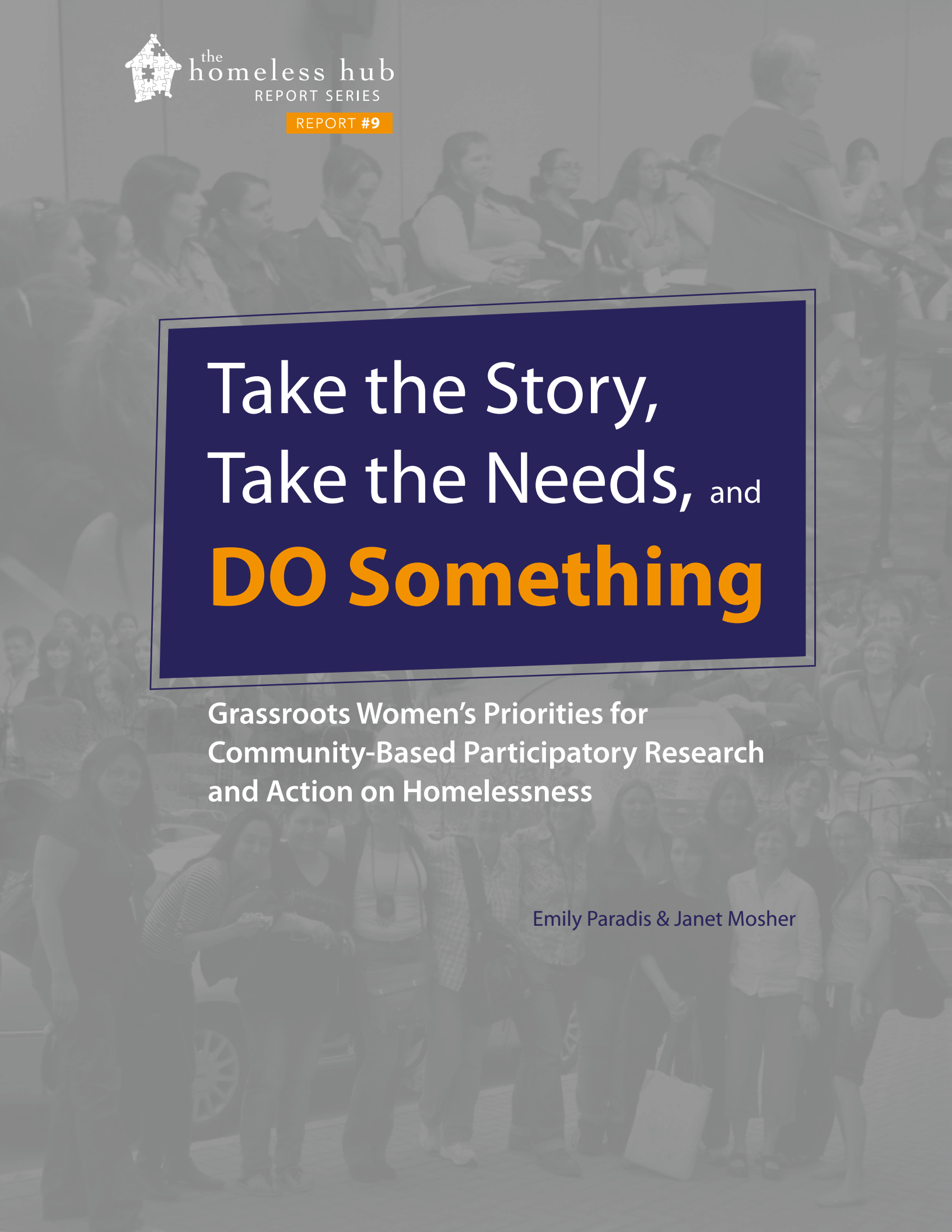

the homeless hub
REPORT SERIES
REPORT #9

Take the Story, Take the Needs, and DO Something

Grassroots Women's Priorities for Community-Based Participatory Research and Action on Homelessness

Emily Paradis & Janet Mosher

"Take the Story, Take the Needs, and DO Something":
Grassroots Women's Priorities for Community-Based Participatory Research and Action on Homelessness

Emily Paradis & Janet Mosher

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Canadian Homelessness Research Network

Cities Centre UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

FORWARD For Women's Autonomy Rights & Dignity

RESPECT

Our voices
Our choices
Our humanity
Our lives
Our dignity
Our wisdom

BE ADVOCATES!!!!!

In other words,
Love thyself last.

(Shakespeare, Henry VIII)

- By Patricia Cummings-Diaz

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Appendices

1. Introduction

The Women, Homelessness and Community-Based Participatory Research project grew out of a sense that while many CBPR projects addressing women and homelessness existed in communities across the country, information about these activities was not widely known. Hence one of the goals of the project was to create an inventory of such projects as a first step in knowledge exchange and potential networking among project actors.

Beyond the creation of an inventory, a second goal was to bring together women who had participated in these projects, in order to deepen the exchange of knowledge and to open the door to future collaborations among such projects across geographic divides. We envisioned knowledge exchange to include not only information about the projects in which they were involved – for example, the findings of their projects and the obstacles and enablers to translating findings into policies and practices responsive to local needs – but also a reflective evaluation of CBPR processes themselves. We were especially interested in bringing together women with lived experiences of homelessness who had participated as peer researchers or in other roles. We saw this as critical both because CBPR processes are rarely evaluated from the perspective of participants with lived experience and because of our shared commitment to ensuring that the expertise of women with lived experience is recognized and valued in crafting research, policies and practices to create safe, affordable, accessible and secure housing for women in Canada.

The project was timed to correspond with a groundbreaking conference on women and homelessness in Canada, *All Our Sisters National Forum on Housing and Safe Communities for Women*, held in London, Ontario, May 9-12, 2011. Importantly, the Conference vision was to build and sustain a national network to improve women's access to safe, secure and affordable housing. Its organizers understood that the realization of this vision required the bringing together of service providers, community members, policy makers, government officials, academics, and change agents, with significant representation throughout of women with lived experience of homelessness. We saw the conference as an incredible opportunity for women with lived experience of homelessness who had participated in CBPR projects to not only share their knowledge and expertise with each other, but to collectively address the researchers, service providers and policy makers in attendance at the Conference. As our project developed we maintained regular contact with the organizers of the Conference, who were wonderfully supportive of our initiative.

With the generous support of the Canadian Homelessness Research Network we were able to fund twelve women facing homelessness from communities across Canada to participate in the project. These visiting experts (see Appendix A) took part in a pre-conference forum designed by and for women with lived experience, and led two *All Our Sisters* conference workshops, the first exploring how CBPR can contribute to action on women's homelessness and the second, envisioning designs of a grassroots women's network on homelessness.

This report largely focuses on what was learned through this project about the process of CBPR and its challenges and opportunities for women who are homeless and marginalized. It also examines the potential of a grassroots women's network on homelessness and how such a network could be supported by research. It is grounded in the perspectives and recommendations of the women facing homelessness who took part in the various project activities, but also includes reflection on our own process of bringing women together to participate in the project. While our project was not a research project per se, the principles that inform CPBR were those that guided us in our work.

