly blurry. For the purposes of this study, by my definition and that of the study participants, Brandon and the surrounding area of Westman should be considered rural in that it is a city that is often perceived as culturally, politically, and socially rural. The point here is not that rural places are bad or worse than urban places but that there are assumptions and

limitations attached to these rural areas that affect how services are delivered and utilized. For example, for smaller communities, with larger service areas, and less resources, it is difficult to help all people, including transgender clients who sometimes have different needs and require different supports which are hard to find anywhere. These challenges may present a barrier to transgender people taking the important step of reaching out for help because they may perceive shelters in rural places as unsafe given what they see as local attitudes or behaviours.

When it comes to attitudes associated with rural places, for example, some participants stated that they had a difficult time balancing local, community values with their own organizational interests. They noted that their inclusive values were fundamentally at odds with the more conservative values attached to their communities. For example, Ang, an HSP in a small, rural community, worked in an area that I am personally familiar with. This community is generally perceived to be a more conservative, religious area of the province. Ang stated that, due to provincial funding limitations, their organization relies very heavily on the support of the community and that it was challenging to rely on this support while not alienating it, because of the organizations distinct progressive and inclusive values. Ang also noted that transgender people in the area might have a preconceived notion that their specific organization would be unsafe for them to access because they might assume that the organization is as “conservative” as the community. These are just a few of the challenges faced by rural shelters in trying to improve their services for transgender people.

Ang noted that their rural community was a “a scary place to come out.” This perception of rural communities as not supportive of transgender people was mirrored by other participants as well who stated that outside major centers such as Winnipeg that there is a perceived lack of

support and visibility for 2SLGBTQ+ people and that it is harder to find gender-affirming supports, such as housing services, the further you get from the city.

I hear a lot that like when you leave the city, there's just, no supportive queer culture or queer visibility in general ... when you leave Winnipeg and even going into smaller cities like Brandon ... how much more difficult it is to find, like lifesaving supports. (Charlie, TSP)

This lack of access to gender affirming housing supports was highlighted as a particularly more prominent rural issue, whereas it is slightly easier to access these supports in the city. It is clear that these smaller communities require improved access to services that work with transgender people and that affirm the identity of their clients.

Some participants also mentioned that while discrimination against transgender people is certainly a problem in smaller communities like Brandon and others that it exists prominently in larger centers also meaning that this is not specifically a rural issue. Participants reiterated that access to these affirming services was not great in Winnipeg as well.

I know that ... in Brandon, discrimination was so much more visible and accepted. In Winnipeg, there's this façade, that discrimination isn't tolerated, but if you're an Indigenous trans person or Indigenous non-binary person, an Indigenous queer person, you already have several strikes against you when you're accessing a service, when you're trying to find a house but because people are not honest or forthcoming about their discrimination it's much more challenging to trans persons. (Levi, TSP)

Throughout this study there was a clear divide between the perceptions of rural places as accepting of transgender people depending on whether the service provider was an urbanite or a ruralite (e.g., urban people view rural areas as sites of discrimination). For example, some rural service providers noted that they had recently witnessed a clear shift in their community's attitudes, beliefs, and values over time. Ang stated that over the last decade the limits of their

organization had been expanded to include things that would not have been considered a decade ago. Ang noted in this instance that they had a younger staff who was pushing the boundaries of their organization leading to more discussion around the topics of accessibility and inclusivity in their organization and in others around the community. This was viewed as part of a wider shift everywhere. It was also pointed out that local pride organizations had seen a prominent rise recently in this community. While raising a pride flag is not the only step needed in improving attitudes towards 2SLGBTQ+ issues in any given community, for Ang it exhibited at least the beginning of a shift in local attitudes, especially when coupled with this participant's perceived increase in the visibility of 2SLGBTQ+ people in their community.

These sentiments were reiterated by other rural HSPs as well. Dawna stated that "we've seen a considerable amount of growth and acceptance in our small community". Dawna mentioned that when she first arrived in this community there was visible discrimination, harassment, and violence towards 2SLGBTQ+ people there, but there had been a significant amount of change in a relatively small amount of time. In this community and neighbouring ones, local pride groups had also seen a rise in prominence and visibility in the area. Dawna also mentioned that on 2SLGBTQ+ related issues there was more considerable growth in the community compared to other issues.

I think historically we've seen a considerable amount of growth and acceptance in our small community, like a lot of my male friends, would be beaten and chased and harassed by family members when they were first coming out as gay and now [neighbouring First Nations community] raises the flag, [their community] does the sidewalk thing, a lot more of the students in high school and even in Junior are presenting as non-binary, or bi, or transgender. So, there's a lot more acceptance and willingness to almost be visible, so that is a humongous amount of progress that we've seen in, I think, in a very short amount of time compared to the other issues of addressing racism or even the disability issues. (Dawna, HSP)

In sum, the rural service providers I spoke to indicated that their organizations values were at odds with their community's. While they recognized that their respective communities have grown substantially in regard to issues facing transgender and 2SLGBTQ+ people they indicated that there is also a lot of work to be done in working with these groups. It is also clear that rural people suffer from a lack of services that are geared towards helping 2SLGBTQ+ people. The participants of this study indicated to me that there is a need for these types of services in Manitoba's rural areas and that existing services needed to be improved to better meet the needs of the transgender and 2SLGBTQ+ people that live there.

One question I asked all my interview participants was why they thought "it is important to be trained on transgender issues" whether they were HSPs or TSPs. In answering this question several themes were common such as bias, inclusivity, and learning from clients. Throughout the answers to these questions, I found that this sample of service providers understood that as people we all carry personal bias and that it is important not to allow these biases to interfere in service delivery. Many participants also noted the importance of learning from clients, who often have important insights, so that as service providers they can unlearn (i.e., recognizing, learning about, and dismantling personal biases) harmful biases and create more open, less challenging environments for transgender people. For example, some service providers such as Barb, an HSP, noted the importance of understanding service provider's biases and discussed the importance of providing fair and equal service delivery to all clients regardless of their identity. Other participants pointed out that even other members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community can carry biases towards transgender people while also stating the importance of unlearning. When service workers allow their own personal biases to interfere in service delivery, it creates challenges for the people they are trying to help (Hank, HSP).

Other participants in their answers to this question noted the importance of being client-driven, client-informed, and how learning from clients can positively impact service delivery. Jaden, a TSP, also recognized that 2SLGBTQ+ people can be clients and staff in any context, and not always visibly, so understanding this and being open to learning could positively impact service delivery when it comes to helping vulnerable people (e.g., transgender people in a housing context).

Housing is a difficult and complex issue that affects many people throughout the province and participants noted that there are many challenges in delivering housing services on top of the already existing issues that transgender people also face (Dawna, HSP). Dawna noted how important it was to be “client-driven” so they could meet the individual needs of the organization’s clients. Charlie reiterated the inordinate number of barriers and stresses that transgender people face in both a housing context and beyond. For the first time, Charlie noted, transgender people were just starting to become more visible, and with that comes its own set of challenges in serving this group, especially in a housing context.

