

FACING HOMELESSNESS

An Arts Based Exploration of Homelessness for Women

CAEH Conference 2018

Session: WH5

Presenter: Eva Kratochvil

The Best Laid Plans often go Awry



On October 16, 2018 – I awoke to the news.....



Damage estimated at \$500K after fire destroys business on Drouillard Road

Outline

- Purpose of project
- Why use an arts based method
- Who is she? Where does she belong?
- Women wanted it known.....
- When we talk about women's homelessness we are talking about children's homelessness
- Resource Less (impacts of not knowing)
- Solutions & Action – Working Together

Purpose of Project

- To put a face to women's homelessness
- To change a stereotypical image that does not speak to women's homelessness
- To rethink the ways we work, questions we ask and solutions we offer up
- To provide women of lived experience an opportunity and platform to speak out

Why use an Arts Based Method

- Arts is a medium that allows the participants to offer what they wish in a safe space that encourages truth telling.
- The individuals who participate can feel empowered over their circumstances as they identify solutions, better ways of working and offer up a variety of potential outcomes.
- Arts is a forum that accepts everyone where they are, to contribute as they are able.

Who is she? Where does she belong?

- Outreach was done through the Windsor Homes Coalition, The Welcome Centre Shelter Drop in Program, and Street Help to reach women willing to share their stories in interviews.
- The question of belonging is twofold - it is one that wider society asks, It is also a question women ask of themselves

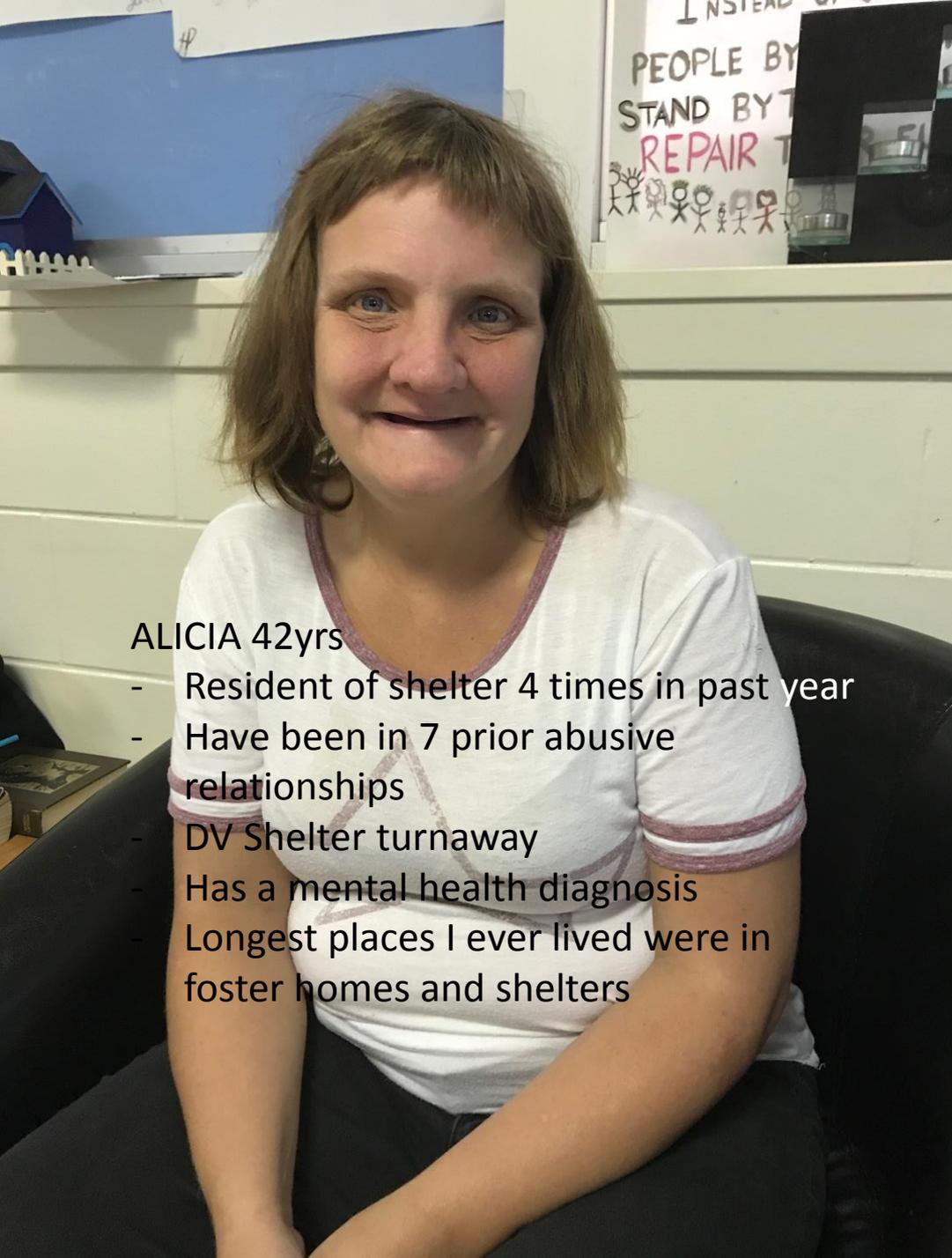
My story is about:

