

Learning from 2SLGBTQ+ Youth who have experienced homelessness in Sudbury, ON

By

Vincent Bolt

B. A., Laurentian University, Sudbury ON, 2012

BSW., Laurentian University, Sudbury ON, 2018

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK

In the School of Social Work

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University of Victoria

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We acknowledge and respect the Ləkʷəŋən (Songhees and Esquimalt) Peoples on whose territory the university stands, and the Ləkʷəŋən and W̱SÁNEĆ Peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

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## Abstract

This study is focused on the knowledge shared by 2SLGBTQ+ youth and adults who have experienced homelessness in Sudbury, Ontario and their recommendations to improve services. A total of 7 participants ranging in age from 19 to 38 were interviewed about their experiences with homelessness and accessing shelters and housing programs. Each participant was asked about their experiences of homelessness and seeking housing and shelter services in Sudbury Ontario and their recommendations for change to improve service for 2SLGBTQ+ people experiencing homelessness. This is a qualitative study, and I used thematic analysis to determine the themes that developed in the research. All the participants had both negative and positive experiences with the services that they accessed, and challenges with services that further disadvantage people accessing them. Each participant shared recommendations that would improve shelter and housings services for 2SLGBTQ+ homeless youth. Overall, participants described how there are policies and procedures in place that work, however, more needs to be implemented to meet the unique needs of 2SLGBTQ+ homeless youth.

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## Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge my committee members Dr. Bruce Wallace and Dr. V.C. Rhonda Hackett for their ongoing support and patience during the writing and editing process. I would like to thank the Chair of Transgender Studies Dr. Aaron Devor and the scholarship committee for selecting me as a recipient for the 2019 master's degree scholarship which funded my research. I wish to acknowledge the many professors I have had from my first undergrad, to my BSW, through to my MSW, as I have learned from all of you and that helped shape my research. A gargantuan thank you to all the participants in my research because without you this data would not exist. Your stories are the most important part of this study, and I am honoured to be trusted with them. Thank you as well to the staff at SACY for allowing me to recruit participants and conduct the interviews in your workspace. I would like to acknowledge my friends and family, who provided much emotional support during the time I spent completing my thesis. A huge thank you to Megan whose support over all these years helped me get to this point, thank you for always believing in me. Finally, I would like to thank my two rabbits Frith and Fiver for patiently waiting for me to spend time with them as I spent hours working on my laptop, and I appreciate you not biting the power cord in half in retaliation.

## **Dedication**

I dedicate this research to all the 2SLGBTQ+ people who have ever had to sleep rough, in a shelter, or couch surf. May there be the change needed in this world to create a place we can all call home.

I also dedicate this research in memory of Megan Turner. I know you would be proud and thank you for being with me every step of the way.

## Introduction

What are the experiences of 2SLGBTQ+ youth who are homeless and precariously housed seeking housing and shelter services in Sudbury Ontario, and what are their recommendations for change? Despite only making up 10-15% of the youth population, 2SLGBTQ+ youth make up 20-40% of the homeless youth population (Côté & Blais, 2019). From my experience working with 2SLGBTQ+ youth who have experienced homelessness, I have heard various reasons for how they ended up staying in shelters, couch surfing, or sleeping outside. The majority shared with me that they left home because they were kicked out, felt unsafe, or could not be themselves while at home. 2SLGBTQ+ youth who have experienced homelessness in Sudbury have experienced challenges placing them at higher risk of homelessness like family rejection, and when seeking shelter and housing services have experienced barriers accessing services.

This research is guided by the principles that people with lived experience are central to finding solutions to the problem and have valuable recommendations on how to address the needs of 2SLGBTQ+ youth experiencing homelessness. I firmly believe in “nothing about us without us” (Scheim et al., 2019) and that it should be members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community taking a lead in this research. While working on this research I consider my own positionality and the way it influences my work. Based on my local knowledge and reviewing the existing literature, I identified the need for research that specifically examines the experiences of 2SLGBTQ+ homeless youth in Sudbury. There are significant ethical considerations when working with a population that has historically been stigmatized and vilified by researchers. I will be utilizing guidelines from the Canadian Professional Association for Transgender Health (Bauer et al., 2019), as well as following the examples set by other queer and trans researchers

when conducting my research. This work has significant implications for social work and social justice work. Changes in the way community members view research and researchers is important to me, as well as conducting research for the purpose of making meaningful change in the lives of communities experiencing marginalization. My connections to the community and relationship with organizations serving this population will be helpful in the research process. The evaluation of this research will be ongoing with my thesis committee.

In 2013 I started working in the youth program at the Sudbury Action Centre for youth and during this time worked with several youth who were staying in a local youth shelter. They shared their experiences with me, and I was deeply upset by what I heard. Some of the older youth shared with me their experiences in the adult men's shelter, where they felt unsafe, and we were searching for alternative accommodations. Over the years I have trained staff at multiple shelters in cities and towns across Northeastern Ontario. One thing that has always stood out to me was that all the data I used to inform the training came from large cities and none of this research was local. I want to amplify the voices of 2SLGBTQ+ youth and ensure that this is not a population that is overlooked when it comes to shelter services. In 2014 I changed positions within the organization and one of my first tasks was assisting a client with getting on the emergency housing list. She was denied a spot because she was couch surfing and not staying in a shelter. At this time, she had already been unhoused and couch surfing for several years. She was too old to stay at the youth shelter which was an all-gender shelter and did not feel safe staying at a men's shelter due to where she was in her transition and was unsure of how she would be treated at a women's shelter. We recruited the help of Legal Aid Sudbury to pressure Sudbury Housing to place her on the emergency housing list. We were able to get her on the list, and a local women's shelter placed her in a hotel for the weeks we waited for an apartment to

become available to her. What impressed everyone working with her at the time was the fact that for several years she had been unhoused and continued to keep her part time job. Despite the tremendous amount of emotional and mental stress she was under, she continued to keep a positive outlook and continued to volunteer and be community minded. During my research, I spoke with her and when I asked her if there is anything else she would like to share about her experience she finished her interview with this advice to anyone going through similar challenges “Don’t give up. Never give up”. Her journey is what made me realize I needed to pursue a master’s degree so I could research and share the experiences of 2SLGBTQ+ youth who have experienced homelessness in Sudbury. These are stories and experiences that must be shared so the policy makers, and service providers planning service delivery know what the challenges are. I take a solution focused approach by including the recommendations from the youth interviewed.

This was a timely study as during the period where I was conducting the interviews there were recent deaths of homeless people in Sudbury. One of the deaths was due to a tent fire. This was during one of the coldest nights of the year, and weeks later another person was found dead beside a dumpster but no cause of death was given (Keown, 2024; Papineau, 2024). The intended purpose of this research is to bring attention to services providers the challenges that 2SLGBTQ+ youth experience accessing housing and shelter services and provide recommendations to ameliorate services. The availability of services took a turn for the worst during the time of this study. In January 2024 the youth centre where the interviews took place had a sewer back-up that resulted in the drop-in closing temporarily. It was decided several weeks later by the Sudbury Action Centre for Youth’s board of directors that the entire organization would file insolvency, and that meant the closure of Sudbury’s only youth shelter. I hope that the information gathered

from these interviews will be used to inform policies for a new shelter. However, at this time, there are no youth dedicated shelter beds in Sudbury, and the overnight warming centers that are available for youth closed in March 2024.

Following this chapter there is the literature review, where I present key findings from the existing research on 2SLGBTQ+ youth who have experienced homelessness. In the methodology chapter I will cover more details on recruitment, and the research methodology used. Following methodology, I will share the complete results of the research and share what the experiences the youth had with homelessness in Sudbury entailed, as well as their recommendations to improve services. In the discussion chapter I will share the final recommendations and considerations for the opening of a new youth shelter in Sudbury. Given the current circumstances there is an opportunity to start from the ground up and open a new shelter with all the presented recommendations in mind.

## Chapter 1: Literature Review

There is little written about the experiences of 2SLGBTQ+ youth who have experienced homelessness in Sudbury. This gap in the literature influenced my commitment to explore the experiences of 2SLGBTQ+ youth who have experienced homelessness and finding out what their recommendations are to improve services. I found research on homelessness in Sudbury, as well as some data on 2SLGBTQ+ people who participated in these studies. The primary focus of this literature review is on the existing research on 2SLGBTQ+ youth who have experienced homelessness. There is information on the reasons many youths left their homes, and statistics about abuse. Once youth are unhoused, I am interested in what their experiences have been in shelters, why youth avoid shelters, and what are unique challenges 2SLGBTQ+ youth experience compared to cisgender and heterosexual youth. Finally, I explore the recommendations in the existing literature. This includes visibility, increasing safety and inclusion in shelters, education, 2SLGBTQ+ specific programs, housing access, research, and prevention.

### *Homelessness Research in Sudbury*

The literature used for this research includes studies on the experiences of homeless people in Sudbury and Northeastern Ontario. In the study by Kauppi et al (2017) that focused on Northern and rural Ontario, 2 out of the 40 participants that experienced homelessness self identified as 2SLGBTQ+. Using focus groups, they were able to document the experiences these two participants had with shelters, housing services, and medical providers. The participants described receiving negative treatment after disclosing their sexual orientation, and one participant said he would be better off in jail than in the local shelter (Kauppi et al., 2017). These negative experiences are not unique to this region of the province and have been stated by participants interviewed in studies from other cities (Abramovich, 2017; Abramovich & Kimura,

2019; O'Brien et al., 1993). The researchers conducting this study also interviewed service providers and 48% said they did not know what the risks are of homelessness among 2SLGBTQ+ people. This lack of training and knowledge has also been found in other cities, including Toronto where youth stated that employees at shelters are unaware of how to intervene when there are incidents of homophobia and transphobia in their shelters (Buccieri et al., 2022).

One study by Kauppi et al (2018) that was specific to the Greater City of Sudbury surveyed 1,954 participants using point in time and period prevalence counts. They included gender and sexuality demographics: 29 identified their gender as two-spirit, 14 as trans women, 12 as gender queer, 21 not listed/ I don't know, and 14% identified as 2SLGBTQ+. This research is an important starting point to see what aspects of homelessness in Sudbury have been researched, and what has worked for researchers in the past when reaching out to this population. The number of people who self identified as 2SLGBTQ+ is lower than in other studies (Abramovich & Shelton, 2017; Barrow, 2018; Côté & Blais, 2019; Fraser et al., 2019). From my experience working with 2SLGBTQ+ youth, and the numbers reported by staff working in the local overnight youth shelter, it is likely closer to 50% of the youth accessing services that identify as 2SLGBTQ+. This discrepancy could be because the staff know the youth, and are more comfortable disclosing their identity to the staff, or this shelter is one that a higher number of 2SLGBTQ+ youth are drawn to because this is a space that they feel safer in. This is something I am hoping to understand in the research I am conducting.

I did find a study that was Sudbury based and focused on 2SLGBTQ+ youth. This study included qualitative research from interviewing LGBT2-SQQ (the acronym used by the author) youths who attended a support group for LGBT2-SQQ Youths. The participants were asked questions regarding their experience at the group and whether the support group was helpful

(Burden, 2013). They spoke about what they liked and disliked about the groups, and the impacts attending has on their lives. The purpose of the study was to help service providers structure their supports to this demographic. Youth who participated in this research discussed reasons for their experiences of homelessness. Some were asked to leave their homes by parents and foster parents because of their identities (Burden, 2013). One youth described her experience because of her girlfriend's parents:

. . . my ex threw me out. Well, her parents threw me out. They took me in and let me sleep on the couch for, like, four months and then me and her shared a room and I moved on my own for a bit and I lived with her again. (Burden, 2013, p. 47)

This demonstrates a level of desperation in the home situation for many youths. The home situation is toxic enough that they are taking the risk of leaving home and living on the streets or in shelters.

### *Causes of homelessness*

There are multiple causes of homelessness including but not limited to: poverty, substance use, mental health, experiences of discrimination, and leaving abusive parents or partners. The primary cause of homelessness for 2SLGBTQ+ youth is family rejection (Abramovich, 2016). Whereas for straight and cisgender people poverty is the primary cause of homelessness, family rejection is a greater factor (Fraser et al., 2019). Living in poverty as a 2SLGBTQ+ youth will still increase the risk of homelessness, however the link between homelessness and family rejection points to different preventative interventions. Experiencing racism increases the risk of adverse experiences that can lead to homelessness, as well as adverse experiences accessing supports (Fraser et al., 2019). Substance use is linked to homelessness for

some 2SLGBTQ+ youth, and the rates of substance use among the general homeless population is 40-70%, and the rates are higher for 2SLGBTQ+ homeless populations (Fraser et al., 2019). Sexual abuse from caretakers is a reason many youth leave home, with one study reporting that 44.3% of 2SLGBTQ+ youth have experienced sexual abuse from caregiver compared to 22.3% of straight and cisgender youth (Whitbeck et al., 2004). Youth living in foster care are at an increased risk of becoming homeless, and 2SLGBTQ+ youth are at higher risk of ending up in the foster care. While in foster care there is increased risk of being rejected by the fostering family and being mistreated by social service providers who lack the necessary training to work with this population. Furthermore 56% of 2SLGBTQ+ youth in foster care have spent time sleeping outside because they felt unsafe in their foster homes (Fraser et al., 2019).

### *Mental health and victimization*

Mental health is deeply affected by homelessness regardless of the person's age, gender identity, or sexual orientation. In a study by Whitbeck, et al. (2004) the prevalence of mental health disorders and victimization among gay, lesbian, and bisexual teenagers who were homeless was tracked in a longitudinal study. They found that 41.3% of the youth they surveyed met the diagnostic criteria for major depressive episode compared to 28.5% of straight teenagers. They were also more likely to meet the diagnostic criteria for post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) at 47.6% compared to 33.4%. The risk for suicidal ideation was also higher at 73% compared to 53.2%. These numbers demonstrate that housing interventions also must consider the mental health status of the youth being served, as well as suicide risk. Victimization while homeless was higher for gay, lesbian, and bisexual youth as well. It is important to consider the additional vulnerabilities that this population experiences, and what safety risks are present in shelters.

### *Unique challenges*

The existence of survival sex work among this population should be noted as 9-20% of 2SLGBTQ+ youth have traded sex for necessities like food, shelter, and money (Tyler & Schmitz, 2018). The rate of survival sex work is higher than compared to cisgender and straight youth (Maccio & Ferguson, 2016; Tyler & Schmitz, 2018). Youth are more likely to trade sex for food or money if they have left their family homes multiple times (Tyler & Schmitz, 2018). Youth have stated that discussions about sexual health and healthy relationships are often geared to straight and cisgender youth, and this education is not meeting their needs (Maccio & Ferguson, 2016).

### *Experiences in shelters and safety risks*

Not every form of discrimination towards transgender youth in shelters is overt like harassment. Transphobia can take place in ways that are systemic and go deep into the foundations of how these services are organized. This can occur in the form of cisnormativity and cissexism. Cisnormativity is the assumption that people will grow up to be and remain the sex that was assigned to them at birth. A baby assigned as male will grow up to be a man, and a baby assigned as female will grow up to be a woman (Pyne, 2011). Shelters operating as single gender spaces for men or for women were designed with a cisnormative framework. This model was never intended as one that would include people who do not fit within strict gender norms. When cities only have men's shelters and women's shelters where do people who do not identify as either go? The inability for youth to self define their gender is a barrier and results in youth being denied shelter services (Shelton, 2015). Some intake processes require people to choose an identity or label that does not fit how the person identifies, this acts as a form of erasure. The person may be welcome in the shelter if they say that they identify as male or female but is not

able to use their own terms for their gender. Having to pretend to be cisgender contributes to the erasure that transgender people experience (Abramovich, 2016). Allowing youth to self identify and explore their gender is a key component to creating an affirming space where youth can feel safe.

Cisnormativity in shelters leads to staff policing how people present themselves, or limit services based on where a person is in their transition. One study highlighted that in the past shelters have made it a requirement to be on hormone therapy, or to have had transition related surgeries. Some were less restrictive but required that trans women wear dresses, or present in a way that is overtly feminine (Pyne, 2011). I would say this is a highly problematic practice. How many cisgender women do you know who wear dresses every day? How many cisgender women do you know who wear casual baggy clothing like hoodies but would never be questioned about their gender for doing so? It is a ridiculous and discriminatory standard to expect people living in shelters to present their best when they must worry about meeting their basic needs. What I advocate for from shelters is to allow people to present in the way they feel comfortable presenting, and to allow space and accommodations for the daily routines that can take more time for a transgender client to do.

I frequently visit Sudbury's downtown library, and it is a location where many adults and youth who are experiencing homelessness go during the day to get out of the heat, cold, rain, or snow. There is free Wi-Fi access and friendly staff that know this is one of the many purposes for libraries. I was there to do a workshop, and I saw a former client that I worked with. We spoke for a bit while I was setting up and she let me know that she is currently staying at a shelter, and I noticed she had a few days worth of stubble on her face when she used to be meticulous about having her face clean shaven. This had me thinking about the barriers that exist

in shelters for basic hygiene routines. She is staying at the adult shelter where there are showers, but at Nest, the youth shelter, there is no shower, and only one washroom. This same challenge for trans feminine youth was brought up in the literature. Youth interviewed in one study (Shelton, 2015) discussed how shelters did not allow the time, space, or required privacy to partake in hygiene rituals like shaving off facial hair. Youth sleeping in shared accommodations lacked the privacy needed to tuck or tape their genitals. One youth shared that they are not given adequate time in the morning to put on makeup which helps with them being read as female and boost their self confidence. Not mentioned directly in the literature, but something that was top of mind for me as a trans man is the necessary privacy required to go without a chest binder. It is not recommended for anyone to wear a binder for more than 8 hours, and it is not advised to wear them to bed, however not wearing a binder in a shelter poses an even greater safety risk because it can out a trans masculine person if they have a large chest.