In this section I looked at the ways that system level issues related to housing transgender people impacted service delivery and utilization for this group. In it, I reviewed some of the issues that transgender people faced in accessing faith-based accommodations, the impact of rurality on service delivery and utilization, and why service providers thought that it was important to be trained on housing-related issues faced by transgender people. The next section of this chapter takes a closer look at the specific things that shelters do that might prevent or limit the use of these services for transgender individuals.

## **4.2: How Shelters are Unsuccessful in Meeting the Needs of Transgender Clients**

The people that I interviewed frequently discussed the ways in which Manitoba shelters, and shelters in general, miss the mark when it comes to meeting the needs of transgender people. This section focuses specifically on some of the ways that housing providers are unsuccessful at addressing the safety and comfort needs of this vulnerable group. I begin with a discussion of transgender people's sense of safety in using housing services. I also discuss how staff, management, and leadership are often not adequately trained on issues faced by transgender people, how negative interactions with third parties can emerge out of referrals, housing organizations' blaming clients as the source of anti-trans discrimination, and that some intake procedures are often viewed as intrusive, probing, and unnecessary. By addressing the ways in which shelters are missing the mark in meeting the needs of this group, it is possible then to discuss how they can improve their services for transgender people.

Throughout these interviews, a common theme was transgender people's sense of safety in accessing housing services. For transgender people and TSPs, generally, this meant the ways in which transgender clients might perceive being unsafe in shelter and the things that fostered unsafe environments. For HSPs this meant trying to empathize with these experiences, brainstorming how they think shelters might be a scary place for transgender people, and addressing how their environment might not be safe or comfortable for everyone.

Many of the TSPs that I interviewed noted that it is difficult to make vulnerable people feel safe when people and organizations do not treat them properly. For many this begins with properly using names and pronouns which many of the participants stated as having an immensely positive impact on the safety and comfort levels of transgender people in especially vulnerable situations. It was noted that many Manitoban shelters do not do this effectively.

Charlie, a TSP, made this clear in stating that “it’s just really hard to make a vulnerable person feel safer if you can’t treat them humanely and ... start by addressing them, how they want to be addressed”.

Study participants also noted the nuance of this issue in the context of gender-based violence. TSPs often noted how important it is, in a gender-based violence shelter setting, to create safe spaces for women because of how they might feel if they were housed with someone who they perceived as a man. Because of this, transgender people who are identified as men by shelter providers will often be placed in sections of gendered shelters that either do not align with their identity or where they feel unsafe. However, it was also noted quite often throughout this study that transgender people face similar barriers, issues, and problems accessing these gender-based violence services compared to cis-gender women such as discrimination, harassment, and violence from family and loved ones. Because of this, it was noted as important that transgender people were not placed into vulnerable positions because of issues related to being forced to stay in areas where they are not comfortable.

Our idea of what it is to treat us like normal is different in that like you can't just look at my face and decide where I'm going to be safe in a shelter. I honestly don't even know where the fuck I would be safe in a shelter ... in an emergency housing situation, people don't know how to handle this shit. (Charlie, TSP)

There is a nuance when it comes to these issues which is a point that was reiterated by many of my participants. As some stated, society has not progressed to a point where we have prioritized transgender bodies and because of this transgender people are left to figure out a lot about where they are safest, where they feel the safest, coupled with how they identify, choose to present themselves, and how these factors influence their safety in shelter settings. So, transgender people want, and need, to be able to be treated as the gender that they identify with but, for example, a

trans man may not feel safe around other men and cis women may not feel safe around them if they are masculine presenting. So, as I will further explain, it is important to allow transgender people to be housed where they feel the safest whether it be with, men, women, individually, or in some other form of accommodation.

HSP opinions when applied to transgender people's sense of safety in these spaces more often centered around trying to empathize with the experiences of transgender clients in discussing how they thought it might be daunting as a transgender person to navigate these spaces. From an HSP perspective, for example, Ang mentioned that navigating shelter spaces is likely a scary, daunting experience for all people attempting to access these services but that for transgender people it is likely even more difficult. Participants also noted the importance of marketing their organization as a safe space for transgender people, but also pointed out the importance of backing up their marketing by proving to clients that these places are safe for transgender individuals and making steps to improve their service delivery.

Multiple participants throughout this study mentioned the importance of ensuring that people who occupy management and leadership roles within housing, and adjacent organizations are adequately trained on the issues faced by transgender people. Throughout this study I was given multiple examples of the leaders of these organizations not being adequately trained enough on these issues. Within at least some of these organizations, training expectations are focused on front-line staff when they should be directed at all members of these organizations especially key decision makers. Participants, for example, mentioned how key figures within 'trans-friendly' organizations acted harmfully towards transgender people. One participant mentioned how the executive director of their organization consistently made transphobic comments towards them as well as misgendering them. This detailed example illustrated how

even 2SLGBTQ+ service organizations can fail to provide a comfortable, safe, and welcoming environment for transgender people.

Our executive director is actively transphobic and has made transphobic comments to me in particular ... the executive director would make comments ... messed up my pronouns the entire time ... and made a comment that because of my appearance and my name, it just was hard for her to get used to my pronouns, which is like obviously harmful ... it's like, "okay, that's not that's not an acceptable ... excuse for messing up somebody's pronouns and then not apologizing for it" ... and so, it is things like that where even the places where you think that you will be the most safe to work and interact still often have people who are not safe to work and interact with and it is a little bit disheartening. (Anonymous Participant)

Other participants noted that it is important for higher-up members to be trained well on these issues because they have the most power to make effective, progressive change that would work to help and support vulnerable groups. It is important that all members of the staff are trained on these issues but the people on the front-line lower rungs of the organization have much less bargaining power in terms of their ability to make change.

These organizations need to understand that it's up to the leadership and it's up to the people being hired and all the people on the front lines, those are the people that need to be protecting the trans clients and they need to understand (Charlie, TSP)

The service providers that I talked to had a lot to say about who should be responsible for creating comfortable, safe, and welcoming shelter environments. Participants mentioned that clients were sometimes scapegoated as sources of discrimination against 2SLGBTQ+ people in housing settings. The participants were clear that it is not the responsibility of the clients (those who are often most vulnerable) but shelter providers to have to worry about improving transgender people's experiences. It is ultimately up to leadership and staff to create and maintain safe spaces for their clients, and it is not the duty of the clients to do so.

I can't expect everybody who is housed in a shelter to be informed on trans issues the way that I could hope to expect to have support workers and people working in the shelter, right? ... Yeah, so there's like a level of nuance there because you can't expect all of these vulnerable people to be very informed. (Charlie, TSP)

Some of my participants challenged the idea that people facing issues finding housing are more likely to discriminate against transgender people. Hank, for example, stated that because transgender people are at a higher risk of becoming homeless, other homeless people are more likely to have had interactions with transgender people thus allowing them to better understand transgender people and the issues that they face.

When I came out and started transitioning and stuff and people would often think that street involved folks would be like less open minded. I would hear that from like non-street involved folks. But I find that the street community folks actually are more likely to know a trans person than someone who lives in the suburbs probably especially when I came out, because a lot of us end up in sort of marginalized employment or no employment and ... we end up congregated in the inner city. And so, I find a lot more people at my work in my client group knew what a trans person was than a lot of other people might. (Hank, HSP)

In summary, shelter clients will sometimes be targeted as sources of discrimination in shelter spaces. This is something that participants often agreed was often untrue and unfair to the vulnerable people who need help the most in the housing sector. Instead, participants reiterated that it is up to shelter providers to work at creating and maintain safe spaces for transgender people. Another responsibility of service providers identified to me throughout these interviews was the role HSPs play in creating safe-affirming referrals for transgender clients.