This report has several aims: to inform communities, academics, and women facing homelessness about CBPR; to encourage scholars to adopt community-based participatory methodologies in research on homelessness; to contribute to the refinement of these methodologies so that they can better support a commitment to liberatory research and action; and to support the creation of a grassroots women's network. In addition to the report, we have produced brief guides about CBPR for women facing homelessness and professional researchers (see Appendices B, C, & D), a guide to creating networks (Appendix E), as well as an inventory of CBPR and self-advocacy projects across Canada on issues relating to women and homelessness.

Section 2 provides a brief overview of the history and development of CBPR, situating this report in relation to other evaluative literature on CBPR and feminist research. In Section 3 we describe in some detail the process of planning and carrying out our project. We hope this description may prove useful to activists and researchers who want to know more about the logistics of developing an inclusive process and bringing together low-income women from across the country. Section 4 outlines the pre-conference forum and two conference workshops through which women exchanged knowledge on CBPR. Section 5 presents the insights about CBPR that women shared through the forum, workshops, and informal dialogues. We have organized the key learnings from this knowledge exchange by theme: the meaning of CBPR; issues of ownership and control in CBPR projects; risks of research for women facing homelessness; questions for assessing CBPR projects; moving research into action; grassroots priorities for CBPR on homelessness; and visions for a grassroots network on women's homelessness. In keeping with the commitment to reflexivity in feminist CBPR, Section 6 reflects upon process learnings from both this project and the broader conference. Here we examine what worked, what did not, and what could be done differently next time, in attempting to create an inclusive space for knowledge exchange among women facing homelessness.

2. Background: Community-Based Participatory Research with Women Facing Homelessness

Here we use the phrase "community-based participatory research" (CBPR) to refer to a research approach in which community members are actively involved in planning, data gathering, analysis, dissemination, and action. The terminology "community-based research" (CBR) has emerged relatively recently in health-promotion research (Israel et al, 1998; Roche, 2008; Stoeker, 2004) to describe an inclusive approach that represents a radical departure from the emphasis on basic research in the health sciences. In a short time, CBR has become a methodology of choice with dedicated granting streams through major funders such as the Canadian Institutes of Health Research.

Though new to health sciences, inclusive, action-oriented, participatory and community-based approaches have a much longer history in social sciences research. Action research (AR) as a methodology to initiate and assess social action has its origins in the 1940s in the work of Kurt Lewin (1946). Participatory research (PR), sometimes also referred to as participatory action research (PAR), emerged in rural development projects in the global South (Tandon, 1981), sharing some of the approaches and political commitments articulated through Paulo Freire's methodology of popular education (Freire, 1971). These include a critique of hierarchical academic approaches to knowledge production, and a focus on producing knowledge by, for, and with grassroots

communities in order to challenge oppression and improve material circumstances. PR was taken up in North American contexts by adult educators, social workers and social scientists working with Indigenous communities and marginalized urban populations (Park, Brydon-Miller, Hall & Jackson, 1993).

Like PR, feminist research (cf. Fine, 1992; Harding, 1987; Lather, 1991; Ristock & Pennell, 1996) has articulated a critique of the inequitable power relations in knowledge production, and a respect for the agency and perspectives of research "subjects." Unlike PR, it draws upon a complex analysis of the intersections of gender, race, class, age, dis/ability, sexual orientation, and other factors in social relations of dominance. It also diverges from PR by placing the researcher in the picture, demanding that scholars be self-reflexive about their / our presence and investments in research. Feminist research has most often focused these commitments on the individual relationship between researcher and participant, and on foregrounding individual women's voices and stories, rather than on collective action to challenge oppression. Feminist participatory research (Maguire, 1987, 2001) and feminist participatory action research (Reid, Tom & Frisby, 2006; Paradis, 2009) have brought together the collective and action-oriented approach of PR with the feminist critique of social relations of dominance, and commitment to self-reflexivity.

The recent mainstreaming of CBPR in health research has cut both ways. Certainly, it has yielded much institutionalized and de-politicized research that bears little evidence of its origins in PR and feminist scholarship. Nevertheless, it has also afforded an opportunity for new researchers to learn about these methodologies, and has made considerable new funding available to support liberatory scholarship. CBPR has become a forum for productive dialogue on the ethics and politics of research, and this dialogue reaches deeper than ever into traditional research territory. Likewise, the managerial, neoliberal emphasis on "evidence-based," "best" practices in education and social services has been strategically appropriated by critical researchers as a platform for the development and evaluation of pragmatic methods for enhancing inclusion, accountability, anti-oppression and action in CBPR.

Because feminist, participatory and community-based research are value-driven and self-reflexive, the literature emerging from CBPR projects often includes an evaluative component that examines the project's process and outcomes against the ideals of feminist CBPR. Flicker and Savan (2007) asked 192 academic and community researchers what they wished they could have done differently in CBPR projects. Responses highlighted five key themes: lack of time; inadequate funding for meaningful engagement and action; the need to clarify roles and expectations; the desire of differently-situated project members for increased involvement in various aspects of the project; and problems with sustaining the project and acting on findings after funds run out. The authors point out that inequitable distribution of power and influence between funders, academics and community members underlie all of these concerns. Smith, Bratini, Chambers, Jensen and Romero (2010) assess their involvement in three PAR projects based in communities facing homelessness, poverty and racism. They conclude that academics involved in PAR must be ready to challenge how their traditional "expert" role influences their own, and community members', expectations; they should be prepared to push back against oppressive narratives that have been internalized by themselves and community members; and they must interrogate and resist their impulses to hasten, manage or control the PAR process.

Some evaluations pertain directly to CBPR with women facing homelessness. Reid, Tom and Frisby (2006), reflecting on a feminist PAR project with low-income and homeless women, point out that traditional definitions of "action" in PR and AR fail to recognize the significance of individual and relational changes, and collective activities, for women involved in feminist PAR. Similarly, in analyzing a participatory human rights education project based at a drop-in centre for women, Paradis (2009) concludes that feminist participatory research and action projects with women facing homelessness contribute to multiple goals at different scales: individual self-recovery from the harms associated with homelessness; growth of supportive relationships; development of a critical analysis of homelessness through collective dialogue; claiming autonomous space within institutions; and public, political actions to challenge homelessness and resist the disenfranchisement of women facing homelessness. In order to fulfill PAR's promise of advancing participants' individual and collective self-determination, such projects must balance political work with emotional support, and flexibility with structure. They also require ongoing negotiations to strengthen solidarity and equitably distribute leadership roles.

Most evaluations of CBPR projects are conducted from the perspective of academic researchers, reflecting the values and ideals of CBPR described within academic literature. This project aims to build upon this body of work by grounding its assessment in the priorities and recommendations of women facing homelessness who have experience with feminist, community-based, and participatory models of research, services and advocacy.

