



# What Must Change? Centring lived experience



Leo Moose & Lee Anne Deegan

CAEH CONFERENCE PRESENTATION 2022

# Agenda

Welcome

Meet the presenters

Project background

Goals Today

Leo's journey

The lived reality of homelessness in Thompson, MB

What must change





## Leo Moose

I am originally from South Indian Lake, but I lived in Tataskweyak Cree Nation in Northern Manitoba for 24 years. I have nine beautiful children and 17 grandkids and one great grandchild. I was one of many people displaced by hydro dam development in the region

I worked as a health care worker in Tataskweyak for four years. I also worked as a registered guide and in public works.

I was one of the participants the photovoice project Housing and Covid-19 in Thompson Study



## **Lee Anne Deegan**

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I am originally from the Okanagan in BC. I have two wonderful children. I moved from Prince George, British Columbia in 2016 to teach in the Northern Social Work Program in Thompson. I continue to teach and am also the Acting Director for the program. Since arriving in Thompson, I have worked on several projects focused on ending homelessness in the region. I am a member of the research team for this project that includes Marleny Bonnycastle, Colin Bonnycastle and Judy Hughes.



*We cannot discuss the issue of homelessness in Northern Manitoba without acknowledging the past and present systemic harms purposely imposed on Indigenous people in the region.*

*The photovoice took place on Treaty 5 lands, the traditional territory of the Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation and the homeland of Dene people and Metis Nation.*

Land Acknowledgement

## Background

This took project place in Thompson Manitoba, a small community (under 13,000 people) on the traditional territory of the Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation. The community of Thompson has amongst the highest rates of chronic homelessness and overrepresentation of Indigenous peoples in Canada. This project came about as a result of stakeholders in the community of Thompson seeking to understand the responses to homelessness in the community during the pandemic. The research project set out to understand challenges and creative responses in the community and to identify strategies and supports that were employed during the pandemic.



# Photovoice



**PART OF A LARGER CBPR PROJECT THAT ENGAGED SERVICE PROVIDERS AND THOSE WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE OF HOMELESSNESS**



**A FOCUS OF THE PROJECT WAS TO IDENTIFY WHAT WAS MOST/LEAST HELPFUL TO PEOPLE NAVIGATING SERVICES DURING THE PANDEMIC.**



**THE GOAL OF THE PHOTOVOICE WAS TO HELP PEOPLE WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE SHARE THEIR KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE STATE OF THINGS IN THOMPSON DURING THE PANDEMIC**

## Depicting the reality of homelessness in Thompson

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- Much gratitude to all the participants who gave their time and shared their knowledge of homelessness in Thompson
- Excluding the pictures of the presenters, all the pictures on the slides are taken by participants from the photovoice



# Goals today

- The aim of this session is to present a lived experience viewpoint on living unsheltered during the COVID pandemic in Thompson, Manitoba.
- By participating today, you will gain understanding of helpful approaches for engagement with people with lived experience of homelessness in change processes.



# Leo's journey:

- Homeless for 3 years
- Being homeless in Thompson isn't healthy.
- You don't belong here wasn't the right message

# Leo's journey: Moving to temporary transitional housing during COVID

- Moved to COVID transitional housing
- The worker's approach was so different
- People came and asked if I needed help, or how my health was...



# Leo's journey: New doors opened up

- Suddenly I had the time to see that I had a future
- I was referred to another transitional program
- I finally felt freedom there



# Lived reality: Mixed messages during COVID

- Some people treated everyone like they were a walking disease
- It was harder to get anywhere during COVID
- There was no communication
- Many of us had no way to get past the barriers created to keep the community safe



# Lived reality during COVID: No home to isolate

- During COVID people were told to go home and isolate if they had symptoms
- The only alternatives available those of us who are not in housing in Thompson or can't or won't stay at the shelter are bins and tarps or cardboard or perhaps in the back entrance or hallways, the 'icebox', wherever they can access to sleep....for many this did not change during COVID