There are unique challenges for trans masculine people accessing shelter services. There is often the dilemma of choosing between going to a men's shelter where they can register and be treated as male in the shelter itself, and risk violence from other residents, or go to a women's shelter and pretend that they are not trans to have a safer place to stay. In either situation there is the risk of harassment and violence from other residents. Many avoid shelters altogether,

“Despite the obvious dangers in sleeping in public outdoor spaces, 39% of participants reported that they chose to sleep outside to avoid the confrontation, humiliation and violence they feared in the shelter system” (Dénomme-Welch et al., 2008, p. 16).

Of those who avoided shelters 61% stated that being unsafe in shelters was the reason they avoided them (Dénomme-Welch et al., 2008). This is incredibly unsafe especially in climates

where hypothermia and frostbite are common. On December 3<sup>rd</sup> 2023 a man who lived in an encampment in Sudbury died due to a fire in his tent that was used in a desperate attempt to keep warm (Keown, 2024). On January 17<sup>th</sup>, a day where the temperature high was -17 Celsius, a man who was sleeping outside was found dead outside of an apartment building (Papineau, 2024). It is a sign that something is terribly wrong with the shelter system if people are safer outside than indoors. Imagine living in a city where the temperatures in the winter can fall below -40 Celsius and taking your chances with freezing to death is the most viable option. Some youth have found ways to stay warm overnight by staying in 24 hour fast food restaurants, and secluded indoor spaces when they were not able to go to a shelter (Côté & Blais, 2019). Locally some of the spaces where people would find warmth overnight like banks with 24-hour access to the ATM machines are locked after business hours, and the one 24-hour restaurant in downtown Sudbury removed all of their tables and chairs and permanently closed their washrooms in order to operate with only takeout and drive through.

Due to safety concerns, there are many youth who hide their 2SLGBTQ+ identity while in shelters (Abramovich, 2016). Youth are afraid of experiencing violence or harassment from other people in these spaces. In cities where there are safe shelters for youth, there are not always enough beds for every youth who needs them (Maccio & Ferguson, 2016). This is something that can be said for Sudbury where the youth shelter only has four beds. Some shelters require youth to show their identification in order to access services, and they have intake that ask personal and invasive questions (Côté & Blais, 2019). The identification request can be particularly challenging for youth whose name and gender markers on their identification do not match the way that they present. This puts transgender youth in a position where they must out themselves. Furthermore, some shelters separate youth based on their gender and youth may be fearful that

they will be placed based on what is on their identification, and not how they identify (Côté & Blais, 2019). Being asked personal questions by a staff person can also be intimidating as 2SLGBTQ+ youth have no way of knowing if this is a safe person to disclose their identities to.

2SLGBTQ+ youth have more difficulty finding shelter than straight and cisgender youth (Tyler & Schmitz, 2018), and those who access may experience homophobia and transphobia by both workers and residents, which is not a new issue for people accessing shelters. According to interviews with youth in 1992 and 1993 this has been a known issue for 30 years. There is emotional stress caused by being 2SLGBTQ+ in shelters, and fear of how the other residents will respond. This includes fearing violence for being perceived as 2SLGBTQ+ or being an ally. Some youth fear that they will be victimized by other youth outside of the shelters when staff are not present (O'Brien et al., 1993).

Safety is a concern for many youths in the shelter system. There is a fear of violence if they do come out, and although the staff may be able to keep them safe during programming and while they are in the facility itself, there is no protection outside of the shelter, or when no one is supervising. Also, there are issues with staff condoning and participating in homophobic behaviour, including referring to youth as slurs like “faggot” (O'Brien et al., 1993). Who do you turn to when the staff are the ones that are making the homophobic comments? The youth are in a particularly vulnerable position because they depend on these workers for their basic needs, but they are the ones who are harassing them.

There are also stories of youth who are denied services at shelters and hostels when they disclose that they are LGBTQ2+. One youth stated in their interview the staff advised them they would not be safe there, and that they are better off going somewhere else (O'Brien et al., 1993).

Transgender youth are more likely to be denied access to shelters than cisgender youth (Abramovich, 2017). There was an incident in Sudbury that occurred in July 2011 where a transgender woman contacted the YWCA Geneva House in Sudbury after conflict with her partner. She needed a safe place to stay for the night but was denied shelter because she is transgender, and at the time the shelter policies did not accommodate transgender people. This led to a complaint made to the Ontario Human Rights Tribunal (CBC News, 2012). Shortly after this incident the shelter reached out to my colleagues at TG Innerselves and received training, as well as re-wrote their policies and procedures.

More recent research has found that many of the same issues that came up in the research in 1992 and 1993 are continuing today. Interviews with youth in the 2000s found that they still experience homophobia and transphobia while accessing shelters and foster care services. A lesbian youth who was interviewed ran away from her group home after the staff called her names and told her she was going to hell (Wilber et al., 2006). A transgender youth from the same study said that when she reached out to a social worker at her group home after being repeatedly beaten by the other residents she was told, “It’s your fault. Stop acting like a girl!” (Wilber et al., 2006, p. 7). Staff continue to contribute to the discrimination and harassment youth experience by refusing to use their chosen names, and making homophobic and transphobic comments themselves (Abramovich, 2017). Sadly these issues in shelters often go unreported because youth are concerned there will be backlash or the situations will escalate resulting in being kicked out of the shelter (Côté & Blais, 2019).

### *Recommendations*

There are many recommendations made by the youth interviewed in previous studies, and by the authors of these studies. I am curious if the youth in Sudbury will have similar recommendations, and if there are recommendations that will be different due to the unique challenges that living in northern Ontario brings. Recommendations to increase the visibility of 2SLGBTQ+ people were repeated in the existing studies, and this included posters and brochures about 2SLGBTQ+ programs, having staff and volunteers who are 2SLGBTQ+. Increasing awareness about existing programming in the agency or elsewhere in the community, and increasing programming was recommended (Abramovich, 2016; Abramovich & Pang, 2020; Ecker, 2017; Halpenny et al., 2022; Paterson, 2022). Staff training appeared as a recommendation in multiple studies (Abramovich, 2016; Abramovich & Pang, 2020; Ecker, 2017; Halpenny et al., 2022; Paterson, 2022). This includes training that is trauma informed and broadening the staff's knowledge about the needs of 2SLGBTQ+ people in shelters and housing services. It is heartening to know that many shelters in northeastern Ontario have already taken this step over the last 10 years by inviting me and my colleagues to train their staff, however not every single shelter has taken this step. Also, some of these shelters were trained 10 years ago and will need to ensure their newer staff receive the same type of training. Recommendations to educate youth about their rights as part of an empowerment approach came up in the research (Halpenny et al., 2022). Training for landlords can reduce the experiences of homophobia and transphobia experienced by tenants as well as decrease discriminatory practices that make it harder for 2SLGBTQ+ youth to find housing (Halpenny et al., 2022).

Many recommendations were made about how to improve services in shelters and housing programs. A significant barrier for transgender youth in Sudbury is a lack of trans specific programming, which the research recommends being available at youth shelters

(Paterson, 2022). Having staff who are knowledgeable about where youth can access hormone therapy, initiate medical transition, and make referrals to clinics that offer transition related care would eliminate many barriers for trans youth who want to transition (Abramovich & Pang, 2020). Having shelters that are transgender or 2SLGBTQ+ specific eliminate many of the concerns about safety, homophobia, and transphobia (Paterson, 2022). This recommendation may not be feasible in Sudbury without there being multiple youth shelters. However, with the current shelters operating with only four beds, and the research indicating that there is a likelihood 2SLGBTQ+ youth are avoiding staying in a shelter, it is possible that a four-bed shelter will be at capacity each night if opened. Even without a 2SLGBTQ+ specific shelter, having staff who are openly 2SLGBTQ+, and supported by their colleagues demonstrates to youth that they are not alone at the shelter (Ecker, 2017; Paterson, 2022). Youth may be more comfortable talking to staff with shared identities, who are knowledgeable about what it is like to be 2SLGBTQ+.

I previously mentioned that there are multiple barriers, and forms of cisnormativity that occur in shelter spaces. Having intake forms that allow youth to self identify their gender, chosen names, and pronouns is a step towards making the space safer for transgender youth (Abramovich & Pang, 2020). In addition, collecting data during the intake on gender identity and sexual orientation in a discreet manner, can help with collecting data on the prevalence of 2SLGBTQ+ youth in shelters. Care must be taken to ensure that youth understand the rationale for these questions, and have the option to decline answering (Ecker, 2017). Public washrooms and changerooms are often feared and avoided spaces for transgender people, and having all gender single stall washroom and shower facilities will be the safest option for transgender youth (Abramovich & Pang, 2020). Some shelters, like Nest in Sudbury, operate as an open space and

do not separate the youth by gender. This is in alignment with the recommendations in the literature to have all gender shelters (Abramovich & Pang, 2020).

An increase in 2SLGBTQ+ specific programs and programming are repeated throughout the literature. Having support groups, educational sessions on topics like coming out and safer sex, peer mentorship, clothing exchanges, and legal aid will help provide youth with the skills they need to build their lives outside of the shelter (Abramovich, 2018; Ecker, 2017; Halpenny et al., 2022). Youth programs that build life skills and social connections are an important part of ensuring youth are prepared for life after they age out.

Programming and how the shelters are run should include input from youth and 2SLGBTQ+ community members. This ensures that the programs are best suited to the population's needs. There also must be an anonymous formal complaint policy so youth have a way to voice their grievances without fear of backlash, the issue escalating, or being kicked out. Youth also need to be able to make complaints about staff in the shelters without fear of reprisal (Abramovich, 2018). Cultural competency and inclusion workshops for cisgender and straight youth in the shelters and youth programs are a way of creating safer spaces, and bridging gaps between these populations (Maccio & Ferguson, 2016). This is something I had done when I worked in the youth program at SACY, and it allowed youth to ask me questions, and explain concepts about gender and sexuality without them putting other youth on the spot. While most of housing programs provide hygiene products, securing funding for gender gear like binders, packers, gaffs, bras, and breast forms can go a long way to help youth feel safer in shelters, as well as feeling more comfortable in their skin (Halpenny et al., 2022). Also, not assuming which products and scents a client would prefer. While many companies still market soaps, razors, deodorants and other products as being for men or for women, keeping all the same types of

products together and letting the client pick which one they want is the best way to go. Even having menstrual products available in a place where clients can discreetly access it reduces the stress a trans masculine client may have when needing these products.

Housing recommendations came up in the literature as well. There is a focus on housing first models, and having people with lived experience as part of the planning for housing services (Ecker, 2017). Housing needs to be made available in safe neighbourhoods (Ecker, 2017). In addition to educating landlords, having a safe landlord list for clients allowing them to know who they can rent from without fear of discrimination, or harassment (Ecker, 2017). Having 2SLGBTQ+ organizations who already have the rapport with the youth who are in need of housing develop and fund housing programs (Halpenny et al., 2022). Initiatives to increase the supply of affordable housing and rent control will continue to improve access to affordable housing for 2SLGBTQ+ youth for years to come (Halpenny et al., 2022).

More research on 2SLGBTQ+ homelessness to fill knowledge gaps and improve service delivery was recommended in the literature (Ecker, 2017; Halpenny et al., 2022). Further research allows for data that includes underrepresented communities, as well as parts of the province and country where this research does not exist. There are opportunities to research different approaches to supporting youth, as well as prevention strategies.

Homelessness prevention is a very important strategy but was not as prevalent in the research recommendations as the recommendations for service delivery. One prevention strategy is working with families to create a supportive home environment to keep youth at home when safe to do so. Providing parents, siblings, or members of the extended family the tools and resources needed to support the youths to prevent them from being on the streets means that they

avoid the risks of violence and harassment on the streets. Working with the family and reunification if the youth is already homeless will not be possible or safe for everyone. Allowing youth to identify chosen families, and work with them to create a support system is another prevention strategy (Abramovich, 2018). I have worked with many youths who have left home to live with their friends because their friends have parents who are supportive. Programs that can offer peer support, legal support, and financial support can make a difference for these families.

The existing literature has given me a starting point to guide the questions that I will ask in the interviews. Due to the scope of my research, I will not be asking what led to the youth being homeless as much as what the experiences of homelessness in Sudbury have been. The existing research has not captured this. I am interested in how many of the recommendations that have appeared in the literature are repeated in the interviews, and if there are going to be recommendations that are unique to Sudbury. It will be interesting to see if prevention is mentioned by interview participants as this was not a prominent theme in the literature but one that could have a tremendous impact.

## Chapter 2: Methodology

### *Approach*

I am informed by principles of Community Based Research (CBR) in this study. This is a methodology that I am drawn to because of the inclusion of community members and lived experience in the research process (Strand et al., 2003). However, I do not have the resources to compensate a research team that includes community members in all stages of the research, and I will be working alone during the multiple stages of the research. My positionality as a queer and trans person with years of experience working with this population puts me in a good position to do this research. I wish to amplify the voices of community members with lived experience and share their stories and ideas in a constructive way to help inform service delivery. CBR is a means of making community members the “curators of knowledge” instead of “passive recipients of so called ‘expert’ knowledge” (Travers et al., 2013, p. 404). Additional benefits of CBR include collaboration with community members, co-learning, empowering participants to have control over their stories, and community capacity building (Elis et al., 2019). For these reasons this is my preferred methodology, and given my limitations as the sole researcher, I will be pulling from the aspects of CBR that fit with the scope of my research. This includes treating the participants as the experts of their own experience, utilizing my own lived and professional experience, and using the results of the research to advocate for the recommendations made by participants. I will be learning from the participants, and I will share the final product with all the participants that are interested in having access to it. The details on how to access the completed research summary will be available through an automated email response on the email address that participants will be contacting. Recognizing that most people are not interested in reading a lengthy thesis, I will offer a shorter summary of my findings for participants as well (see

Appendices). I see it as respectful to the participants and to the time that they have given, to be given the choice to see the finished research.

There are previous examples of CBR with 2SLGBTQ+ people that are helping inform my use of this methodology. This is a model that was used by the research team in the Trans PULSE project. The original research team included transgender researchers and a cisgender ally, and this team recruited community members to join the project. They created an application process and used the following criteria to select research partners:

1) their ability to be allies; 2) their ability to bring resources to the project; 3) their history of progressive forms of LGBT research; 4) their potential to let trans people be experts in their own issues; and 5) their ability to provide research-related expertise and skills for building a sound and rigorous study design for future phases of Trans PULSE. (Travers et al., 2013, p. 407)

My research was not as big of a project as Trans PULSE, but these are questions that I am asking myself as the sole researcher. I do not have the means to recruit like Trans PULSE, but I can reflect on my own ability to be an ally, my ability to bring resources to the study, what I have learned from previous progressive 2SLGBTQ+ research, allowing participants to be the experts in their own issues, and build my research related expertise.

There are further considerations involving my methodology to address. CBR has its own limitations and problems. There can be situations that arise in the lives of the participants that effect their ability to participate and require assistance. I must be willing to “participate in the community process” and provide assistance and referrals if the situation arises (Wallace, 2005).

Providing assistance through referrals to participants did occur during this research. Some

critiques of CBR include research not being relevant to the needs of the community, and being focused on the researcher's interests (Wallace, 2005). Poverty is a barrier to participation in research. If I am working with people who are currently homeless, they might have difficulty getting to the meeting place for interviews. There are costs that can be associated with participation including transportation, childcare, and lost wages from taking time off work (Wallace, 2005).

### *Research Design*

This research included qualitative interviews with seven 2SLGBTQ+ youth and adults between the ages of 19 and 38 who have experienced homelessness in Sudbury. The interviews were between 42 to 61 minutes and each participant received \$20 for their participation. The research received ethics approval through the University of Victoria's Research Ethics Board (23-0431). Each participant signed a consent form prior to beginning their interviews (see Appendices). Two of the interviews were conducted by phone and five were in person at the Sudbury Action Centre for Youth (SACY). Participants were informed that they could choose to not answer any questions they wish and may end the interview at any time.

### *Recruitment*

I used a mixture of convenience and snowball sampling at the local youth shelter and drop in at SACY. Part of the reason I chose SACY as the recruitment and interview location is because of the organization's intersectional approach to working with youth that experience various forms of marginalization. This is an organization that works with Black, Indigenous, and Persons of Colour (BIPOC) youth, newcomers, youth living with mental illness, addictions, and poverty. Allowing for a sample population that includes multiple identities that can influence the

experiences youth have with housing and shelter services. I also wanted to reduce as much possible inconveniences to participants as possible by picking a location many of the participants frequent.

I have connections to the community because I worked with the organization that ran the youth shelter in Sudbury for several years. I have worked with some of the youth in the community with lived experience, and I am still in contact with some of the participants. The relationship I have with the SACY youth and staff means that I already have a starting place for recruitment. Convenience sampling in this case occurred from the relationship that I have from past work with potential research participants, and my past work at SACY. Participants who I recruited in this way shared with their contacts that this research was happening. I scheduled days where I sat in the youth drop-in and the harm reduction drop in waiting for participants. Some participants emailed me to schedule a set interview date and time, and I arranged to meet in an office or by phone for those interviews. I was discreet in the recruitment process due to safety concerns youth have about straight and cisgender youth knowing that they are 2SLGBTQ+. I put posters up in the centre with my contact information on tabs that can be discreetly torn off. The interviews continued until the sudden closure and insolvency of the organization.

Community members who have never experienced homelessness were not included in the study, nor were those who do not identify as 2SLGBTQ+. Participants had to have experienced homelessness in Sudbury, but no specific amount of time was required. My goal was to interview ten youth aged 19-30 about their experiences and recommendations for action, however challenges with the agency closure impacted recruitment, and I included participants in their 30s who fit the rest of the inclusion criteria since they had experienced homelessness as youth.