3. Project Structure and Approach

Our project aimed to reflect the core values of community-based participatory research: most importantly, strong representation of women facing homelessness in all project decisions and activities; an organic approach; and an emphasis on dialogue and action. We strove to manifest these commitments throughout the process of bringing women together. Project reports sometimes leave out the mundane details of their practices and processes, but as this project demonstrates, those very details often determine the extent to which projects achieve the goal of meaningful inclusion. Accordingly, we describe here in more detail the process of planning and carrying out the project. Later in the report, we reflect on this process, identifying practices that were conducive to women's full involvement, and things we would do differently next time.

Planning for this project began in November 2010. The conference, *All Our Sisters: National Forum on Housing and Safe Communities for Women*, had recently been announced. Janet Mosher of York University, a member of the Canadian Homelessness Research Network, assembled a small team of women engaged in research and action on women's homelessness to discuss the possibility of convening a gathering of women facing homelessness from across Canada at the conference. The team initially included Patricia Cummings-Diaz of FORWARD (For Women's Autonomy, Rights and Dignity); Monique Nind of the Centre for Northern Families; and Emily Paradis of University of Toronto Cities Centre. As the project gathered steam, the team expanded to include researcher Sherry Bardy (a member of the research team for a feminist CBPR project based at Cities Centre, called We're Not Asking, We're Telling) and two graduate students, Mary Choy (York University) and Amy Siegel (Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at University of Toronto). All team members have worked on research and activism relating to issues of women and homelessness, such as poverty, violence, racism, and colonization. Several also brought lived expertise on homelessness. All team members' work on the project was performed within the context of paid positions: one as a professor at York University; one as a front-line worker at Centre for Northern Families; one as a research manager at Cities Centre; two as graduate research assistants paid through this project; and two as researchers on the We're Not Asking, We're Telling project. This is significant because one important critique of CBPR—and other models for including women in research or service provision—is that low-income women are often expected to volunteer their time, while professional members of CBPR teams are paid for their participation.

This team held regular meetings at all stages of the process, from developing the proposal through the planning and implementation of project activities, data analysis, and developing outputs of the project. Meetings were not only for practical decision-making, they were also an opportunity for dialogue among the multiple perspectives and investments of team members. This dialogue helped us, over time, to refine and articulate the perspective of the project and the ways in which we could meet our commitments to a liberatory process. As is the case in many such projects, this dialogue was quite marked early on by disparities in power and involvement, with the two salaried professional researchers assuming leadership roles from which we "invited in" the perspectives of other

project members. However, as time went on, dialogue and decision-making became more reciprocal, grounded in the expertise and investments of all team members. As with many CBPR projects, the funding for student assistants' wages and the We're Not Asking We're Telling project ended before the report was complete. As a result, the body of this report has been prepared by Emily Paradis and Janet Mosher with the input of other team members and of women who participated in the project.

Through our own networks, a literature review and web-based research, we first embarked on the creation of the national inventory of CBPR projects and researchers working on issues related to women and homelessness. The process of creating the inventory enabled us to reach out to a much wider constellation of organizations to solicit interest among women with lived experience in participating in our project. The team's shared commitment to an inclusive and anti-oppression approach is reflected in the method by which we selected women to attend the conference. Agreeing that the term "application" was likely to come across as intimidating, the team instead collaboratively developed an "Expression of Interest" form (see Appendix 'F'), which was circulated to researchers and organizations identified through the inventory. The form allowed women to self-identify as "facing homelessness," without requesting any details about the specific nature of their experiences. The remainder of the form posed brief questions about the projects women had been involved with, and the networks that they would bring learnings back to from the conference. The core team evaluated Expressions of Interest as we received them. Selections were based on ensuring broad geographic representation, as well as diversity of background, race, Aboriginal identity, ethnicity, language, dis/ability, and sexual orientation. We also aimed to include a diversity of types of projects: self-advocacy groups; peer-driven programs in front-line services; and academic CBPR projects with various topics and methods. Twelve women from across Canada (see Appendix A) were selected through this process to attend the conference and participate in the forum and workshops described below. These visiting experts brought a wealth of diverse experiences with research, service provision and activism.

The logistics of bringing twelve low-income women together from across the country also deserve mention. We agreed early on to devote our financial resources to ensuring women's needs were met and their time appropriately remunerated, rather than inviting more women. As a team, we thought through what was necessary to make attending the conference completely accessible for each woman selected: funds for childcare, taxi and transit fare; a per diem allowance for food and other necessities; and accommodations that were comfortable and wheelchair accessible. Team members undertook intensive one-on-one communication with each participant by email and phone, tailoring travel arrangements to each woman's needs and schedule. In order to ensure that women did not have to use any funds out of their own pockets to make the trip, our project arranged and paid for flights through the university travel agent; pre-booked residence rooms; and when necessary, wired cash to women so they could pay up front for childcare, and cover the transit and food expenses for their day of travel. We also offered an honorarium to acknowledge each participant's time and expertise. Due to University regulations, this had to be provided as a cheque, which created problems for some participants on social assistance. Depending on the social assistance regulations in their province or territory, some participants lost up to 100 per cent of their honorarium, clawed back from their social assistance payments. This loss of income is just one example of the material barriers women may face when participating in CBPR projects.

4. A Description of Project Activities

After many phone calls and emails, we finally all met face to face in London, Ontario on Mother's Day weekend, May 8, 2011. The whole project team, along with the twelve visiting experts, shared several residence suites at the University of Western Ontario, where we got to know each other over breakfasts, smokes, walks by the river, and late-night strategizing sessions in the suites' shared living areas. In addition to attending *All Our Sisters* (and, in some cases, presenting in other workshops and plenary sessions) women sponsored through this project participated in a pre-conference forum and led two workshops during the conference. These knowledge exchange activities are described in more detail below.

a. Pre-Conference Forum: Sharing Experiences of Community-Based Participatory Research and Action

This half-day forum was held the day before the conference at My Sister's Place, a London drop-in centre for women. It was a gathering for women facing homelessness to exchange knowledge from their experiences in CBPR projects, self-advocacy groups, and peer service programs. It was advertised in the conference program, and invitations were also sent directly to conference presenters involved in CBPR and to some organizations in London. All 30 participants self-identified as facing homelessness, including facilitators Sherry Bardy and Patricia Cummings-Diaz.

The forum's setting and process aimed to foster productive, open and autonomous dialogue among participants. My Sister's Place provided a venue that was comfortable, appropriate and, for some attendees, familiar. Ample food was served throughout the gathering, the atmosphere was casual, and the agenda allowed for plenty of break-out discussion and moving around. Because the forum was intended to be a space exclusively for women facing homelessness, our team's professional researchers left after the initial welcome to forum participants. The graduate student assistants remained to take notes. Their role was not to "observe" from above as academics often do, but rather to support the self-determination and autonomy of the gathering by assuming the administrative task of documentation, and any other supportive tasks the group asked them to take on.