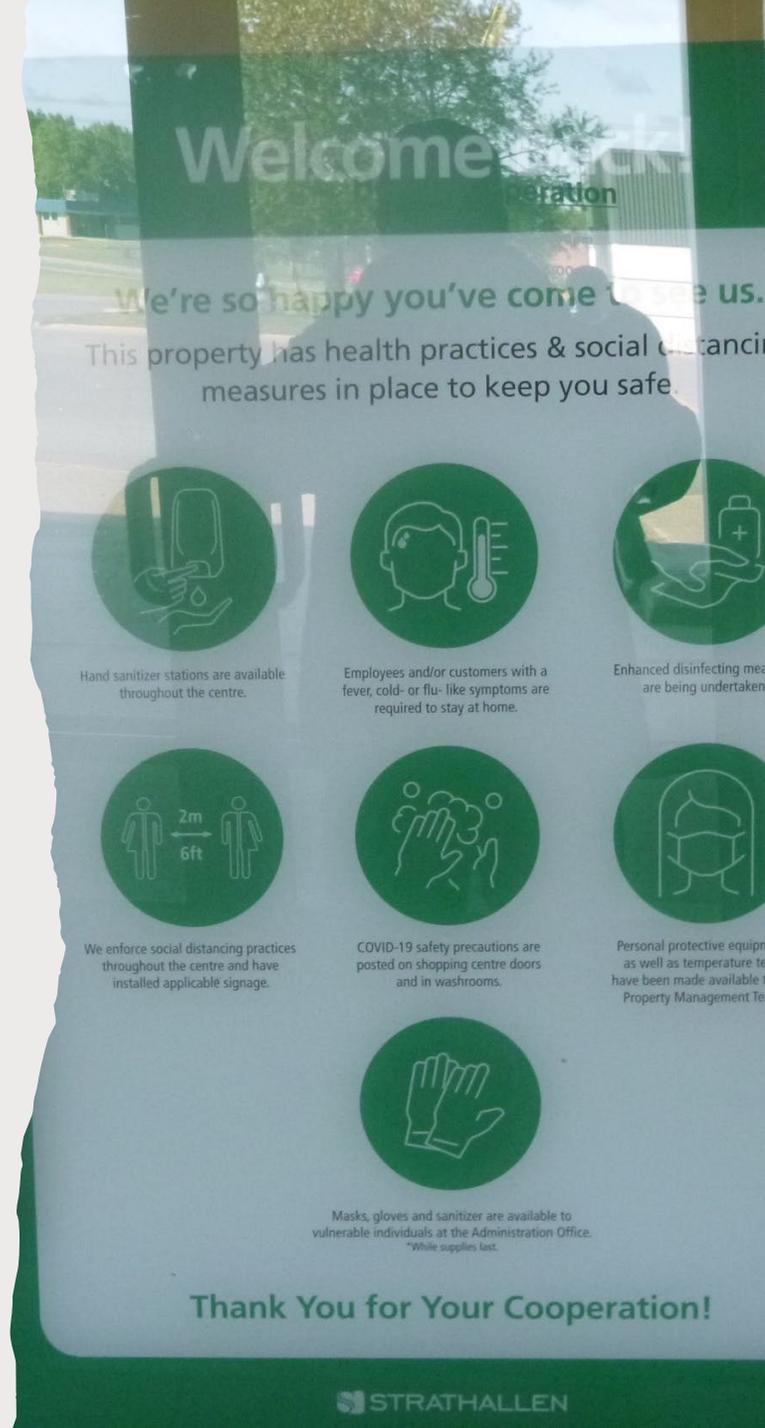
Lived reality: No place  
for hygiene

- COVID cautioned everyone to wash their hands
- In Thompson there is almost nowhere to go to take care of this basic hygiene, if you appear to be homeless you are frequently blocked from accessing public facilities by locks, barricades or security, this was far worse during the pandemic

# Lived reality: Staying healthy

People received a lot of messages about staying healthy during the pandemic:

- There were almost no health care workers coming into the shelter until COVID
- Post-Covid restrictions there are still many people experiencing homelessness who need health care



Welcome to the Strathallen Shopping Centre

We're so happy you've come to see us.  
This property has health practices & social distancing measures in place to keep you safe.



