

LIVING ON THE OUTSIDE

a photo exhibit exploring the realities of home







LIVING ON THE OUTSIDE

a photo exhibit exploring the realities of home

Living On the Outside is a community-based photo-voice project. This exhibition catalogue accompanies an exhibit of photographs held at Artists on Elgin, Sudbury, Ontario, in the spring of 2011.

The photographs were taken by homeless and near homeless persons in Sudbury to show the nature of their living circumstances. Each photograph tells its own story about how “sleeping rough” and sub-standard housing affect mental health. The participant photographers show us their emotions, challenges, and strengths which help us to step into their everyday lives. The themes in the photographs are echoed in narratives about the impact of disordered housing on homeless and near homeless people. The images reveal hidden aspects of life at the margins of our city.

Take a picture. That's what I did. Took a picture. And now they have to see it. JAGGER

Homeless people in Sudbury, like Jagger, inspired this photovoice project. In various studies since 2000, absolutely homeless or near homeless people readily shared their experiences of living on the streets or of their precarious housing circumstances. Researchers from Laurentian University and the Sudbury and District Health Unit saw the photovoice method both as a research tool and a way to create materials that would allow for a better understanding about the forms of homelessness that exist in Sudbury. This project used photovoice—a participant action method—to involve people affected by

homelessness as photographers and narrators of their living circumstances. During the summer of 2007, 13 absolutely homeless and precariously housed people took photographs of their living conditions and housing. The participants were six women and seven men, Anglophones, Francophones and Indigenous people, between the ages of 28 and 55. In interviews, they explained the meanings behind the photographs they had taken. We have not used their real names; all participant names in this publication are pseudonyms.



Organized by the Poverty, Homelessness and Migration project at Laurentian University, the exhibit includes 40 to 60 photographs in print and digital formats as well as the narratives of participants. The photographs and accompanying texts reveal various kinds of problems with housing, including the challenges of “sleeping rough”, unsanitary conditions, lack of privacy, security and space, and problems with landlords. The images reveal hidden aspects of life at the margins of our city and the participants’ narratives communicate their views of local residents who have never experienced the living circumstances of homelessness.

A research report showing the range of problems in housing circumstances within the City of Greater Sudbury was presented to various organizations to raise

awareness and advocate for change. Several groups of people experiencing homelessness have provided input into the results and made recommendations for change. The main goal of this exhibit is to take action on the wishes of participant photographers, like Jagger, who want their photos and narratives to be seen by local residents and to provide the impetus for taking steps toward real change.

Carol Kauppi

Carol Kauppi, Director
Poverty, Homelessness and Migration
Pauvreté, sans-abrisme et migration
ᑎᑎᑎᑎᑎᑎᑎᑎ ᑎᑎᑎᑎᑎᑎᑎᑎ ᑎᑎᑎᑎᑎᑎᑎᑎ ᑎᑎᑎᑎᑎᑎᑎᑎ




We use to sleep under this trailer... There use to be two trailers, where I got buried under snow one year, yeah, that same place. Anyway, we were sleeping there and this big, terrible thunder storm rolled in, was hail, right. And the cops came—they knew we were under there. There was about seven of us, ladies and guys. Most of them are passed now. And the cops told us to get out of there. I said, “it’s soaking wet out.” The cops said, “Go, or you’re going to jail.” So we all took off in a bunch and we just ran to the tall grass, we all dropped and went to sleep in the soaking rain. Just curled up, eh. They couldn’t find us, eh, in the rain. “Hey, there’s some of them!” the cops were yelled. We’re just sitting there giggling, laughing, all soaked. We went to sleep like that, too.

It’s like you almost have to be half human to survive out there. Well, you have to be half human. Half animal.

WOLFE





When you've got no place to
go, that's where you go. SHAUNA

This a bridge where a lot of people go

to do drugs, but I use that place to sleep. I've also been sleeping by the train tracks, there's a little trail. It's in the brush, so it's well hidden. There's another spot in between a store and this little restaurant—a dumpster. If it was raining I would go in the dumpster and sleep there. But, I stopped sleeping there after another street worker was stabbed at the back of that building.

There's a trailer where a lot of Native people sleep. Every time I get a chance I go under that trailer, to see if anyone is not well or dead, because it would be a place that's overlooked. People have dragged couches in there. And they've got sleeping bags. Actually it's quite cozy. I slept there a couple of times, but it was noisy because of drinking people.