After a go-round in which each participant identified herself and described the research and action she was involved with, participants considered eight questions that had been sent to them in advance:

1. What does Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR) mean to you? For women not involved in CBPR – what questions do you have about it and how do you think research should be done in your community?
2. For women involved in CBPR, where did you come into the process of the project initially (what were the power dynamics at each stage), and what did you get out of it?
3. What worked for you and what didn't work for you in the project?
4. How does/did the project translate back into the community and what did the research lead to – influencing policy, creating new projects…?
5. What's next? E.g. – actions, follow-up projects and also sustainability, employment and future work for yourself?
6. Is there any way in which the project got taken away or led to actions you did not intend? Was your knowledge exploited, abused or stolen in any way?
7. For women not involved in CBPR, how have self advocacy or service groups been involved in research or would want to use research?
8. For women not involved in CBPR – can you imagine a CBPR project done in your community? What do you think the barriers would be?

Participants divided into smaller groups to talk about the questions, then reported back to the larger group for discussion. The afternoon concluded with a delicious and celebratory supper prepared by the My Sister's Place kitchen.

b. Workshop 1: The Role of Community-Based Participatory Research in Changing Policies and Practices

This workshop, held on the first day of the conference, brought forward the key issues identified in the Pre-Conference Forum to a group of about 70 attendees including researchers, service providers, funders, and women facing homelessness. Participants from the Pre-Conference Forum led the workshop, sharing their thoughts on the challenges and opportunities in CBPR, how CBPR can support action on homelessness, and what grassroots perspectives and expertise can teach the research and policy communities.

When our team arrived to prepare for the session, we began by rearranging the room to accommodate the large group of co-presenters. As we lifted chairs out of the tidy rows intended for the audience, and arranged them in a wide, loose semicircle around the top of the room, we not only made space for our large group – we also symbolically disrupted the usual, hierarchical academic approach to knowledge production.

c. Workshop 2: The Potential of a Community-Based Participatory Action Research Network

This workshop, held on the final day of the conference, was initially intended to consider how a CBPR network could support collaborative knowledge exchange and action to eradicate homelessness. However, through dialogue between our project team and the visiting experts over the course of the conference, the final structure and content of this workshop shifted considerably. Rather than starting with a presupposition that research would necessarily be the focus of a network, the workshop was reframed around the question of how a national grassroots network on women and homelessness could be supported by research. This change placed the formation of a national network by and for grassroots women as the central objective, and positioned grassroots women as the ones empowered to decide if, when, and how research could support and strengthen the activities of their network.

Debbie Frost, one of the project's visiting experts, introduced the workshop questions and facilitated large-group discussion. Workshop participants broke into small groups, with women from our project at each table to facilitate the small group discussions.

5. Learnings from the Workshops and Meetings

As described earlier, our project aimed to facilitate a space for women to engage in knowledge exchange and reflection on the processes of CBPR in relation to safe, secure, accessible and affordable housing for women. In what follows below, we have attempted to organize thematically the many critical insights about CBPR from the perspectives of women facing homelessness. These insights were shared at various times and in various venues: the conference; pre-conference forum; workshops; group meetings; and informal discussions. To represent as accurately as possible women's perspectives we have included, with their permission, a number of direct quotations from the visiting experts sponsored through the project and from team members facing homelessness.

a. What does CBPR mean to you?

Women identified many features that should distinguish CBPR from other forms of research. CBPR begins in communities, grounded in lived experience and informed by people's questions and needs. It is carried out in communities, so that community members are directly involved and have control of

the mechanisms and process of the research. In CBPR, women with lived experience are active members of egalitarian research teams in which all forms of expertise are honoured, all voices are heard, and all skills are recognized. It takes time to break down stereotypes and build the relationships of reciprocity, trust, respect and collaboration that CBPR requires. Participation in CBPR empowers, enhances self-confidence and self-esteem, and breaks social isolation. Data gathering in CBPR is non-invasive, using open questions, clear language, and methods organic to the community, not those based in scientific observation. Action is central to CBPR, and projects incorporate action plans from the beginning. The community retains ownership of the information, ideas, and products of CBPR projects, and is free to use these in the service of action for change.

b. Ownership

Not all of the ideals identified above are realized perfectly in CBPR projects, and participants in the pre-conference forum and workshops explored many concerns they have encountered in their experiences with research. The first area of concern was control of the process and products of research. While all agreed that community researchers and participants should have ownership of the information and ideas they contribute to a project, and equal control of the products that emerge, in practice this was not always the case. Women recounted negative experiences in which their ideas and projects were appropriated, their information was taken away and analyzed out of context, or the products of research did not belong to the community or did not meet the community's needs. In these cases, regardless of the claim that research was community-based, it ended up benefiting the academic or organization, not the community. As one woman explained, "It served the non-profit, not the women who were involved in it."

Women pointed out the relationship between power inequities in research projects, and issues of oppression in society as a whole. The appropriation of women's ideas and labour reinforces, and is made possible by, stereotypes depicting low-income women as lazy and incompetent. Moreover, the structural exploitation that perpetuates poverty is also evident in research when researchers with lived experience are paid meagre wages or honoraria, or when resources taken from a community are used to benefit a powerful institution. In the words of one forum participant, "The University gets the money and funding to do it, they get the recognition for the ideas and questions, when women came up with it at the kitchen table of a drop-in." And Sherry Bardy points out that when the voice, meaning and purpose of women's stories are "translated" or misrepresented in research, this is a re-enactment of the erasure of poor women's knowledge throughout society.

More subtle, but of equal concern, were situations where women did not feel a sense of ownership of the process of research. In rare instances, women felt pushed to engage in activities that were not comfortable, or even were harmful, for themselves or participants. More often though, concerns about ownership translated into a sense of frustration at specific points in the research process, either when women's expectations were at odds with those of the professional researchers, or when the project didn't provide the training, skills, knowledge and resources women needed to follow through on plans and ideas.

Researchers with lived experience hold a strong sense of responsibility for participants' well-being, for honouring participants' contributions through advocacy and action, and for ensuring that research funds are well-spent on worthwhile projects. As Patricia Meaney explains, "Lived experience researchers become advocates because we know the experience." Without ownership and control of the research process, women lack the authority to uphold these responsibilities. This sets up a catch-22 in which women are faced with a choice between fighting for change (and potentially risking their status in a project) or compromising their integrity.

Women also drew upon their positive experiences with research to identify a number of specific practices that create environments in which women equitably share ownership of CBPR projects. First, women encourage professional researchers to be transparent about their stake in a project, their expectations, and what they are accountable for. As much as possible, the whole team should be made aware of each step of the research process, including tasks like ethical reviews that are usually the academic's sole responsibility. The onus is on professional researchers to show that they are open to criticism, so that women feel free to voice their concerns. Women point out that the requirement of shared ownership is not met in CBPR projects where community members' roles are limited to data gathering. Women must have decision making power. As one workshop participant put it, "Have first voice people at the table whenever decisions are being made."

CBPR research teams need opportunities to develop their own ground rules, and to engage in ongoing negotiation about roles

and tasks, in order to build relationships of trust and reciprocity, and avoid power struggles. Such negotiation can even include issues like the distribution of honoraria and other resources.