Participants were given the choice of in-person, virtual, or phone interviews. The in-person interviews took place in an office at the same centre that operates the youth shelter and daytime youth drop in. This partnership allowed participants access to support from staff after the interview should they need someone to talk to. I provided a list of potential resources for participants if they need support after the interview.

### *Transcription*

These interviews were recorded on a digital recorder that requires a pin number to access the files and then uploaded and stored on a password protected computer. I conducted the transcription using the online service Whisper and then I reviewed the transcriptions for accuracy. The transcripts were then uploaded to Nvivo 14 for coding. The recordings and transcripts will be securely stored and destroyed after 5 years.

### *Safety and Confidentiality*

As with any form of research with vulnerable populations considerations were given to any potential risks to the participants. Although I removed all identifiable information that was divulged through the interviews, when the information is shared the 2SLGBTQ+ community in Sudbury is small enough that I cannot guarantee that someone from the community will not recognize the story. I have personally read a local study that included quotes from participants, and I was able to determine who the participant was based on what they shared even with names and locations removed. For this reason, I used caution about which quotes are in later chapters of this thesis. This is why discretion during recruitment and writing the results is paramount. I acknowledge the difficulties this has caused with recruitment as I did not want to announce in the drop in to all the youth who I am and why I was there, which would out any youth who walked

into the office to speak with me. The staff were very helpful by discreetly talking to youth who they know are 2SLGBTQ+ and asking them if they would like to speak with me. I relied heavily on my involvement with this community and the trust I have already established.

Furthermore, I read and followed the guidelines created by CPATH (Canadian Professional Association of Transgender Health) when conducting research with transgender participants (Bauer et al., 2019). In alignment with these guidelines, I allowed participants to self identify their gender identity and maintained an affirming and unbiased attitude towards any labels used by participants. I continually reflected on my own positionality throughout the research process and how this could have impacted the research and analysis. I ensured that the research took place in a setting where transgender people are welcome and often frequent to create a safer experience for participants.

#### *Data Collection*

I collected demographic data from participants, including age, gender identity, sexual orientation, amount of time spent homeless, and number of times participants experienced homelessness. I inquired about whether they accessed shelters, or housing services, and what was helpful or not helpful about those experiences. I also engaged participants in exploring what their recommendations are to local organizations offering services to 2SLGBTQ+ homeless youth.

#### *Coding*

After the interviews were transcribed, they were uploaded to Nvivo 14 where I manually coded the interviews. I familiarized myself with the data by reading the transcripts a few times. I created the codes based on the answers to the research questions, including codes for demographic information like age, gender, sexual orientation, duration of homelessness, and

whether participants accessed services. Then I created codes using participants' comments about experiences with services, treatment from service providers, and recommendations to improve services. I included codes for couch surfing, sleeping outside, how participants lost their housing, and became housed if they are as these topics came up repeatedly with the interviews, which I anticipated. I did not anticipate the number of times friends, rules, mental health, drugs, and criminal backgrounds would appear in the interviews and I included those terms in the code list.

### *Data Analysis*

I used reflexive thematic analysis for this research. I recognize my limitations as a new researcher, and thematic analysis is a good starting point for new researchers (Braun, & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis allows for contextualist analysis, which I used to explore the systems, and structures in place that lead to the data presented, as well as the context in which it is shared (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I analyzed the data from participants in the context being 2SLGBTQ+ in Sudbury. The experience as someone who experiences marginalization and exclusion also shapes the way situations are perceived. I created codes for the patterns that I saw in the data and interpreted what these recurring themes mean. This allowed me to include the work from previous studies on homelessness to help determine the research questions that created these themes as they relate to the subject. Braun & Clarke (2023) have written recommendations for ethical thematic analysis which I used as a guide for this research. These recommendations include consistency between the researcher's methodological concepts and values, and discussing how the chosen approach is used.

I reviewed the frequency in which words and themes appeared, thought about the connections to previous research, and my theoretical interpretations of what this means. For

example, I considered what it means that I have 32 entries for positive experiences and 76 entries for negative experiences accessing shelters and housing services in Sudbury. Participants shared more about negative experiences, which I could interpret as participants are more likely to have negative experiences in shelters, or it can be interpreted in the context where they were asked “what can be done to improve services?” which leads to the sharing of negative experiences more than positive experiences. When analysed further, certain organizations were more likely to have positive experiences associated with them than others. This analysis allowed me to see how all these recurring themes related to my research question and go beyond just the interview, but how the structures in place like policy, funding, and stigma are interconnected with the data. Latent coding allowed me to identify what hidden meanings are included with the interview data, ideas, and ideologies (Byrne, 2022), which I interpreted throughout the data analysis process. I was able to narrow down four themes: Experiences with homelessness, Experiences with services accessed, Experiences with staff and clients, and Recommendations. Those themes each have additional codes. For “Experiences with homelessness” I include challenges, money/employment, mental health and drugs, friends, family, where participants slept, comparison to other cities, and how they became housed. For “Experiences with services” I included positive experiences, negative experiences, and rules. Rules was a code that came up unexpectedly as almost every participant shared information about being negatively impacted by rules in shelters. The theme “Experience with staff and clients” is divided into four categories, staff positive, staff negative, clients positive, and clients negative. These are the responses to “how did staff or other clients respond to knowing that you are 2SLGBTQ+?”. Lastly, I have “recommendations” which has eight codes, service delivery, new programs and services, inclusion, housing, community building, recommendations for other youth, visibility, and other.

Recommendations for other youth came up because of the number of participants responding with messages of hope and encouragement directed to youth who are experiencing similar struggles. This was not prevalent in the previous research, and I think it is an important category to include with this research.

### *Limitations*

Using SACY as the sole location for recruitment with posters created some limitations. Not every 2SLGBTQ+ youth accesses services there, and there are potential participants who would not have known about the study. The sewer backup that resulted in the youth program closing, and then the insolvency of the organization did create a significant challenge with data collection and limited my number of participants. In my Human Research Ethics Board application, I listed SACY as the site for recruitment and in person interviews, and the organization's closure ended my ability to continue most of my recruitment and any in person interviews. I included snowball sampling, and some participants shared about the study with their contacts, this had a limited reach since youth who were recruited in this way mostly had connections to SACY as well, and it did not allow me to reach out to many who were not accessing this organization for support. I did not reach my initial goal of 10 participants; however, I was able to collect enough data from the interviews that were conducted to continue with the study.

### Chapter 3: Results

In this chapter I will present findings from the interviews. I will begin with the demographic data that was collected from participants, followed by the experiences that participants had with homelessness, other clients, staff, and services. Finally, I will share the results of the recommendations that were provided by participants.

#### *Demographics*

The demographic data for the participants which is included below in Table 1:

Table 1

Participant	Identity	age	Length of homelessness	Did you access services?
P1	Trans-female, gender outlaw, queer, she/he	38	7 years	yes
P2	gay, he/him	22	3-4 months	yes
P3	bisexual, female, she/they	25	2-3 years	yes
P4	trans man, man, pan, demi-sexual, he/him	21	4.5 months	yes
P5	trans man, Two Spirit, he/him	27	3 years	yes
P6	bisexual, non-binary, she/they	19	4 years	yes
P7	she/her, trans woman	35	11 months	yes

The participants ranged in age from 19 to 38, with most participants being in their early to mid twenties. When asked about gender identity all the participants shared labels that they use for their gender identity including trans-female, gender outlaw, female, chaotic, man, trans-man, trans male, non-binary, and trans. Some participants used more than one term to describe their gender, like one participant who stated their gender was both trans-female and gender outlaw, but no two participants used the exact same terms to describe their gender. Six out of the seven participants shared their sexual orientation, and these terms included: queer, gay, bisexual, pansexual, demisexual, two-spirited. One participant labeled themselves as both being pansexual and demisexual, and unlike the question about gender identity there were two participants who identified as the same sexual orientation, bisexual.

*Amount of time participants experienced homelessness*

Since having experienced homelessness was a requirement to participate in the study, all seven participants have experienced homelessness at some point. There was a difference in the length of homelessness, and number of times participants experienced homelessness. Out of the seven participants, four had experienced homelessness for more than 12 months, and three experienced homelessness for less than 12 months. Of those who experienced more than 12 months of homelessness the time ranged from 2-7 years. The amount of time that participants experienced homelessness for under 12 months ranged from two weeks to 11 months. Most participants have also experienced homelessness more than once.

*Reasons for homelessness*

Only four of the participants shared what led to their homelessness. When asked one participant stated. "I lost my apartment because of my addiction (Participant 3)". She also shared that it was due to their ex stating "my ex had kicked me out, thrown out all my stuff, stolen everything else. I just lost my apartment (Participant 3)". Another participant also noted that it was another person's actions that led to her homelessness, saying "My roommate assaulted somebody in my apartment. That's why I freaking got kicked out of there when I wasn't supposed to have a roommate there in the first place. Yeah. I have a friend. Now he's no friend to me (Participant 7)". One participant shared about his deteriorating physical health:

My physical health getting really bad. Like seizures and stuff. And then also my mental health was affected by my physical health. I went to my apartment that I hadn't paid for three months, and I still owe them like \$2,500. And I just paid as well, so it was a lot higher than that because my job wasn't letting me go back to work because I was a health

risk for patients since I had seizures. It was my safety. I was too scared. And then that's when I became homeless, and then that's when I became homeless in Toronto. And then it happened, like, I had my apartment, but someone was living with me at the time, which made me feel unsafe, and kind of took over the apartment (Participant 4).

Another participant shared that feeling unsafe at home was the reason she became homeless:

Um, basically, uh, household issues and, um, just the house not feeling safe enough and supportive enough for me. Uh, the household I grew up in very deteriorated my mental health as I became older, so instead of sticking myself through that even more, I felt as if, though, I needed to leave the toxic situation, and I guess you can kind of say raise myself in a sort of way (Participant 6).

There is some variation in the reasons participants lost their housing or left, like addictions, ex spouses, physical health, mental health, and feeling unsafe. Feeling unsafe in their previous home or with the people who lived there is the factor that came up the most.

### *Services Accessed*

Every participant accessed at least one service in Sudbury. Here is a list of the services and organizations that were accessed by participants: Sudbury Action Centre for Youth (SACY), Nest (the youth shelter at SACY), Cedar Place Women and Family Shelter, Youth Group Home (participant couldn't remember the name), Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA), Foyer Notre Dame (former youth shelter), Salvation Army, YMCA Employment Centre, Homelessness Network, Sudbury and Area Victim Services, Employment Insurance, TG Innerselves (formerly a program at SACY), Artiste Trans Artistry (a transgender arts-based support group facilitated by Myths and Mirrors and TG Innerselves), Off the Streets Emergency Shelter (operated by

CMHA), Ontario Aboriginal HIV/AIDS Strategy (OAHAS), Réseau Access Network, Shkagamik-Kwe Health Centre, Ontario Works, Ontario Aboriginal Housing Services, The City of Greater Sudbury Housing Registry, Safe Harbour House (operated by the Elizabeth Fry Society of Sudbury), Health Sciences North (hospital), Sudbury Mental Health (rehabilitation centre), Ontario Disability Support Program, Become Sober Home, Monarch Recovery Services, Youth Wellness Hub, Better Beginnings Better Futures, John Howard Society, Overnight Warming Centre

All participants accessed services from SACY at least once, TG Innerselves, Nest, Foyer Notre Dame, Off the Streets Emergency Shelter, OAHAS, Cedar Place, and Health Sciences North had been accessed by multiple participants. Only one participant shared their experience with addiction services.

### *Experiences with services*

#### *Negative experiences*

Every participant shared about their experiences with shelters, and with other types of services. I will first cover the negative experiences that participants shared starting with shelters and housing services. I will then cover the negative experiences they had with other services including group homes, youth programs, co-ops and rent geared to income housing, soup kitchens and food banks, and addictions services.

#### *Shelters and housing services*

There were multiple reasons for negative experiences in shelters for participants. Every participant mentioned negative experiences in shelters. Feeling unsafe around other clients, anxiety over how their gender will be read by other clients, poor treatment from clients, poor

treatment from staff, and rules that acted as barriers were all reasons for negative experiences at shelters. One of the trans feminine participants stated that being in shelters had a negative effect on her mental health because it increased her anxiety:

I found that it was more anxiety-ridden because I haven't had surgery, so I still had all that stuff. And I didn't want to be seen as a man in a woman's shelter and stuff like that. I think that's a big thing with all trans people in shelters and stuff like that. They don't want to be seen as a man in a woman's shelter or a girl in a man's shelter. Because that's not who they are. They're a man in a man's shelter and a woman in a woman's shelter. But you can't change the way that you look. I used to have a lot of facial hair. I was really masculine. I couldn't really change any of that. So, there was a lot of stress about how people would react to me and stuff like that (Participant 1).

It is not only trans feminine participants who had barriers accessing shelters because of their gender identity. One participant's father is trans and when the family became homeless when he was a child his dad presented as a woman to get help from a shelter:

I didn't really know what was going on. Although that was a really bad experience . . . It was 10 years ago, but he had to say he was a woman to be able to get help. So, I don't know if it's still like that. And that's also why I didn't access it as much as I should even still be right now (Participant 4).

This currently affects his willingness to access services despite there being a 10-year gap between now and his last experience of homelessness.

Participants cited feeling unsafe in one of the low barrier shelters as part of the negative experiences they had. This shelter was brought up multiple times as being unsafe, "Yeah, I didn't

really like staying there a lot. I felt very unsafe, and I felt weary of everything” (Participant 5).

The same participant noted:

The more people, it's easier to have a riot or something like that. Then again, you don't know the kind of people that are coming into that shelter either. I'm not trying to sound judgmental, but you do have to think about that aspect of it, too, right? You've got to be on your toes. I've seen people have their phones stolen, have everything stolen, and then I started to learn, oh yeah, see, put your phone in your pants. They're not going to take it from you if you don't put it in your pants (Participant 5).

Being 2SLGBTQ+ was also mentioned as a reason for feeling unsafe at the low barrier adult shelter:

Maybe they could have some more education on how to deal with LGBT because I did feel like there was a target painted on my back there (CMHA). I felt like maybe they wouldn't know what to do. Or maybe they didn't even know that I was trans. Maybe they didn't even care. Did it even cross their mind? Would they even care if someone was homophobic? Or if someone pulled a hate crime? I don't know. And I think that's part of the reason why I chose not to stay there (Participant 5).

Theft was not only happening at that low barrier adult shelter, but this was also something that happened at others as well, “And even at the like at one point, I got my wallet stolen by somebody and like they checked the video footage and then they banned the person for two weeks” Participant 2 noted.

The low barrier youth shelter was not cited as being a place where youth felt unsafe, despite some issues with theft, and as I will share later in this chapter this shelter had more

participants sharing positive experiences than negative. The negative experiences were due to the physical property, funding, distance from other services, and the attitudes of some of the staff. Participant 2 noted that the shelter only having four beds meant that there was not guarantee youth would have a place to sleep at night, “But like, it's just the shelter that's like, a little bit like, uncertain, like kind of like, sometimes you might not get in because there's only four beds”. Nest did not have onsite shower facilities and the distance from the shelter to The Mission where showers are available in the morning presented as a challenge for at least one participant:

Because I remember being on the street and missing several appointments just because I didn't feel clean enough to be in that person's office. Or I felt like I didn't smell good enough to be in that person's office. And of course, NEST doesn't have a shower facility, so it makes it even more challenging. No. And the other thing too is if you stay at the NEST shelter, which is about like a 25 minute walk to the mission on a good day, depending on how much shit you have and what the weather's like, it's about a 25 minute walk there from the NEST shelter. So, if you want to shower in the morning, you basically have to get up before anyone else, basically, and have everything ready just to do the 30-minute trek there just to go take a shower. And it's like, if you don't leave early enough for the shower timing, then you're going to miss out on a shower until the next day. And it's like, how is that fair that I basically got to walk 30 minutes, basically, across downtown just to go get a shower in the morning or do laundry or eat? (Participant 6)

This participant noted that the short amount of time from when the shelter closed to when the showers at The Elgin Street Mission are available meant having to choose between breakfast or taking a shower. Staff attitudes at the warming centre ran by the low barrier youth shelter was another cause for participants having negative experiences, “Um, they just, every time I would

go to like the worker for help, it was mostly attitude and just like more like talk back than anything when I was just trying to get services” (Participant 6).

Another issue brought up by a participant with the the low barrier youth shelter’s building was the lack of washrooms:

Yeah, there's only a toilet permanently closed apparently in SACY and when the other one stops working, we basically all have to be sent upstairs and it's just like, get it together, man. You guys have been open for how long now and you can't get it together? (Participant 6)

One participant disliked the way the shelter was structured as it was just allowed for time to sleep, eat breakfast, and then leave. They felt rushed in the morning when it was time for the shelter to close:

And whereas a lot of the other shelters, like the Nest shelter is low barrier where it's, you come in, you sleep, you leave. Yeah, that's basically it. And I even found with, like, the Nest shelter, when it's getting that time to leave and stuff like that, I do notice sometimes some staff members do get a little bit moody and do get a little pushy. And it's like, can you please chill and just give us, like, five minutes to basically pack up our whole lives for the day and go? (Participant 6)

Some of the other issues that participants had with shelters were the restrictive criteria for services. One participant was homeless while pregnant and told she did not qualify for services, this participant also stated:

But when a shelter says that they are a woman's shelter, I don't see why it's such a long list of requirements just to get into a woman's shelter. I remember calling the Genevra

house to go twice, and their question, just to see if you qualify, was ridiculous. And I was sitting there going, what if you don't fall under half of these? Are you just basically told to go help yourself? (Participant 6)

Mandates created a barrier for this participant, and when she did not fit the mandate for one shelter, she was left trying to find a bed in another or come up with alternative lodging.

Although there were multiple participants that feared violence in shelters, only one had indicated that they had witnessed violence, and none shared that they personally experienced violence:

Same as the SACY Warming Center, there were so many fights that people would pick because there was basically no supervision. And I understand that we're not children, okay? We don't need to be supervised like we're at daycare. But when there's drugs, there's going to be violence . . . And I think more people need to realize that because with the violence, people are getting into more brawls, more fights, there's more disagreement, there's more heat (Participant 6).