Once, one of the Mission workers saw me outside on a cold night and he says, **“Why are you here?” I told him, “Because I have no place to go.”** He says, “Well, you could come in the Mission, we're open 24 hours and it's called Operation Out of the Cold.” We're allowed to sleep there on a chair. So I would sleep there most times when it was too cold to be outside.

My friend owned an apartment and he knows what it is to be homeless. So, he would allow anyone who came in through the door to sleep in a bed if there's a bed, on the couch if there's a couch, on the floor where there's room on the floor. And so, I spent a couple of months on that bed when no one else was using it.

I think, at the time of my homelessness, when I have had to be in those places, I'm just so numb that I don't feel anything. My goal is to have a home. I would like to have a roof over my head with four walls that I can paint and watch the paint dry, whatever. **I have a terminal illness and the place I'm looking for is the place where I want to die.** I don't want to die in the street, I want to die in my home. I want pretty furniture, pretty white bedroom furnishings, and that's where I want to be for my last days. So that's what I'm looking for.

I'm still homeless to this day. I'm just tired of knocking on doors and being rejected. I go apply for an apartment, and the landlords will say “no” because they see me standing on the street corner. It makes me mad that they're refusing me. I mean **I'm a person and I should be allowed to have a roof over my head. It's prejudice, and for what?**

SHAUNA

That's my bedroom window. I can't open it because I'm scared. You know, I don't know who could be climbing through. I can't hear if I'm sound asleep, so my fear is of anyone climbing in. I just don't feel safe. And that window is also my fire escape 'cause there is no other exit.

NITA



I recall a bedding...
I had a tent.
A nice, beautiful tent.
A nice sleeping bag.
I had a beautiful park.
I had everything up in the bush—
Until the cops came over and trashed my place.
But, ah, the night, the day after that,
I kinda had, well, I had an idea where to go
Because, you know, it's underneath the trailers.
And it's out of the rain.
I got sick for a few days because of that.

I always leave some of my things up there.
I even had a fire, camp, everything going.
I had a grill.
A coffee maker.
And they just stepped on everything that I had.



I ended up moving on.
I felt down.
Felt sad—now that's my place.
That's my house.
That's my property.
I see a lot of people camping over there.
I didn't want to go.
I don't, I don't want to cause no friction.
I gotta keep on looking forward,
instead of going back.

I get it again.
I do it again.
I go back next, at the end of the month
Go get myself another tent, another park.
I go somewhere else this time.
I go hide myself
In the real bush.

JAGGER



It's discouraging, you know, very difficult. 'Cause if you don't have an apartment, how are you supposed to get a job? How you supposed to do anything, if you don't have a place where you sleep every night? If you don't have a main base where you can go home, shower, eat.

So it's pretty sad, eh? In a country this rich, you know, this prosperous, to have people really living like that.

ALAIN



There are days when I don't feel like going home at all—with the condition of the apartment that I'm living in. You don't know what it's going to be like when you walk through the door. You don't know what you're going to see along the way, or what you're going to find.

I moved to this place three years ago. Makes me sick. There's mostly yelling and screaming and garbage. It's hard to come in here. It's terrible. People leave their things, alcohol or what ever it is, used condoms, here and there. I see needles there in the stairwell.

The stairwell case is broken. No railing. Often people slip. No railing, and no lights 'cause the light switch don't work and it's pitch dark. Someone keeps taking the light bulbs. So if you put in new ones, a few days

later they're gone. You have to feel your way up. You just have to go slowly.

The doorframe is busted open. It had a door handle on it, it did, but now it's gone. I came home one day or one night, I looked, and the handle was gone. Someone had kicked it. And anyone on the outside could just get right in.

The ceiling of the kitchen has rain damage.

After it rains, it stinks. I don't turn the light on when it's wet out, when its leaking through there. Well, I don't really cook in there anyways, I usually eat out. At the Mission, the soup kitchen. I try to stay out of the kitchen. Yeah, who knows what's going to fall in your food.

There's a pretty big hole in the wall. I called the superintendent and he said, "Oh yeah, oh yeah, okay, I'll look into it." But he never did. Never. He don't even think about it again.



I can't stand it anymore. Aaah, it's just a disgusting building. The landlord could do better than that. People make complaints. Even the health inspector came. But nothing's done about it.