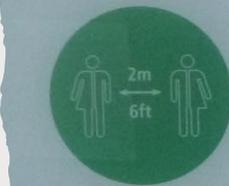
Hand sanitizer stations are available throughout the centre.



Employees and/or customers with a fever, cold- or flu- like symptoms are required to stay at home.



Enhanced disinfecting measures are being undertaken



We enforce social distancing practices throughout the centre and have installed applicable signage.



COVID-19 safety precautions are posted on shopping centre doors and in washrooms.



Personal protective equipment as well as temperature testing have been made available to customers. Property Management Team



Masks, gloves and sanitizer are available to vulnerable individuals at the Administration Office.  
\*While supplies last.

Thank You for Your Cooperation!

# Lived reality: Keeping safe

People on the street are not safe

- They must stick together for protection
- “Security” often worked against people’s safety during COVID fining people who were together and/or dumping their alcohol
- Some security were aggressive adding to the violence people already experience on the street

Keeping our  
**Community Safe**

and wellbeing of our community is  
during these extraordinary times.  
all help to keep each other safe.

if you have fever, a new cough or  
difficulty breathing  
or

**just returned to Canada**

**DO NOT ENTER THE STORE**

**Self Isolate!**  
**Call Public Health at**  
**811**

# Lived reality: Exposure and alcohol

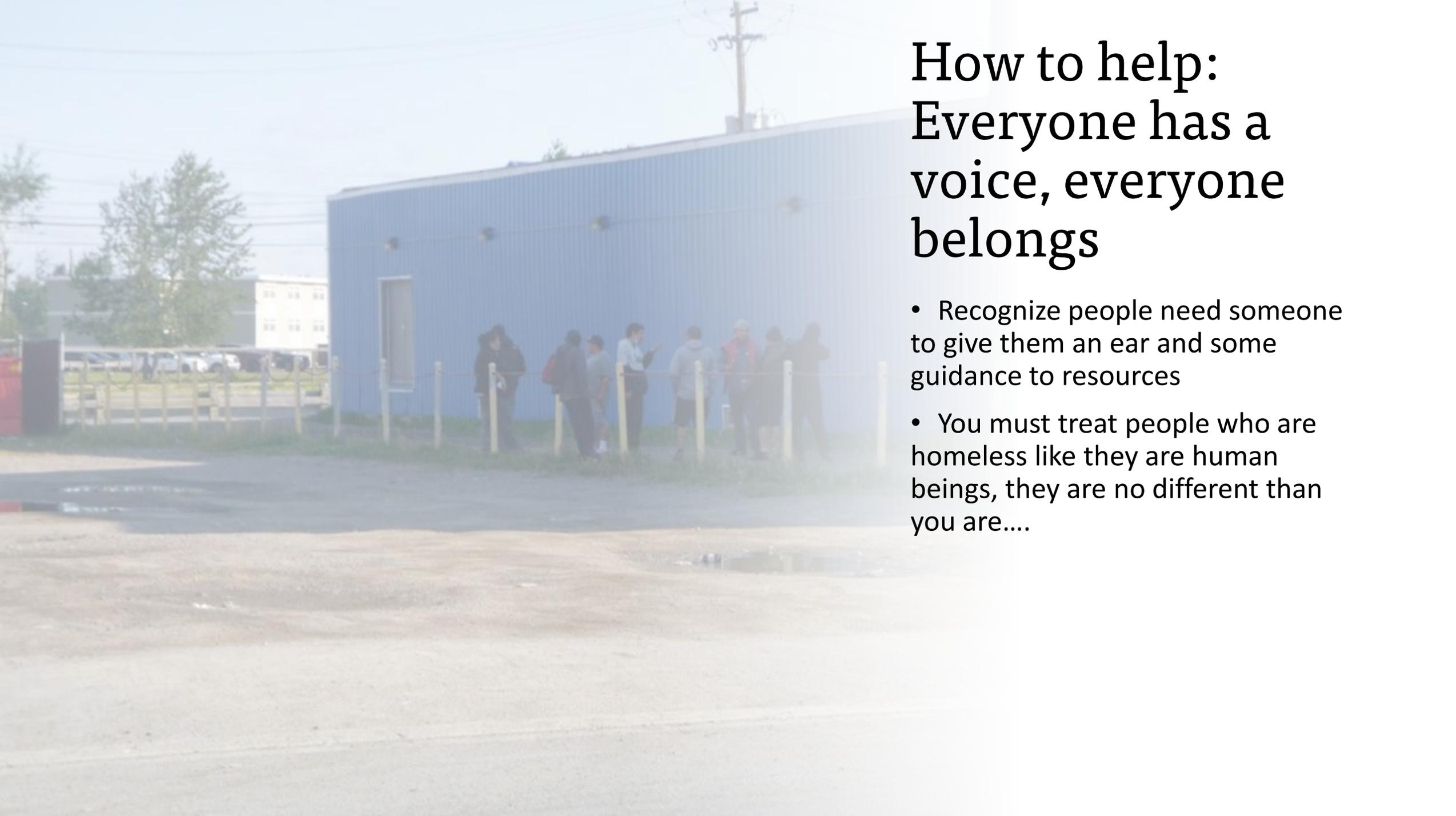
- People experiencing homelessness too often die as a result of exposure during extreme weather, but they also die as result of not being able to access beverage alcohol
- Many turn to alternatives like hair spray, aloe gels and such leading to serious health issues and for some loss of life
- For two weeks, those in isolation for COVID, had alcohol provided by a health professional





