Neha Review Panel Submission

By CH

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Introduction

This submission documents the lived experiences of housing precarity and homelessness in Northern Ontario as represented by the first-person narratives of CH, AP, BB, and MC: four women and gender-diverse people with distinct but related backgrounds.
CH's affidavit provides a frank account of her struggles with addiction, gender identity, and Autism while navigating the social services system. The interviews of AP, BB,
and MC explore themes of substance use, domestic abuse, mental health challenges, and the limitations of available housing resources. These accounts highlight systemic failures and barriers faced by women, Indigenous people, and gender-diverse individuals and the critical need for coordinated, culturally competent, and gender-affirming housing support services, especially in Northern Ontario. The overarching aim is to underscore the government's duty to ensure equitable access to housing for multiply marginalized populations in a timely way.

CH's Story

CH's life is a profound and deeply moving account of resilience, identity, and systemic failure. Her story, detailed in her own words in Appendix A, chronicles her journey through neurodivergence, gender dysphoria, addiction, abusive relationships, poverty, and housing precarity. It also highlights the ways in which social services failed to adequately address her needs, leaving her to navigate a labyrinth of challenges largely on her own.

Early Life and Identity Struggles

CH was born in Kirkland Lake, a small northern town in Ontario, and was assigned male at birth. From a young age, she felt a profound disconnect with her assigned gender, though she lacked the language or representation to understand her identity as a transgender lesbian. Growing up Métis, she later became a citizen of the Métis Nation of Ontario ("MNO") in 2005, a cultural identity that would later become central to her sense of self. However, her childhood was marked by confusion and alienation, compounded by her neurodivergence as an Autistic person with ADHD.

Despite having supportive, middle-class parents, CH struggled to fit into the neurotypical and heteronormative world around her. She worked tirelessly to mask her true self, participating in activities like music, drama, and science, while excelling academically. Yet, she felt isolated and misunderstood, unable to reconcile her internal struggles with the expectations placed upon her.

The Onset of Addiction and Academic Success

CH's introduction to alcohol began in her teenage years, as she observed its ability to ease social anxiety in others. By the time she left for university in Toronto at 19, alcohol had become a coping mechanism for her crippling social anxiety and self-doubt. Despite her addiction, she excelled academically, earning a biochemistry degree and later pursuing a Ph.D. in chemistry. However, her Autistic tendencies and discomfort with the pharmaceutical industry led her to abandon her Ph.D. and redirect her focus toward law, inspired by the growing recognition of Métis rights in Canada in the early 2000s.

CH attended one of Canada's top law schools, where she coped well academically and socially, becoming Editor-in-Chief of the *Indigenous Law Journal* and working with the Law Society of Upper Canada on Métis-related events. She vowed to advance the rights of Indigenous people, a commitment she upheld during her legal career. However, her alcoholism persisted, undermining her ability to fully realize her potential.

Professional Success and Personal Collapse

After law school, CH returned to Northern Ontario, where she worked on significant legal cases, including representing Indigenous non-profits and negotiating self-government agreements for First Nations communities. She also taught courses at Seneca College and Canadore College to help make ends meet.

Despite her professional success, her addiction worsened. In 2014, her struggles came to a head when a judge reported her to the Law Society of Upper Canada for missing a court date, suspecting substance abuse. Instead of offering support, the Law Society of Upper Canada demanded access to her medical records and pressured her to sign an Undertaking admitting incapacity. To date, this Undertaking has ended her legal career, stripping her of her professional identity and financial stability.

Around the same time, CH entered an abusive relationship with a woman who both enabled and exacerbated her addiction. The relationship culminated in a fabricated 911 call accusing CH of assault, leading to her arrest and a protracted legal battle. Although she was exonerated and the charges were eventually withdrawn, the damage to her reputation as a domestic violence lawyer for women was irreparable. Her self-esteem has never totally recovered, either.

Housing Precarity and Systemic Failures

CH's descent into poverty and homelessness began after losing her legal career without outstanding student loans, eventually declaring bankruptcy. She relied on Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) benefits, which were insufficient to cover safe and stable housing. She briefly found solace in a harm reduction home in North Bay, where she stayed sober for nine months and began exploring her gender identity. However, the closure of the home due to funding cuts forced her back into precarious housing situations.

CH's attempts to access social services were met with repeated failures. Addiction treatment programs were often ill-suited to her needs as a neurodivergent, transgender person. Indigenous-specific programs excluded her because she was Métis rather than First Nations. LGBTQ+ services were geared toward younger individuals and failed to address the unique challenges of a middle-aged transgender woman. Women's shelters felt inaccessible due to her male-like presentation and fear of being perceived as a predator, while men's shelters were unsafe and incompatible with her identity.

Her struggles with housing precarity reached a nadir when she was forced to give up her cherished apartment in North Bay to meet the requirements of a recovery program at Monarch in Sudbury. The program itself proved intolerable due to transphobia, homophobia, and a lack of accommodations for her chronic pain and neurodivergence. She eventually fled the program, spending weeks in cheap hotels and on the streets of Sudbury, drinking heavily and facing constant danger.

Rediscovery of Identity and Cultural Connection

CH's turning point came when she reconnected with her Métis heritage through the Métis Nation of Ontario ("MNO"). The MNO provided culturally appropriate, gender-affirming care, including psychotherapy and outpatient addiction treatment. With their support and the unwavering love of her mother, CH began to rebuild her life. She embraced her identity as a transgender, Two-Spirit woman and started hormone replacement therapy. She also discovered she was Autistic; a realization that helped her make sense of her lifelong struggles.

CH's recovery was bolstered by her involvement in community leadership. She undertook training in peer support, Mental Health First Aid, and crisis intervention. She became a leader in organizations like Autistics4Autistics Ontario and TransPeerNetwork. She was also elected, and currently serves as, Chair of the Two-Spirit Council of the Me´tis Nation of Ontario. These roles allowed her to advocate for others while continuing her own healing journey.

Reflections on Systemic Failures

CH's story underscores the systemic failures of social services in addressing the intersectional needs of individuals like her. As a neurodivergent, transgender, Two-Spirit woman, she faced barriers at every turn:

1. **Neurodivergence**: Her Autism and ADHD went undiagnosed for much of her life, leaving her without the accommodations and understanding she needed.

2. **Gender Dysphoria**: The lack of accessible, gender-affirming care delayed her transition and compounded her mental health struggles.

3. **Addiction**: Treatment programs often relied on abstinence-based models that were incompatible with her needs, and medical professionals frequently dismissed her as drug-seeking. The harm reduction home that served her well was defunded by the province.

4. **Abusive Relationships**: Social services failed to protect her from abusive partners, leaving her vulnerable to further harm.

5. **Poverty and Housing Precarity**: ODSP benefits were insufficient to cover safe housing, and social housing waitlists were prohibitively long.

6. **Cultural Exclusion**: Indigenous (First Nation-specific) programs often excluded Me´tis people, and mainstream services failed to provide culturally appropriate care.

Conclusion

CH's life is a testament to her resilience and determination in the face of overwhelming adversity. Despite being failed by multiple systems, she has emerged as a leader and advocate for marginalized communities. Her story highlights the urgent need for systemic reforms to ensure that social services are inclusive, intersectional, and equipped to meet the diverse needs of individuals like her.

Interviews

Executive Summary

The three appended interviews, conducted by CH, document the housing precarity and homelessness experiences of three women and gender-diverse people in Northern Ontario. Each interview explores individual challenges related to gender, identity, and systemic barriers in accessing safe and affordable housing. Interviewees share personal stories of couch surfing, squatting, substance abuse, and difficulties navigating social services. A recurring theme involves how gender, Indigenous identity, and neurodiversity can complicate access to resources and perpetuate housing instability. Additionally, the narratives emphasize the intersections of gender, Indigeneity, queerness, neurodiversity, and socioeconomic status in shaping housing experiences.

The interviewees, anonymized as AP, BB, and MC, share their encounters with homelessness, housing precarity, addiction, mental health challenges, and gender-based discrimination. AP's interview explores difficulties accessing services due to identity complexities and experiences with abuse and survival, while BB recounts couch-surfing with her children after fleeing an abusive relationship and navigating social services. MC discusses her experiences with homelessness and addiction, ultimately finding support through Indigenous services after relocating to a new town. These personal stories provide a comprehensive picture of the systemic barriers faced by women seeking safe and affordable housing. Justice can only be done to these stories by reading them in full.

Overview

Key Themes & Ideas Evinced by the Interviews

1. **Systemic Barriers & Categorization Difficulties:** A major theme is the difficulty individuals face when they don't fit neatly into pre-defined categories for housing assistance. AP articulated this powerfully: "I never fit into any of the boxes that you have to tick-off that can help one get housing." She explains how her Indigenous status, lack of religious affiliation, and neurodiversity create barriers to accessing specific programs. This highlights a rigid system that fails to account for the complexities of individual circumstances. This can lead to being “not queer enough” or not “indigenous enough” to qualify for certain programs.
2. **Gender-Specific Vulnerabilities:** The interviews emphasize that women and gender-diverse people encounter distinct vulnerabilities related to housing. AP notes, "The only reason I was able to get into that hotel was because I was with a man." She also suggests that she felt safer on the streets *because* of being with a man, implying protection that would not be afforded otherwise. This is further compounded by the fact, as AP states, that there are many situations on the street, “but the women are committing sex acts they don't want to commit, to get their drugs, and for safe places to stay.”
3. **Abuse and Violence as Drivers of Homelessness:** All three interviewees referenced abuse and violence as factors impacting housing stability. BB left an abusive partner and subsequently experienced couch surfing and difficulties accessing prioritized housing due to the abuse being primarily mental and

emotional, rather than physical. She was told that "because there was no actual evidence or proof [of physical violence] and that I was [only] mentally abused, they can't bump me up on the list." AP described escaping a predatory and abusive situation with another woman, only to fall into another cycle of unstable housing.

4. **Mental Health & Addiction:** Mental health issues and addiction are intertwined with housing instability. AP described a pattern of drug co-dependencies and a nervous breakdown that exacerbated her housing precarity. Both AP and MC discuss their recovery from drug and alcohol addiction as well as their mental illnesses. BB also mentioned having several mental health issues which were weaponized by her previous partner to manipulate her and keep her stuck in her housing situation.

5. **Impact of Childhood Trauma:** AP and BB both talked about how childhood trauma affected them into adulthood. In AP's case, her family's emotional unavailability and dysfunction made it so she was developmentally delayed by around "five to seven years." This made it hard to navigate important things like school and money; instead, this lead her to a life on the streets.

6. **The Critical Role of Community & Support Networks:** All the interviewees emphasized the importance of community and support networks in navigating housing precarity. While BB primarily relied on friends, and MC accessed services through the Métis Nation of Ontario and other Indigenous organizations. AP found community in Kensington Market, but never fully let others in. She mentions, "I found Kensington Market, but I wasn't willing to be vulnerable... So nobody would ever know what I was doing." This underscores the importance of both having access to support and being willing to accept it. MC felt that moving from Sudbury to Kirkland Lake gave her an opportunity to make fresh relationships where she was able to be the best version of herself.

7. **The Housing System's Inadequacies:** The interviews reveal significant inadequacies in the housing and social service systems. BB was told by Ontario Works because she is employed "they pretty much told me we can't help you with anything." Furthermore, she was told by [Social Services] that because there was "no actual evidence or proof [of physical violence] and that I was [only] mentally abused, they can't bump me up on the list." BB and AP were on ODSP, but even that was not enough to ensure stable housing. MC described CMHA as "a joke" and emphasized the importance of the MNO and Mino M'shki-ki for her. AP noted the judgement and the lack of emotional help for those struggling with drug addiction. The government was not being helpful to them, and they relied on a mix of friends, family, and sheer luck to overcome these obstacles.

8. **Long-Term Impacts & Fears:** Even after securing stable housing, the experience of precarity continues to affect these women. BB is "honestly terrified to leave the apartment that [she has]" due to anxiety about finding another affordable and suitable place for her family. MC felt that she was clinging to her home as a symbol of stability that she did not want to lose but was unsure if that was healthy. Both women's children were aware of the fear, leading to additional stress within the family.

9. **Intersectionality:** AP is the only interviewee to use the term explicitly, but the interviews all show that being marginalized and not fitting into society because of

neurodiversity, Indigeneity, struggles with mental illness, or single motherhood can intersect with the struggle to find adequate and safe housing. “And like that whole pie of intersectionality too. And like the more of those things that you don't fit, the worst off you are.”

Illustrative Quotes

- **AP on fitting into boxes:** "I never fit into any of the boxes that you have to tick-off that can help one get housing."
- **BB on violence:** "… because there was no actual evidence or proof [of physical violence] and that I was [only] mentally abused, they can't bump me up on the list."
- **MC on the importance of community and Two Spirit mentors:** "And Johnny, well... he was there to help even when he was not."
- **BB on the lasting impacts of housing precarity:** "I'm honestly terrified to leave the apartment that I have [now]."

Recommendations & Implications for the Human Rights Review

- **Highlight the need for flexible and individualized approaches to housing assistance.** Systems must be more responsive to complex individual circumstances and avoid rigid categorization that excludes vulnerable individuals.
- **Emphasize the gendered nature of homelessness and housing precarity.** This includes addressing the impacts of abuse, violence, and discrimination on women's access to housing.
- **Advocate for increased funding and support for mental health and addiction services.** Integrated services that address both housing and these intersecting challenges are crucial.
- **Promote community-based solutions and support networks.** Empowering and supporting local organizations and informal networks can provide crucial assistance to those experiencing precarity.
- **Explore the possibility of shelters and services for queer people, who face unique situations due to possible discrimination.**
- **Continue to collaborate with Keepers of the Circle and the Métis Nation of Ontario (MNO), especially as they expand their reach and programs across Northern Ontario.**

Related & Recommended References

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Research Gaps and Future Directions

The research reports highlight significant gaps in the academic literature:

- There is limited research specifically addressing the housing needs of Two-Spirit, Métis, and neurodivergent individuals, particularly in Northern Ontario.
- More studies are needed on the intersectionality of identity and its impact on housing precarity and homelessness.
- Research on the effectiveness of addiction treatment programs for individuals with complex identities, such as those who are neurodivergent and Indigenous, is sparse.

Future research should aim to fill these gaps by employing intersectional methodologies and focusing on the specific needs and challenges of multiply marginalized communities like CH, AP, BB, and MC’s.

Appendix A: Affidavit of CH

In support of the Neha Review Panel's examination of the right to safe, adequate and affordable housing of women, Two Spirit, trans, and gender-diverse people, and the government's duty to uphold this right.

Background

1. My name is CH.

2. Growing up in Kirkland Lake, a town of approximately 10,000 people, I had no role models or representation as a transgender person. Transgender lesbians like me were extremely rare, and I did not have the language or understanding to identify my true self.

3. I am neurodivergent, living with both Autism Spectrum Disorder and ADHD. These conditions shaped my experiences in the world, complicating my ability to connect with others and understand myself.

4. I was raised in a loving, stable, middle-class home by supportive parents. From a young age, I exhibited academic excellence, particularly in science, music, and languages. However, even in this nurturing environment, I felt deeply alone, alienated, and misunderstood.

5. From a young age, I worked hard to mask my identity and fit into societal norms. I hid my queerness and neurodivergence from the world, struggling to participate in "normal" activities and friendships. This hiding took a massive emotional toll on me, even as I achieved many successes. I now have Complex Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder ("cPTSD") from living in a world not tailored to these conditions.

6. Early in my life, I excelled academically and professionally, earning an Hon.B.Sc. in Biological Chemistry from the University of Toronto in 2001. For a few years following, I studied toward a Ph.D. in chemistry while teaching the same at Seneca College.

7. With the proliferation of Aboriginal rights cases in the early 2000s however, I pivoted to attend law school at the University of Toronto. I graduated as *Juris Doctor*, becoming Editor-in-Chief of the *Indigenous Law Journal* and an active member of the Aboriginal Law Students Association.

8. Despite my accomplishments, I struggled with crippling social anxiety and depression. I have also always had a chronic pain condition, which was only recently diagnosed as Complex Widespread Pain Disorder at the TAPMI Clinic at Women's College Hospital. Alcohol became my primary coping mechanism from the age of 16. By the time I was in law school, I was drinking daily.

9. In 2008, I moved back North to North Bay to article with a prominent First Nation lawyer on Nipissing First Nation. Together, we represented First Nations non-profits on a variety of

issues, and lead self-government negotiations with the federal and provincial Crowns. I was called to the Bar in Ontario in 2009.

10. From 2009 to 2014, I made my best efforts to practise law despite my mental health, chronic pain, and addiction issues. I taught law courses at Canadore College First Peoples' Centre on occasion. I operated my own law office on two occasions, often representing low-income and Indigeous clients.

11. Over time, I became known in the North Bay and surrounding area for representing women, particularly Indigenous women and Two-Spirit people, in domestic violence and family law cases. At one point, I was volunteering my services at five different women's shelters, including the Ojibway Family Resource Centre. I also acted as In-House Counsel for the Union of Ontario Indians from 2011-2012.