Referrals are a common interchange between different service providers where information about clients is communicated to other third-party organizations. Participants noted that many of the negative interactions that transgender people face in accessing service

organizations emerge out of how these referrals are conducted and communicated. Dangerous or harmful experiences can emerge from these referrals for transgender clients when handled improperly, and they can have a major impact on their sense of comfort and safety (Charlie, TSP). These harmful interactions emerge out of how service providers communicate about the clients they are serving. For example, if a client has not been given the space or time to tell a service provider how they want to be addressed then the service provider cannot be expected to effectively explain important information about their client to third-parties such as a health care provider.

To prevent negative interactions at these key interchanges between providers a couple of solutions were discussed. Having staff that are properly trained on working with transgender people was key, but participants also stressed the importance of communicating with transgender clients about how they want to be addressed by service providers (Charlie, TSP). This included things such as proper pronoun and name usage. The role of service workers in these interactions is to act as a buffer between parties in order to protect the client from potential discrimination and harm. This is an aspect of service delivery where many providers currently miss the mark.

So, I mean, a lot of the things that trans people come up against that results in like discrimination and micro aggressions and harmful interactions is really around like third party interactions, right? It's about like how we are addressed in the third person when we're not around behind our backs and so, the way that information is communicated about us and on our behalf is often harmful ... it really speaks to how the systems uphold these harmful ways of talking about gender and trans-ness and then on a more specific level providers and support workers and people need to be super clear about communicating with the person to whom they are providing resources ... So, like connecting with people, like all along the way to ensure that, you're protecting your client from potential negative interactions until you have fully navigated the situation on their behalf. (Charlie, TSP)

As we can see, it is the responsibility of service providers to act as a buffer in protecting transgender clients from harm involved around third-party interactions over referrals. When done improperly, referrals can be harmful, as I stated, but by addressing and asking clients how they want to be addressed in the third person many of the issues associated with these interactions can be mediated and limited. This leaves service providers with the opportunity to deal with other issues that transgender people face in working to secure housing.

The participants of this study generally agreed that gender segregation, especially in a housing context, is an issue for many transgender individuals. In shelter environments gender segregation is common. Participants addressed this and countered the idea that gender segregation improves shelter safety and talked about the reasons why they thought it exists the way it does. The participants largely indicated that gender segregation in its current state exists only to protect cisgender women from violent men (Charlie, TSP). While it is certainly important that cisgender women are safe in shelter spaces, the participants of this study indicated that the prioritization of the safety of cis women has come at the expense of transgender people who, as I mentioned in my literature review, are quite often victims of harassment, discrimination, and violence in gender segregated spaces.

Charlie stated that segregating shelter spaces can be an effective means of improving safety when it is done right and in a way that challenges larger societal issues. For example, forcing a transgender person who appears masculine, or is represented as masculine on a piece of I.D., into a space where they feel unsafe can be dangerous for them. Instead, where gender-segregation is enforced, asking an individual where they feel the safest to stay was viewed as the right choice by many of the participants of this study. Sometimes, individuals may identify as a man but not

feel safe around other men in vulnerable spaces such as shelters so forcing someone into these spaces can be risky and harmful for transgender people. Similarly, if there are spaces available for transgender people specifically then forcing them to stay in these accommodations can out them as such. The point that I am trying to make here is how important choice is in this context. The participants of this study stated time and time again that adding transgender people into any gendered section is not going to make the space less safe for other clients but that giving transgender clients the right to choose where they want to stay can have tremendous impacts on how they are read (in terms of their identity) as well as improving their own mental and physical safety (Bre, TSP; Charlie, TSP).

Other participants reiterated that in its' current state, the gender segregated shelter system is failing to meet the needs of transgender people where they are viewed as threats to the safety of other shelter guests and not as victims of violence, which they more often are (Bre, TSP). The participants of this study stated that shelters and other organizations segregate housing by gender because our society associates men and masculinity with danger and violence.

It needs to be on cis people to break down their own ideas about what it means to be trans, because we all know that at the end of the day, sex segregation is because we have allowed men to be historically violent for so long and we associate certain bodily traits with men and masculinity and therefore feel like we need to separate people who aren't men from violent men, and that's not really about trans people. (Charlie, TSP)

Other participants noted that segregating shelters often does not solve safety issues but in fact makes conditions worse for transgender people.

We say it often in presentations for lots of these different things, that it becomes like a sexual assault issue, not a trans issue ... kind of putting that blame on trans folks when if you're worried about people being sexually assaulted in the shelter bedrooms, then that's not ... a trans person issue. That's like just a basic safety issue, because if

there isn't safety in the first place, a trans person isn't going to make it any less safe. (Bre, TSP)

Participants were clear throughout these conversations that simply having transgender people in these spaces will not make them less safe and that organizations should work to improve the safety of shelters for all people. One of the possible solutions to this issue, as I will discuss later in this chapter, is implementing identity-based transgender-specific shelter options.

The participants also indicated that intake procedures at most shelters might dissuade transgender people from accessing the services designed to help the most vulnerable people in our society. Intake procedures were commonly viewed as flawed, unnecessary, and sometimes dangerous for transgender people. The participants of this study largely agreed that while intake is an important step in shelter processes that it was also a reason that transgender people might opt to avoid shelters. Problematic intake procedures include prodding and asking unnecessary questions (or asking questions in the wrong ways). While a lot of the information taken during intake is necessary and important for organizations, it needs to be done in ways that affirm and protect the identities of all people. Intake is often the first experience that many people have in accessing housing services and so negative experiences in intake may lead to clients avoiding these organizations all together. For example, it was noted by study participants that transgender people are often asked prodding questions about their gender identities and sexual orientations.

It's such an unnecessary process. It's like an unnecessary coming out process where people ... just have misconceptions about what shelters look like and each shelter is so different, so it's very tricky... it's just also terrifying and then having to navigate that with the extra complexity of having to come out at every single step of the way several times a day is a horrifying experience. (Levi, TSP)

For many, the questions that are currently being asked during the intake processes at shelters are viewed as unnecessary or that intake questions are not being asked in the right ways. Some participants noted also that transgender people are often forced to explain themselves and their identities to family, friends, and often strangers in their day to day lives. This for most people is both draining, frustrating, and something that many people will often seek to avoid. Charlie, in our conversation, gave examples of some of the ways that HSPs could ask people questions in ways that protect and affirm transgender identities. Some of these questions included:

"How do you want to be addressed when I'm talking about you?",

"How do you want me to describe your gender, if it's necessary for me to do so?",

"Where is the best place for you to be housed?" (Charlie, TSP)

My conversation with Charlie also highlights the importance of consultation when working with transgender people. Participants, such as Charlie, noted how important it is to work with trans-advocacy groups and 2SLGBTQ+ education organizations. If HSPs think they are doing all the right things but have not had any consultation with these groups then they are left without transgender people's knowledge and perspectives on how they want to be asked these questions and are thus unable to resolve many of the issues that transgender people may have in accessing shelter services.