Teams also need training from the outset of a project, so that they have a clear understanding of how research works, what to expect, and what skills they stand to gain through participating. As the project develops, women's capacity to use the project to their own ends should also be continually developed. Some training may need to be repeated throughout the project as new women join the team. At the same time, it is also important for research teams to acknowledge and draw upon women's skills. Johanne Petitpas states, "It's important that women are part of the team. Our knowledge and skills and strengths may be different than a university professor's, but it's important to acknowledge that experience. That is what will turn into action."

These requirements are best met by dedicating substantial time to regular team meetings throughout a project. Meetings must be structured and productive – nobody wants to feel like her time is being wasted. Sharing responsibility for chairing meetings is a concrete way to disperse power, and helps build skills among all team members. As one researcher said, "When women get together we are rowdy but when there is a job to do, we kick ass. We do what needs to get done." Meetings can also improve communication in the team and offer opportunities to resolve conflicts. Terrie Meehan explains, "Our communication problems were debriefed and cleared up, and that helped the project."

As one participant's comments demonstrate, researchers with lived experience must have equal control of research products so they can use these to pursue action: "Even though the university owns the data, the stories are ours to share, so if we want to put our posters in parliament, we can do that." This is in contrast with the experiences of another researcher, who described feeling hamstrung at the end of a project when she and other peer researchers were left waiting for the academic researchers to organize opportunities to take action on the project's recommendations. Such situations represent a lost opportunity in which women's skills, energies, and commitment to action could become a driving force at the very moment when academics' focus is usually waning.

Finally, it is important that women's work and expertise be appropriately valued: "If we are used as consultants, pay us as consultants!" On the other hand, women recognize tensions that can arise when involvement in research is motivated by material need. One researcher with lived experience described a project in a very high-need community, in which food was served at each meeting, participants' babysitting costs were reimbursed, and honoraria were paid. "People were coming more for the food and money, so that skewed it," she explains. "One girl was there passing out in the circle." Based on this experience, the next project this team does will use its resources differently, and clarify expectations of participants at the outset, so that the whole group shares responsibility for the project and peer researchers' material needs are still met.

There are considerable structural factors, however, that maintain the power imbalance in research, in spite of good intentions. For example, the structure of funding often makes it difficult to do research differently. As Patricia Cummings-Diaz explained, "Bureaucracy gets in the way of what we're capable of and what we want." Others pointed to funders' reluctance to finance truly grassroots initiatives, and the limitations on doing advocacy work. Women would prefer not to deal with what one called "money with strings," such as corporate or government funding that constrains the activities a group can undertake.

Some women argued that power inequities are not only built into funding structures, but also packaged into the very thought-structures of research. Noting that research comes from a Western, male tradition of scientific observation, workshop participant Patti Delisle called for a completely new way of constructing research at the grassroots level—what she termed "placental theory"—based in Aboriginal ancestral traditions of reciprocity, fortitude, gratitude, gathering together, sharing resources and honouring emotions. This "feminine" approach would, she suggested, "move research into the sacred." This radical re-visioning presents challenges to grassroots communities as much as to academic researchers. In the words of Cheryl Smith, "Organic is a challenge, because many want a structure and need that. However, it is an ideal to strive toward."

c. Risks of research

Another area of concern with research is the emotional, social, and political risks women face in undertaking it. Lifetime experiences of trauma, violence, homelessness, incarceration and colonization take their toll; as a result, research on issues of homelessness can be very intense and triggering for researchers and participants alike. One researcher with lived experience recounted, "Some girls who came to the group have fallen off the wagon and were not able to participate

and fell out. They were not emotionally ready to share their stories. So it is really important that women are prepared for it – there are ups and lots of downs and research teams need to be prepared and need to take themselves back from their past." Those involved in self-advocacy organizations pointed out that members' life crises also pose a barrier to organizing together effectively. Women agreed that research teams, peer service providers, and self-advocacy groups need mechanisms for sharing emotional support, including making individual counselling available to women who are telling, or receiving, stories of trauma. Academic researchers also have an ethical responsibility to consider women's level of readiness when initiating emotionally-laden research.

Social risks are also a concern for women involved in research. One forum participant described being "consequenced" by an organization when she initiated independent projects or criticized the administration. Women also point out that research participants may be reluctant to give honest feedback about agencies they rely on for emotional and material support. Sharing their personal stories also puts women at risk of being stigmatized and harassed. One woman recounted an incident in which women who had come forward to tell their stories in a news article subsequently faced harassment and were labelled "unfit mothers." Nancy Marr spoke about a peer researcher who agreed to allow media to visit her home to cover a research project she was involved with; the newspaper published her address in the article about the project, and she was forced to move. Because women facing homelessness are already targeted for heightened surveillance and control by numerous systems—including the welfare, immigration, psychiatric, shelter, social housing, criminal justice and child protection systems—the stakes of risking privacy are extremely high.

In spite of these high stakes, some women pointed out that lived experience members of research teams are expected to put themselves out there and risk taking action or stating unpopular opinions, while professionals sometimes take the safer path. Minal Patel points out that women face being politically targeted for their activist work; she asks whether professional allies will stand by them. At the same time, women facing homelessness have a lot to teach professionals about having the guts to stand up for yourself no matter what. "We are not afraid," Jen Sputek asserted. "We refuse to be pushed around. We have spent our whole lives in the system with lawyers, judges ... If you don't like me, too bad. I understand the fear of retribution, but I refuse to live in fear. To hell with anyone who doesn't want to listen to me."

d. Questions to assess research

In the course of the week's discussions, women posed many questions that community members can ask when assessing whether, and how, to become involved in research, and to evaluate research projects they are currently involved with:

- Why are you doing another study?
- Who is the research for?
- What is the project purpose?
- Who is funding the research?
- Where is the research going to go?
- What will be done with our information?
- What will come back to us from this project?
- What role will we play?
- Are we able to implement community based research?
- Are we being supported with research-based ideas?
- Can we challenge the authority and existing barriers effectively, or are we punished and face consequences?
- How flexible and transparent is the professional researcher willing to be?
- How much direction is the professional researcher willing to take from community organizations?
- What is the professional researcher's stake, what is she in it for, what is she gaining?
- What is the professional researcher's experience with advocacy?
- What action is the research leading towards?
- What support will there be after the project to make change?
- What are the alternatives to research?

e. Moving research into action

Overall, women in this project expressed mixed feelings about research. While recognizing the importance of having access to information and statistics to build the case for change, women also are wary of the potential for research to foster complacency and perpetuate a cycle of social injustice. Debbie Frost recounted going to Ottawa to talk about a book based on a project she had worked on. In the archives there, she found a report written in 1968, containing the same recommendations as the book she had just presented. "The government will fund research just to keep us quiet and busy," she said. Women agreed that research must lead to action for change.