Career Collapse and Early Decline

12. In 2014, my drinking caught the attention of a judge after I almost missed a court date. He reported his suspicions to the Law Society of Upper Canada ("LSUC", now know as Law Society of Ontario, "LSO"). I confessed my struggles with alcohol, expecting support. Instead, LSUC gave me an ultimatum: sign an Undertaking to cease practicing law indefinitely or face a full audit of my past legal work.

13. Fearing the stress of an invasive audit, I signed the Undertaking that, to this day, has (temporarily, in theory) ended my legal career. This was devastating for me, as I had always been proud of my work and had received no legitimate complaints regarding my years of practice.

14. Around the same time, my personal life fell apart. I was living with a mentally unstable partner and her son in my house, which was also my home office. She was, on occasion, taking my prescription medications herself and altering my alcohol in unknown ways. One night during a debate over my insistence that we separate, she falsely accused me of assault (via a staged call to 911), leading to my arrest and eviction from my home for many months. Though the charges were eventually withdrawn and my record expunged, the experience shattered my reputation as a domestic violence lawyer for Indigenous women and left me homeless.

15. Shortly thereafter, I declared bankruptcy, lost my precious home and office on the ski hill in North Bay, and began receiving Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) benefits. At just over $1000 per month, ODSP was barely enough to cover any rental housing available in North Bay, let alone other living expenses.

Struggles with Addiction and Failed Services

16. Over the years, I attended six inpatient addiction treatment programs, but none addressed the intersections of my Me´tis identity, neurodivergence, and gender dysphoria. Some were Indigenous-based; some were not. Most programs were abstinence-based and failed to provide the harm-reduction, self-regulation support, or coping mechanisms I needed.

17. I found some benefit in programs using Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT) but relapsed upon returning home from them.

18. I also sought help through hospitals and detox centers, but the treatment I received was often dismissive, demeaning, and inadequate. I was routinely turned away from the Emergency Department at North Bay Regional Health Centre without even being seen by a doctor. At other times, I was ignored, mocked, or assumed to be drug-seeking.

19. My neurodivergence, gender dysphoria, and chronic pain remained undiagnosed, exacerbating my addiction.

Housing Instability and Emotional Anguish

20. After losing my home in North Bay, I was placed on the social housing list, but the wait time was up to ten years. I could not find safe, affordable housing within the limits of my ODSP benefits. My alcoholism exacerbated.

21. In or about 2015, I lived in a provincially-funded Harm Reduction Home in North Bay, which was a uniquely positive experience. The residents were a combination of people recovering from addiction and those with acquired brain injuries. The Harm Reduction Home provided meals, utilities, 24-hour on-site nursing care, and personal support workers. For the nine months I lived there, I felt safe and supported, and I was able to stay sober for the first time in my adult life.

22. However, in or about 2016, the Ministry of Health (Local Health Integration Network) abruptly cut funding for the program, forcing the Harm Reduction Home to close. High-needs residents were placed in alternative living situations, but those of us with lower support needs were essentially discharged to the street.

23. I applied for multiple rent subsidies and social housing programs, but due to long waitlists and complex eligibility requirements, I was unable to secure immediate assistance. I was also de-prioritized because I did not have children and was not (technically) fleeing domestic violence.

24. I repeatedly visited emergency medical services for chronic pain treatment, but doctors often refused to prescribe adequate pain relief due to my history of addiction. I tried to be admitted for "failure to cope" (which was essentially the case) but I was sent home the very next day by my family doctor. He was of the opinion that I was too young for that diagnosis.

25. In 2017, I had the good fortune of moving into a newly renovated private apartment in North Bay, which I loved and was very proud of. Unable to practice law, my rent consumed my entire ODSP income, and I had to find creative and oftentimes demeaning methods of procuring living expenses. Despite having a supportive landlord who was aware of my suspected Autism, without the support services I had at the Harm Reduction Home, I quickly relapsed into drinking. I passed out drunk on the floor the very first night in my new apartment.

26. Living alone, I could not manage my physical or mental health. My apartment, once a source of pride, became a place of shame and isolation. I drank myself into oblivion daily, unable to clean, cook, or maintain a daily routine. I never gave up hope, though.

27. I spent a lot of time watching shows on YouTube about addiction, Indigenous culture, and neurodivergence. I learned a lot about subjects I had been essentially ignorant about growing up. I also began following the show "I Am Jazz," a reality TV show about a young transgender girl growing up in Florida. I couldn't yet capture why I was so captivated by the show, but I felt compelled to watch every episode more than once.

28. During those years, I did also receive some positive support services. Dr. Valerie Primeau, head of Psychiatry at North Bay Regional Health Centre. She agreed to take me on as a patient, and we began experimenting with medications for addiction, anxiety, and chronic pain for the first time. I also received excellent counselling services from Community Counselling Services of Nipissing. My psychotherapist there, Brooke Bertrand, did her best to keep me enrolled in the occasional inpatient treatment program as well as do her best to, basically, keep me alive.

NACM: A Glimmer of Hope

29. In early 2020, with Brooke's extensive assistance, I was admitted to Native Addiction Council of Manitoba's ("NACM") Pritchard House, an Indigenous treatment centre in northern Winnipeg. There I received much more in-depth cultural and emotional support than I had at previous programs. I travelled that long distance to a frosty and impoverished neighbourhood because it was one of the only Indigenous addictions programs that would take me without being a Status Indian (as I was Me´tis rather than First Nations). At that time, I also decided to stop cutting my hair, a tradition I continue to this day.

30. At NACM, I participated in Indigenous healing practices, sweat lodges, drum-making, feasts, and began to more fully understand my identity as a Two-Spirit person. I began occasionally wearing a skirt, for the first time.

31. Despite the progress made at Pritchard House, I relapsed upon returning home due to a lack of post-treatment support and challenges related to my Autism. I sought support from the North Bay Indian Friendship Centre but felt unwelcome as a Me´tis individual. I also did not fit into their addiction or home support programs.

Trauma at Monarch Recovery Home

32. In late 2020, after repeated admissions to the Medically Supervised Detox program at the North Bay Regional Health Centre, I was coaxed into applying to Monarch Recovery Home in Sudbury: a group home for people recovering from addiction. Monarch required that I be homeless to qualify, so I gave up my beloved apartment. This decision was heartbreaking, as my apartment was my last source of stability and dignity.

33. Monarch was a nightmare. The home was unsafe as to my culture and my gender. I was also forced to share a room with no privacy, which was unbearable as an Autistic person. My personal belongings were routinely searched without notice or cause. Residents were also only able to take outdoor walks once per week because of the COVID-19 epidemic. As a result, I felt in danger, trapped, and prevented from accessing external support services.

34. The residents frequently expressed extreme homophobia and transphobia, making violent threats against LGBTQ2S+ people. As someone beginning to understand my gender identity, and even changing the way I dressed, I lived in constant fear. I did not dare dress in any way feminine, and hid many of my clothes, even from the housing staff.

35. At Monarch, we had limited access to family doctors and medical services in general. I was prohibited from taking any pain medication stronger than acetaminophen (Tylenol). When I twice sought medical care at Health Sciences North, the hospital staff dismissed me as being sub-clinical or drug-seeking and sent me back to Monarch without treatment - and with diminished self-respect.

36. After five weeks, I could no longer endure the conditions at Monarch. I packed a small bag, left the rest of my belongings behind, and fled to a cheap hotel in downtown Sudbury – a city I had never lived in before.

Homelessness and Despair in Sudbury

37. For weeks, I lived in cheap hotels, on the streets, and occasionally in the Health Sciences North Detox Centre. My interactions with social service agencies were disheartening at best. One of the only places I found refuge was "Zyg's", a gay and lesbian bar that, surprisingly, remained open during that part of the COVID-19 epidemic. My Autism and untreated social anxiety prevented me from making friends in the LGBTQ community, though.

38. The Health Sciences North Detox Center discharged me to the street repeatedly, offering no long-term solutions. The Indigenous Elder on staff there berated me for not being "committed enough" to my culture or recovery. He was also uninformed and dismissive about my Me´tis culture.

39. The limited LGBTQ social services in Sudbury were unhelpful and unsuited to my needs. They were mostly geared toward young people and did not seem to offer support to a transgender person just "coming out." Many of their programs were limited or suspended because of the pandemic as well.

40. The women's shelter in Sudbury felt inaccessible to me as a transgender woman as I was still relatively male-presenting and feared being treated as a predator.

41. There was no men's shelter available in Sudbury at that time, and even if there had been, I felt too female-presenting to safely survive there. I also heard stories that shelter clients had all of their personal belongings stolen every night, and I felt I had too little left to lose.

42. I was dismissed and failed by nearly every system I turned to for help. I felt invisible, unworthy, and utterly alone.

43. Healthcare workers repeatedly accused me of drug-seeking, even when I sought treatment for legitimate chronic pain, social anxiety, panic disorder, and/or alcoholism.

44. I was mocked by intake workers and doctors for my homelessness, my alleged failures, and my gender identity. One doctor at Health Sciences North, after I was found unconscious and naked in a hotel room, laughed at me, teased me for my condition, and sent me to the Detox Center without appropriate medication or support. This treatment was dehumanizing and deeply traumatic.

Turning Point and Support from the Métis Nation of Ontario

45. In desperation, I contacted the Me´tis Nation of Ontario ("MNO") in late 2020. I had been a citizen since 2005, but I had no idea how much their Healing and Wellness Branch had developed since then. For the first time, I was met with compassion and culturally appropriate care. I was immediately assigned a Mental Health Navigator via telephone and videoconference. She was trained in gender diversity, even having a degree in Gender Studies. Her compassion and support felt angelic to me at the time.

46. I was also offered housing-search and rent-subsidy programs by the MNO at that time, but I ended up not needing them. I am still grateful to this day for their existence, though.

47. The MNO connected me with Alexa Harris, a queer, Me´tis psychotherapist. They paid for all of my weekly therapy sessions and provided gender-affirming addiction support services. This was life-changing for me. Alexa recognized my neurodivergence and used Neurodivergence-Modified Dialectical Behavioral Therapy techniques to teach me to self-regulate for the first time.

48. After a final stint in the rather unhelpful Health Sciences North Detox Centre, I reconciled with my aging mother in Kirkland Lake. She had previously been hesitant to have me return to her rural home, fearing I would be drinking too much, or act erratically without access to alcohol. I assured her that if I moved back home with her in Kirkland Lake to live out the COVID-19 pandemic together, I would stay sober. With her support and the care provided by the MNO, I was able to do just that.

49. Furthermore, with the support of Alexa and a temporary online gender clinic called "Connect-Clinic", I was able to begin my gender transition. I was diagnosed with Gender Dysphoria almost immediately. I changed my legal name and gender. I started hormone replacement therapy in 2021. In 2022, I had breast augmentation. And in March 2025, I am scheduled to have gender-confirmation surgery. Women's College Hospital has been instrumental in ensuring I have safe, appropriate, and affordable gender-affirming care.

50. In the years after returning home, I focused my self-improvement efforts on my ability to provide peer support to other people like me suffering. I pursued trained in Sexual Violence Prevention, Indigenous Peer Support, Mental Health First Aid, and Non-Violent Crisis Intervention. I was elected to the leadership of an online support group for transgender people called TransPeerNetwork and began to rebuild my self-esteem.

51. In 2022, I was hired by the local Indigenous women's centre and provincial advocacy body, Keepers of the Circle, to facilitate its renowned Culture, Confidence, and Competence program – a culturally-based life skills and pre-employment training program for women and gender-diverse people. I facilitated one cycle of the program in-person and one cycle online during the pandemic. Being able to share my knowledge and experience while living out my true identity at Keepers of the Circle was, without a doubt, one of the highest points of my recovery to date.

52. For the first time in my life, I felt my mental health, addiction, and gender identity needs were being met. As a result, I believe, then, for the first time, I realized I was Autistic. The Me´tis Nation of Ontario provided me with psychiatric support through a doctor at Centre for Addiction and Mental Health ("CAMH"), and I was soon connected with a diagnostic service, Embrace Autism. It was also life-changing to be able to connect with a vast support community of other neurodivergent people online.

Current Successes

53. Despite significant obstacles, I have remained committed to self-improvement and advocacy, as well as staying sober for over four years.

54. I continue to work within the Me´tis Two-Spirit community and in non-profits related to housing and homelessness. I am an active member of online peer support groups such as Autastic.com and Autistics4Autistics Ontario. I have started my own consulting business, CH Consulting & Associates. I am also very active as an online peer support person and on social media.

55. In 2024 I was elected as Chair of the Me´tis Nation of Ontario's Two-Spirit Council, a position I hold with pride and dignity, hoping to repay some of the grace the MNO has afforded me over the years.

56. I make this statement in good faith, believing that the failure to address these systemic barriers continues to harm countless women and two-spirit people in Canada.

Signed and affirmed this 27th day of February, 2025 at Kirkland Lake, Ontario.

Appendix B: Interview with AP

This is a transcript of an interview between CH and a gender-diverse person anonymized as "AP" throughout, conducted February 2, 2025 online.

AP: Not having a good day there today.

CH: No problem? No problem. It's Sunday. There's no rules today.

AP: I had an episode there. I got PTSD and I had a flashback. I was taking care of my sister's dog over the weekend. And the whole of the core man came up and I had a freak out actually.

CH: Oh no.

AP: So, my brain got all scrambled and it wasn't working. I just can't explain the glitches but it's just trauma, right? So, I'm good. I'm here.

CH: I have complex PTSD, and I get those flashbacks as well. Luckily not too often but I know what you're talking about. It's very destabilizing.

AP: Yes, correct.

CH: So how are you otherwise today? You doing alright?

AP: I have a story that's different than conventional. And how are we doing this? You're going to ask me questions and I'm going to answer?

CH: Well, I'll give you a little introduction. So, I'm not sure if we remember each other but I'm CH. I grew up in … I'm more or less a retired lawyer. And I'm doing some work with the Women's National Homelessness and Housing Network.
They've filed a human rights complaint against the federal government. It's only been a couple of years that housing has been something that you can file a human rights complaint about. That's a whole new phenomenon in Canada that housing is a human right. So, we filed a complaint against the federal government saying that the federal government hasn't provided housing equally to men and women and gender diverse people. And so, this complaint is about specifically talking to women and gender diverse people and asking them how their experience of homelessness might have been different from just the conventional everyday guy who doesn't have somewhere to live for a month and then finds an environment. It's really looking to find out what's specific in your story to the fact that you're a woman. And I was hoping not to go over an hour, but I don't want to rush you either. I have a lot of prompting questions I can ask you, or if you want you can just tell me at your own pace really what your experience with homelessness or housing precarity counts as well. What led up to it? What your experience was like? How you got out of it? And if you can, how that relates to your gender in any specific way?

AP: Well, I definitely had to fight for my life on a few occasions.

CH: That's too bad.

AP: Yeah, it's definitely shaped me as a person. I never fit... first I'm going to start with... I never fit into any of the boxes that you have to tick-off that can help one get housing. I'm Indigenous but not "Indigenous enough". I don't have a secular faith. There's no housing

programs for which it's, unless you're Indigenous and then you can go through the Indigenous housing. But I don't qualify for that because my Métis status got taken away. I think they couldn't verify one of my ancestors. I also don't have a culture because I was adopted, and I don't know my birth family. So, when I was like...

AP: I jump all over the place. I don't think in linear [fashion because] I'm a neuro diverse. I'm on the [Autism] spectrum. I jump...

CH: Me too.

AP: Okay! Okay, so I'm not going to like. It's a lot.

AP: I didn't fit into any of the boxes. When last year I finally got tired of being precariously housed and living in shitty rooming houses and, you know, being marginalized and not having a category. Like I lived in a Jewish neighborhood in a rooming house and people are all the Jewish people were telling me like: "well, I'm Jewish when I have issues, I go to the JCC, and they help me with housing and whatever else." And then I had like friends who were, you know, queer. But I'm not queer enough because like, I'm bisexual. You know, you go to the 519 [an LGBTQ social assistance centre] and supposedly they'll help you with housing but like I didn't fit into those boxes. And then, like, I'm on ODSP [Ontario Disability Support Program] but I'm not diagnosed - not formally diagnosed. I was misdiagnosed as "Bipolar Type 2" as a lot of women are.

CH: Yeah, absolutely.

AP: So, we didn't fit into the CMHA [Canadian Mental Health Association] model, and they denied me [services]. This is when I was in Toronto. I lived there for 24 years.

CH: Okay, where do you live now? Can I ask?

AP: I live in North Bay.

CH: Okay, wait, sorry, continue.

AP: So. When I went to Toronto when I when I was 24 (I'm 47 now) I, uh, it was sex drugs and rock and roll. I just wanted to go down there and be like, "ahhhhuuuhhhh" you know, and just... just be a total anarchist and live that way. But though back then it was really easy to find a place. You just walked in. You were like, looked at the place. You talked to the landlord, and you were like, okay, well. I want to put a deposit on the place. You sign the lease, put a deposit on the place and then you have the money. You go pay first and lastly, and you get the keys.

CH: I remember. Yeah, I used to do that.

