A photographic journey from homelessness to housing

Tales from a community-driven study on HIV, health and housing.

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Learning Institute – Advocacy Roles: How should researchers and community organizations work together
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Acknowledgements

• Kahnawake Mohawk Territory
• Fellow Community Researchers
• Summit organizers
• Members of our communities whose stories we share
Who we are

We are Community Researchers...

...people living with HIV and passionate about housing research and advocacy.

We have all experienced homelessness in Vancouver, BC.

“Together we will work towards positive change in our communities.”
We used **Photovoice** to reflect on our community’s strengths and needs, engage with policymakers and work towards social change.
What we learned

• People’s health and well-being compromised by unsanitary, unsafe, inadequate living conditions

• Need for transitional spaces to live, socialize, heal and rebuild

• Many barriers to navigating the health and housing systems
What we learned

- Low-barrier services creating a “home away from home” feeling
- Community and individual resiliency
What we learned

• Our photos and narratives convey the importance of stable, safe, affordable housing.

• Without healthy homes we cannot live healthy lives – adhere to our medication, attend doctors appointments and eat nutritious food.
After months of talking about housing and health, we wanted to share our findings. We mounted our photos and narratives and displayed them in the Woodwards atrium. The photos were on display for 10 weeks and attracted a lot of critical attention to the issues raised by the project.
We hosted a photo exhibit at W2 media cafe. Dan, Randy, Rob and Valerie shared video presentations. Councillor Kerry Jang and Vancouver-Hastings M.L.A. Shane Simpson spoke about the City’s approach to end homelessness. The event drew in over 100 attendees who expressed gratitude for the learning experience.
Mel, Randy Dan and Rob hosted a private photo exhibit at the Dr. Peter Centre in honour of World AIDS Day.

Photo credits: Mel Hennan, Dan Wilson and Mike T. O’Shaughnessy
As part of Homelessness Action Week the team organized a community engagement event at Jacob’s Well. The team cooked up a storm, serving hot meals to over a hundred people in the Downtown Eastside while talking about shared experiences of being homeless and struggling to take care of their health.
Spreading the word

THE WAY I SEE IT*
PUTS HEART IN HOME

Photo project explores health, housing, and HIV

Quality of life can't be boiled down to a quantitative measurement. For people living with HIV, the fact that someone cares is an act of love.

"I know what people are experiencing with HIV and AIDS," says Daniel Wilson, a student working with the BC Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS. "It's not that we're saying a lot of lives are being lost; it's that we're saying a lot of lives are being saved."

A fellow is an idea to do with our health and the way we live, and how it affects us as a community. As part of our communication, we need to explore the connections between health and housing for people with HIV/AIDS.

Dan Wilson, 61

"I moved here in 1978. I had no place to live. I moved away after living for six months. I had been working on housing since I came back to the city. It was very difficult to find employment to start with. It was difficult to be self-sufficient."

"I ended up being SRO (Single Room Occupancy) hotel. That was my first exposure to being homeless. Then, I ended up in an dump. I ended up in a drug addiction, and I ended up with HIV."

"I moved into the SRO and it was bad. I didn't know what was going on. I was stuck in the hotel, and I didn't know what to do."

"I was torn between the music and the homelessness, and then I was torn between music and the homelessness."

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Key challenges

- Contacting people who are unstably housed
- Keeping meetings and momentum when health concerns arise
- Honoring diversity of opinion
- Securing meeting space
Reflecting on our tools

- Photovoice has potential to inform an understanding of housing as viewed through the eyes of people living with HIV.

- Cameras are a very effective tool to engage researchers, participants and audiences, with rapid knowledge exchange.

- We must contribute to policy and program change to cultivate safe spaces.
Next steps

• Meetings with BC Housing, City Hall, officials in the housing and health sectors.

• Photos to be placed in permanent home in the Downtown Eastside

• Community-driven intervention study to investigate the impact of flexible housing options
Thank you!

We honour all those who support this work:
The BC Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS
The Dr. Peter AIDS Foundation
The Canadian Institutes of Health Research
Simon Fraser University
McLaren Housing Society
Jacob’s Well
Imaging by Marlis

For more information visit:
www.cfenet.ubc.ca/research/lisa/photovoice

or contact:
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“Together we will work towards positive change in our communities.”