It's a cold building in the wintertime. Yeah, I think it's a piece of dirt. There's one window has glass, only one.

It's not a home. It doesn't sound like a home. It's unsafe. We need more houses that are affordable. Geared to income are the best, but I can't get in yet. It's a big mess, the housing we need. What's next for me, after this, I don't know.

OWEN



These landlords are dealing with people's psychology, people's well being, people's mental health, physical health. **It's shameful.**

ARCHER

I sleep with my lights on
so the cockroaches won't come out

I don't sleep very much at all
can't keep any food open
have to keep my light on all the time
I got those things that I keep over my eyes—
put them on so I can sleep
I have no choice but to take that apartment

I can't handle living here anymore
I'm very depressed
cry a lot
don't sleep
feel dirty
I feel not even part of society anymore
I don't even have people that come over

I have no choice but to take that apartment
I'll be on the street

I try to stay out of the apartment as much as I can
I need something else more liveable
But, I have no place else to move into
I don't feel a thing.

JEANNE



I wish I could catch the stench for you on camera.

Because this area really really stinks of urine. It's unbelievable. This place should be shut down as far as I'm concerned. Right now there's six tenants living in twelve rooms. It's very depressing.

At times I feel that I'm better off living on the outside than I am on the inside of this building.

Out on the streets—I'm better off out on the streets than I am in this place. Especially with the money they're charging for these rooms. Four hundred dollars a month, and that's just a bed. It's despicable.

PHIL

I hope that these photos are gonna make a little change, because I know that I need a break, and I know that there's someone else that needs a break even more than I do. Give us a chance, that's all. SHAUNA



It's not because we want to be out here, it's because they put us here. This is where the city puts you when they don't want you around. This is their answer and I hope they understand that it's not human, not what life's supposed to be.

I've been on the street since I was seventeen years old. I'm 38 now. None—none of this is fun. No, I'm not here because I wanted to be here.

People are ignorant when it comes to homeless people. When they see somebody sleeping on the side of the road, they throw stuff. They treat them like shit. They beat them up. Like, is that what it's really all about? Why? Because you've got a place and we don't? You think you're so much better than us. You know what? **One of these days you might be right where I am.** So who are you to judge? And, you know, it's our government that allows people to live out here.

I really want to go home at night. I want a nice place.

I want a girlfriend. I want a family, you know.

Now, people should realize that winter is coming. They need to do something about it. Because we got a tough winter coming up here. It's gonna be cold. Start checking the parks. **Start taking people out of the street, instead of putting them in it.**

See, Sudbury, the people are walking with their high noses, you know. They're going up, driving by Elgin. But they're driving with their eyes closed.

They're driving by, that's right, with their eyes closed. Walking with their eyes closed and driving with their eyes closed. Ignore the problem.

JAGGER

Acknowledgements

We pay tribute to the participants who took photographs and told us about their experiences of homelessness. Without their willingness to share a part of their lives, this photovoice project could not have been conducted. Each of the participants gave us a unique perspective on the living circumstances of homelessness. Together, they have offered powerful images and compelling stories about the challenges of deep poverty, marginalization and struggles for survival in the midst of affluence. We dedicate this exhibition catalogue to homeless and near homeless people in Sudbury.

Jessica Hein graciously shared her gifts in design, curated the exhibition, and designed, edited and produced this exhibition catalogue. The essential contribution of Ray DeMey is greatly appreciated. He provided timely technical assistance with the production of high resolution images; his assistance kept the project moving forward on schedule. The staff of the Poverty, Homelessness and Migration Project provided extraordinary support for this exhibition. In

particular, we thank Cassandra Sigurdson, Administrative Assistant. We are grateful to Artists on Elgin for its helpful advice and support and for providing access to the exhibit space. In particular, we thank Muriel Checkeris for her assistance. We thank Amy Boyd for contributing many hours to this project as part of her MSW Advanced Practicum. We acknowledge the extensive collaboration with Dr. Vera Etches, former Associate Medical Officer of Health at the Sudbury and District Health Unit, as well as SDHU staff, on the 2007 photovoice project.

To all of the above individuals and several others whose names cannot be listed and who have assisted in one way or another, we feel very much indebted.

The activities for this exhibit have been funded in part by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council.



MIND
LIFE



YOU
MY DICK SAWS