Transgender people need to be given the opportunity in intake to communicate the information that they need in order to feel safe. It was also viewed as important by TSPs to train intake staff on how to recognize whether clients were answering questions authentically or if they felt they needed to answer questions in a certain way to ensure their safety and secure shelter. It seems necessary that staff are trained to allow clients to provide this information on

their own terms. Giving clients the space to tell staff how they want to be addressed can be a very important step in creating access to housing for transgender people, instead of pushing them away from accessing these needed services.

The ways that housing organizations and service providers were unsuccessful in meeting the safety and comfort needs of transgender clients was a common theme throughout my interviews. These failures were evident in how transgender people and TSPs perceived housing services. Housing services missed the mark in several ways. I found in this study that, according to transgender people, TSPs, and even HSPs that staff, management, and executive members of housing organizations were not trained well enough to meet the needs of transgender clients. I also found that transgender clients often found intake procedures at shelters to be prodding and/or unnecessary and that harmful interactions with transgender people emerged out of third-party interactions involving referrals. Finally, I also found that housing organizations sometimes scapegoated clients as the sources of discrimination in shelter spaces and that shelters often prioritize gender-segregation for safety reasons but that this segregation often compromises the wellbeing of transgender people in these spaces. While the participants of this study noted several ways in which shelters throughout the province are unsuccessful in meeting the needs of transgender people, they also revealed some of the ways in which shelters are or could be successful in helping this vulnerable group.

### **4.3: Solutions to the Challenges Faced by Transgender People**

The final major theme that emerged from interviews was the ways in which housing organizations could improve the accessibility, comfort, and safety of their organizations for transgender people. I found that the major ways in which housing organizations could do this were having trans-specific programming, utilizing symbols, stickers, and posters that represent

the space as safe for transgender people, improving staff training on the issues faced by transgender people, and hiring and retaining staff whose identities match their client's identities.

Participants of this study often spoke about the importance of using 2SLGBTQ+ positive media such as flags, stickers, posters, and other symbols and their success in improving the comfort and safety of transgender people utilizing housing programs. Participants noted that using these symbols was very helpful but also severely underutilized by service organizations. For example, Jaden noted that rainbow flag stickers are a simple yet overt way of showing people that an organization is safe for 2SLGBTQ+ people to use. Jaden also noted, however, that symbols need to be backed up by competent staff who are trained to deal with issues facing transgender people.

It's more than just the sticker on the door. Like if that person walks in through those doors, are they going to have that same experience that they hope to have when they see that sticker? Or are they going to be met with staff who don't feel comfortable with pronouns or are using gendered greetings and stuff like that? (Jaden, TSP)

Other participants noted that employing symbols and posters can be a useful way of reminding both staff and clients about the expectations and rules of the space, including anti-transphobia.

So, I think that requires, you know ... instead of just putting up just a rainbow flag with ... something that says instead 'transphobia and homophobia are not welcome here' or, you know, something like that. Both of those kinds of posters can be helpful to sort of let people know that they're not allowed to act in a bullying way to people. (Hank, HSP)

Moving beyond simple symbols such as rainbow stickers is useful in that it more clearly indicates the rules and expectations of the shelter. For example, organizations can use posters that state non-discrimination policies or that bullying will not be tolerated in that space. Other

effective media include posters showing 2SLGBTQ+ people using the space. These tools can be one of the most simple and effective ways to improve client comfort and safety but are currently underutilized by organizations throughout the province.

Participants often talked about how having staff whose identities better match the identities of their clients very positively impacts the experiences of transgender people. As Bre stated above, 2SLGBTQ+ people feel safer around other 2SLGBTQ+ people. Every TSP interviewed stated that they had people on staff who were openly transgender. Conversely, of the HSPs sampled, only one stated that they had a transgender person working in their organization. In this sense, an effective strategy in improving the safety and comfort of transgender clients is through employing transgender staff. Hank, for example, when asked about whether or not being openly transgender made it easier to connect with trans clients said, “Definitely ... I think I would say ... almost always it does” (Hank, HSP).

Participants reported that the shelters who employed more transgender staff had better reputations. Charlie, for example, said that “Main Street Project has the best sort of general reputation in our community and has the most queer and trans staff and staff training”. My participants mentioned that when an organization’s staff consisted of people whose identities matched their clients that it can improve client engagement and comfort accessing the space (Bre, TSP; Jaden, TSP). Some mentioned that it is helpful to have people on staff who can empathize with their clients, especially with vulnerable groups of people in the housing sector. This can also be helpful for other staff, because it can give employees someone to bounce questions off of (Jaden, TSP). Jaden also mentioned, however, that trans and 2SLGBTQ+ employees should not be used as tokens by their employers. Nonetheless, according to the participants of this study and as I illustrated before in the literature review section, having

transgender people on staff seems to be a very effective way to improve both the comfort and safety of transgender clients and staff.

Yeah, so ... like any other organization, representation is super important ... It's a lot easier for clients to engage when they're feeling represented in the community or in the space as well, too. And I think having, you know, people who are of the same race or same gender identity can be really helpful because ... they can empathize with those experiences as well, too. That also gives somebody for staff to have those conversations with ... if they have some of those questions ... We can work with our other colleagues around these sorts of things without putting that pressure on clients. (Jaden, TSP)

An important step in helping transgender people, or any vulnerable group, feel safe and comfortable in shelter settings starts with representation. As my participants mentioned frequently, when people feel represented in the community and in the space, they are freer to engage in shelter programs which can have positive impacts in the long term. However, despite having staff members that are representative of the communities that service providers are trying to serve it is still important that staff are effectively trained on how to deal with the issues faced by transgender people in a housing context.

Participants often mentioned the impact that staff training had on the safety and comfort of transgender people accessing and utilizing housing spaces. Staff competency addressing gender issues seems to be the most important factor influencing how transgender people experience these spaces. Of the participants that I sampled, all but one rated themselves knowledgeable to very knowledgeable when it comes to issues facing transgender people. No participants mentioned that they had *no* knowledge of these issues and only one (an HSP) stated that they were only somewhat knowledgeable in this regard. However, of the HSPs that were sampled in this study only two out of five stated that they had formal training on these issues. All

the participants of this study stated that they felt comfortable discussing transgender issues with their coworkers. One HSP however, mentioned that they felt comfortable talking to staff about these issues but might not feel comfortable talking about this topic with clients based on their own perceived level of knowledge on the topic. This HSP noted that they did not feel that they or their staff were adequately trained enough to meet the needs of transgender clients. In this case, the participant mentioned that they had recognized that this was an issue within their organization and that they were actively working on ensuring that their staff would receive the competency and training necessary to meet the needs of potential clients.

I have some staff that have more experience with that. And I think their ability ... even their comfort level would be wildly different than the majority of my group. I would say I have three staff that would, I'm not sure I would say they're experts, but three that just have much more knowledge on this than the rest of us. (Ang, HSP)

When asked, TSPs overwhelmingly agreed that HSPs needed more training when it came to issues faced by transgender people. TSPs also agreed that there was always room for more training and collaboration with HSPs. Specifically, increasing and improving staff training was cited as very important in bettering the experiences of transgender clients. This is something that is currently lacking amongst housing organizations.