AP: Um, and when that didn't work out because my drug habit got too bad, then I just like went and got another place and moved in there. So that began the pattern of thinking that the geographical cure would help me from... save me from myself. Um, then I blamed my, my partner at the time. I was like, "oh, well, you don't want to stop this drug, but I only want to do this drug." So, like, I blamed her, and I was like, I ended up meeting someone and she was like, "I have a room in my house." It was a predatory situation. It was a female.

CH: Yeah.

AP: So, I moved in with her thinking, "oh, this is safe because it's a woman," but it wasn't safe. She was, she had like dark triads traits [Machiavellianism, sub-clinical narcissism, and

sub-clinical psychopathy.] And saw that I was vulnerable and was abusive towards me. And at one point in time, locked me out of the house.

AP: Um, so I went right back into my pattern that started when I was 17 and I ran away from home with this guy that I didn't really like, but like, I kind of used him to get out of North Bay back when I was like 18. Like when we [CH and AP] knew each other back before you [CH} went through your [gender] transition and everything like. Um, I understand my accountability in that situation but like in doing inner work and like shadow work and all this stuff that I do. And I realized that nobody ever taught me how to do those things because I was developmentally delayed. I was like five to seven years behind. Like when I was 18, my parents sat me down and they were like, "well, so if you want to go to school, you know, we have this money for you saved and you know, it'll help you - not a lot because we're fucked with money - but like it will help you a little. And I was like, "no, I'm going to move to Toronto with my boyfriend. We're going to be rock and roll stars." And, uh, I was 18, but I had maybe the maturity level of a 12-year-old.

AP: So, no one ever told me I was developmentally delayed because we just didn't talk about that stuff back that. Um, I was diagnosed. My godmother told me that back in the 70s and 80s when, when women went for diagnosis, they were basically told that I had childhood schizophrenic traits and that it would even out in my 40s. But it did, it did, but after much introspection and becoming self aware.

AP: And, uh, I used to think it was because I chose the sex drugs rock and rock and roll lifestyle that I was unable to maintain a secure lifestyle. But after being in Toronto for all those years and seeing that there was a punk community. There was like, you know, like a circus arts community. Like I saw all these subcultures that I wasn't exposed to growing up in Northern Ontario and that those people held down fine because they grew together, and they formed a community.

CH: Yeah.

AP: Um, yeah. So. And then like last year I came to the realization that those are all the people that like have ADHD, and that are on the [Autism] spectrum and that, you know, when, like I'm 47. So, like when we grew up back then, we weren't allowed to talk about that stuff. Or they were queer kids, and they were in the closet until they had to leave their fucking city to come out and be themselves. You know, or they were kids that came from abusive homes, and they were never allowed to speak up about their emotions.

CH: Yeah.

AP: You know, and in my experience, these are all the people and, in this sense, women, that ended up precariously housed, moving in the bad boyfriends, moving in the bad girlfriends, moving in the bad roommates. And until personally I had... I had a nervous breakdown in 2020. And I didn't even know I was running the pattern that I was running until... like... I split [psychologically] so badly. That I couldn't tell what was real and what was... like what was third dimensional, and what was multidimensional, and I always grasp on that like, like... spirit, versus physical, versus, like basically like my Medicine Wheel just like exploded. And it fragmented into a billion pieces, and I was left feeling so completely isolated and alone. And the only reason I'm alive today is because at that time I had pets, and I had to get up and like take care of my pets every day.

CH: Mm hmm. Yeah. Yeah, that's a big, a big help actually. Yeah. That's, I'm sorry to hear all that.

AP: Yeah. It's made me into who I am though. And I'm hardened. I'm not that sensitive, play a little magical girl I used to be.

CH: I ran off to Toronto when I was 18 as well, looking for the rock and roll lifestyle and yeah, it didn't, didn't turn out all roses and perfect like I had hoped.

AP: No, never does. Because when we do that, we're just running from ourselves.

CH: I never really found that community though. Did you find some community in Toronto? Like, supportive community?

AP: I found Kensington Market, but I wasn't willing to be vulnerable.

CH: Right.

AP: So, nobody would ever know what I was doing.

CH: Right.

AP: But that protected me when I became actually homeless. Um, I just, I moved from apartment to apartment to apartment; from partner to partner to partner. And they weren't partners, they were drug co-dependencies. Right? Really, tumultuous drug co-dependencies. And, um, when I left the girl, and I met the guy, it was just the same story. It was the same person with a different face. And, um, I was living, like I had left a bad situation with the one female who was abusive towards me. And this like naive, hippie woman took me in. And, uh, I was like, straight up, shooting up [intravenous drugs] in her place and she had a kid and stuff. Like, it was fucked. Um, and then I knew that I couldn't continue living there living like that. So, when I met the other guy, uh, we decided to just start the pattern all over again. Let's go be non-conformists, whatever. And then I found like the whole punk community fucking hated him because he didn't know how to be polite and pleasant. He had no street etiquette. He had way more of a "fuck you" attitude, and he was really belligerent. So that isolated me further. So at that point, I was living like a triple life. I would have my "I'm looking for work life." I would have my "I have my friend's life" and then I would have my life with him. So, my personality became so fragmented that I couldn't keep up with the lies I was telling everyone so that isolated me further. And when I was with him, um, he was so unpresentable, I couldn't bring him anywhere. Like he literally, he was good to me until his alcoholism got really bad. And, but it was a trauma bond. And we met on the street. It was a trauma bond, and it was, uh, a drug codependence. We ended up moving in together. He had a room. I moved in with him because I couldn't live with the girl and her daughter anymore. It was just too much guilt. It was like, I'm addicted to drugs. I'm addicted to needles and I can't stay here doing this. Like I have had a moral compass for that. So, um, I didn't know that when I moved into the room with him that there was a warrant for his arrest.

CH: Oh, wow.

AP: He never told me that until one day he was like, the cops were knocking on the door, and he was like, "I have a warrant. Um, can you just like say I went out to get some groceries or cake or something and cover for me?" So, I ended up covering for him and he jumped out the window and ran away. And that flashed me back to when I was like a childhood con artist. And that reignited my ability to be able to manipulate people. In very, like I could

manipulate cops, like, so easily. And this goes deeper. And this is where the story gets interesting. Um, he came back that night, whatever, and we had to talk about it. Then like a couple of months later, he got caught pissing in an alleyway and the cops like asked him for his name and all this stuff and he didn't have any ID. So, he made up a fake name, and a fake birthday, and that became his alter-ego.

CH: Wow.

AP: So, you know, and he's since past so I can say his name. Niboy Shicerny (sp?) became Boris Tushankich (sp?). So, his street name was Boris. My street name was Queenie. So, we were known as Boris and Queenie.

AP: And nobody ever knew what we were doing because one good thing about him was he was just; he had isolated himself from all the communities and he was so belligerently rude and such a thief that nobody wanted to talk to him. When we, when he lost that place, because he couldn't... he had anger issues, like he would fight with the landlord or fight with the roommate and get kicked out or do something. He was so fucking entitled that he didn't know how to hold his own. So, like, I was like that too, so we got along. Maybe that means getting another place. So, we moved. First, we lived... there used to be all these hotels in Toronto, and they didn't want to rent to women because they thought that we were all sex workers. So, when he went to the hotel and he was like, "I need a place to stay; we have the money for first and last," the owner of the hotel said, "well, you can stay, but she can't."

CH: Hmm. Do you remember what hotel?

AP: It was, it's, it's since been closed down. It's called the Palace Arms.

CH: Okay.

AP: There was also the Parkview Arms. They had the same policy.

CH: Yeah.

AP: All the hotels on the, um, Lakeshore strip had the same policy. They just assumed that all the women were sex workers. I was a sex worker, but not like that. I was a BSM [bondage and submission] sex worker who worked out of a dungeon, not out of a hotel room. I only worked calls, and it was a feminist sex dungeon. So. And, um, where was I? So, we stayed there. And looked for a place and we found another apartment. And that was in 2006. So that, that all happened like within a two-year cycle of like room, hotel, room, hotel, room, hotel. And, um, I really didn't know who I was anymore. And I was losing my sense of identity. A, being with him because nobody liked him. And B, because I was masking [hiding my Autism] differently in all these different communities. Because I probably didn't know that I was autistic.

CH: Yeah.

AP: So, it was just like, that was my, that's what I learned as a little girl. That, and when I was a little girl, I got called manipulative. Told, "you're not trying hard enough."

CH: Yeah.

AP: Told "you're a con artist."

CH: Yeah.

AP: Told, "You're morally deficient because, you, because we're not going to tell you what's really going on with you, because we're not allowed to say [you're Autistic] because it's embarrassing [to us as parents]."

CH: Yeah. Yeah. Exactly. Yeah.

AP: Um, we got an apartment, and it was a great building. There were other people like us. It was like a community. Um, it was like there was like a harm reduction model in that building where we all knew each other used [drugs], but we all accepted what each other did. And just "don't ask, don't tell." And, um, I was selling dope in the park at the time and, you know, I, uh, I met this fellow who was a bigger con artist than me and my, like, he was known in the community to be that way. And people warned me, but I didn't believe them because we were high all the time. So, like my guard was down, right? And then he ended up, like his MO to this day is the same. Like, "I don't have a place to stay. Can I stay on your coach?" And then the people he's staying with end up having their housing taken away because they can't get rid of him. Or he steals from them when they finally had enough and they're like, "okay, well, you gotta go." So, I brought him home. And then my partner was like, "uh, that person can't stay here. I know all about that person." And I was like, "oh, don't worry about it. Blah, blah, blah." And my partner was like, "no, I'm serious." And I was like "just for a couple of days." Any my partner's like, "but this is what he does." And I was so fucking belligerent that like I didn't listen. And after a month of staying with us and like, just being a total fucking mooch, I was so fed up, I had gone to the library and I printed out a list of 600 rooms that he could afford on his income, and I handed it to him and I said, "you gotta go. Here's hotels I've stayed in. You can call them and go get a room right now because you're [inaudible]. And they'll just write, write you a room by the day or by the week. And if you don't have the money, I'll give you the money, but you can't be here anymore. And here's a list of 600 rooms you can afford." So, he was pissed. Um, what happened after that was revenge. Uh, he had someone break through our window and steal our money because any where our stash was. So, we couldn't pay our rent. And a couple of weeks later, I guess the landlord was fed up with it too; the landlord had already started the process for, um, eviction. But the mail stolen by this person I let stay on our couch. So, the mail got stolen. So. Which I know is a federal offense, but like, what you do when you're [living on the] street? Are you going to call the fucking cops?

CH: Yeah. Yeah.

AP: So, um, one day the sheriff came knocking and said you have 10 minutes to get a bag of your stuff and get the fuck out. And I'm just standing there like, I don't know what's happening because I've never been evicted like that before. Right? I'm like, I felt like after all my years of con-artisting, and drugging, and fucking selling drugs, and running, and fucking being a petty criminal, I had no idea what was going on because I was faced with these authority figures basically saying, "we're going to arrest you if you don't leave." And I'm like, "Oh my God, my partner still has a warrant and he's using a fake name, and he used a fake name to get this apartment, so the fuck!" And I was cool with all that because I'm a total like non-conformist. Right?

CH: Mm hmm.

AP: We do what we have to do to survive in a system that persecutes people with criminal records.

CH: Yeah.

AP: It was a breach of probation. And that was traumatic enough for him with his own abandonment issues that he just kept running.

CH: Yeah.

AP: All right. Run on sentences. I'm going to take a break.

CH: I appreciate all of that. I'm. I'm curious. If you don't mind expanding on one point, you, you said like. You would have liked to get services, but you weren't queer enough for some. You would have liked to get other services, but you weren't religious enough for some. You would have liked to get some other services, but you might have been denied because you were a woman. Can you… can you expand on, on any of that? Um, because part of what this study is about is that some of this stuff wouldn't have happened to you if you were a man.

AP: Oh, absolutely not. The only reason I was able to get into that hotel was because I was with a man. Okay? Maybe even the only reason I felt safe on the streets is because I was with a man that nobody liked, and they were afraid that he would do something [inaudible]. I never thought of that before. I think with mental health... and I think there's still an old paradigm because, up until, I think, I don't know if it's 1980 or 1983, women were not considered humans could not have our own credit cards could not buy a house on our own without a man. So, women got married because they weren't able to do anything on their own. That old paradigm like I was born in 1977. So that still affects me. Like to this day, I still get asked why I don't have kids. And my answer every time is because the thought of being pregnant disgusts me. I'm not a breeder.

CH: Yeah.

AP: And they're like the queer community gets it!

CH: Sure. Sure. Yeah.

AP: But like the rest of the world seems to think that like my sole purpose is to procreate. It doesn't mean I'm not maternal. It just means I don't want to do that. I know why... I've got birth trauma.

CH: But if you did have children, do you think it'd be easier to find housing services?

AP: No. No. When I decided to quit drugs, and I went into Narcotics Anonymous. One good thing about that was I got to hear stories about other women that went to detox, halfway houses, quarter houses, and then eventually other kids back. In most cases they had to stay with family, on family's terms, because there wasn't housing available that was appropriate for them and their children.

CH: Yeah, that's true. Yeah.

AP: I have a friend right now that's out in BC. She's an artist. That's her career. She's a little younger, well she's way younger, she's 29. But like, she's goth. She's queer. She has two beautiful little girls that are neurodivergent. And she's [neuro]spicy as fuck too, and it's a barrier because you know you're not conforming. There's this whole idea that, "well if you just conformed, you would be okay!" But conforming to that ideal of: I have to look a certain way, act a certain way, talk a certain way, be a certain way, that that deflates our sense of personal autonomy and identity. And for her outward expression as an artist, the dress of goth is part of her identity.

CH: Yeah.

AP: And raising her children with gentle parenting and in a way where they can freely self-express... like I asked her, "would you go to a shelter?" because she's in a bad situation right now. Like, seems to me like having to hide behind a man or have a man around or have a second parent with them. With women with children, it's a second parent. They can't do it all alone. I have another friend right now too. And she's a single. Single moms have a hardest time.! She's a single mom. And she's trying to pay off a house, pay off a car. She put herself through school. She became a nurse. And then she just goes, go, go, go, go. And then she burnt out. And her childcare helpers were exhausted. So, the people stepping up to help the women that have children that are precariously housed or can't afford to pay off their houses burn out. So, the support networks burn out too. And the support networks, like, I was her support. Like, she's the one that helped me move back here from Toronto. I stayed with her for six months. And I helped her with her [neuro]spicy little boy who's ADHD all over the place. The time came when I was like, okay, I need to look for a place in a job. I left Toronto because I couldn't find a place. I went through the system there in the past two and a half years. I was on ODSP after my mental breakdown. I officially declared myself homeless. So, I wasn't getting housing assistance. I decided, "I'm going to try to do it legitimately." Just to see what happens. And I couch surfed. And that broke me down mentally to the point where I had... I still have that... I just I have an apartment now and I just want to be in my apartment. I don't want to babysit my sister's dog. She doesn't understand that I just need to be in my apartment. She doesn't get it, right?

CH: How long did that take from declaring… declaring you were homeless to finding an apartment?

AP: It took a year and a half. I declared myself. I called 311. I said, "I'm not safe where I'm living." I was physically safe, because I will fucking look someone in the eye while they try to kill me. I don't have any fears - I was born like this. I'm a wolf. I have no fucking fear. But emotionally and mentally and spiritually, I wasn't safe. So, I called 311 and I said, I'm living in a situation where I'm not safe. Nobody's beating me. But like my mental health has seriously declined to the point where my executive functioning is so bad that I'm surprised I'm even on the phone right now. And I remember that day. It was a rainy day, and I was at the library when I made finally fucking surrender to make the call. And they couldn't offer me anything. They were like, "well, do you want a Safe Bed? Do you want to shelter bed?" And I was like, "I can't do that. I have pets." And I can't give up my pets because my pets kept me alive.

CH: Yeah.

AP: I have since given up my pets. I have to, to leave. I decided, like, if I'm going to be vagrant, then I'm going to be fucking vagrant and I'm going to give it a shot. And I have to believe that I'm going to be a part of the reason why I wanted to come back here [to North Bay] too. And to put my roots down too. To make amends with family because they didn't understand why I was never present. My family home was, we got fed, we got clothes, we got housed, we went to school. We had extracurricular activities. But the Emotion part of the Medicine Wheel was not there. Like my father was emotionally unavailable and my mother was emotionally dysregulated. So, my emotion chip never developed properly. So, I came back in my recovery journey. That was one part of why I came back. And I said, if it doesn't work out there, then I'll keep trying. Because Maslow's hierarchy needs this fucking moot. And I'm going to need a place to live. I said to myself: "I will kill myself if I don't find a place

\to live." And now I work in human services and social services. And I work at the AIDS Committee of North Bay.

CH: Wow.

AP: I'm a Harm Reduction Outreach Worker. And because I have the story I have, our clients that come in that are precariously housed, and vulnerable, and addicted to drugs, and being raped, and whatever their stories are, of trauma, trauma, trauma, trauma... they open up to me. And I'm relatable. So, I can pay it forward. So, it wasn't a total loss. The Creator didn't make me go through this journey without a light at the end of the tunnel. And a lot of the times, it's the women. And the men are okay on the street. They'll sleep in tents together. They'll deal with the cops together. They'll do what they have to do to survive. But the women are committing sex acts they don't want to commit, to get their drugs, and for safe places to stay. Or SAFER... not like, minus 30 Celsius. Like, inside. I never did that. I'll tell you how I actually survived. I have never told the story before, except for to the people that I trust.

