



UAKN  
Urban Aboriginal  
Knowledge Network

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Réseau de connaissances des  
Autochtones en milieu urbain

## **RESEARCH PROJECT SUMMARY**

### Western Research Centre

#### **Name of Project:**

Aboriginal Youth-Powered Documentaries on Pathways into and out of Homelessness following Southern Alberta's 2013 Flood

#### **Collaborating Friendship Centre and/or other urban Aboriginal organization:**

Urban Society for Aboriginal Youth

#### **Research Start-up Summary and Abstract:**

Front-line housing and social services agencies in Calgary report that the city's safe and affordable housing crisis was critical well before June 2013's floods. The city's already low rental vacancy rate reached 0% in the Fall. The situation disproportionately affects Aboriginal persons, who compose a third of the known homeless population (3% of Albertans are Aboriginal). Research indicates that this over-representation is due predominantly to structural determinants; barriers to housing security are especially evident among youth, who are even more over-represented in the child welfare system (64% of Alberta foster children are Aboriginal) and in other indicators that negatively impact health and resilience (i.e. child poverty, teen pregnancy, suicide, addiction). While the situation for Aboriginal youth has been urgent for years, an influx of post-flood rebuilding funds means that policy-makers and service providers in southern Alberta face tough questions about how best to overcome systemic factors threatening the wellbeing of Canada's fastest growing sector of youth. Nation-wide, few studies identify who exactly are those within the broad category of Aboriginal youth at highest risk of homelessness, nor the extent to which vulnerability is intergenerational. Translating critical knowledge into meaningful action, this project asks: What are pathways into and out of homelessness among Aboriginal youth in diverse conditions of housing insecurity? Indigenous methodologies inform a research approach that engages homeless youth who participate in documentary filmmaking workshops as co-researchers encouraged to overcome barriers through guidance from their communities. Four short films on housing insecurity experienced by Aboriginal youth will be written, interviewed, shot, and edited in small groups, as the voices of many more will appear in films and articles. Deliverables meet stated needs of service providers for material to educate members of the wider society.

#### **Engagement Objectives:**

Look at what are pathways into and out of homelessness among Aboriginal youth in diverse conditions of housing insecurity, especially following southern Alberta's 2013 flood?

Three overlapping goals drive our participatory action methodology:

- 1) Validate the identities of marginalized youth by recognizing how structural violence is defined, understood, and experienced in different contexts by at-risk Aboriginal youth (e.g. involvement in child welfare system; extended time in shelters);
- 2) Engage experiential wisdom and strategies embedded in local and indigenous ways of knowing for coping with colonialism and rapid social change; and
- 3) Expand the analytical and technological skills of high-risk youth through creative media.

This project aims to develop short films on housing insecurity experienced by Aboriginal youth in southern Alberta will be disseminated with an initial premiere event in the early summer of 2014. These will then be made public on media-sharing platforms such as *Vimeo* and *Youtube.com*, useful for diverse housing agencies with which we are well-connected who have indicated that this format would help educate the broader public on this pressing topic. At a homelessness research forum that Dr. Henderson's research team recently hosted in October 2013 in Calgary, representatives from the province's Interagency Council on Homelessness and the city's Homelessness Foundation confirmed an interest in being able to draw on such films for their own awareness campaigns.

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