Some TSPs mentioned that there is always room for housing organizations to collaborate with trans-friendly service organizations that can work to help educate staff on these issues while also tailoring this training to the specific needs of the housing sector. Other participants mentioned that for HSPs, TSPs, educators, and even transgender people themselves that there is always room for more education when it comes to these issues. One transgender participant also

mentioned that when their coworkers were more adequately trained on these issues that he felt more comfortable interacting with them in professional settings.

I talked to my boss, and she got everyone the training and then I think I would say that it's gotten much more comfortable and now there's more queer people on the team. And so that makes it a lot better too. (Hank, HSP)

For both clients and coworkers, having staff that are adequately trained on issues pertaining to 2SLGBTQ+ communities can have immensely positive impacts on the comfort and safety of these groups. So, training housing organization staff on these issues coupled with specialized services and spaces, symbols identifying the organization as a safe space, and having transgender people on staff may dramatically improve experiences of homelessness for transgender people.

In discussing remedies to the distressing experiences faced by transgender people in accessing housing services many providers mentioned the importance of implementing and advocating for trans-specific identity-based programs and 2SLGBTQ+ -only spaces. These specialized services can be an effective way for the social housing sector to help tackle the issue of homelessness in the transgender community. Trans-specific or 2SLGBTQ+ -specific shelters are important to improving the comfort of transgender people facing homelessness, which was also a prominent theme in my literature review. Trans- and 2SLGBTQ+ - specific spaces can be very important, safer to access, and more comfortable for transgender individuals.

I think that ... there need to be like queer only spaces for gender diverse and non-binary folks because it really is a matter of safety and comfort, because I know even in my own experience, like with dating or making friends or whatever it is, other queer folks just feel the safest, ... like people who have that shared experience where you're not even having to, like, justify your existence. ... I think to have spaces where trans folks can feel that way would be so important. (Bre, TSP)

As I exhibit in the environmental scan that follows here, these services barely exist across the country, especially locally. This is something that was widely picked up on by my participants some of whom noted that the lack of these needed spaces put members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community at risk.

If there were queer specific shelters where trans and non-binary folks felt safe to access and then to also have women's shelters like absolutely that would function a lot better. But society hasn't really reached the point in which they're prioritizing queer folks. So, it often puts other people at risk by not prioritizing queer folks as well. (Bre, TSP)

Many of the participants recognized the implementation, development, and utilization of these services as a good way to improve housing outcomes for transgender people. The participants of this study did note, however, that trans and 2SLGBTQ+ spaces need to be developed in the right ways. For example, as I discussed earlier, one Manitoban shelter tried to start a housing program specifically for 2SLGBTQ+ people, but it soon failed for a few reasons. Participants mentioned that many of the problems associated with this program were caused by the sheer lack of 2SLGBTQ+ people on staff, lack of consultation from the 2SLGBTQ+ community, and privacy issues related to the potential outing of client's gender identity or sexual orientation.

It was a good idea that they had a section that people could ... self-select to go into ... And everyone got their own room ... And like I said, it wasn't gender segregated but they didn't do all the things that would have been really helpful, like have queer people working there and for some reason, only certain people were offered it and like other trans folk weren't being offered and ... it kind of just fluttered out like that. People weren't selecting to go, of course it's like "that's where the queer people are". So, a lot of people weren't comfortable with being that out ... So, everyone knew if you went to that floor, you were queer in some way. ... So, there were some things that didn't quite work well. But I think the idea of it was very interesting to have like a non-gender segregated space and a type of center for queer people is a really interesting idea. (Hank, HSP)

Despite these glaring issues the participant still thought this program was a good idea but needed to be implemented better. Some participants also mentioned that to effectively implement trans and 2SLGBTQ+ - dedicated spaces, that organizations need to be able to balance the harm of being outed with offering specialized services. One participant also mentioned that they and their organization were in the process of creating and implementing new housing programs specifically for 2SLGBTQ+ people in the province. As we can see, despite certain challenges, transgender-specific identity-based housing has a lot of potential in combatting homelessness experiences faced by transgender people. So, if these programs are important, relevant, and urgent, what programs currently exist that offer this type of specialized assistance?

#### **4.4: Environmental Scan**

As part of this project, I conducted an environmental scan that included an extensive internet search and compilation of information from interviews with service providers in order to identify what safe and welcoming transitional housing options already exist for transgender people, that organizations in Westman might learn from. An environmental scan was one component of the initial report that I submitted to YWCA Brandon. For program developers, environmental scans are important because they highlight current programs, show where there is room for innovation, and can give organizers someone to base their models on. For myself, this scan was essential context for this research and was one of the first steps that I completed in the research process. My environmental scan sought to assess what specific shelter services existed for transgender people and members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community. I chose to include 2SLGBTQ+ members, in addition to transgender people, because services specifically for transgender people were even more limited than they were for the broader category of 2SLGBTQ+ people.

This specific scan showed that homelessness services for transgender people are extremely limited across the country. For example, I could only find one service across Canada that offered housing services specifically to transgender people. This was Ross-Aoki house in Vancouver, BC. and was first identified to me through one of the participants interviewed in this study. The scan itself was organized by the type of service provided (Drop-in, Transitional/Long-term, Housing First). In total I identified two drop-in programs, six transitional and long-term programs (although one was no longer running), and three housing first style programs. Through these searches I discovered that some of these programs offered seemingly helpful housing adjacent supports like counselling, occupational supports, and group activities. This list of programs may not be exhaustive but was the entirety of what I was able to identify via extensive internet searches and from interview conversations. Through my interviews I also found out that there was an organization in Winnipeg working at establishing a housing unit specifically for 2SLGBTQ+ people who have experienced chronic or episodic homelessness as well as a transitional hostel that would operate as a shelter for 2SLGBTQ+ people without anywhere to go. The majority of the services that I was able to identify were tailored towards 2SLGBTQ+ people or programs that may include transgender people but were not specifically geared towards them. This scan illustrates that across the country housing services for transgender people are clearly extremely lacking. More specifically, it represents a gap in service provision.

Table 1: Organizations identified offering housing services to transgender and 2SLGBTQ+ people across Canada retrieved from Hammond et al., 2021