Racism was mentioned by a couple participants. One participant commented that it came in the form of comments from other clients, and another participant experienced racism from staff in one of the youth shelters, "I heard two of them talking as I went outside and went, oh yeah, she's just a fucking Native. That was one of the comments I heard and everything else" (Participant 3).

Strict policies and rules at a youth shelter that had closed prior to the interviews came up from multiple participants, one participant called this shelter "high barrier". One participant opted to walk to their parent's cabin instead of spending the night stating, "I didn't like how like, controlling they were like, I find that like, SACY is more like, less controlling" (Participant 2).

Another participant shared about how the curfew negatively affected her job, and led to being kicked out of the shelter for 24 hours:

I wouldn't show up on substances, but they'd accuse me of being on substances because I was up since 2 o'clock in the morning because they wouldn't let me in the night before. I was downtown all night, got in trouble at work for showing up in a dirty uniform because same clothes that I went to work in, I slept overnight downtown and then had to go straight back to work the next morning. And then they'd look at me and be like, oh no, you're on something. And I'm like, no, I'm on like 2 hours of sleep. . . And one night that I told them I was only working until 9 so they would have let me in after curfew. My manager called and spoke with the person in charge of Foyer and said, hey, one of our closers isn't going to be here. I understand it's an issue for her being late after curfew. Do you mind if she works until 1am? I myself, like the GM, will personally drop her off so that you know she was actually at work with me. And they went, yep, I'll let nighttime staff know. And I got back. They sent me away again. And at that point my manager had already driven away because they let me inside the door to tell me inside that I was out on a 24-hour out. And because that was my third 24-hour out in a week, they kicked me out (Participant 2).

There were also complaints about the lack of privacy at the shelter:

Oh, they pretty much used to strip search us when I was there. They had a staff wait outside the bathroom while I took off all of my clothes and put them in a bag and handed them to her. She gave me towels and everything. I took a shower and then she gave me new clothes. Well, they also searched my stuff in my room (Participant 3).

Participants shared having more negative experiences with the shelter that closed four years ago than the shelter at SACY. The primary complaints were about how they were treated by staff and strict rules.

Rules and policies that participants had to follow came up 13 times from 5 participants. Because this came up frequently, it was included as a code. Participant 1 shared about the curfew when she was staying in a hotel room provided by the shelter. She said she didn't break other rules but would sometimes go to the Tim Hortons across the street after curfew for a coffee. One participant shared about the medication policies at one of the youth shelters:

But like at Foyer Notre Dame, it was like, very, very controlling. Like I, I like taking my medications myself and having them on me. And they have this rule where they lock them. And like, that really pissed me off (Participant 2).

Not having that autonomy to take their own medications was frustrating for this participant and they wanted to have more control.

Rules and structure can also be helpful for some youth, especially those who are under 18, but pose a problem for other youth:

Yeah, and there are those who really do need the structure that they had, especially when you're talking about people who are under 18 who may need that kind of security. I liked the routine I just didn't like how militant they were about enforcing it. As much as I struggle with routine, having routine also helps. It's 50-50 for both for me, but they were so militant about it that it's pretty much taken me up until now to start being okay with routines again, because at this point, I'm like, they can't kick me out, they can't force me

to do this shit, I'm not there anymore. Even for the two months I was there, it completely fucked up my cycles on everything (Participant 3).

The strict curfew at the youth shelter created problems for youth who worked evening and night shifts, but some staff would accommodate:

So, like I said, when I had night shifts that would take me past curfew. If the supervisor or the lady who was in charge was there during overnights, she'd let me in, she'd let me shower and then it was straight to bed. I didn't get dinner, I didn't get anything, but I got let in to go to bed. If she wasn't there it was at staff's discretion whether they let me in or not. Even though they had the copy of my schedule and knew which nights I would be out longer because the person operating it said she has a full-time job. That's one thing that we required youth to try to get when staying here is a job (Participant 3).

The rigidity of the rules, including the curfew at one of the youth shelters was brought up multiple times:

If they weren't so up their own asses and rigid about everything. I understand the no substance rules given that they were allowing youths under the age of 15 to stay there. That I can understand, but the rules for everything else, like for the people who had jobs, I'm not the first person that I've known to stay there and have been told, oh I don't care if your shift lets out after curfew, you're not welcome back. This place has a three-strike system, but at the same time, they know when a youth needs help and they'll still help you anyway. Foyer is supposed to have that same three strikes you're out rule, and they were just turning kids out their first mistake (Participant 3).

There were additional problems with hours of operations, curfews, and when youth were allowed to be in the shelter:

. . .I didn't really like the way that it was run. I felt like you were only allowed to be home at night or in the morning. You know? And it's okay to be an introvert and want to stay inside. Everybody has their things that make them comfortable. Right? And to just... Like, they're kids. They're fucking teenagers. You shouldn't... There's no excuse for that. What if they got homework or something from school? Like, you're going to make them do it at night? Kind of inconsiderate. They should be settling down (Participant 5).

This participant shared that it creates challenges for completing homework if they are forced to leave during the day and are not given a place to do it after school hours. These policies create challenges when youth struggle to find quiet places to go outside of their hours of operation.

Shelter policies beyond breaching curfew were brought up in the interviews. This included policies about chores:

Part of my chore list when I was there was to clean the bathroom. I cleaned the bathroom, and somebody took a shower and left her hair all over the shower wall, but left the rest of the bathroom clean. And I got written up and a 24 out because she left her hair on the shower wall after I cleaned it. So, they said I didn't do my chores (Participant 4).

There were rules about drug use at one of the youth shelters, being under the influence of drugs was against the rules, “At that point I was on drugs, but I wouldn't go to Foyer on substances because I knew they had dry rules, like you couldn't do nothing” (Participant 3). This participant used drugs, but not while staying at the shelter.

*Negative reactions from other clients*

I asked participant about whether they received negative reactions to their gender identity or sexual orientation when coming out to other clients or staff. All seven participants shared negative responses from other clients, and there were 14 mentions in the interviews of clients responding negatively to their gender identity and/or sexual orientation.

One participant who is a trans woman shared about her experience as a teenager in a boy's shelter:

But it was tough because, like I said, dealing with teenage boys when you yourself don't identify as a boy. You wear girls' clothes, and you have to hide that so people don't make fun of what you have and stuff like that (Participant 1).

She discussed having to hide her identity to avoid mistreatment from the boys in the shelter.

The participants who stayed in mixed gender youth shelters had negative experiences with other clients as well, "There were some people that were kind of like not so nice, but those were like just like people that were staying there" (Participant 2). This participant also shared:

Um, a lot of them are okay with it. Like, um, one of them was a little bit like, I don't know, homophobic in a way, but still nice to me. Like, um, yeah, like it was really hit or miss (Participant 2).

Another participant shared about their experience with other clients at the youth shelter being mixed, but mostly positive:

Some of them are good. Well, most of them are good. And then there are some that weren't too well. But for the most part, when I met people, especially through SACY, it was very accepting. But in more recent years, I would say, like, the past two years, things

have changed a lot in terms of just, like, even just the services and how people are acting, the management, you know, all of it (Participant 4).

Age was mentioned as a motivation for clients to act in a way that is disrespectful. This participant found younger people to be less respectful than other adults:

Adults are always going to be more respectful than kids, right? But kids don't really know any better. I find kids are the most hurtful because they don't know any better yet. But that being said, there can be some really older people that are stuck in their ways, raised old-fashioned, and they don't see eye to eye with the times (Participant 5).

Ignorance about non-binary identities came up specifically at the youth shelter:

Um, mainly there was this one individual that was staying at the Nest shelter and she just, they would constantly come up to me and be like, Oh, you're non-binary? Okay, so that means that you have no gender, and they would just basically say really weird comments like, oh, so what category does that put you in? And I remember one time they walked up to me and said, So, does that put you in the inanimate object category? And I just said, no, it doesn't (Participant 6).

There were experiences of transphobia in the adult low barrier shelter. One participant shared about the comments other clients made about her gender, "But they knew I was a trans because they would make fun of me and tell me I should not be there. You should start your [medical transition] yeah. Stuff like that. I don't even wanna repeat what they said" (Participant 7). In addition to experiencing transphobia, this participant shared that she was also accused of theft by other residents:

Just normal, like, not really about transgender stuff or anything like that, they would always put the stuff. Like, say, if somebody took something or something like that, it would put it on me instead of, like, looking and all that stuff for and, like, playing the blaming game on me (Participant 7).

The last negative experience shared was at a rehab facility in Toronto. A resident at this facility spoke to the media about not wanting to share a room with a trans woman, and she shared that the article is about her. There is no identifying information about her in the article, therefore I will share what she said about this experience:

Ah they would . . . there is an article without my name in it because they, kept me out of it. The press kept me out of it. The not the press, but the rehab facility, not rehab facility. The Sober Living House I was living in, which they ran a rehab facility. . . Yeah. And, being forced to live with somebody who is transgender and all that stuff, and she thought I was going to have sexually abused her because I have a dick. So, she went to the press (Participant 7).

Although this was not a Sudbury experience, her experience at this shelter is important to note, and will be discussed further in the analysis chapter.

#### *Negative experiences with staff*

Four of the seven participants shared negative experiences with staff due to sexual orientation or gender identity. As mentioned previously in this chapter, there were other types of negative experiences like racism, and being treated poorly. This section is focused on homophobia and transphobia specifically. One participant did not have these issues with staff at the shelter, and when I asked who it was, they shared, “A lot of the older generations. A lot of the

volunteers that would help out with different programs and different programming” (Participant 3). A lack of education is what one participant described as the cause for their treatment by staff at the low barrier adult shelter:

At the low barrier shelter. I found that they were very... What's the word I'm looking for? Uneducated. Unempathetic. Even unsympathetic. It's hard to explain because if you're a youth and you're going to a low barrier shelter, they're usually dealing with adults, too, so they're not going to treat you as a youth. They're going to treat you as an adult (Participant 5).

When I asked the same participant about their experience at the high barrier youth shelter, their response was, “Personally, I... I find that... A lot of people walking down the street would treat you better than the staff that worked there” (Participant 5).

Staff at the temporary warming centre in the wintertime did not have the warmest response to one participant when they came out as non-binary:

Some of them, when I would tell them that I was bisexual and non-binary, some of them wouldn't take it the nicest. And I could just tell from their presence that they just didn't have the nicest attitude towards me after I told them (Participant 6).

Frustration with the number of questions that were asked after coming out when seeking housing support was mentioned in one interview:

They would ask me, like, what does non-binary stand for you? What does bisexual mean for you? Like, kind of just basic information that someone should already know. And it's kind of, like, they also ask, like, how do you live your life? How do you, like, how do you, like, deal with, like, day-to-day life? And I'm sitting there, like, deal with day-to-day

life. I understand that there's issues that come with it. I do have mental health issues because of it, but at the same time, I'm sitting there and I'm going, what issues are you talking about? (Participant 6)

While staying in a rehab facility, one trans woman was placed in the male dorm, “Because I had a dick, they put me in the guy's section because I still looked like a guy with facial hair and everything like that. So, they put me in the guy's dorm” (Participant 7). In this case the negative response was their actions placing her with the men. She also shared that she experienced transphobia from other clients in front of staff, and I asked if they intervened, “No. And they did it right in front of the staff too” (Participant 7). Even though in this case it was not transphobic comments from the staff, the staff did not stop clients from making comments could be because of their own negative beliefs about 2SLGBTQ+ people.

### *Exiting homelessness into housing*

Experiences accessing housing services came up in three of the interviews. There were issues with not hearing back from programs after reaching out for support:

I've been trying to, even still, because I may be evicted. So, it's kind of fun. But there's a lot of places that aren't getting back to me. I also reached out to Toronto services as well. There's only a few places that actually reached out (Participant 4).

This participant reached out to services in Toronto as well as Sudbury to improve their odds of getting housed after not receiving timely responses from local organizations.

Policies at the housing support services in Sudbury presented as a deterrent for one participant to seek help:

I heard at one point in time you had to be consecutively homeless for six months, and couch surfing didn't count. So that really made me feel some type of way. I was like, well, I'm not going to friggin' talk to you guys about that. You're probably not going to help me (Participant 5).

The criteria for services acted as a barrier for this participant seeking housing support. Another participant shared their negative experiences with staff at a housing organization:

I would say it was the most shittiest experience of my life. . . they were very rude and nagging about it, and very pushy about it. . . Just like, basically for say I didn't hand in one form, or I didn't make an appointment, it was, oh why weren't you there? . . . But then they have to also realize that sometimes we can't sign these forms, we can't make these appointments or make these phone calls because we're on the street (Participant 6).

Attitudes from staff were the cause of negative experiences for this participant accessing housing supports.

### *Group homes*

One participant shared about her experience in an all-boys group home in her teens as a trans woman. She shared, “That was a lot tougher. You're living in a house full of boys going through testosterone and stuff like that” (Participant 1). The testosterone fuelled environment contributed to her discomfort being there. She also experienced trouble with accessing gender affirming clothing:

I've lived in a group home where being part of C.A.S. I wasn't allowed to buy female clothes because I wasn't born female. So, I ended up stealing everything that I had because I wasn't given money to feel accepted and feel (Participant 1).

Being unable to access feminine looking clothing led to her shoplifting for these items, and having access to feminine attire would have improved her experience there.

### *Youth programs*

Two of the participants had negative experiences with youth programs. One found that they did not connect with the therapist they were paired with, “I finally went to The Youth Hub and tried. Well, I saw one therapist once, but I didn't really like her. She didn't vibe with me” (Participant 2). But this did not stop this participant from continuing to access support and is now seeing another clinician at this centre. Another participant shared “I've had some positive ones, and I've had some negative ones, but the positives outweigh the negatives” (Participant 5). Participants shared that they had negative experiences, but because they had more positive experiences, continued to access services.

### *Co-ops and geared to income housing*

Negative experiences with co-operative housing and geared to income housing was mentioned in two of the interviews. In one interview the participant faced discrimination from the co-op board:

I would have liked to get into a co-op. I even tried to apply to a co-op while I was homeless, but, and the lady liked me, but the board didn't. They said they had mixed feelings about me because I was homeless. So, like, that was a big barrier to getting housing is like being homeless. Just the fact, the stigma around it, just, they didn't want to have me, even though like, I'm not a bad person, like I'm a good person. I'm very respectful of like people, but like, just the fact that I was homeless, they didn't want me (Participant 2).

Another participant shared about the trouble they have accessing social housing due to the long wait list.

I applied over, like, two years, and I literally just got, like, my update notice, and they're telling me I got, like, 13 months left, and I'm sitting here, and I'm like, so I got a year left? And I've been sitting here for, like, almost three now? Uh, what happened to emergency housing. . . Because this isn't a... this is not no emergency housing (Participant 6).

### *Positive experiences*

Each participant had positive experiences to share about, but compared to the 166 mentions of negative experiences, there were only 32 mentions of positive experiences. The positive experiences shared were with shelters, housing services, youth centres, ASOs, and mental health supports.

### *Shelters*

All seven participants had at least one positive experience with shelters to share. There were multiple participants with positive things to say about the low barrier youth shelter specifically: “SACY was a big help for shelters” (Participant 1) according to one participant. Participants felt that this shelter was a safe place for them, “So like they really, they do things right. And they like, they really like make sure that like everybody is like in a good safe space” (Participant 2). Another participant noted that “They were pretty good at keeping it safe for me and monitoring. It was never an issue. I never had a safety issue there” (Participant 5).

This shelter offered more than just a place to sleep, they provided necessities like hygiene supplies and clothing which was not available everywhere else:

I think it's perfect just the way it is. But then again, that's my opinion, right? I find I get better services from a place like SACY because I'm a smaller dude, even finding clothes . . . I thought I was treated the best at SACYs, though. You guys, they were really good. They were really good at SACY's, because even at the low barrier shelter, they didn't have clothing or anything like that. If you stunk, you stunk. There was nothing you could do about it. You couldn't even change your clothes (Participant 5).

One participant described it as more inclusive than other shelters:

I'm glad that the Nest Shelter exists because from what I understand from friends who have stayed here at the Nest Shelter, they're a lot more open and accepting of everything from gender identity to sexuality to what race you are (Participant 3).

One participant had only good things to say about the higher barrier youth shelter that the Nest shelter at SACY replaced:

Um, wonderful. No disrespect, no snootiness, no like, bad. Like, I really have nothing bad to say about the Foyer Notre Dame house. They definitely helped me a lot during my homelessness journey . . . I guess anytime, like, I needed help with stuff, they were right there. Like, when I was applying for, like, when housing was trying to switch me over to Aboriginal housing, so I basically had to fill out all new forms. All the workers helped me understand all of that. Especially with the Foyer Notre Dame house, I used to have to use their phone for calling my kids, so they used to meet me all the time at a location and at a time. That was super convenient, and just, it felt more like a family and a community than any other services that we really have here in Sudbury. And they operated in a very, very different way because theirs was very structured (Participant 6).

This participant liked the structure that this shelter offered which is different from the experiences noted by other participants.

One participant shared about the shelter ran by Elizabeth Fry, and had positive experiences there:

They would have one on one conversation if I needed to have a one-on-one conversation. They would check up on me and let like, every so often if I ask them to. They would not, like when somebody, like, try and hurt themselves or anything like that, they will make sure they would be okay and all that stuff (Participant 7).

She further noted that she was impressed by the staff at this shelter:

Like, they would, like, go behind and beyond and, like, do if you need a ride, they would actually they aren't supposed to do it. They would actually give you a ride to your doctor's appointment or whatever if they need to (Participant 7).

The Salvation Army operated women's shelter was accessed by a couple participants.