AP: After JJ stayed on our coach, and the sheriff came knocking, and we had to leave. At the time I was doing a lot of parkour and urban exploring. And I knew, because I had a network of like street people, punk rockers anarchists, like, nonconformists, and I was selling dope in the park. First, first thought was, I'm going to go to the park. Park. You know, I know somebody's going to be there that will be able to help me. Hopefully they'll fucking help my apartment. So, I went to the park, and I bumped into Mike. And I was like, "Mike, you know, JJ, right?" And he's like, "Oh, I know JJ." And I'm like, "I let JJ stay on my couch." And Mike sat next to me, and he was like, "you let JJ stay on your couch?" And I was like, "yeah, and now I've been evicted from my apartment." He was like, "I'm going to bring you somewhere. You don't tell anyone where it is. And if we keep it private and you don't, you don't talk, you don't mulk [sic] this around because it's a pretty fucking good spot." And I said, "there's only one catch. Can the boy should [sic] come with us?" Mike said, "if he doesn't act like a fucking shithead and he's respectful, then he can come, you know, and if he contributes. And you know, it was like a punk rock spot. So, Mike brought me. And I already knew about this building because I had been urban exploring, but like if I knew that people were squatting in a building, I wouldn't invade it because, it's their home. So, like I already knew who was staying there or what was going on because I'm like a street detective. And we went there, and it was this building on Queen Street West, and diverse group of people staying there. Some people were punk. Some people were like... the guy that was like running the place, we called him Cookie Monster because he was like the biggest crackhead ever. And so, Cookie Monster was like the fucking godfather of this squat. And then there was like me and my partner, my six birds I had at the time, which were 50 pigeons. Those were my pets. A couple other people, Mike was there. Mike's girlfriend was there. Another couple was there. And then we called him Danny the midget. Cause Danny was like this kid that ran away from Quebec from a group home. So, we had all had this, like, fucked up life experience and we were all like cool with squatting together and holding the fort down. And in there, there were different apartment units. So, I cleaned up the upstairs apartment unit and that's where we lived while we were looking for a place. And Street Services... we didn't want to be put into the system. Um, mainly because of JJ's warrant. So that affected me. Did I want to be put into the system? No, because I had pets that they probably weren't going to be able to find me a place to be with. That lasted for a couple of months. I continued to urban explore and then I found the fucking gold mine! I walked through this, my MO was, I'd knock on a door. If nobody answered, I'd try [to open] the door. The fucking door was open! I walked

into this place and I'm looking around and like, I'm really psychic. Like I developed that skill as a protective mechanism when I was a child living in an emotionally unsafe home.

CH: Yeah. Yeah.

AP: And if I could feel that the place has been abandoned for a very long time. So, I called out a random name. That's what I always did. I'd say like, "Suzanne! Gerald!" You know, and nobody called back.

CH: Yeah.

AP: And if somebody came, I'd say, "Oh my God, I'm sorry. I've walked into the wrong house. Gerald and Suzanne just told me to walk in. I am so sorry!" But in this case, nobody was there. So, I went to I went and I explored and I looked through the place and then I knew it had been abandoned for a really long time. I pulled out my flashlight for urban exploring. I went to the basement. There was a paper trail down there that was 30 years long. And there was information there that told the story of the house. I didn't even tell my partner or any of the people at the other squat. I just... waited. And I went back. And then I went back. And then one day my partner was like, "where have you been going all these days?" and I'm like, "we have to go for a walk. And we can't bring these people with us. And we have to keep this on the down low because this is a real fucking squat. It has power. It has water. It's it could work. It's been abandoned for 20 years." And I'm like, "why was the front door open?" Well, we found that out later. But we ended up telling everyone else we got an apartment. So that alienated me further because now I can't tell my street family where I'm going because they would want to come too. And we moved in there.

AP: Eight months in, the owner found out that we were there because my boyfriend was a fucking idiot and there was a phone line still hooked up in the house. And he decided to use the phone line to call his parents in New Brunswick.

CH: Oh, yeah.

AP: I guess [the apartment owners] got their phone bill and noticed a pattern over time. "Oh, there's long distance calls being made from our landline. What the fuck's going on?" Well, the owner showed up with [Toronto Police] 14 Divisions and 52 Division.

CH: Oh, wow.

AP: This right at Queen and Spadina. Right beside the Horseshoe Tavern.

CH: Yeah. Yeah.

AP: And because there was a paper trail in the basement and there was signatures on everything we had forged ourselves rent receipts. Every month, it was a ritual. I would just write out the rent receipt, right out the subletter's name, put the actual owner's name on it. And we also back checked the house, so we knew that was the owner. And we used a sub letter angle with a very common name where they would never be able to find the person because there's tons of people with that name. Even though the cops knew we weren't supposed to be there and that it was a squat, when they showed up and we had rent receipts, a hydro [electricity] bill, a water bill and a cable bill, and that we had been living there for eight months and had evidence of it. Both police divisions went to her car and said, sorry, lady, this is a Rental Tribunal matter. We can't help you.

CH: Mm hmm.

AP: And we ended up staying there for like another two years.

CH: Wow. Wow. Until what happened?

AP: Until she sold it.

CH: Oh, OK. Wow. What a story.

AP: It's not like any other story. And within that time period, it was between 2007 and 2011. Beck [a mutual friend] actually got to come and see that squat. It was pretty fucking cool. So, I'm really grateful that Beck hooked us up for me to share this story with you CH.

AP: Because it's not until recently that I decided that like enough time has passed safe to share my story.

CH: Just so you know, this will all be anonymized. I won't be using your real name in in any of the testimony.

AP: Thank you.

CH: But that's, that's a very unique story. Wow.

AP: I call myself a retired Master Squatter. Other people knew we were squatting, but they didn't know where and when they found out where no one believed that it was a squat. The agent was fucking pissed.

CH: Yeah.

AP: The guy that likes stole our money and fucking are mailing all that. Vengeful little fuck. Was he ever pissed!

AP: I don't do drama. I don't do gossip. Ever. I fucking hate it. I didn't get involved. He was babbling shit all over the streets and like, oh, well, let's get people together and barge the door down and push them out and take the place from them. And like my MO when I found the squat was, I'm changing the locks on the front doors, because I know how to make keys and pick locks and shit. So that was my survival story. I changed the lock on the front door, come and go from the front door, a pure legit, just like a tenant. And the first three months we were there, it was just like, feel-it-out. We did have the receipts to back us, but it was very tense for about three, four or five months. Oh, yeah, I forgot to tell you, too, five months in, [Toronto Police] Special Investigations Unit came to see who was in the house. Two plain [clothes] cops. They came up the back stairs. I went and answered the door and when they came to the back door, they were sneaking up on us, right? Like I answered the door and I'm like, who are you? They're like, they flashed us their badges and they told us what was up. And they asked if Art Cabari had been around and I'm like, I don't even know who you're talking about. So, I back-checked Art Cabari. Hungarian mafia. He was the uncle of the woman that owned the house.

CH: Hmm.

AP: He had raped her and her mother, which was his sister. All the journals were in the basement. And she didn't want to even step foot in that place again. It was her nest egg. And I knew that when her mother died, she would sell it. And when mother died, she sold it. I still have a box that her mother made. It was in the closet. It's like beautiful Hungarian.

CH: Wow.

AP: Like this is like my... not my trophy, but like my thank you rose for letting us be there, I guess.

CH: Yeah. Yeah. Fantastic. Wow. Now, remind me again how long you were there, total?

AP: Thirty-seven months.

CH: Wow. Fantastic. Wow. And then what led you back to North Bay?

AP: Well, that ended in 2011. I got my own apartment. Then I got gentrified out of my apartment after three years of living in my apartment.

CH: Mm-hmm.

AP: And I was still on and off with this guy, but like he was like, I was trying to get off heroin and morphine and he didn't care. He was like - and methadone actually became my drug of choice too - I figured out how to con the pharmacist and how to bang that too. Like the drugs were... just... I don't know how to feel my feelings because my emotion chip was never developed. But when I had people around me and community around me, I didn't feel the need to engage in those like drug seeking behaviors. So, when I lived in my apartment and I wasn't living with my boyfriend, who was not my boyfriend anymore, it was just a codependence. It was really difficult for me to break out of that codependence because half of the week, he'd supply for the for the drugs half of the week, I'd supply for the drugs and I was like, I don't want to do that with you anymore. I'm going to take home my own meds like I croaked the doctor and got other people to croak the doctor for me to get me other pills. That was his "in" to try to keep me around that codependence slash trauma bond, drug trauma bond. I had community around me after we moved out of the squat. Everyone knew where I lived. I was a street performer at the time. I was busking. I had my Kensington market people. I wasn't with him anymore. But like he was infantilized to the point where he could still couldn't keep a place. He still didn't have any friends. And he had a couple since he died over the holidays in 2024. I found out he did people did like him. But when they were with him, they couldn't hang out with anyone else. So we couldn't all hang out together because he had isolated himself with his behaviors.

CH: Yeah.

AP: So, he wasn't completely alone, but I didn't want to feel alone anymore. In his presence, I was still doing drugs, but I wanted to do them on my own terms and not be in a codependent situation with it.

CH: Yeah.

AP: And he ended up getting a place in that building. So, it was like a stalking kind of situation, but like I wasn't afraid because I could just close my door and say, fuck you. But like I said, I don't like drama and gossip. And there was a lot of drama and gossip, and I learned how to hold my own in that time. You know, I'd bring my friends over and have people at my place and go out and busk and hang out in the park with all my buddies and, you know, like people that I'm still friends with to this day who always wondered what the fuck I'm doing with this person. And I'm like, well, we're not together, but he does have a good side. But you don't get to see the good side because he's got no fucking self esteem. Right? And he's fucking loaded all the time, just… just beyond like fall down, loaded alcoholic. People didn't want to baby him and take care of him when he was in that state. And it's like, you know, how babysitting someone on an acid trip can totally ruin the buzz?

CH: Yeah. Yeah, for sure.

AP: Same. So, I had gotten back, although we fucking stood down like a fucking well-oil machine when we live in the squat, I came to my own decision that I didn't want to live with him or anybody else. But then I got gentrified out of my apartment and I was looking for a place where I could bring my birds because when I lived in that apartment, I had a rooftop loft for my pigeons.

CH: Mm. Cool.

AP: So, my only options were to move in with other people that had houses. And I found a place to live, but it was in North York. It wasn't downtown. So, all the community that I had developed after the squat, after having to keep everything hush, hush on the down low. In that three years of having my own apartment, I felt completely pulled away from my community again.

CH: Yeah, totally. Yeah.

AP: And that's what happens. Like, you know, one of my… the friend that lives out in BC, she had this awesome apartment in Toronto Community Housing. And then she got pregnant. And when she got pregnant with her partner at the time, who I believe raped her, she won't she's not clear about it. But then she had to leave that place to get a bigger place so that she could have her baby. Like, it's not it's not done right for people that have kids and that want to have families. Like when your kid grows up and they're 18 and you have a two-bedroom together and you've lived there for 18 years with your kid, that's now 18. Like my buddy Tim just had to move out of his unit because his kid turned 18 moved out of the unit, so they put him in a totally different community housing building on the other side of town. And you lose your community!

CH: Yeah. Can I ask you a question? You have mentioned that through a lot of this time, Social Services wasn't something you were necessarily looking for or even if you had they wouldn't have been able to help you. But is there anything in like a philosophical world that the government or social services could have done better to help you? Not necessarily like just providing an apartment, but is there something ODSP or community policing or any social services could have done to… to help you through that time?

AP: Formalized peer support. A place where we know where we can go and share together our life experience that's competent, like a Narcotics Anonymous meeting, but not fucking not about abstinence from drugs.

CH: Right. Right.

AP: That's a good sharing platform, but if you don't want to be absent in drugs, you can't fucking go there. That's the requirement to be a member. Like what do people that self-medicate do? What do people that don't fall into that fucking... if you don't fall in... Even though I fell into that, and I was like, OK, I've got to get off drugs, I didn't feel [comfortable]. Like, I felt [Narcotics Anonymous] was a very White, cisgender, middle-class place to go.

CH: Totally. Oh, yeah.

AP: Like I didn't see any goths there or punks there. I thought all my punk rocker friends in fucking recovery would be there. You know? There were a couple of queer people, a couple of people that admitted that they were neurodivergent or had BPD or other dark triad stuff.

But like it's almost like in that recovery model, they want you to completely strip any ideas or diagnosis away from yourself and just focus on the fact that if [you stay] clean every day, [you will] be fine.

CH: Yeah, absolutely. Yeah.

AP: I did meet a friend there, a really fucking amazing person who like I still talk to. I don't go to [Narcotics Anonymous] anymore unless somebody wants to go, then I'll do the work, right? But like she, she is a real estate agent, and she tried to help me find a place. And because I didn't have the money, and I was on ODSP and I didn't have any credit. That's another one... credit! I never built credit. I never had credit. I fucking had cash, lots of cash. All my fucking fraudulent activities, I did. I had fucking wads cash. But now you can't just walk into a place and have an envelope of cash and say, I want to rent this place. Like if it doesn't work out, I'll fucking leave.

CH: Yeah.

AP: Like they want blood samples, basically for a person to get an apartment or condo. Like I'd look at rooms and condos and there was no privacy. And these people are renting rooms up for $1,500 a month. I'm like, that's fucked. They can't afford to keep their condo if they don't rent the room out. But I won't rent the room out because I need privacy. And these were all women or female identifying people. If you want to help them because they're sisters, right? But like, I also need privacy. What if I want to be what if I have a partner and I want to bring them over and there's no privacy? I'm not paying $1,500 to live in a room where I can't be my unusual self.

CH: Yeah. Relatable.

AP: I have behaviors that help me self-regulate that some people might look at me and judge me for.

CH: Yeah, me too. Yeah. I get it.

AP: So, what did help me was I found people that I could share my situation with that had also been through what I had been with. Because I just kept saying, you know, I need a place. I need a place. This is what's up. And this was in [Narcotics Anonymous] meetings. So, I would meet with these people outside of [Narcotics Anonymous] and listen to their stories, just [to be a sister]. I would ask: So, you got out of detox and then they got a warehouse, halfway house. How did you get a place? "Well, *they* found me a place." And then other friends, like they got out of jail and how did *you* find a place? "Oh, well, I had a cosigner. And that's how I got a place." And then I have a friend that has severe physical and mental disabilities. And she always has a really nice condo, and I sat her down one day and I said, "I need to know how you do this?" And I told her my story and she said, "I didn't know that life had been so bad for you." And I'm like, "no, I'm really good at fucking pretending I'm okay. That's what I've been taught to do."

CH: Yeah. Same.

AP: And she said, "My dad cosigns for me. Otherwise, I would be homeless." So, the cosigner angle. And in every case, the cosigner is a [cisgender] White man.

CH: Yeah, of course. Of course. Yeah.

AP: My idea right now, as I work with clients who are homeless, it's so out of the box, because that's the way I am, "Why can't agencies like Crisis Centers and CMHA?" CMHA's been around for a hundred fucking years! I'm like, do better!

CH: Yeah, for sure.

AP: Why aren't your fucking credit cards for your company, why aren't they cosigning for people? Yeah, on a month-to-month basis. And like, do you know about [Ontario Premier Doug] Ford's idea for Heart Hubs?

CH: No.

AP: OK, I'm going to send you links. HART [acronym]: Homelessness, Addiction, Recovery, Treatment.

CH: Oh, those. Those. Yeah. They're setting one up in Sault Ste. Marie and one in Sudbury. But yeah, but not in North Bay or Timmins.

AP: And it's stupid. It's not going to work.

CH: Yeah.

AP: Because it's like living in jail, like or Northern Pines, like I know all about Northern Pines. There's women that try to go there to get overnight beds. And because they're brain damaged or have undiagnosed conditions or they're just high in their flailey. But even if they are high in their flailey, they can go in high. They just can't do drugs on site. You know, they get judged, they get mistreated. There's been reports of security guards making sexually abusive comments. I know one like if you get that enough, and I know from mine too, like when I was a kid, I got called a retard so much I just decided to start acting like one or what I thought that was. "Oh, you going to call me that?" [I thought] "Well, you think I'm on drugs?" [I thought] Well, I'm just going to go and do this because I want to anyways.

CH: Yeah.

AP: Like judgment in spaces of people that already feel like they can't… they can't climb out of the hole that they're in.

CH: Yeah. It's hard. I live in my mom's basement now.

AP: And that's the way she goes, right?

CH: Yeah.

AP: I'm grateful for you that you have your mom.

CH: Yeah, me too. Yeah, I wouldn't... I don't think I'd be alive otherwise.

AP: I stayed with my godmother when I got my job. I was staying with my friend in Trout Creek for six months. And then when I got my when I was looking for a job in the place and then I got my job, I stayed with my godmother four days a week. She was the Crown Secretary at the Ontario Court of Justice 30 years ago. She retired.