Even research that contributes to action can seem irrelevant when compared with the depth of deprivation women are facing. Gloria Knotts stated that when her program refers women to research projects, they ask, "Why do they keep doing this? Instead of doing so much research, why can't they provide more affordable housing?" On the other hand, women also acknowledge the material contributions that research can make. For example, some CBPR projects provide stable, paid employment to researchers facing homelessness. Some, through the actions they lead to and the information they generate, contribute to policy changes that address poverty on a much broader level. The process of CBPR can have ripple effects, as participants and researchers learn how it feels to be heard and have ownership. The relationships formed through CBPR projects, and the individual changes in women's lives as a result of their work in CBPR, are not often considered when assessing the "action" or "impacts" of research, but in the end these may be the most enduring and influential results of a project. This project provides one example of the varied impacts of CBPR. It aimed to examine how CBPR can contribute to action on women's homelessness; but it also brought together a group of women who otherwise would not have met, some of whom are now working together to start a national grassroots organization.

Organizations at the community level also stand to benefit from research. In some cases, self-advocacy organizations are able to fund some of their activities through research funding, which is usually more flexible than program funding. At the same time, grassroots groups may not wish to have their activities constrained by a definition of "research," either. Workshop participants asked, "What sources of money are not connected to research? What else have grassroots groups done to sustain themselves?"

CBPR also potentially provides grassroots individuals and groups with access to the skills, influence, authority, and resources of professional researchers. The presence of an academic researcher can open doors that would otherwise be firmly closed to women facing homelessness. As one researcher explained, "The 'Doctor' label is a class distinction. As horrible as it is, if you have that academic standing behind you it's helpful ... If I go to Corrections Canada and identify problems, they'll kick me to the curb." At the same time, women raise the concern that relying on professionals to confer authority can reinforce the classist barriers in institutions—and even women's own internalized classism—thereby, in the long run, contributing to the exclusion of women facing homelessness from the spaces and discussions where policy decisions are made.

f. Grassroots priorities for CBPR

Participants identified a broad range of useful products coming out of projects they had been involved with. These included a resource guide for women in prison; posters with women's stories and photos; books; zines; and social mapping. These products had been mobilized in a number of actions, including community work; identifying policy gaps and bringing this information to policy makers; community building; hanging posters in Parliament; engaging wider communities in anti-poverty work; and using research funding to finance advocacy activities. In CBPR, women agreed, these non-academic products and activities should be conferred equal or greater importance than academic products such as journal articles, since it is through these types of dissemination that research becomes relevant and useful to communities.

Women also developed a list of research topics and projects that would make important contributions to grassroots self-advocacy. Rather than doing new research, many of these ideas would make existing research available and accessible outside academic institutions. Projects women propose include:

- the history of social movements, how they have come together and fallen apart, and what strategies have been effective in making change;
- clear language summaries of existing research on the roots of homelessness;
- what changes to the economy and the system have caused communities to deteriorate in the past 20 years;
- building groups' capacities in research methods, such as how to conduct surveys;
- a review of the existing research on Guaranteed Annual Income policies;

- a comparison of poverty reduction plans across provinces, including the costs of consultants to do these plans;
- research to understand the causes and impacts of Aboriginal peoples' movement back and forth between reserves and cities.

In the end, women want allies in the academy to think carefully about the worth of proposing new research, when so much research has already been done on poverty and oppression. "Stop repeated projects," a participant asserted. "We need to look at all the research that has been done and is going to be done, and implement it. Take the story, take the needs, and DO something."

g. Envisioning a grassroots network supported by research

Consistent with this focus on action, one of the project's objectives was to consider the potential of a national network to facilitate research and action on women and homelessness. In constructing the cross-Canada inventory of projects and groups, we consistently heard expressed a desire to learn about the activities and initiatives of other groups across the country and to find ways to connect with each other to mobilize for change. By the final day of *All Our Sisters*, many grassroots women were clear that they wanted to create a national network. Our final Conference workshop was, as mentioned earlier, reframed to reflect this by focusing on how a national grassroots network could be supported by research. Working in small groups led by women facing homelessness, workshop participants—including service providers, researchers and policy-makers—sketched out a vision for a grassroots network.

Workshop participants defined the concept of 'grassroots' to include multiple dimensions:

- persons on low income who have lived the experience and know the issues first-hand;
- a way of working where everything is developed through the engaged participation and voices of persons with lived experience;
- a set of particular values, including equality of participation, inclusivity, and respect; and
- the recognition and validation of varied expertise, especially the expertise of "professors of poverty from the school of hard knocks."

The principles used by another organization and captured in the acronym 'DOES' (Dignity, Opportunity, Empowerment and Security) were identified as consistent with a grassroots approach. Similarly, others noted that the Dis/Ability rights movement slogan, "nothing about us without us," captured the values that should guide a grassroots network.

In discussing the issues that a grassroots network would seek to address, participants spoke of the importance of using a broad definition of homelessness, including experiences of being uprooted from community (for example, persons who are refugees) and of precarious housing. The approach to homelessness must also be women-oriented and family and community focused.

Objectives for – and hence the reasons to create – a network would include:

- identifying common challenges and ways to tackle these challenges;
- sharing information/findings/local expertise/ materials/questions;
- communicating to government what works;
- developing skills, for example in relation to grant writing;
- creating a safe space to tell and share stories;
- connecting existing research to the front lines;
- connecting existing research to action; and
- the provision of mentoring and training in relation to research so that the stories of network participants are not handed over to, and controlled by, others.

Workshop participants asserted that network governance must be consistent with grassroots values and principles. Appropriate models would emphasize consensus decision-making and the decentralization of power. More broadly, the network should be set up and governed in a manner that ensures equality-producing relationships wherein all participants would be recognized for their skills and varied forms of expertise. With this in mind, a successful network would hold everyone's voices as central at all levels of decision-making, including throughout the entire process of network development.

Diversity also must be reflected in the approaches and forms of decision-making undertaken by a grassroots women's network. For example, Aboriginal and consensus based forms of decision making should be used.

The small groups also discussed the potential relationship of researchers to the network. Here, workshop participants identified the importance of the relevant community(ies) taking the lead, exercising the ability to decide what research gets done and how funding is allocated. An honest and open approach to collaboration with a grassroots network by academics and others (who do not have lived experience) are of importance when supporting equitable relationships. As some of the objectives identified above suggest, connections to researchers and research were identified as creating possibilities for capacity development (mentoring in the acquisition of research skills), access to existing research that could support actions for change, and expanded spheres of influence (opening avenues to key decision-makers).

6. Process Learnings

The above sections explore what we learned about CBPR and networks through our discussions; however, the process of this research also yielded many learnings about how to facilitate inclusive spaces for research, dialogue and action.

a. *All Our Sisters* as a model for inclusion

First, *All Our Sisters* was itself a groundbreaking example of inclusion. Compared with other recent Canadian conferences on homelessness, there were far more participants with lived experience of homelessness and poverty. At least 100 out of the 500 attendees, or one in five, received the free admission that was offered to women who were low-income and facing homelessness; undoubtedly, there were many other attendees—front-line workers, students, researchers, and administrators—who were there in their professional roles but also brought lived experience of homelessness. Even more importantly, the representation of people facing homelessness in leadership roles was far superior to any other conference on homelessness that members of our team have attended. In this the conference clearly drew upon feminist, anti-oppression, grassroots and trauma-informed frameworks that recognize the importance of women's experiential knowledge. These frameworks understand that power and control must be equitably shared in order to challenge systemic oppressions like homelessness.