One noted that she had a positive experience there:

Cedar Street. And it was an all-female homeless shelter, female and families, and they allowed me to be, to go in because I identified as a female, so they were like, and at first, they put me in a hotel room, so like I wasn't even in the house, I was by myself, in Gatchell, in a little hotel room (Participant 1).

Another participant accessed this shelter with their family as a child, and the family was placed in a hotel as well. This participant noted, "I do remember people bringing food by and they were really nice. But that's about it because usually it was my dad dealing with them rather

than me” (Participant 4). They had less contact with staff directly but overall had a positive experience with this shelter and the staff.

*Positive responses from other clients*

Four participants shared about positive responses from other clients, and there were 11 mentions of positive client responses. When asked about the experience with the other clients at an adult women’s shelter responded to one trans female participant, she said:

The way that people accepted me, the residents and staff like that. The staff had to accept me because it's their job, but the residents didn't have to accept me. They didn't have to say hi to me or anything like that and make me feel welcome. I didn't have anybody make me feel like I was unwelcome. They [never] felt threatened or anything like that. So that's what made it feel like a safe space to me, is the positivity I got from all the other women that lived there. Because that's a big sign of if it's going to be safe or not, to be treated and respected (Participant 1).

Even though some of the participants had negative experiences with the staff at the high barrier youth shelter, the interactions with other youth were positive, “For the most part it was okay because everyone that was there when I was there was pretty decent” (Participant 3). One participant shared about meeting their best friend at a youth drop in:

Like, I, I met a best friend from coming here and she's really open, like, and accepting of me. So, like, um, yeah, she like, I'm her gay best friend. So, I mean, like, that's really positive. I mean, like a lot of the people here were really accepting. There wasn't that many that were like homophobic or something like that (Participant 1).

The participant who lives in a co-op has also had positive encounters with neighbours, and her sexual orientation is not a problem to all of them:

Yeah, they don't really give a shit. As long as you're not causing problems and starting a bunch of shit, and having like screaming matches at 2 o'clock in the morning in the parking lot, they don't really care. . . for the most part, when people learn that I am bi or that I've been homeless, that I had an addiction, they're generally very supportive of the fact that I've been through all of that. And there's been a couple times when members of the board have come up to me and been like, oh, you know this, you know this, right? And I'm like, kind of, like I didn't grow up in a stable home or stable environments, and they're like, oh, like we couldn't really tell because you're a decent person (Participant 3).

#### *Positive responses from staff*

All seven participants shared about staff responding positively to their gender identity and/or sexual orientation, and in total positive staff reactions were mentioned 15 times. There were more mentions of staff responding positively than negatively in the interviews.

When asked about the experiences coming out to staff at the adult women's shelter one participant said, "The staff were good. They understood it" (Participant 1). When asked about another local women's shelter one participant said, "They were actually really good to me for that because it is a transgender, a transgender shelter too. They go by the LTGBQ type thing" (Participant 7). This shelter advertises that trans people are welcome in their space, which will be discussed more in the Analysis chapter. When asked about the staff at the low barrier youth shelter the response was similar, "The staff were very nice. They were very welcoming" (Participant 2). The same participant added:

Like I said, they're very open and like welcoming. So, like nobody ever judged me for that. Actually, I made very good friends with some of the staff, like especially one, her name is Francine, like she's super nice. And I like her a lot. And like she actually cares about me, like all of them cared about me. And they literally told me that like I was like the best like youth that ever came into the shelter (Participant 2).

Some of the participants never experienced homophobia from staff at the low barrier youth shelter, "I've never really experienced that here at SACY" (Participant 3). Another participant shared about their positive experiences with staff:

I mean, I haven't had any problems with anyone in terms of that. I've always been a big part of the community, so everyone knows that I'm kind of out there. I'm definitely not even close to closeted, so if they search up my name, they'll be like, oh, he's trans. Well, especially SACY. . . My experience in Sudbury has been pretty decent (Participant 4).

This participant had a mostly positive experience with service providers locally. When I asked another participant if they have experienced homophobia or transphobia from staff they said:

I find it really depends on how invested they are in their work. If they're not invested in it, then they shouldn't be there in the first place. If they're not there to help people, they shouldn't be there. So that being said, if they're making me feel uncomfortable, again, I'm probably not going to seek services from them, right? . . . I've never been made to feel that way. There's staff that I'm more comfortable with, but I think everybody experiences that. People they just bond with naturally (Participant 5).

When I asked about the experience participants had at the high barrier youth shelter there were positive, or neutral responses from staff, “They didn't really say much about it”. There was not as much data shared by participants about this shelter.

### *Youth Centres*

Two participants shared about their experiences with youth centres specifically. One of the youth centres is the Youth Wellness Hub that is operated by Compass, a local mental health organization that serves children, teens, youth, and parents. One participant shared about the positive experienced they had there:

And the (youth wellness) hub is a really nice place. That's where I got my therapist.

That's where, and I can see her like anytime, like today I went to see her twice this week and we can talk as long as we want. Like sometimes it's an hour and a half. And then my nurse practitioner, she's part of like a group of clinics, right. And one of the nurse practitioners that is working at the hub right now is part of that group of like nurse practitioners (Participant 2).

The SACY youth program was mentioned by participants in combination with the Nest program, which is why there are not many quotes about this program specifically. One participant lamented that they aged out of the youth program, “I like the programs that they had at SACY, and it sucked that I aged out” (Participant 5). Their experience was positive and sadly irreplaceable with adult services.

### *Housing services*

Only one participant shared positive experiences with programs that are specifically for housing support. They noted:

I think in terms of Sudbury we're doing pretty decent in terms of the housing supports and Homelessness Network and stuff like that. . . Just that they're so kind and understanding from, I mean, at least the people that, like the person that I've talked to, and I mean, they seem like they actually care about people, not just like the money that they make (Participant 4).

This participant found that the staff and support at this organization to be the reason for their positive experience.

### *Recommendations*

Participants were asked for their recommendations to improve services for 2SLGBTQ+ people experiencing homelessness in Sudbury. These recommendations were divided into eight categories: service delivery, new programs and services, housing, community, recommendations for youth themselves, visibility, and other.

### *Service delivery*

All seven participants had recommendations for service delivery, with a total of 32 recommendations. Recommendations to improve shelters came up most frequently. These recommendations included changes to policies and shelter layouts to be safer and more inclusive.

A concern about safety in the low barrier youth shelter was having all the youth sleeping together in one room. One participant recommended having individual rooms:

It's very important because like, I was scared that like people would steal my phone and like things like that. But like, if you're in a different room, then those worries are not as, it's not as like a bigger issue. Like here it's an issue because like you're four people in a

room, if you're sleeping, you don't know what's going to happen. So, it's really unpredictable. And, um, I can't remember what they did with the belongings, but like here it's very stressful. Right. Like I stole, somebody stole my wallet, and I just went to brush my teeth, and she stole it. And I could tell it was her because she was pacing around, but like, because it's very low barrier and all of that, they can't like tell her to stay and like give it back. So, like, it was just an unfortunate thing (Participant 2).

One participant recommended that community members be consulted when creating policies and procedures:

I think all female shelters should do that [have community members review policies and procedures]. They should talk to the queer community and see what they can do to make their shelters safer and more... I don't want to say inviting because I don't want people to go like, oh this shelter looks awesome, I'm going to get myself kicked out so I can live at this shelter. I don't want that for anybody because being homeless sucks ass. . . You don't know where you're sleeping one day to the next. You don't know where you're eating or what you're eating one day to the next (Participant 1).

Another participant alluded to the importance of people with lived experience working in the field:

Because when you have the life experience, that's when you, I feel, can make the most change. Because when have you ever met a social worker that didn't have any trauma? Come on. I'm still trying to think if I know any (Participant 4).

I asked participants who stayed at the Nest shelter what would improve their experiences there. The lack of space to sleep led to problems for multiple participants, and having more beds, and room, especially in the winter would improve the experience:

. . . when I first stayed at the shelter, there was, like, two couches, so that equals two beds right there. And then there was about five beds in the back, and then they added more beds over time, obviously. But then recently, and I don't know why recently, but they've taken the beds away. And now we only have six beds again, and we are down to only one couch and one chair. So basically, if there's a full house that night, we are either told to figure it out for ourselves, or we can leave. And I believe that as a youth shelter, you should have more beds, especially during the wintertime, and not take away the beds that you would have just gave us access to. Because I'm sorry to say, but there was this one time, and I've been sitting here and I've been quiet about it for so long because I didn't know who to talk to about it, but there was this one time that there were at least 14 of us, and there was a winter blizzard coming. So obviously, they can't really kick us out under the winter blizzard, as you know, by law. . . I remember they put one person on that couch, and then on the second couch, they literally put me on one side of the couch, and my ex on the other side of the couch (Participant 6).

For this participant in addition to lack of beds, not being able to lie down comfortably on the sofa made the experience even more uncomfortable. Making changes to the space as well of policies would make a positive difference.

I asked other participants about the number of beds, and I asked if having more beds would helpful:

Yeah, it would be. But that's up to the city, right? Because they're the ones who fund things. So, like, even like, to the fact that like, the shelter is not supposed to be funded for food at night, they still do it. Like, they find some extra money to do that. And they're not supposed to, but they, well, I mean, it's not that they're not supposed to, but they're not funded for that (Participant 2).

Having mental health services on site in shelters was recommended by one participant:

Or I actually have a therapist in the shelter, like, a psychiatrist in the shelters. . . I would, like, have somebody to talk to on 1 on 1 or, like, be able to have a service and oh, yeah. I want to talk to you about that after. And let people have animals if they have animals in shelters (Participant 7).

This participant had said in their interview that they had to surrender their cat to an animal shelter to access to a shelter. This was also an issue that I encountered with clients who were choosing to sleep in tents or in vehicles to avoid surrendering pets.

Funding came up in numerous responses, “But at this point, where do we get the funding for everything when there's limited funding for all the supports that we need anyway?” (Participant 3). Participants noted how the lack of funding affected the services at SACY:

Um, personally for SACY, um, I think just investing, because I hear about SACY getting all these donations and stuff like that for, like, the youth shelter and, like, for the main stuff. And, but at the same time, I'm sitting here and every time I go to SACY, either during the day or at night, there's really no changes at all. Like, it just gets, it seems like it's getting worse and worse, and I just wish that the funding that they do get, I wish they

would put it more towards things that the youth need than what we don't want  
(Participant 6).

The limitations in the shelter space itself, including the lack of shower facilities came up in the interviews, and participants recommended that shelters have some of these basic facilities, “I wish that they had showers there because it's a positive enough environment that I would feel comfortable enough to take a shower there if they had the means for it, you know?” (Participant 5). Having updates to the space and the facilities came up more than once:

I would say like that SACY would get a new, nicer place. But even though like, it's still nice here, and it's welcoming. But it would be nice to have a bigger space, I feel like, and newer like furniture and things like that. But again, like that's something the city has to fund (Participant 2).

Shortening the wait times for services, and amount of time people must wait to hear from service providers was recommended by a couple of participants. One commented:

If they're at risk, there should be somebody there, like right away. And not be like, oh well you're only at risk. Just do what you have to do and try not to be homeless. No, you actually have to be there to support that person (Participant 1).

Another participant shared that shorter response times from service providers is an important step to improving service delivery, “Response time. If it was, you know, if there was more people maybe to monitor emails or messages or phone calls, whatever it is, to be able to get back to the people who want to access it” (Participant 4).

Participants shared that low barrier spaces that do not require clients to be sober is a required service.

Honestly, more shelters, more beds, more safe places for people to go that don't have the expectation that you have to be sober, because unfortunately, one big thing that I learned while I was on the streets and from friends who are still on the streets is that being down there, and I do call it the trenches, because there, you're literally fighting for survival, no matter what you do or where you go. It's finding those safe places to go that, like, oh, you've had a beer or two. Oh, well, as long as you're not causing a disruption or continuing to drink, come in. It's finding spaces like that (Participant 3).

Another recommendation for relaxing rules and reducing barriers in shelters and warming centres:

I have this argument regularly with my parents, because they're like, oh, yeah, there is drop-ins. And I'm like, yeah, but they're not all open at the same time. A lot of them have really different, fucked-up rules for each place. And, like, even the warming center downtown, you're only allowed to spend so much time there before they tell you to leave (Participant 3).

This participant noted the time limits. None of the warming centres or shelters that participants utilized are open 24 hours per day, and clients must leave when they close which leaves a gap during the day where there is no access to a warm space, or public washrooms outside of 24-hour fast-food restaurants. On this note, there is only one 24-hour fast-food restaurant in downtown Sudbury but due to the number of people who utilized their dining room as a place to stay warm, dry, or out of the heat in summer, they removed all the seating and permanently closed

their public washrooms and operate as take out and drive through only. One participant noted the lack of 24-hour services results in people having to carry all their belongings with them everywhere they go which leads to discrimination and stigmatization:

A lot of the people that I have talked to downtown, when I've spent time downtown, talk about wanting to make things better, but being discriminated and discouraged because they carry all their stuff with them in wagons and shopping carts and they have to bring it with them, because if they don't, they'll lose it or it'll be thrown out on them. And they get shit on for that, but at the same time, that's how they have to live. Because I know a lot of people downtown would like to get out of downtown, but nothing is available for them because everyone looks down on them for being downtown (Participant 3).

This participant recommended having spaces where people can store their stuff during the day without having to worry about it being stolen or thrown out:

I could see it helping. And of course, that's not the solution, but at least, especially days where it's raining during the day or whatever, you've got somewhere you can lock up your stuff for the day when you're not using it. See, that would also help, because then their stuff wouldn't be ruined, they wouldn't be throwing it away downtown all the time. Because I know I had that issue a couple times when I was downtown, that I'd hide my bag somewhere so I could go to work or go to Foyer because I couldn't bring all of my shit with me. And I'd come back to all of the content scattered everywhere and have my things missing. I couldn't exactly be mad, just I had to leave it outside (Participant 3).

Having education, training, and reducing prejudice towards people who experience homelessness was brought from a few participants, one when asked said “And get some

education in there” (Participant 7). Increasing education and knowledge about people’s experiences was brought up about health care, and challenging preconceived notions that workers have about people who are experiencing homelessness:

Preconceived notions that people seem to have. Especially healthcare professionals who work in the ER because that's something that's very serious. So, when people go there for help usually, especially homeless people, that's why they didn't treat me well in Toronto is because I was homeless there. And then the same with when I went here because they saw my records from Toronto and they, you know, I guess, again, preconceived notions and just like assuming things about me just by how I look. They didn't treat me like they would treat someone else. Say, if they were wearing a suit and a tie (Participant 4).

A participant brought up education for police services as a recommendation:

Or even, I don't know, look up a textbook of social work. I don't know, maybe take courses on... Maybe frickin' do therapy yourself. Like, I think there needs to be more extensive training in the recruitment process, because that... None of what I've heard from queer people should happen. And I've had enough experiences that I've seen with my own eyes in Sudbury (Participant 4).

### *New programs and services*

There were various programs and services that participants recommended. All participants had recommendations in this category and there were 32 recommendations in total. The first recommendation was having a 2SLGBTQ+ specific shelter:

I think there should at least be an LGBTQ plus safe space homeless shelter or a group home or something. . . So, I think there should be a queer-inclusive homeless shelter so

they know that they're safe. They're not going to be judged by anybody because they're all going through the same stuff (Participant 1).

Multiple participants made this same recommendation, “Personally, I think we should have just strictly a LGBT shelter. And again, a lot of people may not see a need for it, but... I think it would benefit the community” (Participant 5).

Having more 2SLGBTQ+ specific programs and supports above and beyond shelters was mentioned, including re-introducing programs that no longer exist. One example is starting a PFLAG (Parents Family and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) chapter in Sudbury:

Definitely PFLAG . . . I want to start a PFLAG chapter in Sudbury, but I can't do it because I don't live in Sudbury. So that kind of sucks because I want this to happen. Because there's not really many resources for trans people. So having a PFLAG chapter here, there's going to be resources that are going to be coming in (Participant 1).

This participant has reached out to friends in Sudbury who are activists and is working on having a chapter started in Sudbury.

Having more support groups and places for community members to get together was recommended by multiple participants, “Um, just like more groups, maybe like more places where we can gather” (Participant 2). Another participant stated:

Seriously, I think a big thing that would help would be something like TG again. Because if you have the right people that are queer, and they have similar experiences, then there's a safe space. And then there's also those people that are in power that are now fighting for what they believe in. So then when they go into this safe space, they know that... It's also about making connections. That's why I've been trying to think of how to do that myself.

I remember ATA. That's not TG, but all the queer people in that room and all of us doing things we love together and being stupid and being silly because we're that comfortable.

That's what I want to see in a homeless shelter for trans and queer youth. I don't want it to feel like a homeless shelter (Participant 4).

This participant would like to see more programs like the groups TG Innerselves offers, and the collaboration between TG Innerselves and Myths and Mirrors, Artiste Trans Artistry (ATA) return. This group was peer led, and each meeting was dedicated to working on various art pieces and projects while having open discussion. I was one of the people who spearheaded that group when it first started and unfortunately it ended because both collaborating organizations no longer had the funding to keep it running. This participant shared about one of the friends he made while at the group and the impact memories of the group continue to have:

I still talk to them. I actually just talked to them yesterday. I cannot be any more proud of the person that they become, and I know that part of it is because of everyone they met through ATA. I mean, I'm different because of them. Literally earlier today, I was sobbing on my floor, but also while manically looking through five of my friends' different profiles, because I thought that maybe they weren't dead. But then, I'm smiling because now I'm thinking about ATA. That, that is why we need that again (Participant 4).

The lack of services and need for more services was noted, "I find there's a lack of just services for LGBT in general. Forget about trans. There's, like, barely anything besides maybe Zigs, and I wouldn't even call that a service" (Participant 5). Zigs is known as the only gay bar north of Toronto, and is a space enjoyed by many, but when people ask about where to go in Sudbury if you are queer or trans, this is a space that is frequently mentioned:

We do need more programs and more groups and more services. Yeah, yeah. I think a lot of our youth may be feeling isolated or they may not even know. Like, personally, I didn't come out until I was 19 (Participant 5).