CH: Oh, yeah.

AP: That was her career. She's so fucking conservative.

CH: I worked at that courthouse. I don't I don't remember. I don't remember who the crown secretary was.

AP: Well, she retired 30 years ago.

CH: Oh, I see 30 years ago.

AP: You might be around my age so you wouldn't have met her.

CH: Yeah, same age. Yeah.

AP: I think it's cool that like you decided to get out of law and that you're doing this now.

CH: It doesn't pay as well.

AP: I know. You have that background, and you know the law and to be in that position and you know the language of the law.

CH: Yeah, for sure. Yeah. We're… we're almost out of time and I don't want to keep you over an hour. Is there anything you wanted to add or anything I've missed? Or is there anything sort of aspirational you can think of that that's… that's missing from the current system?

AP: Sometimes single women or female-identifying or queer people need still need somebody male [cisgender] and White to go and advocate for them when they're seeking out services.

CH: Yeah, that...

AP: SUCKS. But sometimes they need that person as a body double.

CH: That's kind of like you were talking about you need credit or you need a cosigner, or you need a… you need a white guy to… to be there. Right. Yeah. Kind of like credit.

AP: Also, starting on a grassroots level like as an outreach worker, I'm going to local churches. I'm going to like, tell the truth about what's really going on with the homeless people. Because a lot of times like a news reporter is only going to give their angle or their interpretation of story. From my experience working at the AIDS Committee in the past five months, five and a half months, and seeing this marginalized community in particular, like the homeless people. And how they're treated in a Northern Ontario conservative city. People don't even consider them to be human. And the more...What's the term for more minority you are, than the worst it is for you.

CH: Yeah, it's intersectional.

AP: Yeah. Intersectional! Yeah. Yeah. And there's like that whole pie of intersectionality too. And like the more of those things that you don't fit the worst off you are. I want that to change. Like I see human beings as human beings. I've always had that gift for like if you're polite and you're pleasant, you're not a fucking dick to me, like I'm cool, right? I'm not I'm not like saying if you're Black, I see that you're Black. If you're Indigenous, I see that you're Indigenous. But like I know that that's just the outside of a person like I think that all human beings should have the right housing and the autonomy to be able to do whatever they want in their place. And like I found my really outside of the box ways to get that for myself. But not everybody has that. Not everybody thinks that way. And especially if like someone's a parent, then you can't go and live in an abandoned house and forge rent receipts. And you can't do that because CAS [Children's Aid Society] will come, and fucking take your kids

away. You know. So sometimes people that are trying to get out of what I call the shitty diaper need someone to hold their hand while they're taking the steps to get where to get to their goals.

CH: Yeah. I really want to thank you for working with the AIDS community. I really appreciate that. And I really appreciate you sharing with me today. There's some beautiful quotes in there that I'm sure will make it into my submissions. What's going to happen is I'm interviewing between three and five women or gender diverse people like yourself. And then I'm going to use my own story of... I had a brief but dangerous stint with homelessness. And I'm going to use my story supported by these three or four other stories to make a submission to the Human Rights Panel. Probably they will just read it on paper. But there's a small, very small chance that they'll want to hear more. And they could call me as a witness. And if they do, I might get back to you, for to get, if they have specific questions, I might get back to you for some more information. But most likely, you know, how these things go, we're… we're just kind of small fish in a big pond. And this is a national case. This will be submissions from every province. So, but there's a chance that the Human Rights Panel will want to hear more. So, I absolutely really appreciate you so much. And… and thank you for sharing your story with me.

AP: When… when you release like all of your interviews and your findings, can you please send me a copy by a boss wants to read it?

CH: Yeah, absolutely. I like I said, it'll… it'll be sort of written up as… as testimony from my voice. But it'll include all of all of our stories. And I will absolutely share a copy with you. No problem. And I'll just anonymize your name.

AP: Yep, I'm "out" to like my work about it. Because it's the nature of my work. But yeah, the people that I work with, like, especially Stacey, my boss, like I told her I was doing this interview with you, and she was like, that's great. You're sharing your story. The more people that step up and actually share with the truth is. And we do it over and over and over again, especially on a national level, like the more… more becomes real to the people that are not aware.

CH: Well, we're trying to hold the federal government to account and to their responsibilities that never know what will happen. But that's what we're trying to do.

AP: Amazing. I love it, CH. Thank you so much for interviewing me today. CH:

Thank you for your time. And I hope you have a good rest of your weekend. AP:

Yeah, you too.

CH: Okay, take care.

AP: You too.

Appendix C: Interview with BB

This is the transcript of an interview by CH of a woman referred to as "BB" throughout, conducted February 1, 2025 in Kirkland Lake, Ontario.

CH: So, I'm CH. I grew up in .... I left when I was 20 years old. I moved to the city to go to university and then law school. It was hell. I had no idea I was Autistic the whole time. I had no idea I was trans. And at the beginning of the pandemic, like a million other people, I moved back home and quit my job as a lawyer. And I've been doing this type of work ever since trying to improve the situation for gender diverse people and Indigenous women, especially around housing and education. Do you want to just give me a brief background about yourself?

BB: For sure. So, my name is [redacted]. I'm originally from New Liskeard. I was born and raised there up until I was about 18 when I had my son. So, I was pretty young having my children. I ended up having my daughter about a year later. We ended up moving to Kirkland Lake when my son was only a couple months old. I've just kind of been raising my kids working lots. I work at the hospital here in Kirkland Lake. And a few years ago, I ended up leaving their father and it was quite a difficult time in my life. So, it's been about three years now and we're doing a lot better since then. But it was a very difficult time in my life.

CH: So, can you tell me just briefly a bit about your family and your ethnic background? Like, where your parents were, where they were from, how big your family was?

BB: Yeah, so I don't have a super big family. My dad is originally from North Bay. So, they ended up moving here, both way before I was even born. So, they've been in the New Liskeard area for quite a few years. My family was actually born and raised in Quebec and her first language was French. So, she didn't even really speak English until she was almost 12. So, you know, she has lots of family, but we didn't really communicate too much with them other than like, you know, my, I do have an uncle on that side that I communicate with and my grandparents and kind of on both sides is kind of how it is. I don't have too many cousins around or anything that I talk to. I do have two sisters and I'm really close with though. I have a younger sister and an older sister. So, and since my mom's passed, we've become incredibly close. So, it's been really nice. So, a small, the medium-sized family? Yeah.

CH: Yeah. If any of these questions you want to skip, you can always skip them. Do you identify as a woman and have you always had or have you always, have you definitely self-identified as something else?

BB: I've always identified as a woman.

CH: Okay. And you grew up, did you stay mostly in Haileybury?

BB: In New Liskeard, yeah. In the New Liskeard, Haileybury, Tri-Towns area.

CH: When did you move to Kirkland Lake?

BB: This would have been 2016. So, yeah. So, my son was only a couple of months old at this time.

CH: How many kids do you have?

BB: Two.

CH: And just to recap their age right now?

BB: Oh, eight and seven.

CH: Okay. Great. Do either of them have any special needs?

BB: My daughter right now, we're going through an ADHD diagnosis and assessment. So, so that's been, you know, a path, a journey. So, we're figuring that out. My son doesn't show any difficulties currently.

CH: I have ADHD.

BB: So, do I!

CH: So, it gets better. It gets better if you treat it.

BB: Yes, yes. Mostly, we're just kind of looking for, you know, resources and stuff for school to help me get a little more easier for…

CH: So, what's your experience with either hidden homelessness or housing precarity or, or unfit housing? Any of those?

BB: Yeah. So, I definitely have a few little stories with that. So, my one first moved to Kirkland Lake. Finding housing was okay, but finding, I think, housing that, because I've always rent from other people. So, finding landlords that gave you what you needed was a little difficult. I've lived in places that didn't have heating. I've lived in places that the hot water would shut off and it would take them a week or so to get in. So, I'm boiling water to give my children a bath. So, that was difficult. And, filing reports through like the Landlord and Tenant Board is, is a hassle and it takes a really long time for them to get back to you. So, you know, I've tried to do these things and it, and I feel like it just goes nowhere. So, apart from that, after I left my ex, like I said, it was a very difficult time and I, I had to leave. He was pretty abusive. So, I had to take my kids and go, and I didn't have really anywhere to go. So, me and the kids were couch hopping for a while with friends, which wasn't, you know, it was, it was a roof overhead, but it definitely wasn't, you know, very ideal for what we were doing. I was living with friends who also had three, four other kids and like a two, three-bedroom house, if that, so our apartments, you know, so it was difficult. And I, the resources that I had tried to look into, because my situation was mentally and emotionally abusive but not physical, [Social Services] didn't deem that as, as like something to push up on the [priority] list. So, like low-income housing, for example, I've been on the list still for three years and I'm still waiting. And when I had called pretty much in tears, you know, like crying to them, like "I need a place for my, my two children." And they told me that because there was no actual evidence or proof [of physical violence] and that I was [only] mentally abused, they can't bump me up on the list. So, that was really hard to hear, a summer who spent, you know, 10 years in a relationship being verbally, mentally, if he was too, it was very difficult. And it got a lot worse after I had left because he kind of went over the top. So, yeah, so that was a really difficult thing to hear, is that like the things that I went through wasn't deemed important enough for them to give me proper housing for me and my children.

CH: So, yeah, because I've heard the waiting list around here is only about two years.

BB: Yeah, yeah, and I'm still waiting. It'll be almost three years.

CH: Where did you, at the beginning of all of that, where did you go to try to explore your options, finding safe housing?

BB: So, I went to a couple different places. I was a part of the CMHA [Canadian Mental Health Association] at the time. So, I did reach out to them. And kind of all they did was just give me, you know, a list of "here's some rental apartments", and honestly, a lot of those were not affordable for me. I'm a single mom of two, just not affordable to have a two bedroom. And technically, I should have a three bedroom for my two children, but I just can't even still now have a four-to-three-bedroom apartment. So, they did give me a list, but a lot of those were not affordable. So, then I did reach out to the, I guess it would be the District DTSAB [District of Temiskaming Social Services Administration Board], the ones that do the low income. Yeah, so I did reach up to them. And like I said, I did do an application and it's in there, but unfortunately, there was a whole lot they could really do for me either. And I did reach out to Ontario, like the Ontario Works [unemployment services], which is kind of like the same, you know, and they, because I'm employed, they pretty much told me we can't help you with anything. So, I was like, oh, okay. So, those were the resources that I tried to go to, and I kind of got, I felt like shown just a lot of times, you know.

CH: Okay, so this question, I don't want you to take it as any sort of blame or finger pointing. But I'm wondering, what did you do before things got to the point where you felt, "oh my God, I don't have a place to live?" What, what things were you trying to do, good or bad, crazy or not crazy, to try to keep that not good, living situation, what we're trying to do.

BB: Honestly, for the most part, I was just trying to make sure I had something, you know, so, the amount of friends that I reached out to, hey, can I crash for like a couple weeks? I have money, you know, because I have always worked. So, I've always had an income, which I think is even even scarier, because it's like, I have an income, I have a good income, I work at the hospital, yeah, I still can't find a place to stay. So, you know, I was constantly reaching out to friends, I was honestly probably harassing the low-income housing people for the longest time, being like, hey, where am I on the list? Like, how long, you know, what do we need to do to prove to you that like, I'm in a really bad situation. So, I was honestly harassing them for a little while, and that didn't really do anything. And honestly, I was just trying, you know, like every apartment that I've seen, like, I'm, even if I didn't afford it, I was like, you know what, I just need a place right now. So, I'll figure it out, you know. So, like, I would go and I would look and I would fill out applications, I probably filled out like 30-some applications before I finally found the apartment that I'm currently in now. And that was a godsend, because honestly, the majority of the apartments, I wouldn't be able to afford. So...

CH: And the apartment you found now is that a geared-to-income [low-income] place, or is it just a standard?

BB: No, it's just a standard apartment, yeah.

CH: And what's your experience been with it with the landlord?

BB: Currently, it has been a lot better than what I've experienced in the past, for sure. It's been a lot better, but it is a small [apartment]. And, you know, my kids are getting bigger, and I have a dog. And so, it is a very tiny place, and now that the kids are getting older, you know, it is only a two bedroom. So, eventually, I know it's not going to be enough.

CH: Can I ask what you pay?

BB: No, it's okay. I pay; it just went up. So, I now pay $950 [per month] plus heat and hydro. Yeah. And I was... I heard what I was saying. Yes, I was like, I got very lucky with this one, very, very lucky, because everything else that I was looking at was well over like $1,200.

CH: And again, this is a question. I don't want to dwell on it. I know you could probably talk about this one for a long time, but just your previous partner at the time, were there any specific things that he did or tried to do that made it more difficult for you to leave and find you on place?

BB: Absolutely. Try to be big. No, for sure. Absolutely, for sure. There was a lot in there. Like, the apartment that we had when I left, it was a four-bedroom apartment, and we paid really good for it. I think we only paid like, no, I think it was the same, like, $950, and with heat and hydro [included], because I honestly worked really hard to get that place. And he refused to let me and the kids stay there. Like, when he didn't... he still now doesn't really want anything to do with the kids. And he honestly, I could have afforded that place, and he couldn't, because he had no income. He had... it was just him. He didn't really want the kids around, and he still refused to let me stay in that place, which is honestly why I had to get up and leave. So that was the biggest thing. Like, if [he] would have just been like, hey, you know what you and the kids could stay here, it probably would have been a lot easier for me to you know, I could have stayed there probably.

CH: Is he the father of all the kids?

BB: Yes.

CH: And is there any... is there any like social or mental ways that he acted that tried to make it harder for [you to get away]?

BB: Oh, absolutely. He was... like, he said he was pretty mentally and emotionally, so he was very manipulative. So, and also coming, because I do come from a broken home also, you know, my parents are divorced. And so, he played on that a lot. I also have... I have a couple mental illnesses on my belt, so you know, that didn't help either. And he would use those against me a lot. You know, he'd be like, "you can't go up on your own with the kids, because you know, you have bipolar disorder," and "you have this [mental illness], and you know, you can never do it on your own," you know. So, things like that, for sure. And once you're here to know if it starts getting to you.

CH: Yeah, for sure. Yeah, I understand that one. Did he... Did he participate in any of the interviews or meetings that you had to go to… to try to find a new place? Like, was he cooperative and helping you find any place?

BB: He didn't attend the meetings or anything, but I definitely wouldn't say he was cooperative. The whole time he was trying to get me to come back. So, I think in his head he's like, if she finds a new place, then this is like for real, you know. So, he was definitely not very cooperative. There would be times that he would like schedule things or try to be with the kids during those meetings, you know, when I'm like, "this is important, like, I can't do this right now." And he's like, "oh, you have to come pick up the kids right now right now," and I'm like, "I'm doing something very important, you know, to better me in the kids' lives, like you need to kind of..." So, he was definitely finding ways for sure to not allow me to find [a new place].

CH: What would you say were your top three prospects? Like, is your top three resources for finding new places? You said CMHA?

BB: Yeah, the CMHA definitely helped. Like, they would give me like an updated list kind of every time I went in there, which was helpful because I would call pretty much every [person on the] list. So then for sure, other than like honestly like Facebook, like apartments, like looking, you know, like on like the pines, that was or whatever, for other apartments, honestly, those were probably my only places that I can get.

CH: I'm thinking government organizations. The DTSSAB you mentioned?

BB: Yeah, so they weren't very helpful though, so they were definitely, like I said, like I talked to them a lot trying to figure out what to do, but they weren't... They didn't give me very many resources or really helped me in that path of trying to find even housing before I could get into low income. They didn't really help with that aspect.

CH: Was that Temiskaming Shores or Kirkland Lake?

BB: It was Kirkland Lake. It was the one here, yeah.

CH: It's surprising because they say that they're really good.

BB: Yeah, in my experience, it was very disappointing. It definitely, it made me feel like I was being thrown down [inaudible] for sure because I was like, you 're supposed to be helping me.

CH: So... again, just briefly because I don't want to... I don't want to re-traumatize you or anything, but can you give me just a picture, a picture of what like the lowest situation for you housing-wise was?

BB: So, I would definitely say the lowest situation was where we were living with my friend, she has three kids. And this was a... I think it was a two-bedroom apartment. So very small. And she has three kids, and I have two, so it's five kids and three adults as well as they had also three dogs. So, living in this little two-bedroom apartment and that I think was probably the lowest because, you know, I didn't really have anywhere to sleep. The kids obviously had had the room, had the beds. I slept on the floor a few times. I would sleep on the couch, but it was so many children and adults [and] animals. It's like honestly, it's easier at this point to just sleep on the floor next to my kids' beds. So, I definitely think that was definitely the lowest point.

CH: And that was in Kirkland?

BB: And that was in Kirkland. Yeah.

CH: How long were you there?

BB: I was there for five months. Yeah. I was sleeping rough only a month and a half and that felt like yeah. Honestly at one point I felt like I was like I'm never gonna get out of this. Yeah. It was a very rough time in my life for sure.

CH: Did you seek any supports other than government supports, like other than CMHA and DTSSAB? Did you seek any community supports?