Service Type	Location	Description
<b>Drop-In</b>	<b>Sunshine House</b> Winnipeg, MB.	Offers a specialized program called “Like That” for 2SLGBTQ+ people.
	<b>The519</b> Toronto, ON.	Offers housing support to 2SLGBTQ+ people and has various programmatic offerings specifically for transgender people.
<b>Transitional and Long-Term Housing</b>	<b>Friends of Ruby Home</b> Toronto, ON.	A custom-built transitional house for 2SLGBTQ+ people. Canada’s first custom-built transitional house for 2SLGBTQ+ youth. Individual bedrooms and shared living space for 2SLGBTQ+ people between the ages of 16-29.
	<b>Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre</b> Winnipeg, MB.	Runs a program called Honoring the Spirit of our Little Sisters which is a specialized home designed to help sexually exploited girls and transgender teens.
	<b>Pride Home</b> Saskatoon, SK.	Run by OUTSaskatoon is a long-term housing operation for 2SLGBTQ+ youth. The program is designed to minimize rent and provide this group with safe, affordable housing.
	<b>Ross-Aoki House</b> Vancouver, BC.	Run by Atira Women’s Resource Society is a 24-room single-room occupancy hotel for trans, gender diverse, and Two-Spirit people. The project is designed specifically to help trans people who are facing barriers finding safe, affirming housing. This project is led by a trans person.
	<b>Salvation Army Booth Centre*</b> Winnipeg, MB.	Previously offered a shelter program (no longer in operation) to help house 2SLGBTQ+ people. According to an interview participant this program did not last long as it was not created with the input of 2SLGBTQ+ people and this group often had reservations about outing themselves to an organization that has historically treated them quite poorly.
	<b>YMCA Sprott House</b> Toronto, ON.	Transitional housing program for 2SLGBTQ+ youth. This program provides 25 youth and young adults up to one year of supported residential living, but it can also support up to 6 residents on an emergency basis.
<b>Housing First</b>	<b>Aura Host Homes</b> Calgary, AB.	Run through Trellis Society in Calgary is a program designed to help find safe, affordable housing for 2SLGBTQ+ youth who are at risk of, or currently facing, homelessness.
	<b>RainCity Housing</b> Vancouver BC.	Runs a program that works to secure housing for young people who identify as queer or trans. It also helps to connect clients to gender affirming health care, employment, and community.
	<b>West Central Women’s Resource Centre</b> Winnipeg, MB.	Offers a Housing First program that includes trans women. A local trans advocate stated that WCWRC extends their programing to anyone facing gender-based violence which should include any people who fall under the trans umbrella.

## 4.5: Conclusion

Interview participants described some of the system level issues related to transgender people accessing housing services, some of the unsuccessful ways that housing organizations are working with the transgender community, and solutions to these challenges. In the context of system level issues, these interviews revealed that transgender people, in general, may have issues accessing faith-based housing services, that transgender people have a difficult time finding housing, and the impact that perceptions of rurality have on service provision and utilization. Interviews revealed that housing organizations in Manitoba are not often meeting the needs of transgender people because staff, management, and executives are inadequately trained on issues facing transgender people, intake procedures can sometimes be harmful, prodding, and unnecessary, and gender segregation in shelters creates problems for transgender people in terms of access, comfort, and safety. These interviews also showed that referrals, when done improperly, can be harmful for transgender people and that organizations will sometimes scapegoat their clients as the source of potential discrimination against transgender people where their services need to be improved. Finally, participants discussed solutions to these issues, they brought up the importance of properly training staff on issues faced by transgender people, of trans-specific and 2SLGBTQ+ specific identity-based housing programs, of having transgender people on staff, and using signs and symbols to identify spaces as safe for transgender people. In line with the solutions that were identified in the interviews that I conducted I have also developed a list of recommendations based on the findings of the interviews coupled with recommendations that I identified in my literature review.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

The primary objective of this study was to analyze how transgender people experience housing services and what makes them feel safe and comfortable in transitional housing spaces. While there is a large amount of information pertaining to homelessness, and there has been a recent increase in the amount of literature on the conditions of 2SLGBTQ+ people facing homelessness, there is a dearth of information on the specific conditions of transgender people experiencing homelessness as well as their involvement in the shelter system. This is especially true within the field of Geography where no research, to my knowledge, has been conducted that specifically analyzes how transgender people experience these conditions. By asking “what makes transgender people feel comfortable and safe in transitional housing settings,” this study addresses this gap in knowledge.

This thesis was divided into five major sections. In Chapter 2, my literature review, I analyzed the challenges faced by transgender people. For example, I discussed how transgender people are often made uncomfortable using faith-based shelters or those that are strictly gender segregated. These specific spaces and the shelter system overall represent spaces of normalized oppression against transgender people and much work is needed to recognize and remedy these conditions. In this chapter I also discussed housing-specific challenges faced by transgender people that were identified in the literature, and I also reviewed what the literature identified as potential solutions to both of these sets of challenges. In Chapter 3 I talked about the methods that I utilized to complete this project. This section includes an overview of the background, context, and research setting in which this project was undertaken. I also discussed my sampling, recruitment, procedures, methodological limitations, interview design, ethical considerations, and the coding process. In Chapter 4 of this thesis, I discussed the results of the interviews that I

organized. In it I recognized three major themes. These themes somewhat mirrored the results of my literature review. The first major theme identified in my results was the system level issues that exist related to housing transgender people. Second, I identified some of the ways that shelters in Manitoba are unsuccessful in meeting the needs of transgender clients. Finally, as I did in the first chapter, I identify solutions to these challenges such as improvements to staff training which are urgently needed as these are key sources of discomfort for transgender people using these services. In this chapter I also included a section detailing the results of the environmental scan that I undertook. This scan, as I mentioned, revealed that there was only one housing program across Canada that specifically sought to help transgender people. Beyond that I identified the limited number of housing programs that were specifically designed to help 2SLGBTQ+ people across the country. Despite all these challenges, I have highlighted a number of ways in which shelter organizations can help alleviate the stresses faced by transgender people navigating housing systems and shelters.

## **5.1: Recommendations**

The following list of recommendations was created with housing providers in mind and submitted and presented to YWCA Brandon in the fall of 2021. It was developed based on my interviews with housing service providers and transgender service providers, a literature review of relevant literature, and an environmental scan of housing programs specific to transgender and 2SLGBTQ+ service provision. In addition to the environmental scan and literature review, a list of recommendations for YWCA Brandon was another required section of the report that myself and two other students developed in preparation for the organization. This list was organized into four categories: General, Policy, Staff & Training, and Space. The recommendations that we submitted to YWCA Brandon in Fall 2021 included recommendations for housing multiple other

demographics that were researched beyond transgender people. In the report each demographic's section contained their own recommendations and were put together as an appendix. For the purposes of this thesis, I have extracted only the section pertaining to transgender people. I have also included a small list of relevant pieces of literature that also contain more detailed recommendations for service providers. The recommendations are as follows:

### **General**

- Collaborate with transgender advocacy groups, such as Trans Manitoba, to improve programming.
- Create specialized services and supports for LGBTQ2S people
- Involve transgender people throughout the process of the development of any form of transgender-specific housing programs.
  - Provide opportunities for transgender clients and staff to share the experience and knowledge that they have acquired to inform programming and policy.
- Consider the needs of transgender people with intersecting marginalized identities.
- Apply discretion when collecting personal information such as sex and gender (particularly for transgender residents).
  - Allow them to self-select the gender identity that they identify with (including options beyond male/female/other).
  - Be able to explain why collecting such information is necessary and where it goes.

### **Policy**

- Develop shelter policy on accommodating transgender people based on the individual's choice, not on the staff's perception of their gender identity.
  - Ensure that staff allow residents to self-select the shelter or room where they feel safest or aligns best with their gender identity.
- Develop a policy for all staff to use preferred names and pronouns (regardless of what one's legal name is or what gendered section someone is in).
- Update non-discrimination policies to include specific language around gender identity, gender expression, and sexuality.
  - Post non-discrimination policy so that it is visible to all residents

### **Staff & Training**

- Ensure sensitivity/equity training is mandatory for all staff to complete.
- Hire transgender staff.
  - Don't use them as a token, representation is very important in making transgender clients feel safe and represented.
- Work in partnership with local 2SLGBTQ+ organizations in developing training modules for staff.