- What happens when systems fail
- Please stop asking me “Why?”
- Women are held more accountable than the men who abuse them

KIM - 24 Yrs.

- Mother of 4
- Situation of homelessness brought on by Domestic Violence
- Criminalized
- Diagnosed with PTSD, bi-polar and anxiety resulting from traumas
- Children Family Services involvement (children currently in care)
- DV Shelter Turnaway





ALICIA 42yrs

- Resident of shelter 4 times in past year
- Have been in 7 prior abusive relationships
- DV Shelter turnaway
- Has a mental health diagnosis
- Longest places I ever lived were in foster homes and shelters

My story is about:

- Everyday I try not to look homeless
- I try to have a purpose, to be somewhere
- It's important for me to have a place to go, so I always come to drop in and use MHC all the time

BREE ANNE 32yrs

- Transgender
- Criminalized
- Homeless last 3 years
- Living in shelter
- High acuity based on SPDAT
- Made the by-names list
- Will be Rent supplement assisted

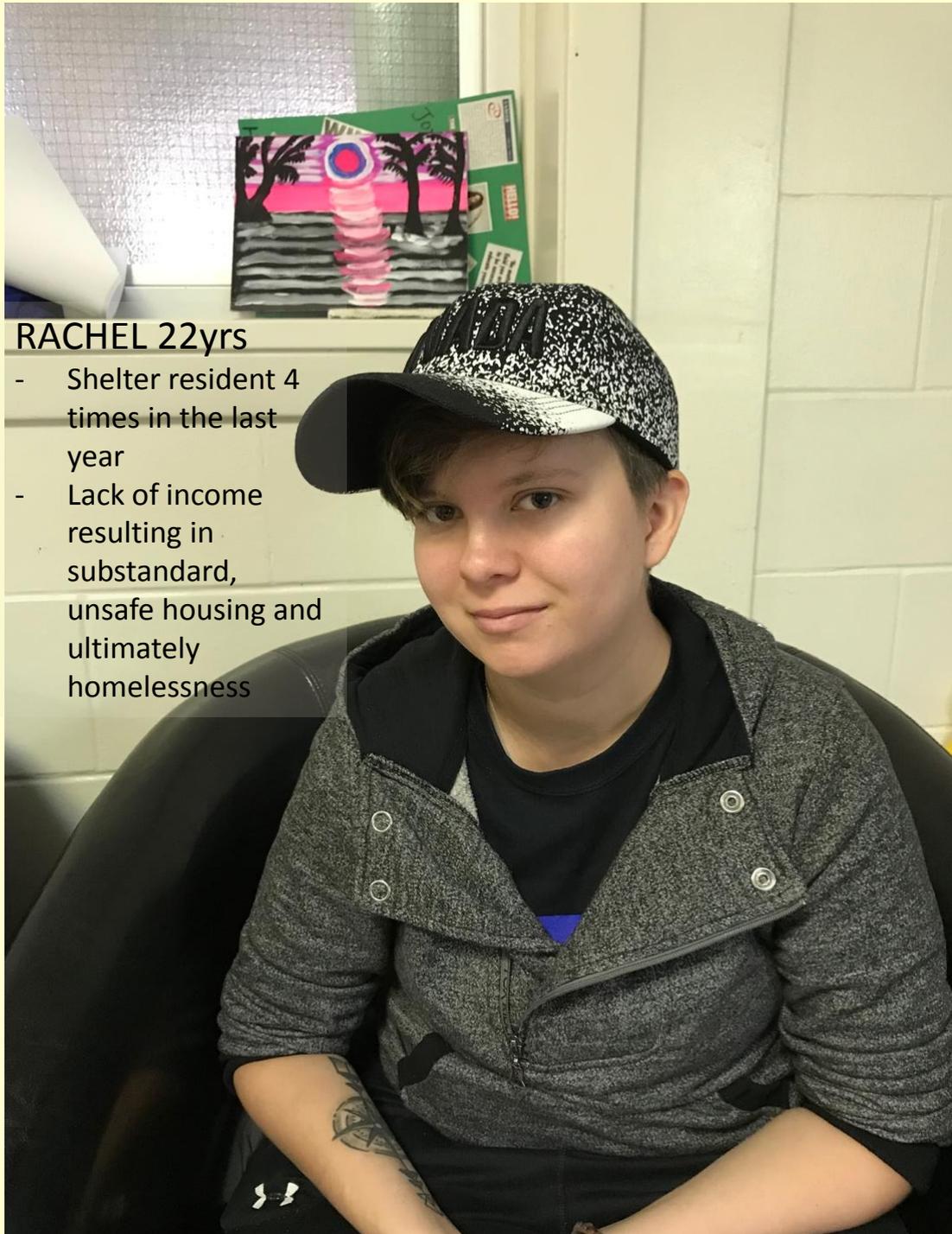


My Story is:

- Having lived in both men's and women's shelters I can honestly reflect on my experience and say that for the most part the reasons for women's homelessness are a lot more varied, you have wider walks of life
- The cost of being a woman is expensive and this doesn't go away on the street
- I should have been a Priority 1 but I didn't want to share my story
- Homelessness is the end result of a fractured system

My Story is:

- Affordable housing means I had to settle for cockroaches, bedbugs or “touchy landlords” (sexual advances)
- I am not irresponsible with my money, I dress to protect myself, it’s the only thing I can do
- Homelessness is not always about drugs, alcohol, and mental health problems
- There needs to either be more affordable housing created or an increase in the allotments to obtain safe affordable housing



RACHEL 22yrs

- Shelter resident 4 times in the last year
- Lack of income resulting in substandard, unsafe housing and ultimately homelessness