BB: I don't think so. I think those were my main resources that I didn't know. Yeah. I think those were my main resources that I went for. Other than that, other than just the friends

that I had supporting me, and my family tried their best. You know, they, you know, can only do so much too. So other than that, I did, honestly, the hospital was helpful too. Like there was a few times that they gave me [pay] advances when they, they're like "we can only do this one more time." You know? So, they were pretty helpful too, which is, which is wonderful. But yeah, other than that, not, not really.

CH: So. And this is probably the hardest question of the survey. When you think back at that experience so far, we've only talked about the bad stuff really, but I mean, you think back at that experience, can you think of how any of it would have been different if you were a man or identified as a man during any of those situations?

BB: It's definitely a hard question because, you know, I'm not too sure how it would, how it would go really. I definitely find that I felt like I wasn't listened to, and I don't know if that would have made a difference if maybe if I was in a male, you know? I felt like I was just pushed to the side a lot. Or there was like a certain instances where I just felt like I wasn't being, you know, protected even when, when I should have been, like in regards to housing as well as like during the times with my ex, you know? So, I don't know, I don't, I don't, I can't really say if it would have made a difference, but I, yeah, that's the third question to answer for sure.

CH: But you, but it sounds like you didn't go to any women's resource specific centers for health.

BB: I, I did, I think I totally forgot about this, but I did at one point there was, is the Pavilion [Women's Shelter]. And, but they don't have, like a resource, like resources in Kirkland Lake. So, they were able to give me some, I totally forgot about this, but they were really giving me some stuff but not very much. And they're like, "if we want to help you, you have to go to Haileybury." And I was like, "but my job isn't Kirkland Lake, and I don't drive. I, I have some medical conditions that, you know, makes it hard for me to drive. And so, I can't." And so, I'm like, I, I can't leave my, my job at the hospital that I make a good amount of money at to go live in a woman's shelter in Haileybury for a temporary time. So that was definitely difficult. And I felt like, yeah. And, and at the time too, they're like, "um, you know, we don't even know if we have, um, like available, like, if you wanted to go to Haileybury tonight, I don't know if I could get you there tonight because, you know, is there, is there some beds for you." Um, so, so that's why I honestly, I think I just went over my head because they weren't, they weren't really helpful in that aspect either because there wasn't really anything in Kirkland Lake where I could just go to if I needed a place to stay, you know, if I didn't have friends here, if I didn't make those connections when I did, I don't have family here either. They're all in New Liskeard. I, I don't know where I would have ended up if I didn't have friends who took me and my children in.

CH: Was this in winter?

BB: Yeah. Yeah.

CH: Um, I'm sorry to hear all of that. Um, how did you eventually get out of the situation and who helped you?

BB: Um, so it was honestly just, like I said, like looking at all those listings all the time, I was just able to finally, one of those applications went through and I got a phone call and they asked if I, if I wanted the place and that's kind of, just kind of how it, and if obviously it's lame, like, yes, please, yes. So, um, so then I was able to move into the apartment that I have

now, and I've been there since and I'm honestly scared to leave this apartment. Um, not only because I don't know if I'll be able to find another one, um, but find one that I can afford. And is this apartment in perfect working order? Um, it is. It is. Um, it is pretty good. Not, I'll say, I think this is the first apartment that I've been to in person like, but I'm, I, I'm not like calling the landlords all the time being, "hey, my water shut off" or "hey, like, I have no heat right now." Um, and the landlords have been pretty good. So, I'm pretty blessed with that. It's just, like I said, it is small. So eventually, eventually I know I'm going to have to find something bigger.

CH: No backyard?

BB: No backyard. No, which... I do have a husky. So that is kind of unfortunate. We take him for, for lots of walks. Um, yeah. So, no backyard. It is just, you know, it's a, I think there's three apartments in there. And I haven't had any issues with neighbors either, which is wonderful. They've been really good. Because I'm on the top floor. So, when you have two kids running around, sometimes that can be an issue. Um, but I haven't had any. So that's been good.

CH: Um, but did you, when you were shopping for apartments and other shelter options, temporary options, did you experience any sexual discrimination or challenges because you're a woman?

BB: Um, I have, I didn't experience anything like that. Um, at least not to my knowledge if I did. Yeah, which is wonderful. Um, something that I did experience a lot though, was that apartments ask for credit checks now. And, um, because of my ex... my credit, I'm working on it, working on it, and it's been better, but my credit is not very great. Um, so I know I did get denied a lot because of that.

CH: What did your ex have to do with you having bad credit?

BB: Um, so he, um, he would like to things, and because he didn't have credit, it went under my name. And he would be like, oh, we're going to pay it off. You know, it's okay. Like simple things like phones and, and bills and stuff like that. So, a lot of it was under my name. And then, you know, he would lose his job, and then he couldn't afford it. And then I'm trying to scramble and afford everything. It's my money on things that he didn't need instead of paying those bills. So, it kind of made my credit go. And he couldn't get credit because... I don't even think it's not that he couldn't get it. It's that I think he just, he didn't want to do the process of like, hey, here's like, you know, he was one of those people. He would just rather put it on someone else than just try to build his credit in a way, you know. And at the time being young and dealing with lots of other things, I was just like, "okay." You know, you live and learn.

CH: When you were between apartments. Did you ever have trouble getting essential services, groceries, schools, library, visiting family, like, was there ever a point where you were in a temporary location, and you didn't have access to the things you needed to like?

BB: Food for a little bit was hard to get to. And I think at the time, I was on a little leave at work because I was dealing with so much I couldn't focus on work. And so, I did take a little leave. But because I'm only part time, I don't get benefits like that. So, I had to go on [Employment Insurance] for a bit. And it wasn't very much, you know, and I'm paying friends to live in this place. And… and the only resource really that helps here is the food bank. And it's helpful, you know, but not super when you have two kids to feed. And you

know, and… and they're also going to school. So, I need snack foods, and I need lunch, and I need, you know, so for a little bit, that was definitely hard. I think I was I was borrowing money from my dad a lot. And yeah… and just trying to which is wonderful. He was so helpful. But that was definitely what I had to do for a little while just to be able to kind of stay on my feet. And I think it's, too, is I was also trying to save for first and last [months' rent], which is a whole other thing because I'm like, oh, I have an apartment, but now I need to pay 18 [hundred dollars] just to move in, right, which is a big chunk of money when you're, you know, going through different places that you don't when you two kids, you're trying to feed myself from trying to feed. So, like that was pretty difficult to you is trying to save for this. And then also still trying to survive at the same time.

CH: So, we all go into these situations kind of naive, like, you don't get trained. Absolutely. How to manage housing precarity. I'm wondering, where did you look for help? Were did you expect to find it and just not find any help?

BB: I think the two biggest places now that I had mentioned it was definitely the Pavilion [Women's Shelter], you know, especially going there and being a woman shelter. And I expected them to help a little bit more and I felt let down immediately from them. And as well as the DTSSAB [Social Services], and I think what really, really hurt was that I was being told pretty much. I felt like I was told that because I was mentally abused, it doesn't count. So, I think that was the hardest part of that because they told me yeah, they told me if I was physically abused and had evidence of it, I could report that, and I would be bumped up on the list. But because there was no, at the time, physical, like anything physical, I wasn't able to get anywhere with that.

CH: Sorry to hear that. Yeah. So sorry. How did any of this affect your mental health or your family's mental health?

BB: So, I mentioned before I have a few things under my belt.

CH: So, you don't have to go into details about these things if you don't want to.

BB: I'm pretty open about it. I like being open about it. It kind of helps people along the way, you know, but I do have Bipolar Disorder Type Two. And I was also diagnosed with Borderline Personality Disorder and ADHD is well, yeah, ADHD in my brain is a wicked place to be in sometimes. So already dealing with those things, dealing with an emotionally, mentally abusive person who didn't leave me alone for quite a long time, even after the split[up] was already incredibly difficult to deal with. I went into a huge low point in my life where I didn't know if I was even going to make it out. And I was like, "it's probably not even worth for me to make it out." So then also going through not being able to find housing, not feeling like I was supported in the way I felt like I should have been, you know, it was definitely really difficult. Like there was a point where I was having severe panic attacks at work because which is why I had to go on leave because I was so stressed out. I didn't know what to do. I didn't know where I was going to be from day to day with my children, you know, who are young, like my kids are still very young. So, for me, I didn't know where I was going, what I was doing. And like you said, like we don't, we go through this, we don't have like here's a checklist, there's a book that I could read, you know, to be like, what do I do next? So, I just felt like I was going day by day, it's not knowing if I was going to even end up alive, if I'm being honest. I'm like, "is it even worth for me to stay here?" So, my mental health went through, you know, through, right to the ground, you know. My kids being so young, I don't know if they really grasped at the time what was really going on really, you

know. But I definitely see the effects now of the things, especially now that my son is getting a little older, he's asked me questions, you know, like, "hey, during that time, what's going on?" And I'm honest about it, you know, I'm… I'm not going to lie to anybody. Like, you know, this is what happened, and you know what we're getting out of it, now doing a lot better. So, you can kind of see now that it's turning in his head. And, you know, obviously that kind of scares him when you when you tell him like, "yeah, we were having a rough time." So, you can kind of see the effects now, but at the time, thankfully, they didn't they weren't really old enough. I think they really comprehend the severity of that situation.

CH: They pick up on it though, eh?

BB: Oh yeah, they're very smart. Children are… are a lot smarter than sometimes we all give them credit for it.

CH: And they get smarter all the time.

BB: Absolutely!

CH: So, did you was there any government agency support that really helped pull you out of that situation or was it all your own blood, sweat and tears?

BB: It was really all me. Yeah, um, all of the agencies that I did try to go to, like I said, I felt like I was shot down immediately and I were just like, "well, we can put you on the list, and here you go." And like I said, TDSSAB [Social Services] didn't even really give me any resources, which I was surprised about or even… even housing listings like CMHA was doing. I didn't really get any help that way. So, everything that I did end up doing was either the support from my friends or from just myself and finding… finding out what I could.

CH: I hope it's okay for me to mention this. I can leave it out of the interview if you want, but like we don't have specific resources here for queer people either. Like in Sudbury, there's, when I was homeless in Sudbury, I was too shy to go to the, there's like a young people gender support services or whatever. And I just, I was too new [to being out as trans] and I just could not, I could not walk in the door.

BB: That's understandable for sure.

CH: But we don't really have those things [in Temiskaming].

BB: No, I honestly, I'm trying to start [a local Pride committee]. Yeah, honestly, I didn't even realize that that was even, that's amazing that they do have resources like that out there [in Sudbury]. And I would never even would have thought that that was especially being in such a small town. I feel like our resources are already not very big. So you don't have very many places already to reach out to. So, yeah.

CH: This is kind of a stupid question, but do you think it would be better in Temiskaming to have some housing and homelessness solutions for queer people?

BB: Absolutely. Absolutely for sure. But I totally get why you have to ask. And 100% I think that would be helpful for sure. Because I also feel like my experience living in small areas and Northern communities and being a part of that community hasn't always been very positive. So, I feel like now I have, I can't say like I've been through it. But I definitely can imagine that there's discrimination in there somewhere, you know, between being queer as well as being women. So, like I said, I haven't experienced it personally, but I think having those resources would definitely be helpful.

CH: Personally, it's just me. I think it would be helpful too if the services for Indigenous housing and queer housing could, kind of, cooperate on more things, because it is a big region with a lot of people and not a lot of money.

BB: Absolutely.

CH: And anytime organizations can team up, they can get more done. I don't see it happening.

BB: Absolutely. I don't see that thing now. More hands on deck the better.

CH: So just to just to verify though, through all of this, your family status with your children never changed? You managed to maintain custody.

BB: I did. I managed to maintain custody through the entire thing.

CH: That's really fantastic.

BB: Yeah, I was very lucky for that too. Because honestly, they were the ones that really helped push to be like, I need to do this, you know, and I need to get better, and I need to figure out somewhere for us to go. So, I'm very blessed that [I] didn't [lose custody]. And I think it had a lot to do with, I did have a lot of support from friends, which I'm very, very blessed for. Because like I said, if I didn't, I don't know where, it would have been a completely different story for sure. And because of that, [my children] at least did always have somewhere to sleep at night. So that that comes a long way too.

CH: And do you think going through any of this changed your sexual identity at all or those just kind of separate?

BB: Those were definitely separate. But I think going through those hardships made me be a lot more okay with being more open about it, if that makes sense. You know, I feel like I got stronger from it for sure. You know, now people, I don't think anybody should have to go through it. But it definitely gave me a level of strengths for sure that I didn't think I had. And which then in turn kind of started giving me strengths in different areas of my life too.

CH: So, two more questions. Okay. How does that experience still affect you today - or your kids?

BB: So, like I kind of mentioned earlier that I'm honestly terrified to leave the apartment that I have. So, I definitely have a lot of anxieties with that, especially knowing that probably within the next, like, within the next couple years, at least, I'm going to have to find a bigger place. Like my son's going into almost preteen stages, ages, you know, so I know eventually they're not going to be able to share a room. So, there's certain things that I know I'm going to have to have to do. And I'm scared of being able to find an affordable place. Like that's number one, because even like every once in a while, I'll look at the listings and the prices are outrageous. And as a single moment of two, I don't think I could ever afford those. So that leaves me with a lot of anxiety - just going out and trying to find housing and then knowing the resources that were supposed to help during that time kind of shunned me out. It doesn't make me feel excited to go try to, "Hey, can you help me again?" You know? With my children, like I said, at the time they weren't really able to comprehend. But now my son's asking a little bit more questions. And I think it gives him a little bit of anxiety too. You know, like, "well, what if we ever leave this place and what'll happen?" You know, he's kind of a "what if" guy like I am. So yeah, so those are those are definitely struggles.

CH: And do you have any advice for specifically for a gender diverse person who ended up in your situation? Is there something they could do differently? It sounds like you did all the right things. Is there any advice you have?

BB: Yeah. Honestly, my biggest advice is, is honestly, it's okay to ask for help. And I learned that I had to learn that super early because I was terrified to ask my friends, I was embarrassed, you know, to be like, "Hey, I don't have anywhere to go." Like, "can I please sleep on your couch tonight?" Like, that's a really embarrassing thing to have to ask over and over and over again. But I think my biggest, biggest sort of advice is: that's okay. Ask for help. Because it's better than having to sleep out in the snow, you know, it's better than having to find somewhere to go that you, you know, that's not safe. And try to keep those supports close because like I said, if I didn't have them, that the story would have been completely different. I might not have my children. I might, you know, like, who knows what would have happened? It would have been very different if I didn't have those support systems. So, I definitely think that would be my biggest advice is just: ask for help because sometimes, you know, you need to.

CH: Anything else you'd want me to add to this type of a... there's a... what I'm going to do is I'm going to take your testimony, three other people's testimony, my testimony, and I'm going to compile it into sort of a picture of the Northeast. There will be some Indigenous people, some queer people, some cracker people. And I'm going to submit it all as one report. There's a small chance, probably not. There's a small chance that they'll call me as a witness to go testify. And then there's an even smaller chance that they could call anyone else to come explain. If there's some little thing you've said that the Panel is really curious about, they could call you as a as an expert witness to Ottawa; it'd be kind of cool. But not likely. But what we will give you for sure is a $50 e-transfer. Either you can fill out the online form right now, or I can just send you the link and you can fill it out. I don't mean, it's just a couple questions you have to fill out to get the, to get the e-transfer. Unfortunately, I don't think it happens overnight. I think it might take a few months or something, but you'll get it. And if there's anything else you wanted to add into my testimony that I haven't asked you, that was the time.

BB: Not that I can think of off the top of my head. I think that was like pretty, pretty good. You asked some really good questions that even got me thinking. Even thinking of things I haven't thought of in a long time.

CH: So, I hope I didn't take you back to any dark places.

BB: No, for sure. I've kind of gotten to a point in my life where it's a lot easier to talk about those things. If you asked me a couple of years ago, it probably wouldn't be the same.

CH: Me too. 2020 was a year I did not want to remember. Now, I can talk about it.

BB: Yeah. Yeah. Sometimes it just takes a little bit of time, you know, and, and some much-needed healing and counseling has been a savior.

CH: Yeah. Keep, keep doing that.

BB: Yeah. For sure.

CH: Okay. So, did, did you want to try to fill this all out now? Or do you want me to just send you the link?

BB: You could just send me the link and yeah, I could just do that. Sorry I couldn't buy you a coffee while we're here. There's no coffee [at the library].

BB: No, okay. I know it's okay. It was okay.

CH: I really appreciate you coming out on a Saturday morning. Thank you.

Appendix D: Interview with MC

This is a transcript of an interview by CH of a woman labelled "MC" throughout, conducted February 8, 2025 in Kirkland Lake, Ontario.