- Ensure training modules include a separate section on Indigenous 2SLGBTQ+ issues, including Two-Spirit people and work with local Indigenous agencies to ensure cultural accuracies.

### Space

- Universalize washrooms so that they can be used by anyone.
  - Locking doors.
  - Labeled with what is in them.
  - Do not restrict usage by gender, allow people to use the facility they feel safest using.
  - Provide private shower options, if there is no way to make that happen then set up a system where people can use group showers privately with a locking door.
- Display visible 2SLGBTQ+ signage (e.g., rainbow sticker on door, posters/signs of 2SLGBTQ+ people using the space, statements on non-discrimination) throughout the shelter and include 2SLGBTQ+ specific language in advertisements, pamphlets, or other materials that describe your programs and services.

### Recommended Reading

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These recommendations are informed by the academic literature, service providers, and include trans voices. The recommendations outlined were developed with YWCA Brandon in mind but were also designed to be general enough so that they may apply to other shelters that exist locally, across the province, and across the country.

On top of these recommendations, this project contributes in other ways as well. For example, this project adds additional knowledge to the topic of homelessness experiences faced by transgender people, which is currently understudied in all realms of academia, whether it be in the fields of Geography, Sociology, Urban Studies, or others. This project contributes to the field of geography, specifically, in that it examines the experiences of people in places and spaces. Specifically, it looks at how transgender people experience transitional housing spaces, and thus fills a gap in geographical research.

This project has also contributed a few different things that will be useful for housing providers and for other researchers. First and foremost, this project and the associated report that I co-authored have been submitted to YWCA Brandon so that they may inform the organization's future programming and practice and help them to better understand the conditions faced by transgender people who may be seeking to access their organization. This study revealed many of the ways that transgender people are discriminated against and in researching this I was able to establish much of what makes transgender people feel *unsafe* and *uncomfortable* in these settings, which aided my analysis. In this thesis I also discussed how transgender people's concerns in this context have remained widely ignored by shelters, shelter systems, and different levels of government. Broadly, these issues have received little attention in academia or local and national media. Together these projects make significant contributions to knowledge for service providers in Westman and potentially beyond.

There is a lot of work that needs to be done in combatting homelessness, by both service providers and governments. Analyzing the specific experiences of vulnerable groups of people facing homelessness may be an effective contribution in the fight to end homelessness for all people as it is a broad social problem with a variety of causes, experiences, and needs. This

remains true for transgender people who, as we have seen, face a large variety of challenges and have distinct needs compared to cisgender people. In this regard, there is room for other future research opportunities. These could include Indigenous-focused projects that examine what safe and comfortable housing can look like for Indigenous transgender and Two-Spirit peoples, or the viability of transgender-specific identity-based programming (e.g., case studies). There is an urgent need to examine the ways transgender people experience transitional housing settings, just as there is an urgent need to expand spaces for transgender people. These spaces need to be developed for, and in cooperation with transgender people. Geography is a discipline that is especially well suited to analyze how transgender people experience shelter spaces, including transitional housing, and as such there is an urgent need for geographers to undertake research on this important topic. Transgender people, like all people, deserve the opportunity to live happy, successful lives and there is a growing potential for both research and programs that seek to address the issues faced by transgender people so that they can have safe, comfortable, and more welcoming experiences in transitional housing settings.

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**Appendix A**  
**Outreach Template**

To whomever it may concern,

Hello! I am conducting an undergraduate research study about what shelters in the Westman region of Manitoba can do to make transgender people feel comfortable and welcome. The goals of the project are to create local knowledge about transgender folks' comfort in shelters, identify best practices to better assist this group and make transitional housing accessible, and to inform the practices of YWCA Brandon who I am working, in partnership, with to generate a report so that they may better assist transgender people in our area. Would you be willing to participate in a short interview or to connect me with someone in your organization that I should speak to? I would love to interview you, for no more than an hour, at your convenience, either over zoom or over the phone. I am conducting interviews between July 2021 – August 2021 and, anyone who participates will receive a \$10 gift card as a small token of appreciation. I would appreciate your participation in this study. If you would like to participate, know someone who might be interested in participating, or have any questions please contact me:

- Matt Paterson – \*\*\*\*\*@\*\*\*\*\*.ca

Thank you,

Matt Paterson - Student, Geography and Environment, Brandon University

**If you have any questions or concerns you may also contact Dr. Julie Chamberlain, my supervisor, at  
\*\*\*\*\*@\*\*\*\*\*.ca**

**Appendix B**  
**TSP Interview Guide**

1. What is your role with \_\_\_\_\_?
  - a. What does your work entail, what are your duties and responsibilities?
2. What does your organization do?
3. Have you had transgender clients?
  - a. If so, how often? (i.e., Never, Once, A Few Times, Often)
  - b. Have you heard about transgender people having a difficult time finding housing?
4. [SCALE] How would you rate your level of knowledge when it comes to issues pertaining to transgender people (**No knowledge, somewhat knowledgeable, knowledgeable, very knowledgeable**)?
  - a. Does [your organization] provide specialized training in this regard?
    - i. Do you feel like you have been trained enough to deal with the needs of LGBTQ2S+ folk?
  - b. Do you feel comfortable talking to co-workers/clients about transgender issues?
  - c. Why do you think that it might be important for staff to be knowledgeable regarding issues facing transgender people?

**THIS NEXT SECTION IS ABOUT WHAT HOUSING PROVIDERS DO TO MAKE  
TRANSGENDER PEOPLE FEEL MORE COMFORTABLE IN SHELTER SETTINGS**

5. In what ways do you think [your organization] tries to be welcoming to transgender people?
6. In your opinion, in what ways might it be challenging for a transgender person to access housing services [in Brandon]?
7. What do you think are the challenges a transgender person might face in accessing [your organization]?

8. Have you ever heard of clients expressing positive/negative sentiments towards transgender people?
9. Are any of the staff or service providers (i.e., your co-workers) openly transgender or gender queer?
10. Do you think the intake process at shelters might dissuade a transgender person from accessing support? In what ways?
11. What is the bathroom situation like at your facility?
  - a. Are they shared, gendered, universal?
12. Do you have any ideas (or new programming) that you think would be helpful to transgender people seeking housing in Brandon?
13. Is there anything else you think I should know?
14. Do you know of any other people I should talk to?

## **Appendix C**

### **HSP Interview Guide**

1. What is your role with \_\_\_\_\_?
  - a. What does your work entail, what are your duties and responsibilities?
2. What does your organization do?
3. Have you had transgender clients?
  - a. If so, how often? (i.e., Never, Once, A Few Times, Often)
  - b. Have you heard about transgender people having a difficult time finding housing?
4. [SCALE] How would you rate your level of knowledge when it comes to issues pertaining to transgender people (**No knowledge, somewhat knowledgeable, knowledgeable, very knowledgeable**)?
  - a. Does [your organization] provide specialized training in this regard?
    - i. Do you feel like you have been trained enough to deal with the needs of LGBTQ2S+ folk?
  - b. Do you feel comfortable talking to co-workers/clients about transgender issues?
  - c. Why do you think that it might be important for staff to be knowledgeable regarding issues facing transgender people?