Offering more group support beyond one-on-one support:

Um, definitely, like, more support groups, definitely, because, like, I don't really see much support group through, like, different agencies for, like, all this and I'm just sitting here and I'm like, why is there not as much support group? Because I understand that some people just want to talk one-on-one, but then what about the people who want to almost do, like, a group session and, like, talking in groups? (Participant 6)

Another participant recommended trans specific groups in addition to what is offered currently by TG Innerselves, “And actually have more groups for transgenders and all that stuff in Sudbury like you used to be here. You used to have a drop-in center here” (Participant 7). TG Innerselves used to operate out of SACY, and when the program was still staffed with a direct client service worker, they had drop-in hours where clients could meet the worker for one-on-one support.

Multiple participants discussed the need for more addiction services:

I guess I didn't mention this more addiction, like resources. Right. Because like, I mean, like if you were bullied, if you've went through a lot of trauma, like maybe that could lead to addiction. . . resources to help people, especially like with fentanyl and like harder drugs, like to get them the help they need. And like, also safe supplies, like that would be a big help. And just because you never know what's in the black-market drugs (Participant 2).

This additional support for addictions including mental health supports that addresses trauma, “We need different programmings (sic) to deal with the trauma and the incidents and everything behind why they have these addictions and why they are where they are” (Participant 3). One participant recommended a 2SLGBTQ+ specific rehab facility:

And actually, having LGBQ rehab facility for people who are wanting to actually get clean. Because that's why I struggle right now. I want to get myself clean and off the drugs, but there's no rehab facility who would it accept me (Participant 7).

Having services like what was offered at SACY spread out in different parts of the city was recommended:

It sucks that there's not more places like that. Maybe if we had two or three more SACYs around, spread out. Like smaller ones. Maybe one in Gatchel. Yeah, so not just having the shelters downtown (Participant 5).

Having programing spread out throughout the city can increase access when public transportation is limited and spreads out services beyond just downtown.

### *Inclusion*

Recommendations for inclusion were made in all seven interviews and there were 27 recommendations in total in this category. One recommendation is ensuring that the people who are hired as staff and volunteers are going to be friendly and treat clients with respect:

The only way I can think to say this right now is get with the program. And understand that sexual orientation and your gender and your race don't matter when it comes to needing help and being a person. People who can treat people as people are what you

need. Because no matter the situation, we're still people and we deserve respect (Participant 3).

A participant was familiar with the training that TG Innerselves had done for the Greater Sudbury Police Service and the training video made in collaboration between the two Creating and Understanding of the Transgender Community, that is the training and video referenced in the following quote:

You've got to have that background. And that's why I feel like everything that even TG, like what we were doing with the police and the videos and the whatever, that was good. That was good, that was good. We need to force people to watch it. If you're going to be a police officer or a social worker, you've got to watch these things. You've got to actually understand people and not be judgmental (Participant 4).

This participant saw training and education as an important tool for inclusion. Having signs that increase visibility were recommended to improve inclusion:

I personally, a lot of people may not see it as a big deal, but I like seeing the all-gender sign on the bathroom. Yeah. I like seeing that. It makes me feel welcome. Yeah. And if I don't see that, then I may not use that bathroom. I may not be comfortable (Participant 5).

### *Community spaces*

Four participants recommended more spaces for community members to interact, have leisure activities like arts and sports, and that are safe to congregate. One participant noted: “There's no places for transgenders to actually really hang out in Sudbury here” (Participant 7). There are not many places for 2SLGBTQ+ people to meet other community members. Some recommendations included coffee shops, spaces to play video games together, sports teams like

hockey and soccer, and a revival of programs like ATA. One participant recommended a mini gay village in Sudbury:

And in Toronto they have huge gay village. And like, I mean, like, I feel like maybe at least like a little portion of the town where like, maybe like people can go and be accepted and be more in a safe space (Participant 2).

### *Housing*

Five participants made recommendations about housing specifically, including having more affordable housing available. One participant noted a link between addictions and lack of housing, “So yeah, like addictions and housing, I feel like that's the biggest supports that we need in Sudbury because Sudbury is the, like, I didn't know this, but Sudbury is like the overdose capital of Ontario” (Participant 2). This ties into the recommendations made about mental health supports attached to shelter services.

Not only does the affordable housing, geared to income housing, and co-operative housing need to be built, but addressing challenges with discrimination in housing is important to participants as well:

And there's certainly a demand for cooperative housing and anti-discrimination practices with cooperative housing and maybe looking at co-ops that are built to take in people who are coming out of shelters. Yeah. And they do have like some co-ops that are like through Sudbury housing (Participant 2).

The long wait to get into geared to income housing for one participant was six months because she had a baby, even then, it is a long time for a parent and child to have to live in a shelter.

Decreasing the wait to get into housing is another recommendation tied in with increasing the housing that is available:

So having affordable housing... Because I know the general housing list right now is like five years and the emergency housing list is almost a year long. Thankfully when I had my daughter, I was on the emergency list and only had to wait six months. But for other people and other youth that I know that don't have children and aren't having a child, they're stuck just trying to figure shit out (Participant 3).

Another participant has been on the housing list for three years:

The wait times. Yep. That is the number one worst thing. I've been on the wait list for Sudbury Housing for... three years. And even victim services, after everything that's happened within the past four to five months, they told me, even if they put me down for... I guess like a rapid housing whatever, they were like, it's still gonna be at least a year and a half or two more years (Participant 4).

### *Visibility*

Increasing visibility through community events and awareness was recommended by one participant, noting annual events that are already occurring in Sudbury:

Um, honestly, like I think that they're doing a lot. Like at schools now, they're putting the pride flags up. Like at, I think City Hall, do they have a pride flag now? Um, so they would do that during Pride Week. Yeah. And Trans Day of Remembrance and things like that. And they're really trying to like to make the new generation be more open (Participant 2).

This participant noted the practice of raising flags increasing visibility and openness towards 2SLGBTQ+ people.

Another part of increasing visibility is providing education information to youth so that they have the tools to educate themselves:

I definitely think more, like, resources for us and more information for us, because I've also noticed going into several of these places that they don't really, like, inform you or give you information about any of the LGBTQ community (Participant 6).

Providing more information can help increase the understanding that cisgender and straight youth have about the community, as well as showing 2SLGBTQ+ youth that there are resources that can be accessed locally.

### *Recommendations to youth*

I was not anticipating participants to provide recommendations directed to youth who are experiencing homelessness; however I think it is important to include these recommendations. The first is about seeking services as a transgender person: "Don't try to change yourself to be able to go somewhere. Because that's going to do a lot more damage than it is help" (Participant 1). This participant learned that it was better to be herself in shelters than hide that she is a trans woman.

Participants offered words of support to youth who are feeling alone in the world and like no one else understands:

Because I mean, the number one person who's going to support you is you. So through homelessness and drugs and alcohol abuse and whatever else that someone is going

through, I just want them to know that even if in that second minute or even year that they feel like they're alone and that they should die or nobody cares about them, that there's a lot of other people that feel the exact same way and aren't sharing, that they feel the same way because they feel they're a burden and they don't want to reach out (Participant 4).

Final words of wisdom for any 2SLGBTQ+ people experiencing homelessness, “Don't give up. Never give up” (Participant 1). These words came from a participant who was dealing with homelessness for over seven years and is currently housed, living with a spouse, and now running a PFLAG chapter in another city.

## Chapter 4: Analysis

### *Introduction*

I interviewed seven participants between December 2023 and March 2024. The interviews lasted up to one hour and participants were asked questions that provided demographic information about their age, gender identity, and sexual orientation. I also asked questions regarding their experiences with homelessness, accessing services, and what their recommendations are to improve services. While the interviews were semi-structured and participants raised many issues, each interview included the following primary questions:

Have you ever experienced homelessness in Sudbury for any amount of time?

Do you identify as 2SLGBTQ+? What terms do you use to label your gender identity and/or sexual orientation?

How old are you?

How long were you homeless (including couch surfing, staying in shelters, sleeping rough)?

During this time did you access shelters or housing services?

If services were accessed, what was that experience like for you?

How did staff and other clients respond to you being 2SLGBTQ+?

What needs to change based on your experience in Sudbury?

The participants I interviewed were treated as experts in their own experiences. The stories and experiences from participants at the center of my study. Multiple research participants were familiar with who I am and that I am also a member of the 2SLGBTQ+ community, and the participants that did not know me were introduced to me by SACY staff, or by friends who also

participated in the study. Participants shared openly about their experiences, and I had no difficulty with getting answers to the questions being asked. I believe that the recruitment approach and being a part of the community helped with establishing trust and safety.

I used thematic analysis to interpret the data and what I have gathered. The answers given by participants about their experiences with services, and recommendations is where I found the codes for my research. I read through the interviews and categorized their responses, and I noticed patterns within what they shared. When multiple participants shared a similar experience or recommendation that became a code.

### *Theoretical Approach*

I use Queer Theory as a framework to analyse and understand the ways that a participant's identity is linked to their experiences, and how that shaped their recommendations for services. This involves queering the perspective about the responses and services participants received, and what changes are needed, "In academic circles, to queer something is to analyze a situation or a text to determine the relationship between sexuality, power, gender, and conceptions of normal and deviant, insider and outsider" (Dilley, 1999, p. 458). The relationship between gender, sexuality, and being unhoused are intrinsically intertwined for many of the participants and directly connected to how they were treated in these spaces. In the case of this study queer is the norm as it is the shared identity of the researcher and the research participants, in this instance the "outsider" is on the inside.

Qualitative research in this kind of study is important as it centers people who are not often given a platform to be heard. Using thematic analysis, the responses I was given to the questions by participants determine the codes and themes. I believe in this research as an

important service to amplify these voices, and then disseminate the results in hopes of meaningful change:

Human beings and their lives are not simply reduced to statistical (or even narrative) representation; they have experiences and concerns that go beyond the research, that will continue after the study is finished. The key to incorporating research into an educational pedagogy that fosters a questioning of the status quo, a sense of empowerment, that affects and improves their lives through the research of educational project is an aim of the works of such theorists and qualitative researchers as Freire, Apple, Grioux, Lather, Tierney, and McLaren. (Dilley, 1999, p. 466)

Shaking the status quo in shelters, housing policy, and programs that serve people experiencing homelessness to an experience that fosters empowerment for the people accessing these spaces is the ideal.

A better understanding of connection between identity, experiences, and the way institutions contribute to systemic oppression is an important step to ensuring the needs of 2SLGBTQ+ youth are met:

Queer theory offers important insights into our work because of the ways in which it focuses on how power gets inside our bodies and shapes our context and experiences. This is particularly important for queer and trans communities because of how systems and institutions have been designed, functioning more as disciplinary mechanisms of targeted violence and oppression rather than of safety and liberation. (Black, 2020, p. 115)

The necessary changes are not only at the policy and practice level, but also in the way that 2SLGBTQ+ people are treated at the systemic level. Continued attitudes that condone homophobia, transphobia, and marginalization will keep queer and trans youth on the streets.

### *Analysis*

#### *Experiences accessing services*

All participants shared that they had negative experiences with shelters and housing services. The reasons given for these negative experiences included feeling unsafe around other clients, anxiety over how their gender will be perceived by other clients, poor treatment from other clients, poor treatment from staff, rules and policies, theft in the shelter, lack of beds and facilities in the shelter, racism from staff and clients, and lack of privacy. Participants avoiding services, or choosing to hide their identity while accessing services is an issue that has been found in other studies as well:

However, 2SLGBTQ+ youth and adults in Canada and the United States report experiences of prejudice, violence, and discrimination when it comes to accessing any type of housing – from emergency shelters through social and rental housing to home ownership. Due to these past experiences, or in anticipation of them, 2SLGBTQ+ individuals are faced with the need to navigate identity disclosure and concealment in order to access housing and related services and supports. Altogether, findings point to a heightened level of housing instability for 2SLGBTQ+ youth across the housing continuum. (Halpenny et al., 2022, p. 11)

One participant noted in the interviews that there was a “target on my back” (Participant 5) and as a result avoided not only the low barrier shelter downtown, but also the soup kitchen.

In addition to safety concerns limiting his shelter options, it also affected his ability to access daily meals. Violence was witnessed by one participant:

Same as the SACY Warming Center, there were so many fights that people would pick because there was basically no supervision. And I understand that we're not children, okay? We don't need to be supervised like we're at daycare. But when there's drugs, there's going to be violence . . . And I think more people need to realize that because with the violence, people are getting into more brawls, more fights, there's more disagreement, there's more heat (Participant 6).

This can also contribute to the fear accessing services, and understandably staying at a warming centre or shelter with limited supervision can be intimidating after witnessing violence. Avoiding shelters altogether due to fear of violence came up in the literature on this topic (Dénomme-Welch et al., 2008). Being 2SLGBTQ+ in a space where violence is already happening can certainly increase the fear of being targeted. A space is unable to stop violence from happening would not feel safe to anyone, let alone someone who already experiences harassment because they are 2SLGBTQ+.

Single gender shelters continue to exist in many cities, including Sudbury. Multiple participants had experience with staying in the women's shelter in Sudbury. One participant shared about her fears about not appearing feminine enough:

I found that it was more anxiety-ridden because I haven't had surgery, so I still had all that stuff. And I didn't want to be seen as a man in a woman's shelter and stuff like that. I think that's a big thing with all trans people in shelters and stuff like that. They don't want to be seen as a man in a woman's shelter or a girl in a man's shelter (Participant 1).

Some trans people will require more time in the morning to get ready for the day. In my experience working at a summer camp for 2SLGBTQ+ teens, I commonly had trans feminine campers ask for an earlier alarm in the morning so they would have more time in the morning before breakfast. It is difficult in a shelter where much of the space is communal to carry on with regular activities like shaving and putting on makeup. Policies in shelters that close for the day and require all clients to exit by a certain time puts transgender residents at a gross disadvantage. This was brought up in another study:

The ability to physically articulate their gender was crucial to the overall functioning of the study participants, and the process of physically articulating their gender was also time-consuming for some young people. The emergency shelter programs accessed by the study participants were overnight programs; the residents were required to exit the program for the day by 8:00 am in most cases. (Shelton, 2015, p. 14)

Having privacy first thing in the morning so residents can shave and put on makeup is critical for many. Similar challenges with being read as transgender exists for trans masculine people in men's shelters. Trans masculine people who wear binders would also benefit from extra privacy because it is not recommended that people sleep in binders but when someone is sleeping in a space with other people, chest binding over night reduces the chances of other residents noticing that they are transgender. The fear of violence from other men in a men's shelter if other residents discover they are transgender has been discussed in previous research (Dénomme-Welch et al., 2008). This same fear was echoed by one of the participants I interviewed, "Yeah, I didn't really like staying there a lot. I felt very unsafe, and I felt weary of everything" (Participant 5). Access to showers and hygiene is challenging for any youth experiencing homelessness even if being misgendered is not a safety concern:

I remember being on the street and missing several appointments just because I didn't feel clean enough to be in that person's office. Or I felt like I didn't smell good enough to be in that person's office. And of course, NEST doesn't have a shower facility, so it makes it even more challenging (Participant 6).

Lack of access to necessities like showers prevents people from accessing other services they need. This also has implications for youth attempting to attend school or find employment. There is also a lack of available washrooms in downtown Sudbury. The mall downtown now requires customers to find a security guard to unlock the washrooms, same for the public library. At least two of the fast-food restaurants downtown including the only 24-hour establishment in the area has permanently closed their customer washrooms as well. This has resulted in alcoves in front of businesses becoming public washrooms.

Participants shared that negative reactions to their gender identity and/or sexual orientation were a part of their experiences accessing services. In the interviews I conducted one participant shared that staff reacted negatively towards them due to their gender identity and sexual orientation:

Some of them took it very nicely and some of them, when I would tell them that I was bisexual and non-binary, some of them wouldn't take it the nicest. And I could just tell from their presence that they just didn't have the nicest attitude towards me after I told them (Participant 6).

This participant experienced a change in attitude after disclosing their identity and understandably make staying in that shelter uncomfortable. Another participant shared that she was not accommodated in the female section of the shelter after disclosing that she is a trans

woman, “Because I had a dick, they put me in the guy's section because I still looked like a guy with facial hair and everything like that. So, they put me in the guy's dorm” (Participant 7). Other participants shared they were accommodated with a hotel room. It would have been better for this client if they discussed what accommodations would have been best for her. I have had discussions with shelters in the past about the possibility of trans women who are presenting as male arriving at their door, some women arriving may have had to flee without packing feminine clothing or had a chance to shave. Providing the things that clients may need like a change of clothes, shaving cream, and razors allows clients to present in ways that affirm their identities, as well as help them feel more comfortable if their preferred accommodation is with women in the shelter.

Accounts of staff responding negatively and not providing proper accommodations appears in the literature as well. Transgender clients in some shelters are placed in dorms based on the sex on their identification and regardless of where they are in their transition (Abramovich, 2017). I would be curious to know if the participant I spoke with would have been placed with the women in the shelter if she were farther along in her transition. As shared earlier by another trans woman who stayed in shelters in Sudbury, when she identified herself as female even though at the time she presented as male she was accommodated with a hotel room. This could set an example for other shelters on how to navigate the diverse needs of trans clients. One Toronto shelter offers segregated rooms for transgender clients:

Segregating transgender youth in private rooms may also result in safety concerns because it automatically forces youth to out themselves as transgender, even if they are not ready to do so. This type of segregation inevitably contributes to the erasure of LGBTQ2S bodies in the shelter system. (Abramovich, 2017, p. 1492)

In addition to outing clients because they are in the rooms that are designated for transgender clients, this also further others transgender people. Participants I interviewed shared about being segregated in Toronto shelters compared to how they were treated in Sudbury and how that made them feel:

I have a friend who was a trans male who was upstairs in the men's area. But the trans females were in a single room outside of the female area. If there was a locked door, they'd separate us. Which is segregation because we're being separated because we're different than cis-gendered females and so on. But we're not, we're females, we identify as females. So, I felt kind of segregated about it. I thought I was like whatever. But I don't think there should be any feeling of segregation at all in homeless shelters for trans people and so on. Because they're already going through segregation in their life (Participant 1).