# Lived reality: Lost connections

- “I don't know what I feel like I'm lost because we lost so much during [these] couple years that it just gets to you, the loneliness the sadness sinks in it seeps like right in and just destroys you just mix [of] emotions, I guess”
- “We weren't allowed to go home. Zero total lockdown. We weren't allowed to...Like, like our communities were all on lockdown. Now I think it was the third wave and we wanted to be able to visit our family. And we weren't allowed to leave Thompson to like to go back home and visit”

A photograph of a blue metal building with a group of about ten people standing in a line outside. The people are wearing various clothing, including jackets and hats, suggesting a cool environment. The building has a single door visible. In the background, there are trees and a utility pole. The foreground is a dirt and gravel area.

# How to help: Everyone has a voice, everyone belongs

- Recognize people need someone to give them an ear and some guidance to resources
- You must treat people who are homeless like they are human beings, they are no different than you are....



# How to help: Access to healthcare & housing

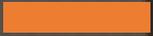
People should be regularly interacting with health professionals where they are, health care is a human right

No one should have to live indefinitely in transitional housing, at the shelter or in a bin or otherwise, housing should be accessible to everyone, it's their human right

Security and  
police should  
not be a  
substitute for  
services to  
people

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# How to help: Enhanced supports

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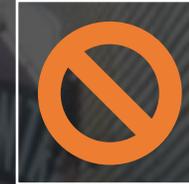
There aren't enough people with the skills to help:

- People need to have training on how to communicate with people, how to listen
- Programs need to be in right relationship with the people
- People need interpreters – Cree, Dene, people need to be able to speak in their own language
- People need to ask what people need and help them to access the resources and supports they want or need whether it is medical, educational, jobs, internet...

# Message for leaders



The photovoice participant's message to leaders is for all people to live in a healthy society everyone must be able to live a healthy life.



We must stop ignoring the realities people are experiencing when they are homeless.



Involve those of us with lived experience and we will help you to find solutions



***Thank you for listening***