There is much to be learned from how the conference approached and accomplished its goal of meaningful representation of women facing homelessness. This conference offers a template for future such gatherings, academic or otherwise, on how to foster an environment in which people facing homelessness take leadership.

First, meaningful inclusion of women facing homelessness should begin in the planning stages. *All Our Sisters* established a Lived Experience Advisory Committee from the outset of the planning, with representatives from the London agency My Sister's Place and other organizations. In addition, women facing homelessness were actively recruited to participate in the National Advisory Board for the conference. "The Shoebox Project," in which women from across Canada documented their stories of homelessness and sent them in shoeboxes to the conference organizers, helped spread the word about the conference and developed a sense of shared ownership among women who submitted their stories. The conference website, programs, and other promotional materials consistently acknowledged the expertise of women facing homelessness and specifically invited participation from women with lived experience.

As a result of women's input into planning, the conference itself reflected the needs and priorities of women facing homelessness in many ways. One of the most important innovations was Our Sisters' Space, a room at the conference site

that functioned as a retreat, with comfortable chairs, soothing music, counsellors and Aboriginal elders available for support. This space reflected the organizers' recognition that both the content and the process of the conference would be triggering and overwhelming for many participants, whether or not they had experienced homelessness. Unlike most conferences where delegates are left to process their emotional responses on their own, *All Our Sisters* made space for these emotions, acknowledging them as central to the process of healing and change the conference sought to set in motion.

The voices, stories, and demands of women facing homelessness were front and centre throughout the conference. While many homelessness conferences "display" stories and voices of homelessness, *All Our Sisters* positioned women as active experts and leaders. The plenary panels that opened each day featured women with lived expertise from across Canada sharing not only their personal stories, but their recommendations for changing services and policies. Many conference sessions were led by or with women facing homelessness who spoke about self-advocacy and CBPR projects. The active outreach to women facing homelessness, and the fee subsidy, meant that there was a "critical mass" of conference delegates facing homelessness in every session – this was in stark contrast to other conferences on homelessness in which women with lived experience are often isolated and made invisible. Women's visible presence in every sphere of the conference transformed the culture of the gathering: instead of the alienating, professionalized environment characteristic of most conferences, *All Our Sisters* was a space defined by solidarity, alliance, and diversity of experience.

The conference dedicated considerable resources to meeting women's material needs. Nutritious and abundant food was available throughout the day, including nightly suppers for delegates facing homelessness. Through a fundraising campaign called "300 for $100," *All Our Sisters* raised enough money to cover the travel and accommodation costs of dozens of low-income women from across Canada. Transit fare and taxis were also made available to assist women in travelling between My Sister's Place and the conference.

All Our Sisters also provided many informal opportunities for women facing homelessness to connect with each other, share support, and build networks of solidarity. The suppers at My Sister's Place, the smoking area outside the conference centre, and the hotel rooms shared by delegates facing homelessness, all became spaces in which women met, talked, sang, wept, and strategized.

Within these informal spaces, women also took the opportunity to discuss and analyze the conference, identify gaps, and recommend improvements. One area of concern was the travel and accommodation arrangements for delegates facing homelessness. While the hotel rooms provided were in a convenient location close to the conference, some women found it stressful sharing rooms, and felt alienated and out of place in the luxury hotel. It was recommended that future conferences accommodate women in single rooms in a more casual environment – the University residence suites were considered preferable by many. Another concern was that delegates did not receive allowances to cover daily needs, childcare, or costs of travel other than airfare or bus fare, meaning that many women endured hardship in order to attend. In addition, the conference's subsidy system did not offer women honoraria to acknowledge their time and contributions. Considering that most other delegates were at the conference in their paid professional roles, this created an environment of inequity in which some participants were being paid to attend while others were not. These critiques were not shared by all delegates facing homelessness, and women also recognized that the conference was trying to do the best it could with the resources it had available. Open dialogue about these issues, though, could help identify solutions for the next conference.

b. Process learnings from our project

Through the process of our own project, we also learned a lot about what it takes to bring women together. Two important areas are described in detail in Section 2. First, our team's decision-making process strove to reflect the principles of CBPR. And secondly, making attendance accessible for women facing homelessness required intensive communication, and we had to take many things into consideration including childcare, honoraria, travel arrangements, wheelchair access, and providing cash up front.

We also believe that the pre-conference forum set the stage for women's full participation in the conference. Ensuring a space at the beginning that was led by and for women facing homelessness enabled critical tensions and insights about CBPR to be articulated early on, and further refined and clarified throughout the conference.

In our debriefing meeting, the project team also identified some things we could have done differently, to better realize the potential of this gathering. Most importantly, we wish we had dedicated resources to extend everyone's stay by one or

two extra days. This would have allowed for more time to plan and connect as a group before the pre-conference forum, and to debrief and absorb the week's events after the conference. As it was, the group was thrown into activities shortly after arriving, before everyone even had time to get to know each other or learn more about the purpose of our project. Likewise, we wish we had planned for more social and unstructured time as a group, such as a day trip or a meal all together, where we could have gotten to know each other better and decompressed from the intense environment of the conference.

As a consequence of this lack of time together, even though many connections were made individually, our group as a whole lacked cohesion – the sense of the "we" that fosters collective wisdom and actions. This meant that when conflicts, disagreements, and tensions arose among group members, it was difficult to resolve these in a way that contributed to the group's learning. In addition to spending more time together, another way to improve group cohesion would have been to negotiate group guidelines for communication with each other.

Finally, we learned that it's important to seize the moment of an event like *All Our Sisters*. Though we hoped to be able to carry forward the momentum and inspiration from the conference, this was impeded by the daily demands and crises that greeted all of us on our return to the "real world." Now months have passed, and it is more and more challenging to keep contact with each other and work together to develop initiatives like the national grassroots network. One solution to this would have been to build even more of this work into our time together – another reason why it would have been good to have more time. A second solution would have been to set dates for future contacts (such as conference calls, or even a future meeting) while we were all still at the conference, so that the group would come away with a clear plan for building on the work we had started together. In order to fully realize the potential of a gathering like *All Our Sisters*, the coordinating team must spend time in advance planning not only for the activities of the conference itself, but for future activities, and options for funding them.

7. Conclusion

CBPR has opened research up to input from women whose voices are often ignored. Throughout this project, women facing homelessness have drawn upon their experiences with community-based research and action to articulate a new and challenging agenda for CBPR on issues of homelessness: projects in which community members have a meaningful voice in all decisions; research activities are planned with grassroots needs and priorities in mind; and action to end homelessness is the focus of research endeavours. Importantly, though, women also challenge professional researchers to break the cycle of research for its own sake, repeated projects that yield identical results but don't contribute to ending homelessness. And finally, women call for the knowledge produced by research to be made available and accessible outside the academy. All Our Sisters and this project offer some practical examples of ways in which to create spaces for collective dialogue and action on women's homelessness between professional researchers, service providers, policy makers, and women with lived experience. Such spaces are critical for realizing the potential of CBPR to support the self-determination of women facing homelessness.