This participant brought up a very interesting observation that not only are transgender women treated differently than cisgender women, but this shelter also treats transgender men differently by allowing them to be placed with the other men in the shelter. I question the motivation behind this and if they are assuming that transgender women are a threat and is that why they have this policy in place? Staff homophobia and transphobia is not only present in the policies and procedures but also in how they intervene when clients are being mistreated by other clients. What could be unique about Sudbury is most of the shelters that were talked about by participants had received training by me and my colleagues about trans inclusion, and we helped them create policies and procedures to support trans people accessing these spaces. It is possible this work had not happened at the Toronto shelter when the participant was staying there, whereas the shelter she accessed in Sudbury had already completed that work.

One participant shared that she was being harassed and bullied by other clients in front of the staff at the low barrier adult shelter, and they did nothing to stop it (Participant 7). This is present in the literature as well (Abramovich, 2017) where in other cities staff also are silent bystanders to anti 2SLGBTQ+ behaviour from clients. By not intervening staff perpetuate the idea that it is acceptable for violence and discrimination to exist towards 2SLGBTQ+ people in the shelter system. Clearly more work will need to be done so staff are aware of this, and how to respond.

Another participant had shared throughout her interview about the negative impact the shelter hours and curfew had on her work life. She worked the late shift at a pizza place and worked past curfew, as a result shared that she would be kicked out of the shelter for the night:

I wouldn't show up on substances, but they'd accuse me of being on substances because I was up since 2 o'clock in the morning because they wouldn't let me in the night before. I was downtown all night, got in trouble at work for showing up in a dirty uniform because same clothes that I went to work in, I slept overnight downtown and then had to go straight back to work the next morning. And then they'd look at me and be like, oh no, you're on something. And I'm like, no, I'm on like 2 hours of sleep. . . And one night that I told them I was only working until 9 so they would have let me in after curfew. My manager called and spoke with the person in charge of Foyer and said, hey, one of our closers isn't going to be here. I understand it's an issue for her being late after curfew. Do you mind if she works until 1am? I myself, like the GM, will personally drop her off so that you know she was actually at work with me. And they went, yep, I'll let nighttime staff know. And I got back. They sent me away again. And at that point my manager had already driven away because they let me inside the door to tell me inside that I was out on

a 24-hour out. And because that was my third 24-hour out in a week, they kicked me out (Participant 3).

Policies in place at shelters need to reflect the realities that the residents face. Youth who work later shifts are going to have a difficult time with shelters having curfews that are earlier than their shifts ending. This policy created barriers in accessing services. The limited shelter space in Sudbury and lack of overnight services for youth and adults means that these rules like curfews put people at risk.

In the interviews I conducted there were some examples of negative experiences with clients, and most were sharing that there were mostly good experiences. This may speak to the culture created at Sudbury shelters like Foyer Notre Dame, Nest, and Cedar where they have had training on 2SLGBTQ+ inclusion. Some direct examples were given, especially for one participant who came out as non-binary to other youth at the shelter:

Um, mainly there was this one individual that was staying at the Nest shelter and she just, they would constantly come up to me and be like, Oh, you're non-binary? Okay, so that means that you have no gender, and they would just basically say really weird comments like, oh, so what category does that put you in? And I remember one time they walked up to me and said, So, does that put you in the inanimate object category? (Participant 6)

This participant experienced transphobia from other youth in the shelter and for them it did form negative experiences. The issue of harassment, bullying, transphobia, and homophobia from other clients is fairly common in the literature (Abramovich, 2016; Dénomme-Welch et al., 2008; O'Brien et al., 1993; Tyler & Schmitz, 2018) and I was not surprised about it coming up in the interviews; it surprised me that it was not brought up more. It will be interesting to explore a

deeper comparison between the experiences people had in Sudbury shelters and Toronto shelters such as why there appear to be fewer accounts of mistreatment from other residents than expected, and what worked for Sudbury shelters to potentially prevent such experiences. SACY was the home for the TG Innerselves program, and I had trained the staff, as well as held trans 101 sessions for the youth in the drop in. This might have contributed to an environment that was more inclusive.

### *Positive experiences*

The number of examples of negative experiences mentioned nearly doubled that of positive experiences. I did consider it important to ask if there were positive experiences while accessing services. It is as important to know what services providers are doing correctly, and what should be continued moving forward. Previous research also included positive examples participants had accessing services. One example is a 2SLGBTQ+ shelter in Toronto: “Youth participants described YMCA Sprott House as an incredibly important program that provided safety, connection, community, and stability to its residents” (Abramovich & Kimura, 2019, p. 1250). Although Sudbury does not have a 2SLGBTQ+ specific shelter, participants did share about programs that made them feel similarly. When one participant was asked about the low barrier youth shelter, they said, “So like they really, they do things right. And they like, they really like make sure that like everybody is like in a good safe space” (Participant 2). The shelter created a space that felt safe to this participant and modeled the way that a shelter should be run.

Similarly Sprott House in Toronto provides activities and groups that give youth a sense of connection with community (Abramovich & Kimura, 2019), this was also present in the interviews I conducted when I asked about the services offered in Sudbury. One participant reminisced about the Artiste Trans Artistry (ATA) group that ran for about two years in Sudbury:

It's also about making connections. That's why I've been trying to think of how to do that myself. I remember ATA. That's not TG [Innerselves], but all the queer people in that room and all of us doing things we love together and being stupid and being silly because we're that comfortable (Participant 4).

This group gave this participant a sense of connection to the community. This group was a trans peer group that incorporated art into each meeting and had a strong social component.

Programming like this has a way to bring community members together. This was not just open to youth and there were participants in their early teens all the way to their late 50s. The historical work that SACY did with 2SLGBTQ+ youth had created an environment where identities are affirmed. For many years the centre ran a 2SLGBTQ+ youth group, as well as hired staff who are openly 2SLGBTQ+.

Participants shared that they felt safe in some of the shelters in Sudbury, one stated, “They were pretty good at keeping it safe for me and monitoring. It was never an issue. I never had a safety issue there” (Participant 5). Another participant shared about having positive experiences at another youth shelter, “No disrespect, no snootiness, no like, bad. Like, I really have nothing bad to say about the Foyer Notre Dame house. They definitely helped me a lot during my homelessness journey” (Participant 6). Most of the existing research is on the negative experiences that youth have in shelters. The positive experiences were important to me because it is a way to examine what is it about the staff themselves that create these positive experiences. Does having staff who are well trained, who are community members, and allies reduce the instances of negative responses to a youth’s gender identity or sexual orientation? The Nest shelter had staff that fit this description, and it could be why participants shared mostly positive experiences with shelter staff.

Participants shared about their positive experiences with other clients as well while in shelters and accessing services. One youth shared that he met his best friend at the shelter:

Like, I met a best friend from coming here and she's really open, like, and accepting of me. So like, um, yeah, she like, I'm her gay best friend. So, I mean, like, that's really positive. I mean, like a lot of the people here were really accepting. There wasn't that many that were like homophobic or something like that (Participant 2).

This participant did not have any issues with homophobia from other clients while accessing the low barrier youth shelter, which for him contributed to his experiences being mostly positive. This is also reflective of the importance of creating spaces where there is a sense of community for clients. It is not difficult to imagine that if youth are sleeping in beds in the same room how much easier that experience will be if at least one other youth there is a friend.

There are also examples of positive experiences with staff in the interviews. Multiple participants shared about staff being open and welcoming. One shared:

Like I said, they're very open and like welcoming. So, like nobody ever judged me for that. Actually, I made very good friends with some of the staff, like especially one . . . like she's super nice. And I like her a lot. And like she actually cares about me, like all of them cared about me (Participant 2).

Having staff that go above and beyond just providing the services, but who build connections and professional relationships with the clients contributes to the experiences of safety. Being able to access services free of judgement but filled with compassion and acceptance is the cornerstone of these positive experiences participants shared. This is also in a shelter that hired 2SLGBTQ+ staff who were open about their identity. They continued to have updated training for new staff

and made 2SLGBTQ+ visibility and safety a high priority. I was invited in regularly to provide 2SLGBTQ+ 101 sessions for clients who used the drop in as well. This could have been a contributing factor to the greater ratio of positive experiences versus negative experiences. I cannot say if this is a practice unique to Sudbury, however I see value in bringing in community members to run workshops for clients to help build a more inclusive environment.

### *Recommendations*

Participants were asked to share their recommendations to improve services for 2SLGBTQ+ people accessing shelters and housing services. Most of the recommendations were about service delivery, new programs, and inclusion. Multiple participants recommended opening a shelter that is specifically for 2SLGBTQ+ people, “So I think there should be a queer-inclusive homeless shelter, so they know that they're safe. They're not going to be judged by anybody because they're all going through the same stuff” (Participant 1). Having a shelter like this allows residents to be among people with a shared identity and reduces the fear of experiencing harassment and violence due to gender identity and sexual orientation. This recommendation is also present in the existing literature (Abramovich & Pang, 2020; Paterson, 2022). It is a dream to have a 2SLGBTQ+ specific shelter in Sudbury. I think given the population size of Sudbury compared to Toronto the argument could be made that Sudbury is too small to support a 2SLGBTQ+ specific shelter. I do believe that it can be a possibility in the future. When the youth shelter at SACY closed they only had four beds, a smaller shelter could work to support this population. Should this not come to fruition, taking steps like other shelters did to continually have training for staff, workshops for clients, hiring 2SLGBTQ+ staff, and well thought out policies and procedures are realistic for Sudbury.

Nest was an all-gender shelter, and a new youth shelter should follow that set up. If a 2SLGBTQ+ specific shelter is not an option for Sudbury, having all gender shelters increases safety for trans and non-binary youth because they do not have to worry about how their gender expression will affect their ability to stay at the shelter. Someone who is early in their transition and is not read as their identified gender will not have to worry about whether or not they look masculine or feminine enough to access the services, and someone who presents in a way that does not conform to either a masculine or feminine presentation does not have to change the way they present themselves to have shelter. As one youth put it, “First of all, I don't think it should be gendered. Because gender is a social construct. . . Safety-wise, it doesn't matter what you have in your pants. So, it doesn't matter who's sleeping beside each other” (Participant 4). This eliminated the challenges that other participants had with single gender shelters. For instance, the transgender woman who was afraid of making other women in the shelter uncomfortable because of her presence, or another transgender woman who shared that she was placed with the men because she did not have bottom surgery. Having shelters that are all gender and ensuring that there are facilities that are all gender like washrooms is supported by other researchers as well (Abramovich & Pang, 2020). Since Nest only had one washroom, by default it was an all-gender washroom.

Inclusion was another topic that received multiple recommendations from participants.

One participant said:

Maybe they could have some more education on how to deal with LGBT because I did feel like there was a target painted on my back there (adult low barrier shelter). I felt like maybe they wouldn't know what to do. Or maybe they didn't even know that I was trans. Maybe they didn't even care. Did it even cross their mind? Would they even care if

someone was homophobic? Or if someone pulled a hate crime? I don't know. And I think that's part of the reason why I chose not to stay there (Participant 5).

He was concerned about his safety at this shelter because of concerns with the staff's level of training and knowledge. Having staff who are well trained can make the shelters safer for youth, and make youth feel more welcomed, which is also supported by previous research (Abramovich & Pang, 2020; Ecker et al., 2019; Halpenny et al., 2022; Paterson, 2022). Some of the local shelters received training on 2SLGBTQ+ inclusion. Multiple local shelters had training on 2SLGBTQ+ inclusion. This likely contributed to there being fewer incidents of homophobia and transphobia reported by participants. One of the shelters not only had the training for staff, but also for volunteers and board members on an ongoing basis. They also had community members review policies and procedures and help in their development. This is important in shaping spaces that are safer for 2SLGBTQ+ people:

But like the staff and the environment was always nice. And they made sure that like nothing bad would happen. And if somebody was talking bad, like they would tell them not to do that. . . So, like they really, they do things right. And they like, they really like make sure that like everybody is like in a good safe space (Participant 2).

Complaints about the physical space the Nest Shelter occupied came up in multiple interviews. A vacant Baptist Church was renovated to have offices on the main floor and upstairs, and the church hall in the basement was converted into the youth drop in. A large office in the back of the building is what was converted into the sleeping quarters. That space accommodated four beds, and in the adjacent office there were lockers for youth to store their belongings. Overnight the drop in became an overnight warming center for youth who could not get a bed for the night. Some youth would sleep on the couches and chairs, some would sleep on the floor.

There was only one washroom available for one person to use at a time and no shower facilities on site. One youth commented that funding and resources need to be allocated to improving the shelter space:

I would say like that SACY would get a new, nicer place. But even though like, it's still nice here, and it's welcoming. But it would be nice to have a bigger space, I feel like, and newer like furniture and things like that. But again, like that's something the city has to fund (Participant 2).

Sadly, since this interview took place, the entire organization shut down, and the Nest youth shelter has not been replaced by a new shelter. An obvious recommendation would be for a new youth shelter to open. From the responses received by participants who had to sleep on the couches and floor because the four available beds were already occupied, more beds are needed and a larger space for the shelter to accommodate the number of youths requiring the service.

Not all the recommendations are mirrored in the literature on 2SLGBTQ+ youth that I have read. One youth recommended, “Eliminating the anti-homeless architecture that's up there” (Participant 3). This of course is not an issue that is specific to this population and affects everyone who uses public spaces. The City of Greater Sudbury has taken aggressive measures to eliminate outdoor spaces downtown where people can sit outside. There are flower planters that have fences around them so no one can sit on them. Buildings have spikes on the ledges and outside of Memorial Park there are only two outdoor benches. This has made it difficult for people to sit in visible parts of the downtown core. There can also be danger to people who are 2SLGBTQ+ because instead of being able to sit and congregate in visible areas on main roads where there is a lot of pedestrian traffic they are forced into areas where they are less visible and vulnerable to being attacked. The downtown has become a hostile environment with few

available public washrooms and indoor spaces. Unlike larger cities like Toronto where people can seek some warmth and shelter in malls, 24-hour fast-food restaurants, and bus stations, Sudbury has no 24-hour spaces for shelter or washrooms.

Participants experienced stigma because of their experiences with homelessness. One participant stated:

Hopefully over time, like the stigma of like homelessness and all that will like soon, like become like, not a stigma, like de-stigmatized, then maybe like it wouldn't be such an issue. But right now, like there's people of older generations that are not as like understanding (Participant 2).

Working to eliminate stigma around homelessness is important for people who are trying to find employment and housing. Changing attitudes surrounding homelessness, and not seeing this as a personal failure, but a systemic failure in our institutions and programs that allows people to become homeless in the first place. Right now, people are living on the streets of Sudbury not because they are falling through the cracks, there are large gaping chasms where necessary services do not exist!

Multiple participants recommended additional affordable housing. One took this farther to include anti-discrimination policies, “And there's certainly a demand for cooperative housing and anti-discrimination practices with cooperative housing and maybe looking at co-ops that are built to take in people who are coming out of shelters” (Participant 2). Having anti-discrimination training is a great step for addressing the stigma people experience seeking housing, as well as addressing homophobia, transphobia, and racism that are present within co-operative boards and geared to income housing staff. Both increasing the supply of affordable

housing and ensuring geared to income housing has anti-discriminatory policies is also reflected in the existing literature (Halpenny et al., 2022).

Finally, some of the participants made recommendations directly for the youth who are currently experiencing homelessness:

Be a voice. I feel like helping you with this, I'm a voice for the transgender community and stuff like that. Being a volunteer with PFLAG in the Durham region, helping out with Sudbury and stuff like that, I feel like I'm becoming a voice for the transgender community. And everybody's like, don't burn yourself out. But I keep adding stuff to my plate because I want to do so much more. Because I've been through so much. That I feel like I have all this energy and passion that makes me want to keep doing stuff because none of this was around when I was young. . . Don't give up, never give up (Participant 1).

This participant survived several years of homelessness and in her adult life turned everything around and is now volunteering in her community. Her story is a reminder of how a person's life can be positively affected when they have access to the right services and programs.

I know it's very cliché to say a lot of things that I want to say. Because it's all stuff that I used to hear and be like, oh, that's stupid. But like, if you truly do want support, you will get support. Because I mean, the number one person who's going to support you is you. So through homelessness and drugs and alcohol abuse and whatever else that someone is going through, I just want them to know that even if in that second minute or even year that they feel like they're alone and that they should die or nobody cares about them, that there's a lot of other people that feel the exact same way and aren't sharing, that they feel

the same way because they feel they're a burden and they don't want to reach out  
(Participant 4).

This participant shared about his multiple experiences with homelessness, and his struggles with mental health and wishes to let everyone who is going through similar struggles know that they are not alone.

### *Limitations*

While I was in the data gathering process of this research, SACY became insolvent and immediately shut down. My original intention was to interview 10 or more people for this study, but with the closure of the organization I was no longer able to recruit and conduct the interviews in the way that I had stated in my Research Ethics Board application. Although that was a minor disappointment for me, the closure of SACY was absolutely devastating for me personally and for the community at large. For several weeks it felt like I was mourning the death of a close friend and had to take a hiatus from working on this study. The small sample group is a limitation, however the participants shared important information about their personal experiences that helped bring attention to what the specific challenges are for 2SLGBTQ+ people accessing services in Sudbury. Recruitment was conducted by placing posters promoting the study at SACY, and through word of mouth from participants and staff. One limitation is that only youth who either go to SACY or know people connected to the organization would have been aware of it. The in-person interviews took place on scheduled days at SACY, and some of the interviews were by phone. The days I went in to do interviews in the youth drop in were not always on days where many youths were present. On one occasion I was in the drop in from morning to closing and only two youths utilized services that day because it was below -25 Celsius (in the -30s with the windchill). From my experience working there on days where the

temperature is very cold, or the weather is horrendous the drop in remains empty. There were challenges being in the drop in at the right time to get the interviews needed. As someone with a full-time private practice, I had to book full days off to go to SACY a month or more in advance, and hope for the best.