CH: … to interview three to four women or gender diverse people, preferably indigenous, but they don't have to be indigenous, but who are willing to talk about their experiences with homelessness. And I've interviewed two people already, so you will be the third. And then what's going to happen is this is all being done for the Women's National Homelessness and Housing Network. You might have met some of the people from there. They're filing a human rights complaint against the federal government saying that the federal government has a duty to provide equal access to housing for men and women. And that the federal government has failed in that over the last 50 or 100 years, because it's much harder for women to stay safely housed, affordably housed, housed in their… a neighborhood that's good for them. It's harder than it is for men. And so that's what this interview is about. And I have my own story. I ended up unhoused briefly only for about two months, but it still sucked balls, in Sudbury, during the pandemic, during the winter. It was really not great. And I'm lucky that I survived it. So, the way I'm going to be doing this is I'm interviewing you for local compatible people who have somewhat similar stories. And I'm going to write a submission to the Panel that'll mainly be about my story, but I'm going to pull in parts of all of your four experiences to back up my story and convince them that what I'm saying is true.

MC: Well, that's lovely. I love that. That's such a great opportunity for you. We need more of that in our lives, because I feel that it was not enough people standing up to the government for our rights. And generally, being as the [cost in the] economy is just rising so high right now. It's hard to live on your own woman, man. It doesn't really matter at this point anymore, because you look at a small apartment and you're paying like $1,600 or $1,700. I love you. I love it. Thank God. Very happy.

CH: It's also really important because in Canada, there hasn't been a human right to housing until about five or six years ago. We had a human right to be free from discrimination. We had a human right to education. We had a human right to not be discriminated against on our gender, but there was no human right to housing in Canada until recently. So this is the first court case about that. So, we're very excited about it and it should be pretty historic and it's national. These interviews, like this interview with you, there's community people doing this all coast to coast to coast in all 13 provinces. So, we're going to be submitting all of that on March 14th and it's going to be a big day, big celebration.

MC: Well, I'm really excited that you, you know, I need to be part of this. It's like, that's a really great opportunity. I've been embraced. I've had quite the opportunities throughout this, like I did an interview with CBC radio Sudbury over Christmas. And it was about, yeah, it was about how, you know, the substance abuse crisis that we're facing right now and how like it's very challenging for anybody that's struggling to find the proper support and to go through all these hoops that they expect.

CH: Oh, totally.

MC: I've been really enjoying embracing these meetings and these interviews because it's just the part of my path and like my story, I talk about it all the time because it's important,

you know, people like me, they don't, we don't necessarily talk about our success. We dwell on our, you know, the things that we didn't do well.

CH: Yeah, me too.

MC: So, I'm really happy to be able to, you know, be part of this with you. So, thank you so much.

CH: Great. What I don't want to do is I don't want to take more than an hour of your time today. So, we're going to try to hopefully pack a lot of good information into one hour. If you do have to go take care of your kids or whatever, just put up your hand and I will totally understand.

MC: [Inaudible] is here; she's taking them today. So, they're fine. We already checked on them. I went and made [inaudible] before I come down here.

CH: Fantastic. So, we'll try to keep it under an hour. I'm getting paid peanuts. I'm getting paid [peanuts] for this whole experience. And, but I do get to give out $50 gift cards to all of the interview participants. So, when you, I'm going to send you the consent form after this interview and whether you wanted or not, they're going to send you a $50 gift certificate just to say thank you. But anyway, now that we're recording, yeah, just super briefly. I'm, I'm CH. You know, I'm from this area. I'm a citizen of the Métis Nation of Ontario. I grew up in a good middle-class family. Nobody would have ever predicted that I would have ended up homeless. But I'm Autistic and I'm trans and I moved away to the city, and I didn't know what all of those things meant. And I ended up heavily, heavily, heavily addicted to alcohol drinking myself [to death], every day for 20 years. I lost my marriage. I lost my house. I lost my business. I lost my driver's license. I lost almost everything. And I ended up on the street. And the pandemic made it all that even worse. So, I do have a little bit of experience in what we're talking about, even though it's not like I lived on the streets for 20 years or anything. But my main problem was that I was just starting to transition as I, when I needed a shelter. And I, I was too manly to go to a women's shelter and I was too womanly to go to a man's shelter. And so, I had nowhere to go. And it was, it was really scary, and I ended up just staying in hotels and drinking myself to death. So, it sucked. It sucked. But what I'm hoping is that maybe you can just tell me a little bit of a background about just super, just a few details about who you are and what led up to your experiences with housing precarity. And I'm not just talking about like on-the-street homeless. I mean couch surfing. I mean moving to a new town and not having secured a place to live yet, like the week before you get there. I'm talking about any experiences with homelessness that, that threaten your health and well-being. You know what I mean? And if you could just give me a little bit about what led up to those and why they were hard for you as a woman. I don't know if you identify as gender diverse, but either way, what about your homeless experience do you think was different because you were a woman or a gender diverse person where it would have been different if you were a man? And then just a little bit about how you got out of the situation and back to where you are today.

MC: I've had a few different experiences where I've been unhoused. So, we'll go back to like when I was probably like 15 and I had moved to Thunder Bay with my father, and I was living on the streets of Thunder Bay and I lucked out because I was still in high school. So, I would still attend school because it was kind of like the only thing keeping me stable. And I was taken in by this family. But before then, it was really challenging because I had uprooted my entire life to Thunder Bay because I wanted to get to know my father, right? And there

was substance abuse disorder in our home and due to that, I had ended up getting kicked out because I was not necessarily a nice person when I was under that pressure. I feel that living on the streets and trying to couch surf and to see where you're staying every day, it was a very challenging experience for me because I was young, right? And as a woman and being a young woman, it was just frightening because I didn't know anybody in Thunder Bay except for the school kids. I didn't have no family and have no support. It was wintertime.

CH: Where did you come from before Thunder Bay? Sorry.

MC: Sudbury. I was in Sudbury.

CH: Okay.

MC: Yeah, because so I'm born and raised in Sudbury.

CH: Okay, thank you.

MC: I moved to Kirkland Lake three years ago and I ended up landing here because I was unhoused as well. So, I was struggling with substance abuse. And my kid's father, he was struggling with substance abuse. And we tried to battle that crisis, and it wasn't always successful. He and I split up in 2018, I think it was, and he went to prison. I was losing my house. I ended up moving in with my mom. Long story short, he went to jail, come back, and we moved in together because we wanted to re-incarnate our family because, you know, like, it was just, it was a good thought. So, we got an apartment, and it was $2,000 a month for a three-bedroom apartment. And it was insanity because I was driving a school bus, right? Just a little bus. And I would have never been able to afford it. So, when we decided to split, I had a home until I didn't. So, like my, I moved to my mom's house. I lived in a storage unit. I had actually purchased a trailer, like a camper trailer. So, a lot of mine and children's like everyday needs were in there. So, it was easily accessible for us because I did have the kids. So, I was struggling with substance abuse. I was trying to find my niche. I was trying to keep the kids together. It was very hard. So, when me an [redacted] split and my mom kicked me out. Like, so I went to live with her and then she was like, oh, if you bring him around (because he was toxic), you can't stay here anymore. But like, he was the father of my children, and I have empathy - too much, honestly. And I let it get the best in me. So, at this point, I was literally couch serving. I had found an apartment with a friend of mine, a one bedroom. And I was living in Access Storage Units in Sudbury. So, all my stuff was in storage. I had my trailer. I had my kids. I was trying to get sober. Like I would stay at one friend's house and then like, you know, the quabble would happen and then I would be like looking for another place and like this all happened with kids.

CH: And was, was Children's Aid [Society] breathing down your throat during any of this?

MC: Umm, I was really good with words. I did have them involved. I'm not going to lie. Like there had been calls made, but like, like, although I was in a very stressful situation, my main priority is since having these children has always been my kids. Even when I struggled with substance abuse, I was a functioning addict. Not that I was a good addict, but I functioned, you know, like, and although I was, you know, under the influence, I was still providing for them. So, I was couch surfing. I'd stay at my kid's father's, have partner one day. I would stay at my mom's. I'd go stay at my cousins. Like we literally surfed for like three months. It was awful. I called Ontario Aboriginal housing because I had just recently received my Me´tis citizenship card and still had the children. So that was my saving grace. I called them and I said, you know, I'm a single mom. I don't have Children's Aid breathing down my throat, but

I'm telling you it's going to come. I mean like, there's a month left until school starts. I'm a mother of two. We're living in a frigging storage unit. I'm like, I need a home. I'm like, where I'm housed? It's scary. You know, like you don't want to be living on the streets with the kids and you don't want to be, you don't, it's hard to depend on people, you know, because people make you feel like a burden. Society is so like, not welcoming, you know? Like they're just, I feel like everybody is like for themselves and if we can't benefit them in any way, then they don't necessarily care to help us, you know? In many cases and that was the case then. So the kids and I had another three weeks of like couch surfing and [Aboriginal] Housing called us, and they said, "we have two houses available right now - and the problem is you're going to have to relocate your whole life."

CH: Where were you at that point?

MC: So, at this point, I was still living in Sudbury. Sudbury. So, I was in Sudbury, and they said, "we have two housing available to you. We have one in Swastika [a suburb of Kirkland Lake]," which is where I live now. And then there was one in Wawa, and they had given me the opportunity to choose which one I want. So, I was on the phone with her, and I said, "like, this is a really big choice for me." I'm like, "can I like take a minute? Like maybe 15, 20, maybe 30." She's like, "yes, this is a big choice," you know. So, I got off the phone and then I had prayed for an opportunity to vacate that life that I lived, you know - the unhoused life, you know, the non-stakeable like having just that environment of, you know, substance abuse and drugs. I was just over it. And I, as somebody who was in like in that cycle, it's really challenging when you want to get out and you don't know how. Right? So [Aboriginal Housing] told me that I could move [to Swastika, a suburb of Kirkland Lake] August 1st, which would have been August 1st, 2021. Yeah. Right. Like mid pandemic. I, I never even knew what Kirkland Lake looked like. I didn't know what this house looked like. I moved here on sheer faith, but it was going to work out. And we actually worked out with the kids and I, because when I opened the door to see all my stuff in the middle of the house, I cried because I was like, we have an entire house! Three bedrooms, a bathroom, a yard, a basement, a large... like everything that me and these children needed to just be okay. It was this and it was like an appreciative thing, you know, but the market is so high. You know, as a single mom who doesn't have support from their father, you know, like $1,600. That's one month. If you double that, that's a ridiculous amount to be asking from a single parent who has chosen... like my kids are at like that age right now where it's challenging. Like, we have an age where we leave them for like an hour or so, but like, they're still little. So as a woman and a mother, I find it's, it's challenging to try and sit... situate yourself where you're stable because, you know, being a mother that's already a burden. That's *not* a burden, sorry, I didn't mean that, by any means. It's already like a challenge to work around that, you know, employers don't necessarily like to work around your kids. It's like, I need you this and there and, you know, some jobs you can't do because they're 12 hours a day and I'm, I've been through a lot as a child and due to those facts, I don't let random people watch my kids. I don't even do daycare. So, it was challenging for me, but I mean, it's, it's not just me that's faced with these challenges, you know. I have friends back home that I've spoken to and they're facing those challenges too. Like, it's not, it's not, it's not fun for anybody, you know, to be unhoused and I don't think that the government is doing enough for us. [The Prime Minister is] not helping us, any of us. Like, if you walk down any town, you see so many unhoused people and so many tent cities, like the stigma attached to that as well as it's very like, it's sad, like.

CH: Can I ask you a few more specific questions?

MC: Absolutely.

CH: So, when you finally did move to [Kirkland Lake], was the father of the children involved or did he get left behind, so to speak?

MC: He was touch-and-go involved, like, but I did leave him behind.

CH: I'm wondering, I'm wondering just like, would the move here in Aboriginal housing and stuff with that have been easier with him or easier without him?

MC: It was easier without him, right? Because when I applied for the application, I was in a toxic relationship, right? So, there was a lot of mental and emotional abuse involved. So that was kind of my saving grace, like as a woman that was going through a separation at the time. And it being toxic, having that on paper, it really helped to push them, right? Because now they're like, hey, there's a mother, she has children, they don't have a home, they're dealing with, you know, toxic relationship. So, like they rushed me, which was like, great. Not everybody has that, but I did.

CH: Absolutely. And when you say you got your Me´tis citizenship card, I just want to verify specifically, do you mean the Me´tis Nation of Ontario?

MC: Yes, the Me´tis Nations of Ontario. So, I received that in 2021.

CH: That's great. I would say when I was in Sudbury and I was living on the street and I was drinking myself to death and I was coming out as trans, [the Me´tis Nation of Ontario] were the only people that I could get help from as well. I tried all the local services, all the local places you're supposed to go. And the only people who ended up really helping me get counseling and a roof over my head and a stable life where it was the Me´tis Nation of Ontario. I was really, really fortunate, especially I wasn't a woman at that. I didn't identify as a woman at that time. So, I wasn't eligible for all the mother's programs and women's programs. So, it was really hard, but they're the ones who helped me out. So, I'm really, I'm really happy to hear that you've got some support [from the Me´tis Nation of Ontario (MNO)] as well.

MC: But I still follow them like to this day. Like I still have a file with the MNO, and I still try to partake in a lot of the stuff. Should I be able to like as a mom? Yeah.

CH: Did you try any of the other mainstream government services before you went to the MNO?

MC: I dealt with Ontario Works, obviously. Yeah. CMHA [Canadian Mental Health Association] was a joke. Yeah. Honestly. I had seen my family doctor like I was following up with him a lot back home as well because I was struggling with my mental health. And I wasn't sure if it was a substance abuse-incurred mental health or if it was just because I didn't know how to regulate myself and I didn't understand how to cope with life. So, my exit was like, I'm going to use [drugs], and drink. So, it was hard, but like CMHA was not no help. When I moved… moved here, thankful for my [MNO] card, I was able to utilize the Indigenous team like Mino M'shki-ki [Indigenous Health Team], and stuff. So, upon my arrival here per se, I did have support from [Keepers of the Circle Indigenous Women's Centre] and Mino [M'shki-ki] as well as the MNO because they just followed me. Like I try to like keep in tabs. It's like a family for me, right? Especially being so far away from home. Like, you know, you meet a lot of people when you're networking and you're working in a professional environment and stuff, but you know, to meet people and to know people is

way different, you know? So, it's nice to have that support from the MNO. They like make you feel like you're family. So that's, that's great.

CH: That is really great. I just want to add to the record here for the interview. Mino M'shki-ki here is the Indigenous-led, nurse practitioners' clinic and health clinic and mental health clinic that's run between a partnership between three local First Nations and the local Me´tis Council. So that's really fantastic that you found some services that Mino. I did too. When I first moved back here, it was impossible to get a family doctor and I got all of my health services through either the MNO or through Mino M'shki-ki for the first three or four years. I just got a family doctor recently because I have some really complicated health issues, but I was very happy at Mino M'shki-ki and through the MNO. Did you, did you ever get any like therapy or counseling services through the MNO?

MC: Yeah, so I used to see their addiction as a mental health social worker.

CH: You just said you were seeing some, you were seeing a therapist briefly.

MC: Yeah, so I was seeing one of their addictions and mental health social work counselors if they had available to me. I also did a land-based healing with the other cultural social worker that they had that was no longer there now. But I was feeling like I wasn't really benefiting from seeing that counselor anymore, right? It was more so like a friendship-based, because I was an employee there and because it wasn't beneficial. So, I actually started seeing Shirley, which is the psychotherapist or the therapist [at Mino M'shki-ki], the actual therapist that we have through the clinic. And I worked with her for a year and a half. I haven't been recently working on myself, which is probably not a good thing. But I also saw the Indigenous healer, Michael Clark, for like a good eight months. I think that was the most successful part of my growth like my entire life.

CH: Really, eh?

MC: Yeah, like he really helped me see my value. Like, he really reminded me of the facts that I already knew, but like I was not like, I just, I knew these things were not good and that they were not benefiting me. But at the same time, you know, like when you're in the transition of being this person and going into this person, like that transitional period is very challenging because you're so used to this. And you like, but this is where you're going and you're like trying to meet in the middle to not like overwhelm yourself because change is overwhelming. It's overwhelming. No matter what anybody says. But I should go back to my therapy sessions. I haven't been in a while, but I still utilize the RN [Registered Nurse] and the doctor there because it's Kirkland Lake… Like, unless you go to [the Hospital Emergency Department], you're kind [of out of luck]. So, I'm grateful for their presence, but I do still utilize their services a lot. I'm currently trying to get in there for placement for my program.

CH: Oh, cool. That would be so great. Can I ask where you did the land-based healing? I didn't do that program. I'm wondering where it was.

MC: Oh, no, he just brought like, so we used to do like appointments where we would have like sacred fires.

CH: Oh, through Michael [Clark], you mean?

MC: No, through Chris [Carn].

CH: Oh, through Chris. Okay.

MC: Yeah. So, we used to do a lot of like land-based; just great activities. Learning about our medicine and just learning stuff. That was pretty interesting. And unfortunately, those services right now are on cold.

CH: Yeah. Any of that's how I got sober. I had to leave my life behind. I sold everything I owned. I gave up my beautiful apartment in North Bay and I moved to Winnipeg for seven weeks and I lived in the Northern end, the worst part of the most impoverished part of Winnipeg in the middle of winter and we did land-based healing, cultural healing, Cree-based healing for seven weeks. And that really, really changed my outlook on my situation.