My Story is:

- I have been in and out of shelters four times in the past year
- I have to keep up a façade to be safe, people are put into your life either as a Lesson or a Blessin
- It took 8 months waiting to get into treatment since March 2018 until October 15 when I go in
- I need a place to go when I get out so I can be well, there needs to be a plan after leaving rehab



LORRAINE – 55yrs

- Mother of 3,
grandmother of 6
- Homeless as a result
of Domestic violence
- Entering Treatment



PAM - 43yrs

- Grew up in Nova Scotia
- Became homeless as a teenager
- Did what I needed to have shelter
- Spent 14 years being homeless
- Decided enough was enough moved to Ontario
- Finally housed and happy

My Story is:

- There were days I wanted to go to sleep and never wake up....I depended on my faith to get me through
- I did most everything on my own to get back on my feet...my Doctor through Street Health has also been a big help
- It helps having a place to go everyday, so I don't fall into a depression
- I can really relate to others, someone who has been through it can often offer better advice, because they know it, they feel it, they have lived it and what they offer doesn't sound like bullshit...

As a Street Help
volunteer I am here to
do whatever needs to be
done or If there is
nothing to be done then
I can be here as a client
to have coffee and eat,
hang out, to get out of
the house so I don't get
depressed





Where did you live the longest and what kept you there?

One time I lived at a place in Toronto for over five years, actually it was probably closer to six years but what made it perfect was that it was close to this art supply store where I could get anything I needed to do my art and it was furnished a little and even had a housekeeper that came in once a week. That really helped. It was kind of like a hotel, but it wasn't.

- Marianne Smelle, Windsor, Ontario



Tell me about a time you became homeless what happened?