In addition to the small sample size is the limited representation of experiences. I did manage to have a mixture of trans feminine, trans masculine, non-binary, and queer cisgender participants. There were only two cisgender participants and with a larger sample size I could determine if there were differences in the experiences they had versus transgender participants. I had a few participants who identified themselves as Indigenous, and there is a lack of BIPOC representation.

Limiting myself to recruitment at SACY ended up leaving me without a physical space to recruit when the youth program closed due to the sewer backup, and it also limited my ability to recruit youth who may not be connected to SACY or other SACY clients. In the future I would include places like the Main Branch Library, which offers a space for people to meet with a housing worker and is utilized throughout the day by many people who are unhoused. I think of this a “rookie mistake” and my inexperience with research is a limitation.

It is important to note that my own positionality and personal biases. I am far more familiar with the SACY youth drop in and NEST shelter because I worked at SACY and was an employee at the time that the shelter opened. It was easy for the shelter to bring me in for training as I was also an employee. I am also on the board of directors for Compass, the organization that runs the Youth Wellness Hub. I approached the interviews with neutrality and hope that participants did not hold back criticism about these programs because they knew about my involvement. I also hope that them being clients currently accessing the services did not

create any concerns about openly speaking about the problems with the programs and organization. Some participants did share their critiques about SACY which I made sure to include in the results and analysis.

## Conclusion

This research began with me wanting to learn more about the experiences of 2SLGBTQ+ youth who have been homeless in Sudbury and hear their recommendations to improve services. This research was inspired by friends and clients that experienced homelessness in the past. This is an important topic to me personally and professionally, especially with the increasing visibility of homelessness in Sudbury. My goal included expanding the amount of 2SLGBTQ+ specific research in northern Ontario, as many Ontario based studies on this population focus on Toronto and other larger cities.

Participants shared that they have all experienced challenges accessing shelters and housing services. Some of these negative experiences were caused by fear of transphobia from other residents, for example transgender women staying in hotels or single rooms out of fear that they will make other women in the shelter feel uncomfortable. Participants shared experiences of homophobia and transphobia from other residents in shelters which made them feel unsafe. They also shared about positive experiences including making friends with other clients, having a rapport with staff, and feeling safe in the shelter. Staff attitudes and treatment towards participants effected the way they felt accessing services. Even with the most inclusive staff and policies in place, youth are still left out in the cold or sleeping on the floor in overnight warming centres when there are not enough beds. The Nest Shelter was a space that all the participants who stayed there said they felt safe, but there were only four beds. They also did not have the necessary amenities like a shower. Participants liked that the shelter was low barrier and that there was programming during the day where they could be connected to services. Programs like the Youth Wellness Hub were utilized by participants to access mental health services, which came up frequently in the recommendations section of the interviews. One participant noted that

an important feature of the previous shelter Foyer Notre Dame was how helpful the staff were with connecting to resources and assisting with housing. The shelter was not set up as a low barrier shelter and had strict rules, for some this was incredibly helpful and for others this was a high barrier for accessing shelter services. Moving forward I would recommend from this feedback that having both types of shelters available to youth meets the needs of more youth because a one size fits all approach does not accommodate the diverse needs of this population. Positive interactions with staff and other shelter residents helped improve the experiences and demonstrates a need for education and training in shelters and programs serving this population.

Participants made multiple recommendations that were expected, like having shelters that are specifically for 2SLGBTQ+ youth, staff training, and increasing access to mental health and addictions services. They also recommended increasing access to affordable housing and ensuring that co-operative housing is available without discrimination due to their experiences with homelessness. Furthermore, increasing funding to shelters and programs serving this population will help these programs keep their doors open. It was the lack of funding that led to the only youth shelter in Sudbury closing its doors in March.

The research process was challenging, navigating the realities that comes with research with vulnerable populations. SACY was a tremendous help allowing me to use their space for recruitment and interviews. Even though the recruitment did not go as planned due to the sewer back up, and sudden closure of the organization, valuable information was gathered about the participants' experiences and recommendations. The participants in this study are the experts in their experience, and having lived experience with homelessness makes their voices and opinions important on how to move forward with future service and policy development.

The most recent municipal homelessness count estimates that there are 500 people who are homeless in Sudbury, an increase from the last count in 2021 of 399 people (Stranges, 2024). I will be sharing the results of this study with the Homelessness Network, and it is my hope that when a new youth shelter is opened, the recommendations from participants will be put into practice. Currently none of those beds are for youth under the age of 18. Many of the recommendations are addressing the overall lack of services. Now there is an opportunity to start something new with the recommendations that have been gathered. This study can help answer the questions about what worked for 2SLGBTQ+ youth accessing these services, what did not work, and what will make things better. The largest gap in the research is the lack of research specifically on 2SLGBTQ+ homelessness in northern Ontario. I will not claim that seven people speak for every single person with this experience, I see this research as a starting point to bring attention to a population with unique challenges finding safety in the existing services.

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## **Appendix A: Research Summary**

Title: Learning from 2SLGBTQ+ Youth who have experienced homelessness in Sudbury, ON

This study included interviews with 7 participants who identify as part of the 2SLGBTQ+ community in Sudbury and had experienced homelessness. The participants ranged in age between 19 and 38. Most of the participants experienced homelessness for over a year, and at multiple times throughout their lives. Every participant shared their negative and positive experiences they had accessing services, as well as their recommendation.

Negative experiences included:

- While in a shelter fear of how other residents would view them as a trans person
- Fearing for their safety while accessing services
- Being kicked out due to curfew violations
- Anti Indigenous racism from staff
- Not enough beds or privacy
- A lack of facilities like showers and washrooms
- Homophobia and transphobia from other clients
- Staff not intervening when clients were being harassed
- Being denied housing due to stigma

Positive experiences:

- Receiving accommodations that affirmed their gender identity

- Shelter staff who are well informed about 2SLGBTQ+ people, and supportive of their identities
- Staff creating a space where they felt safe
- Staff who were helpful and went above and beyond, showing genuine care for clients

Recommendation:

- More gathering places, social events, and groups
- More geared to income housing
- More shelters
- Ensuring existing and future shelters are 2SLGBTQ+ affirming spaces
- Training for staff and volunteers on 2SLGBTQ+ inclusion
- Workshops for other clients on 2SLGBTQ+ inclusion
- Eliminating anti-homeless architecture
- All gender facilities
- Addressing racism in shelters, and increasing staff training on Indigenous peoples
- Have 2SLGBTQ+ people review shelter policies and procedures
- Ensuring shelters have adequate space, furniture, and beds to support the demand
- Increased privacy in shelters, have private rooms
- Places to go during the daytime when shelters are closed, and to store belongings
- Having mental health services attached to shelters and drop ins, providing services like counselling and psychotherapy on site
- Opening a shelter specifically for 2SLGBTQ+ people
- More medical and mental health services for 2SLGBTQ+ people

- Providing gender affirming clothing and hygiene products
- Programs for friends and chosen family that are supporting 2SLGBTQ+ people
- Ensuring that there is 2SLGBTQ+ visibility in shelters like posters and brochures

## Appendix B



### Participant Consent Form

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#### **Learning from 2SLGBTQ+ youth who have experienced homelessness in Sudbury, ON**

You are invited to participate in a study entitled *Learning from 2SLGBTQ+ youth who have experienced homelessness in Sudbury, ON* that is being conducted by Vincent Bolt. Vincent Bolt is a Graduate Student in the department of Social Work at the University of Victoria and you may contact him if you have further questions by emailing [homelessnessstudysudbury.com](mailto:homelessnessstudysudbury.com).

As a graduate student, I am required to conduct research as part of the requirements for a Master's of Social Work degree. It is being conducted under the supervision of Bruce Wallace. You may contact my supervisor at 250-721-6275.

#### **Purpose and Objectives.**

The purpose of this research is to gather information about the experiences that 2SLGBTQ+ youth have had accessing shelters and housing services in Sudbury as well as their recommendations to improve these services.

### Importance of this Research

Research of this type is important because it will help service providers who work with 2SLGBTQ+ youth know what is and isn't working for people accessing their services. Your recommendations are important because they are coming from people who will be using the services.

#### **Participants Selection**

You are being asked to participate in this study because of your lived experience as a 2SLGBTQ+ youth who has experienced homelessness in Sudbury. You sharing your experience provides important insight into what needs to be changed, and what changes you wish to see.

#### **What is involved**

If you consent to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will include a 60 minute interview where you will be asked about your experiences with homelessness, accessing shelters, and housing services. You will be asked what you think would make

things better for 2SLGBTQ+ youth who experience homelessness in Sudbury. The interviews will be recorded, and transcribed. No identifying information like your name will be included in the transcriptions. Everything will be saved on a computer that is password protected, and only the researcher will have access to it. Some of the information from the interviews will be quoted in the final study with a fake name, and what has been learned from your answers will be summarized. The interviews will take place at SACY (95 Pine St), online, or by phone. Each participant can choose whichever they prefer.

### **Inconvenience**

Participation in this study may cause some inconvenience to you, including travel to SACY for in person interviews, or taking time out of your day to participate.

### **Risks**

We do not foresee any risks or discomfort from your participation in the research. However, there can be discomfort when talking about past experiences. Phone numbers for crisis support will be provided to all participants.

### **Benefits**

The potential benefits of your participation in this research include sharing important insight that can help change the way services are provided to 2SLGBTQ+ youth who experience homelessness in Sudbury.

### **Compensation**

As a way to compensate you for any inconvenience related to your participation, you will be given \$20 cash, and bus fare if needed for participation in person, or a \$20 virtual gift card for participation by phone or online.

### **Voluntary Participation**

Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation. If you do withdraw from the study and you wish to have your data destroyed it will be deleted, and will not be included with the study. If you withdraw after the interview has started you will still receive \$20 for your time.

### **Researcher's Relationship with Participants**

The researcher may have a relationship to potential participants as a former staff at SACY. Participants might have accessed services while he was an employee, and he might have worked with participants directly. Participation in this study does not change your ability to

access services at SACY, and the information you share will be kept confidential. You are also under no obligation to participate in order to continue accessing services. To help prevent this relationship from influencing your decision to participate, the following steps to prevent coercion have been taken: 1) all identifying information will be removed from the data; 2) no interviews or transcriptions will be shared with anyone outside of the study; 3) no current staff members are taking part in the research, and the organization's role is as a host location for recruitment and the interviews.

### **Anonymity**

In terms of protecting your anonymity only pseudonyms will be used in the final report, and any identifying information will be removed. Only the researcher will have access to the recordings and full transcriptions. The researcher will not share with SACY staff who has participated or what was shared. There are limits to anonymity and confidentiality. The limit to confidentiality is the researcher's duty to report as a Registered Social Worker. If a participant discloses child abuse or neglect he is obligated to report this. If a disclosure is made then the researcher will contact Children's Aid Society of Sudbury or Kina Gbezhgomi Child and Family Services if the child is Indigenous.

### **Confidentiality**

Pseudonyms will be used in the transcripts and data. The interviews will be recorded on a recorder that requires a password, and uploaded onto a password protected computer. All of the transcriptions will be saved on a password protected computer. This information will only be accessible to the researcher.

### **Dissemination of Results**

It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with others in the following ways: 1) the study is for a thesis, and will be part of the final work; 2) a summary of the study findings will be shared with participants and service providers; 3) the researcher may share the research findings in future presentations, trainings, and workshops.

## **Disposal of Data**

Data from this study will be deleted after 5 years.

Please be advised that this research study includes data storage in the U.S.A. As such, there is a possibility that information about you that is gathered for this research study may be accessed without your knowledge or consent by the U.S. government in compliance with the U.S. Freedom Act.

## Contacts

Individuals that may be contacted regarding this study include Vincent Bolt ([homelessnessstudysudbury@gmail.com](mailto:homelessnessstudysudbury@gmail.com))

In addition, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria (250-472-4545 or [ethics@uvic.ca](mailto:ethics@uvic.ca)).

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study, that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researchers, and that you consent to participate in this research project.

---

*Name of Participant*

---

*Signature*

---

*Date*

***A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.***

## Appendix C

# Learning from 2SLGBTQ+ youth who have experienced homelessness in Sudbury, ON



My name is Vincent Bolt and I'm an MSW student with the University of Victoria.

I'm seeking 2SLGBTQ+ youth ages 19-30 to participate interviews about their experiences accessing shelters and housing services in Sudbury

The purpose of this research is to gather information about the experiences that 2SLGBTQ+ youth have had accessing shelters and housing services in Sudbury as well as their recommendations to improve these services

If you identify as 2SLGBTQ+ , between the ages of 19-30 and have experienced homelessness in Sudbury, you are eligible to take part in this study.

The interviews will be approximately 60 minutes and you will be asked about your experiences and recommendations.

The interviews will be 1 on 1, and take place at The Sudbury Action Centre for Youth, online or by phone.

Participants will receive \$20

If you are interested in participating please email Vincent at: [homelessnessstudysudbury@gmail.com](mailto:homelessnessstudysudbury@gmail.com)

This research is being conducted under the supervision of Bruce Wallace, Professor in the University of Victoria School of Social Work. He can be contacted at 250-721-6275.

### CONTACT

#### VINCENT BOLT

- [homelessnessstudysudbury@gmail.com](mailto:homelessnessstudysudbury@gmail.com)



## Appendix D

### Interview Data

Have you experienced homelessness in Sudbury?	
What terms do you use to label your gender identity or sexual orientation? Pronouns?	
How old are you?	
How long were you homeless in Sudbury?	
Did you access shelters or housing services?	

### Interview Questions:

Have you ever experienced homelessness in Sudbury for any amount of time?

Do you identify as 2SLGBTQ+? What terms do you use to label your gender identity and/or sexual orientation?

How old are you?

How long were you homeless (including couch surfing, staying in shelters, sleeping rough)?

During this time did you access shelters or housing services?

If services were accessed, what was that experience like for you?

How did staff and other clients respond to you being 2SLGBTQ+?

What needs to change based on your experience in Sudbury?

## Appendix E

### Resources:

HSN Mental Health & Addictions, 127 Cedar St Crisis Intervention – 24 Hour Crisis Line  
705-675-4760, Toll Free 1-877-841-1101

Trans Lifeline 1-877-330-6366 (Available 24/7)

Hope for Wellness Help Line (An Indigenous helpline, open 24/7) 1-855-242-3310

Warm Line (pre-crisis support) 1-866-856-9276 (6pm-12am 7 days a week)

## Appendix F



University  
of Victoria

Office of Research Services | Human Research Ethics Board  
Michael Williams Building Rm B202 PO Box 1700 STN CSC Victoria BC V8W 2Y2 Canada  
T 250-472-4545 | F 250-721-8960 | uvic.ca/research | ethlcs@uvic.ca

### Certificate of Approval - Annual Renewal

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: <b>Bruce Wallace (Supervisor)</b>	ETHICS PROTOCOL NUMBER: <b>23-0431</b> Expedited review - delegated
PRINCIPAL APPLICANT: <b>Vincent Bolt</b> <b>Master's student</b>	ORIGINAL APPROVAL DATE: <b>31-Oct-2023</b>
UVIC DEPARTMENT: <b>Social Work SOCW</b>	APPROVED ON: <b>17-Oct-2024</b>
	APPROVAL EXPIRY DATE: <b>30-Oct-2025</b>

**PROJECT TITLE: Learning from 2SLGBTQ+ youth who have experienced homelessness in Sudbury, ON**

**RESEARCH TEAM MEMBERS:**  
Rhonda Hackett - Committee Member, UVic SOWK

**DECLARED PROJECT FUNDING:**  
Chair in Transgender Studies, University of Victoria, Funding was paid directly to the researcher in 2019.

**DOCUMENTS INCLUDED IN THIS APPROVAL:**  
 LettertoSACY.pdf - 08-Sep-2023  
 tps2-epc2-certificate.pdf - 08-Sep-2023  
 Participant Consent Form.docx - 09-Sep-2023  
 Email to SACY Staff.docx (1).pdf - 29-Sep-2023  
 Resources for Participants.docx.pdf - 29-Sep-2023  
 Interview Questions .docx (1).pdf - 29-Sep-2023  
 Recruitment Flier.pdf - 25-Oct-2023  
 Participant Consent Form.docx.pdf - 25-Oct-2023

#### Conditions of approval

This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above term provided there is no change in the protocol.

**Amendments**  
To make changes to the approved research procedure in your study, please submit "Amendments" or "Annual renewal with amendments" form. You must receive research ethics approval before proceeding with your amended protocol.

**Renewals**  
Your ethics approval must be current for the period during which you are recruiting participants or collecting data. To renew your protocol, please submit a "Request for Renewal" form before the expiry date on your certificate. You will be sent an emailed reminder prompting you to renew your protocol about six weeks before your expiry date.

**Project Closures**  
When you have completed all data collection activities and will have no further contact with participants, please notify the Human Research Ethics Board by submitting a "Notice of Project Completion" form.

#### Certification

This certifies that the UVic Human Research Ethics Board has examined this research protocol and concluded that, in all respects, the proposed research meets the appropriate standards of ethics as outlined by the University of Victoria's policies for research involving human participants.

Dr. Sandra Gibbons  
 Chair, Human Research Ethics Board

Dr. Cindy Holder  
 Vice-chair, Human Research Ethics Board