MC: Absolutely. Like when I first moved to Kirkland Lake, I like I had my Indigenous roots, and I knew that they were there. But to know that your roots are there and to partake in your roots is completely different. So, when I moved here, I had like a Christian-based faith. And then I learned a lot of traditional stuff and I did the [Culture, Confidence, and Competence] program [at Keepers of the Circle] and then I got the naming ceremony and like all these little ceremonies that I did were life-changing because my direction completely changed. And then I was like, I've always, I've searched for a place where I felt, you know, at home. So, like I went to Pentecostal church and All Nations Church and, you know, the Roman Catholic churches and there's so many different ones and I've been to them all. But it wasn't until I moved here and started partaking with the Indigenous women's groups and [Mino M'shki-ki] that I really embraced my culture and for the first time in my entire life, I really felt I belonged there. We always search for a place that we belong, and spirituality is often a way that we find that. And I, honestly, like, I found a lot of peace in Indigenous culture, and smudging, and ceremonies, and sacred fires, and you know, the grounding exercises, and putting your feet on the ground and just letting The Creator work through you, you know.

CH: That's fantastic. You put that so well. Thank you. I have two, I have two kind-of tough questions. You don't have to answer them if you don't want to. One is, how do you think your situation would have played out differently if you didn't have kids?

MC: Oh my God. I've cried about that many, many times because I think that they were the only reason that people jumped out of their way to help me. Because everybody always cares about the kids. You know, it's the kids that matter. It's not the makers of the kids. So, I truly believe that without these kids, I would have never made it to Kirkland [Lake]. I probably would have never made it out of my substance abuse disorder. I don't think I would have, I wouldn't be here. I don't think I would have graduated. It would have been a lot different, you know, because when you have children, it's like, even though all hope is lost, you still have hope when you have kids. Like even though you don't see that hope, you find it as a parent, you know. So, I'm just very thankful that I had the kids because they rushed me right through, right? Like here's the home, here's... and should I not have had them, they probably would have just told me "We'll put you on the waitlist," because that's basically what they tell everybody.

CH: Just for the record here too, let's just make sure we put on tape. Your housing is not provided by the MNO, right? It's by Aboriginal Housing...

MC: It's Ontario Aboriginal Housing Services.

CH: Okay. I just wanted to have that on the tape so that we have the name.

MC: There's a lot of different indigenous organizations, so it is important to have people to separate them.

CH: I know the MNO has just started building their own housing services, but they own like 10 places, that's it. It's really, they're really small and they're just starting. And they're starting in Sault Ste. Marie for some reason. I don't know why they're there.

MC: Yeah, they do have a lot of stuff in Sault Ste. Marie. It's not housing, it just got $14.8 million in funding for housing right now. They haven't really, they haven't disclosed yet where they're going to be situating that funding, but I gather that it'll be throughout Northern Ontario because the need for housing is overpopulating.

CH: Yeah, it's skyrocketing and even in little places like North Bay, when I lived in North Bay, I didn't see any homelessness out on the street, but now I do. I see it around there. So, it's definitely gotten worse in Northern Ontario. This is one other weird question and don't answer if you don't want to. I don't think that I was facilitating [the Culture, Confidence, and Competence Program at Keepers of the Circle] when you took it, right?

MC: It wasn't. No, it was Deena and... What was that guy's name? Johnny?

CH: Oh, Johnny! Johnny. Yeah, I was going to ask if you in your recovery journey in your not just from substance abuse, but your whole recovery journey, getting back on your feet, moving to a new community, taking these programs, going back to school, I was going to ask you if any Two-Spirit people have been part of that recovery journey for you. And I think Johnny identifies as Two-Spirit.

MC: Yeah, and then we've had a couple of like you've come around a few times as well to that journey. Like you were still kind of working [at Keepers of the Circle] when I [inaudible]. But no, I'm honestly, I'm alone. I'm not going to lie. I've made a lot of acquaintances. Like I know quite a few people in Kirkland Lake and surrounding areas because of my position at Keepers [of the Circle] and, you know, the fact that I ran a shop here when I first moved here and stuff. But I've chosen solitude, because to heal, you need to be at peace with yourself. And when you take like when you're so based on like friendships and like those relationships, you're taking away from yourself and my entire life, I was a people-pleaser. And now the only person I'm trying to please is my own self. Because I gave so much of my own cup that mine was empty. And I am trying to like… reformat. But like I love to help people. That's why I'm in school for what I'm in school for. But I would just like to put I've been putting myself and, you know, to be on my own with the kids has given me the opportunity to get to know them on a deeper level spend more quality time with them. But it has also allowed me to observe things in my life to make myself love myself again, because substance abuse and the separation and stuff that was, that's a lot on somebody. So, you know, your value is often nothing at that point. So, you know, I didn't really have no respect for myself as a person. So, like this entire healing journey has allowed it. And I don't hang out with people. So, I would love to say that I have all these people in my life. I talked to Eva Collier, [who was in my cohort of Culture, Confidence, and Competence]. Her and I, she had lost her daughter actually three or four months prior to meeting me.

CH: Oh, wow.

MC: Yeah. So, it was kind of like a, if I got goosebumps, it was kind of meant to be like, you know, because I have lost my whole life and she had lost her whole life, right? So, in her and I are still very close today.

MC: And then Abby... like Abby was the first one who was like, "Hey, you can do your high school here." And then, "Hey, you can do the [Culture, Confidence, and Competence Program]. I still have contact with them. Like, and I talk to a lot of people, but to say like, I'll go out with them now. No, I, I found peace in solitude. Honestly, like, I just, I'm at peace in being alone. I'm at peace not having to deal with everybody right now, because it's my time. I'm trying to build myself up so that I can be there for the kids, you know. And I wasn't always the best. And I wasn't always the best person. I did my best. But, you know, when you're on, when you use [drugs], you think that you're great, but you're not, you know? So this has kind of just given me an opportunity to grow and apologize to that, you know, I'm sorry that I wasn't the best person of myself.

CH: That's true. That's important, but don't forget: nobody is the perfect parent. There's no perfect parent.

MC: No, no, there's not. But kids are not perfect, so we can't do it.

CH: That's right. That's right. And I understand you about needing to spend time alone during your recovery. It's so easy to go back to people-pleasing and being codependent and putting your problems on everyone else and not dealing with them on the inside. It's easy to do. And I really congratulate you on your commitment to rebuilding your own life and your own spiritual well-being. The question though that I just, I didn't mean it as anything serious... I just wondered if you had met like any Two-Spirit people along the way who kind of helped you in your recovery journey. And I think Johnny would be a great example.

MC: Yeah, no, he was, he taught me so much about the culture. I really appreciated him. You know, introducing me to the drumming and, like, the songs and like I, that was like kind of like a new experience for me through the [Culture, Confidence, and Competence Program], right? Like I had heard about it, but I had never partaken in it. I did my first pow wow with them. Like there was just the opportunities and the things that I got to experience out here was just... like... And Johnny, well... he was there to help but not. Like we had our, we did well but we didn't. I'm a very, well, I'm working on like my assertiveness or maybe I'm bold, I don't know. I don't know. I don't know how to say that. I'm [inaudible]. I thought time it was the beginning of my time to be a nice person. So, I was not necessarily like, [inaudible], yeah.

CH: That leads me into my next question for you is how, how has your experience with getting into homelessness and getting back out of homelessness, how has that experience changed your approach to living like or who you are today?

MC: To not have anything, and to have to start over, is huge. Like technically speaking, when I moved here to Kirkland Lake, it's pretty like I have to start over from scratch like I had nothing. I was a nasty person. I blamed everybody. Everybody else's fault. It wasn't my fault that I was on drugs. I was it was that person's fault. And it was because of how I grew up. And the move and having a home has really given me that humbleness. You know, like I'm very grateful for this home and I appreciate it, and my actions show that, you know, and I tell the kids all the time, like we're very, we're very graced with this home. You know, there's families that are living in tents or living in boxes and, you know, we just got lucky. We got lucky. And when I look at myself today and like back, it's going to be four years in August that I've been in Kirkland Lake now, I'm a different person. I have more empathy. I'm more compassionate and I'm less judgmental, you know? Because I was so judged for so long. It was a... it was a quality that... not a quality, but it was a characteristic that I picked up; and now I just, I have like a more like, I'm just more compassionate and more open to being

listening and to hearing, you know? Before it was like... it's all me. It's all me. I'm on a very selfless journey, you know? It's not all about me. It's, you know, there's people out there struggling and I try to just, you know, remember where I came from sometimes, you know? As somebody who's been unhoused and couch surfed, you know... you really have a different outlook on what you have when you didn't have it.

CH: And is there anything you've explained how the MNO and Ontario Aboriginal Housing helped you and you've explained how Temiskaming Native Women's Support Group [a.k.a. Keepers of the Circle] has helped you. Are there any other of the big mainstream services who could have done a better job to help get you back on your feet?

MC: You know what, at that time I wasn't really fully aware of the resources that are available to us.

CH: And that is totally fair. Neither was I. Neither was I. That's a fair answer, but I'm just wondering if there's anything.

MC: Yeah, I know. I mean, I don't like I only started realizing the amount of resources we have now, personally. As I've been growing in a professional environment, right? But like back then, like, you know, you knew Ontario Works, you knew, you know, MNO, you knew whatever, that was it, CMHA.

CH: Yeah.

MC: There wasn't very many services back. Like, like the last time that I was unhoused, I managed to have services because I had the kids, but like the one before that was even worse. I feel like it has gotten slightly, like, slightly better when it comes to resources. But like I say slightly because as much as they're available there, are they actually available?

CH: Yeah, and they're not connected. They're not connected to each other very well, eh?

MC: No, they really need to come together and unite all do services so that they can actually support each other and supporting these unhoused people instead of [unhoused people] doing the legwork and then then doing the legwork and then they go switch. You know, like there's not enough, there's not like enough communication within the professional environment for the people, you know, because oftentimes they're helping the same people because this person goes there and then they go there. I think that they really need to have a better network system so that they can have a further reach for the people, if that makes sense.

CH: Yeah, absolutely. I agree they've in some places they've built these Indigenous hubs like in North Bay. Now they have an Indigenous Care Hub where all the different social services are supposed to be accessible in one location. I don't know how well it works. It sounds, it sounds to me like maybe it would work, maybe it wouldn't work. I don't know, but I think we're really lucky to have Keepers [of the Circle]. We're really lucky to have Keepers [of the Circle Native Womens' Indigenous Centre].

MC: Yeah. I'm very thankful for that place. I don't spend as much time there as I did there when I was working there [at Keepers].

CH: It's an easy place to give back [to]. Like, even once you've taken the programs and graduated, it's very easy to volunteer and go back and teach courses or just go and sit with the Elders. There's lots of ways to give back there, which I like.

MC: Yeah. I love that. I miss the Elders because I was always in the kitchen, right?

CH: Yeah.

MC: So, I was in the first face that everybody saw. I got to still think I miss them the most. A lot of my schooling had an in-depth Indigenous knowledge [course]. They actually focus a lot of this program on the Indigenous population and the Residential School survivors and the intergenerational trauma and stuff. I personally am actually breaking the intergenerational trauma in my family. I don't know if I mentioned that to you, but my great-grandmother was a Residential School survivor.

CH: Wow!

MC: So, it kind of started making sense to me why it took me so long to be culturally knowledgeable, right? And once you start understanding, you're like, wow.

CH: Yeah. That's heavy, eh? That's really heavy. I think it's heavy. Our family escaped the residential schools because we were able to hide as, because we don't look Indigenous. But instead of that, what our problem has been that Two-Spirit runs in our family, there's lots and lots of Two-Spirit people in my mom's family and a lot of suicide. Because back in those days, it was chased underground, and it was demonized. And it was seen as a sickness. And we're only just learning now that Two-Spirit people are valuable and important parts of society. So yeah, I feel like I'm part of breaking a bad cycle there too.

MC: Well, yeah, like it's, it's hard to be that warrior. Yeah. Here we are.

CH: I only have one or two more questions for you. This one's a tricky one. Is there any way that your experience still affects the way you do things today? Like are you still cautious about certain things or are you still worried about certain things or are you stronger in certain ways?

MC: I think that life is an everyday journey, and I get stronger in everything that I utilize but I also still struggle. I don't know how like, I mean, even though everything seems fine and dandy, life still has a different plan sometimes, you know? But I personally, umm... I don't know. I wouldn't want to leave here. Like I, I just a lot of things that just feel safe in this spot and I don't want to, like I don't want to date. I don't want to move out of my house. But I had nothing, I'm clinging to this like for dear life. Yeah.

CH: You think that's healthy? I can relate to that. I can relate to how you feel, but I'm wondering, do you think that's healthy? I don't know.

MC: No, I think it's part of, you know, growing those survival modes. I call a lot of my behaviours "survival mode". Last year for my birthday, I got a tattoo and it says, "I want to live and not just survive." So, if you look back at, like I look back at my life, you know, substance abuse, you know, dancing, the list goes on and on. My history is very, very colorful, but like it's just, you just, you appreciate things different, you know?

CH: And finally, do you have any, do you have any advice you would give some young person in, in, in those early stages of, of, of losing their, the, the foundation of their housing situation? Where things are just starting to get rocky?

MC: Absolutely. Don't let them get me shined, you know, life is always going to be challenging. Whether you have things made or you don't, things are going well or they're not, you know, life is never going to be like... easy peazy. So, you know, just, I think it's

important for those people that are in that transition to just know that they matter; and that, you know, these challenges don't seem fair right now, but they're going to build that character. They're going to come out stronger. You know? Not giving up, even when you feel like giving up, is the key to success, right? You just keep pushing, even when the world's pushing you down, you get back up and you just keep going, because nobody's going to be resilient for you. You have to be resilient on your own. But it's important for them to realize that no matter what the circumstance that got them in that situation, like... they matter. They're cared about. Their family might not tell them, but their life, it does something for somebody, you know? I still to this day get messages. And like, I get a little bit smishy about it, because [...] I literally get messages sometimes and people are like, "you are like hero to so many people." You have no idea how many people have watched you strive through your journey. You know your history and you have, like, changed people's lives just by being who you are and fighting through all the stuff, you know? So, it's actually really rewarding to not be a fuck up. I think you know. Well, they're like, "oh my God, look at you do so well!" And then you're like, "oh my God, I really am doing really well." But I would just, I tell people that are struggling, you know, that struggle, it doesn't last forever. I mean, it seems lengthy, but once we get through that struggle, it gives us a different characteristic of strength and resilience. The thing that we go through is put it in our paths and we're going to use that strength somewhere.

CH: That's amazing. Thank you so much for sharing that. Just again for the record, can you tell me what it is the program that you're taking in school?

MC: Oh, yes. I'm in my second year of Addictions and Mental Health Social Work. I'm doing it remotely with Northern College. I have two more elective [courses] and a placement, and that's it. I'm graduating in December. I never thought that this was possible. But here I am.

CH: Fantastic. Good for you. I'm really, really happy for you. And I didn't know, you know, a lot of details about your story. And I'm really impressed, and I really want to thank you for being willing to share all that with me. What I'm going to do is I'm writing basically for this testimony, for this human rights complaint; I'm basically writing my story, but I've interviewed [three] women now. And I'm going to be bringing in parts of your stories that are similar or that back up what I'm saying or that are even stronger than my experience. And it'll make like a little tree because the testimony has to be from a first person's account. So, I'll write in large part my story, but I'll have the [three] of you all have amazing, wonderful stories that I will pull in. But your names will be anonymous. Okay, so I won't be using your real name. But...

MC: Even if you did [use my name] no worries from me, man.

CH: Yeah, I know everybody says that, but I...

MC: I'd love to be the star. No, I'm just kidding.

CH: It is going to be a national court case [and human rights complaint]. You might not want, you never know. You might not want your name on it someday. But it'll be anonymized. I will send you a consent form. I just need you to fill out. And as soon as you fill that out, they'll send you a gift card for $50.

MC: Hey, hey, stop them.

CH: Yeah, and I really appreciate your time today. This was... This interview turned out better than I expected. And I'm really proud of you. And I think you're doing great things.

MC: Oh, thanks. If you need me for anything. I'm here anytime. If I'm able to help you out in any manner that's going to help the world be a better place. Please don't ever hesitate to reach out. I was honored when you reached out.

CH: Yeah, I'm always really interested in addiction recovery because I have that history myself. But I'm always more interested in the land-based programs and the cultural-based programs. Like, if you heard of Enaahtig? It's in Parry Sound. It's a land-based program. It's where the Chief of Beaverhouse [First Nation] used to be a counselor there.

MC: My res is actually that one. Beausoleil First Nation. That's where my family comes from. I have never been there yet. I want to, though.

CH: Cool. Well, yeah, I think land-based healing is where part of the future is going to be, for sure.

MC: I remember now that actually before, like, when I was working, I mean, they said, "It is people in our generation that are going to heal from substance abuse and that are going to save our people."

CH: We're the seventh generation, so yeah, that's supposed to be... That's a lot on our shoulders, but yeah.

MC: That's okay. We got this.

CH: Good. I hope you have a really good rest of your weekend.

MC: Thank you so much.

CH: Bye.