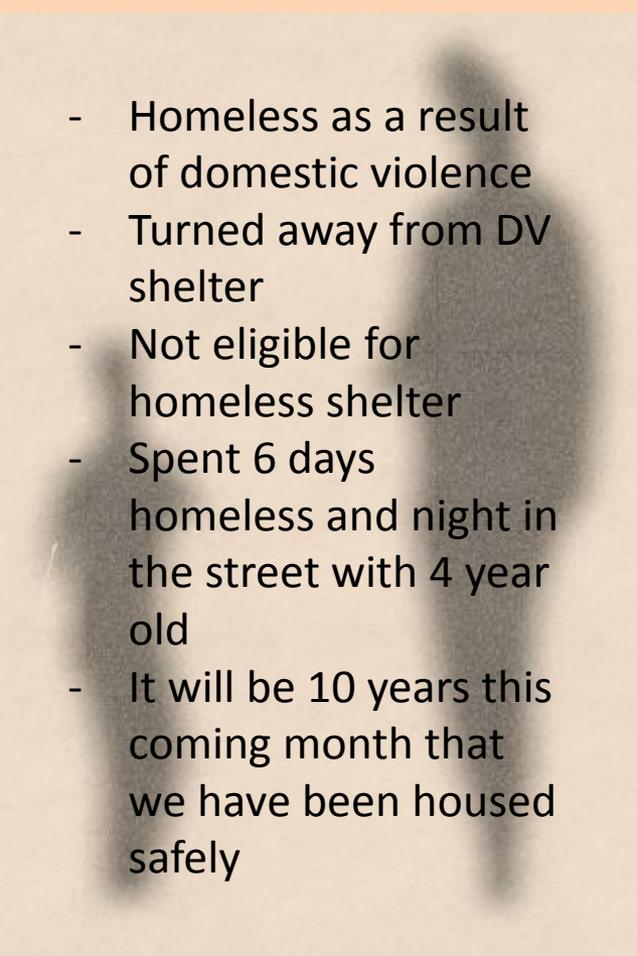
You know, I have to travel sometimes, well I had been living at a supported home and had been gone for a month, I returned to find that everything of mine had been thrown out. **You know what happens when someone throws out your belongings?you no longer belong.** I had nothing to go back to, I had nothing and my trust has been lost I will never go back there for help again.

Kacy's Story – 43 yrs

- Victim of DV
- Turn away from DV Shelter due to capacity
- Bipolar Diagnosis made +++ worse by trauma due to abuse
- Ended up Living alone in market rent place \$800 /month
- Lost F/T job due to Abuse / Bipolar worsening resulting in six week hospitalization
- Spent all \$ / Savings on Hotel and then lived in my van before going to shelter
- Ended up in Homeless Shelter for Women
- Now on ODSP \$1300 / monthly
- Now volunteer for Drop In, to keep involved , avoid being isolated, provides me purpose, I am able to give back and I am provided with Grocery cards for my contributions which is very helpful

Jacqueline's Story – 37yrs

My Story Is:

- Surviving homelessness with a child
 - What helped, what is needed
 - Poverty keeps us down, the stigma holds us back
 - This is my child's story as well
- 
- Homeless as a result of domestic violence
 - Turned away from DV shelter
 - Not eligible for homeless shelter
 - Spent 6 days homeless and night in the street with 4 year old
 - It will be 10 years this coming month that we have been housed safely

Andrea's Story – 51yrs

I'm not going to talk about myself, I am going to talk about what is happening:

- Women don't and aren't encouraged to plan for their future, and that's how they end up in these circumstances
- We have little or no savings and zero insurances
- All our trust is put into being a good person and if I am not on drugs than this won't happen to me
- The truth is women don't make risk free decisions
- The shelter systems present risks and dangers being brought into the shelter
- Shelters have all the resources needed but are not able to eliminate the risk of prostitution, drugs being brought into shelters etc.
- It's not just woman versus woman, it becomes woman versus herself
- Women are taking risks and are at the mercy of strangers
- Things are vastly different from city to city and solutions needs to be different
- You need to put money back into Housing

Women wanted it known....

When you have endured major traumas, your life becomes fractured. On the outside I had become hard and nothing bothered me. It wasn't until after I had my son that I began to have those fractured pieces of myself come back to me, my psychiatrist explained that they were suppressed memories I needed to deal with to heal. The best way I can explain it is like when you break a mirror and it shatters into a hundred pieces, it's as though they are all coming back together into one piece the reflections of yourself in each of them.