**THIS NEXT SECTION IS ABOUT WHAT HOUSING PROVIDERS DO TO MAKE  
TRANSGENDER PEOPLE FEEL MORE COMFORTABLE IN SHELTER SETTINGS**

5. In what ways do you think [your organization] tries to be welcoming to transgender people?
6. In your opinion, in what ways might it be challenging for a transgender person to access housing services [in Brandon]?
7. What do you think are the challenges a transgender person might face in accessing [your organization]?

- a. [Probe for Christian organizations]: In your opinion, does the Christian foundation of [your organization] present barriers for people trying to access your services who might identify as transgender?
8. Have you ever heard of clients expressing positive/negative sentiments towards transgender people?
  - b. If a conflict were to arise between clients what would staff do to intervene?
9. Are any of the staff or service providers (i.e., your co-workers) openly transgender or gender queer?
10. Could you briefly describe the intake process?
  - c. Do you think the intake process might dissuade a transgender person from accessing support? In what ways?
11. What is the bedroom situation like at [your shelter]?
  - d. Are they individual, gendered?
12. What is the bathroom situation like at your facility?
  - e. Are they shared, universal?
  - f. What about the showers?
13. Do you have any ideas (or new programming) that you think would be helpful to transgender people seeking housing in Brandon?
14. Is there anything else you think I should know?
15. Do you know of any other people I should talk to?

**Appendix D**  
**Consent Form**

## **Informed Consent Letter**

**Title of the Study:** Transgender Comfort in Transitional Housing Settings in Brandon, Mb.

**Principal Investigator and Research Team:**

Principal Investigator: Matthew Paterson – Geography and Environment, Brandon University,  
(\*\*) \*\*\*\_\*\*\*, \*\*\*\*\_\*\*\*\*\*@\*\*\*\*\*.ca

Thesis Supervisor: Dr. Julie Chamberlain – Assistant Professor, Geography and Environment,  
Brandon University, (\*\*) \*\*\*\_\*\*\*, \*\*\*\*\_\*\*\*\*\*@\*\*\*\*\*.ca

To help you make an informed decision regarding your participation, this consent form will outline what the study is about, the possible risks and benefits, and your rights as a research participant. If any information provided is unclear, please ask a member of the research team for clarification prior to consenting to participate. You will be provided with a copy of this form for future reference if you choose to participate in this study.

**Purpose of this Study:**

You are invited to participate in a research study about what makes transgender folk comfortable in transitional housing settings in the Westman region of Manitoba. We also seek to determine best practices for creating comfortable and welcoming spaces for this group. This study is being conducted both for my honours thesis and to inform future practice at YWCA Brandon. I am working in partnership with YWCA Brandon to write a report of my findings so that they may better assist transgender people experiencing homelessness in the Westman area. This study is also funded by the Manitoba Research Alliance.

**Participant Responsibilities:**

Participation in this study will consist of the completion of a single interview in which the participant will be asked to answer questions and converse about the subject outlined prior. Interviews will be roughly 45-60 minutes long and scheduled at the convenience of both the participant and researcher. Interviews will be conducted using Zoom (online video conferencing software) or over the phone (if the participant prefers) and recorded to ensure the accurate transcription and analysis of these interviews. The research team will store recording of these interviews on a password protected computer used only by members of the research team. This study will involve up to 10 participants. To participate in this study, you must have expertise or experience working in either housing services or in working with transgender people in Canada.

**Participant Rights:**

You are under no obligation to participate in this study. Your participation is voluntary, and you may decline to answer any question (or you may choose to end the interview at any time). The permission of your employer has not been asked and is not a condition of your participation. You may withdraw from the study, and withdraw any information that you provide, at any time, up to January 2022 when it will no longer be possible due to anonymization of raw data or submission

of report for publication. This can be done by telling either member of the research team that you wish to withdraw your involvement and associated data with this study.

### **Benefits/Risks:**

Participation in this study may or may not benefit the participant, individually. As individuals involved in service provision for marginalized individuals (e.g., transgender, homeless individuals) participation in this study may inform future work or offer reflection on current work. This study may also benefit the community by providing a better understanding of what makes transgender people feel comfortable and safe in transitional housing. In addition to this, anyone who participates in an interview for this project (even if they withdraw from the study) will receive a \$10 gift card, as a small token of appreciation.

To ensure complete anonymity we will make sure that any and all of the personal information that you provide is anonymous as well as any information about your organization. You will be given the opportunity look over the transcript of your interview. Once the interview has been transcribed and anonymized you will be sent a copy of the interview so that you have a chance to review it before we write any reports. We will be very diligent to not use any direct quotations that may identify your participation in this study. While the researcher team will take measures to ensure your identity and data is kept confidential, depending on the information shared with, there may be an ethical or legal obligation to disclose information to a third party. For example, some information may require disclosure to authorities such as information that pertains to the abuse of children or people in care. You may also withdraw yourself and any of the information that you provide at any point throughout the study until January 2022. Only the research team will know which data is from your participation. After transcription, participant information will be anonymized, pseudonyms will be used to protect participant information and data collected will not have any identifiers associated with it. Participants may choose the pseudonym that they would like to use, or a pseudonym will be applied by the researchers. The information you provide will be safe guarded and kept confidential by being kept on a password protected computer accessed only by the lead researcher. Data will be stored for a period of up to five years at which point it will be destroyed. The research team intends to share the study report, findings, and publication with members of YWCA Brandon. Dissemination shall include, but is not limited to, publication in a peer-reviewed journal, conference or public presentation, addition to a publicly available database, and/or posting on a website. For example, this might include presentations to a class or thesis committee, public presentation, being available in the library or being otherwise publicly accessible. There is no intention to commercialize the research findings however they may be used to inform the future work of the YWCA Brandon. By consenting, participants have not waived their rights to any legal recourse in the event of research-related harm. If you have questions regarding this study, or would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participation, please contact:

-Matthew Paterson - (\*\*\*) \*\*\*\_\*\*\*\*, \*\*\*\*\*@\*\*\*\*\*.com

-Dr. Julie Chamberlain - (\*\*\*) \*\*\*\_\*\*\*\*, \*\*\*\*\*@\*\*\*\*\*.com

If you have ethics-related questions or concerns about this study, please contact the Brandon University Research Ethics Committee (BUREC) at (204) 727-9712 or [burec@brandonu.ca](mailto:burec@brandonu.ca)

### Other Information

This study has been reviewed and received Ethics approval by the Brandon University Research Ethics Committee (BUREC). By providing your consent, you are not waiving your rights to legal recourse in the event of research-related harm.

### Consent

I have read the information presented in this consent document. I have had the opportunity to ask questions related to the study and have received satisfactory answers to my questions and any additional details. I understand that by consenting to participate I have not waived my legal rights. I consent to participate in this research project that has been described.

- I agree to participate in this research study as it has been described.
- I agree to interviews being recorded for the duration of the interview to ensure accurate transcription and analysis.
- I agree to the use of quotations in any thesis or publication that comes from this research.

I would prefer to have a pseudonym used to protect the anonymity of the data that I provide:

Yes    No

- 

If you chose yes, what pseudonym would you like to be used (if yes is selected but a pseudonym is not provided the research team will decide one for you): \_\_\_\_\_

Participant Name and Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher(s) Name and Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_