While homelessness needs to be everyone's business, it needs to stop becoming a Business!

As a young woman I was raped. I remember the responding officer said to me “You shouldn’t have been out so late!”. **I was homeless.**



A woman with dark hair, wearing a black short-sleeved shirt, black leggings, and a blue apron with a yellow floral pattern, stands next to a makeshift bed. The bed is on a metal cart with a white top, covered with a blue and white floral patterned blanket and a blue pillow. A red bag is on the cart behind the bed. The background is a brick wall with significant peeling white paint. To the right, there is a doorway and a white car parked on the street. The scene is outdoors in bright daylight.

Where is the
safety in all of
this?

“Someone’s child is
sleeping here”





Hidden in Plain View

Changing Times

It's called a:

Wardrobe

(what I've got to wear)

War-drobe

(I have to fight for a place to put my things)

Ward-robe

(what I must wear on my corner)

“When I have no place, what I have has no place”



When we are talking about Women's Homelessness we are talking about Children's Homelessness

- It's hard to get the real figures of women's homelessness because it often involves their children and mom's do what they need to protect their children
- The most marginalized women and children end up in shelters

Resource Less – The Impacts of not Knowing



Solutions & Action

Working Together

- Let's think about the questions we ask, How might we re-frame them
- What approaches might we use to reach women to talk about their homelessness
- How can we adjust current systems using a gendered lens that speaks to women's homelessness
- Our Collective Action – Postcards

What Housing Solutions do you see working?

I imagine a housing solution that is a place of transition. Helping people rebuild their lives, creating connections, providing support, allowing individuals to be a part of and feel valued. Instead of pocketing money for providing shelter beds, if the nominal shelter allowance received could be saved up by the program over a three to four month period a person might be there and then utilized to pay the first and last months rent on a place for them when they are ready to transition out into decent affordable housing.

DO OR DON'T OPEN



“THE QUIETED SPACES”

MEET OUR HIDDEN HOMELESS...

On October 16, 2018 local hotels in Windsor play hosts to the homeless families of our community. The 'lucky ones' - predominantly racialized, minoritized, women and young children.



14 FAMILIES:

25 CHILDREN (DEPENDENTS)

- DOOR#2: Older mom with 2 adult sons, racialized, admitted Sept 14
- DOOR#3: Older mom and young adult daughter, racialized, admitted Oct 1
- DOOR#6: Mom and dad and 2 children
- DOOR#9: Mom with 2 young sons, racialized, admitted Sept 9
- DOOR#14: Young couple, woman currently 6 months pregnant
- DOOR#15: Older couple, racialized, admitted Oct 9
- DOOR#21: Same sex couple, racialized, admitted Sept 26
- DOOR#23: Single young mom with 2 daughters, admitted Sept 26
- DOOR#24: Young couple with 2 children, racialized, admitted Oct 7
- DOOR#25: Single mom with 3 daughters, admitted Aug 12
- DOOR#27: Single mom with 4 children, admitted Oct 9
- DOOR#30: Single mom with 2 children, racialized, admitted Oct 3
- DOOR#31: Single mom with 3 children, racialized
- DOOR#205: Single indigenous mom with 2 children

**The Right Honourable Prime Minister
Mr. Justin Trudeau
Office of the Prime Minister
80 Wellington Street
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A2**

Dear Prime Minister Trudeau,

When we talk about women's homelessness, it almost always means we are talking about children's homelessness.

The effect is harshly felt by the most vulnerable of society.

You have the power to make a difference, we are calling upon you to do so!

Sincerely Yours,

**THERE IS AN
ART TO WOMEN'S
HOMELESSNESS**



GET THE REAL PICTURE...

There is an art to women's homelessness, deceiving ourselves and those around us to believe that everything is okay when nothing is as it should be.



Photo captured in the streets of Windsor, ON on August 31, 2018.



**The Right Honourable Prime Minister
Mr. Justin Trudeau
Office of the Prime Minister
80 Wellington Street
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A2**

Dear Prime Minister Trudeau,

There IS a place for the state in the bedrooms of the nation when private lives have to become public displays.

Housing is a HUMAN RIGHT!

Sincerely Yours,



Thank You for
Participating Today
& Helping to Change
Tomorrow!