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Appendix A:
Profiles of Visiting Experts and Project Staff

Minal Patel *(centre)* speaks at a workshop on how community-based research can support action to end women's homelessness.

L to R: Workshop co-leaders Monique Nind, Patricia Meaney, Johanne Petitpas, Minal Patel, Nancy Marr and Gloria Knotts.

Our group meets after lunch to plan the next day's workshop.

L to R: Nancy Marr, Cheryl Smith, Mary Choy, Sherry Bardy, Terrie Meehan, Patricia Cummings-Diaz, Patricia Meaney, Monique Nind, Debbie Frost, Janet Mosher, Gloria Knotts *(standing)*, Emily Paradis, Johanne Petitpas

NAME	WHERE	ORGANIZATION & ACTIVITIES
Cheryl Smith	Toronto ON	Peacock Poverty *http://www.peacockpoverty.org/* Cheryl is the founder and managing editor of Peacock Poverty, a community-based website that "brings the voice and strength of marginalized people to the forefront in an effort to combat stigma, highlight our contributions, talents, wisdom and plights- it is a grassroots endeavour at journalism that seeks to empower, inform and educate the general public as well as offering resources, inspiration and a platform for those otherwise ignored, discarded and silenced." She has also been a member of Voices from the Street, a speakers' bureau of people facing homelessness and / or mental health issues, and the Community Advocacy Program at The Stop, a community food security organization. She is currently a student of journalism and freelances as a public speaker and writer.
Debbie Frost	Saskatoon SK	Canada Without Poverty *http://www.cwp-csp.ca/Blog/* Debbie is a long-time member and past President of the National Anti-Poverty Organization, now called Canada Without Poverty, which is a national grassroots organization of low-income people working to eliminate poverty. She has also worked on many projects in Saskatchewan including "Don't we count as people?", a participatory research project in which women spoke about the impact of living in poverty on their mental, physical and emotional health. "For me every day is about learning new things, events such as this are not only about net-working, they are about sharing skills, knowledge and coming together for the better good, Learning about what works and what isn't working, what has been tried in various places."

NAME	WHERE	ORGANIZATION & ACTIVITIES
Debra Perry	Halifax NS	YWCA WISH *http://www.ywcahalifax.com/index.php/homelessness/wish* Debra is a long time activist in the movement for sex trade worker's rights, and was a founder of Halifax's first shelter for the Aboriginal community. "Women have the ability and the right to speak up."
Gloria Knotts	Winnipeg MA	West Central Women's Resource Centre *http://www.wcwrc.ca/* HOMES Project Gloria is a Community Mentor with the HOMES Project at the West Central Women's Resource Centre. She provides peer support, advocacy and information to other women facing homelessness and poverty. She has helped women avoid eviction, get housing, obtain welfare benefits, leave abusive relationships, go into addictions treatment and deal with Child and Family Services. "I myself know how it feels to be homeless. I know how it feels to be desperate. I know how it feels to be scared and how women think in these situations. Through this experience I am able to be a strong person, have courage and believe in women out there that can make a difference within their lives, to feel safe for themselves and for their families."
Jennifer Sputek	Calgary AB	Inside Out Project *http://fsw.ucalgary.ca/node/253* Jen is a co-researcher and public speaker with Inside Out, a group of women of lived experience, professors and students trying to identify gaps in services for women coming out of prison in Calgary. Jen has been in and out of the system for more than 25 years and has been involved in child prostitution, drug addiction, abusive relationships, and been homeless many times. She has a lengthy criminal record and has been in and out of prison most of her life, but most of the crimes that she committed were committed to support either herself or her family. Jen was recently released from a federal prison and in the last year has been somewhat successful in transitioning back into the community. "I truly believe what we are doing will make a difference and we will encourage changes in our community. I want the next woman's journey to be easier than it was for me and I want to make changes on a municipal, provincial and federal level…I want to give a voice to the women who haven't found their voice….yet…I want to put a face to homelessness and incarceration, and I don't want any woman, man or child for that matter to suffer the abuse and mistreatment of the system, government and the law makers of this country….I have a voice and I will be heard."

NAME	WHERE	ORGANIZATION & ACTIVITIES
Johanne Petitpas	Moncton NB	Mental Health Commission of Canada At Home / Chez Soi National Consumer Panel *http://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/English/Pages/MonctonResearch.aspx* Moncton Common Front for Social Justice *http://saintjohn.cioc.ca/record/HDC1193?UseCICVw=43* Johanne is an Advisor on the National Consumer Panel and local Advisory group for the MHCC At Home / Chez Soi project, a pilot demonstration project providing housing and supports to people who are homeless in five cities across Canada. She is also active with the Moncton Common Front for Social Justice and the Greater Moncton Homelessness Steering Committee, and does advocacy, referrals, and public education about homelessness and poverty. "I believe that in order to live we have to go through trial. I was born into a family that had booze and prescription drugs and I believed that was what life was so I did them too and went on to others and then woke up in trouble many years after and in all of that I came to believe my past brought me from there to here so that now I can help others so that is why I do what I do with the organization I belong to, that's why I give my talk to students now and other things, in all I feel that I am making a difference."
Minal Patel	Calgary AB	Women Together Ending Poverty *http://www.wtep.ca/www.wtep.ca/Welcome.html* Minal is a member of Women Together Ending Poverty, a grassroots group addressing poverty as a major issue, which started four years ago out of a project called Poverty Talks. "We address the root causes of poverty, educate ourselves and others, and create our support network. We are active – we attend rallies, organize events and agitate politically. The purpose is to end poverty for women, and thereby end poverty for all, and in the process end the patriarchal and capitalist structures that perpetuate inequality and poverty."
Nancy Marr	Toronto ON	Street Health *http://www.streethealth.ca/home.htm* Nancy has been a peer outreach worker with Street Health—a community health organization serving homeless people in Downtown East Toronto—for 6 years, and was a researcher on the Street Health Report research project on health and homelessness. She also volunteers with two women's drop-ins and helps organize an annual rally called Reclaim the Streets. "I am a survivor of violence and strongly believe in the rights of women and children to safety and security. I work hard to ensure the support to women during my outreach and drop-in work and I will bring my learning back to these environments after the conference."

NAME	WHERE	ORGANIZATION & ACTIVITIES
Patricia Meaney	St John's NFL	Lone Mothers: Building Social Inclusion Research Project *http://www.wlu.ca/homepage.php?grp_id=1287* Patricia has been a peer researcher throughout the process of the Lone Mothers: Building Social Inclusion Research Project, a participatory research study of lone mothers' experiences with the labour market and welfare policy. "Active participation as a member of the research team has provided me with many opportunities to share knowledge and to advocate for change in a number of ways. I was an active member of the team that produced a DVD, which depicts a day in the life of a lone mother on income support. I have facilitated workshops and participated in presentations for social workers, social work students, and academics. I have also had the opportunity to speak at conferences and discuss the struggles of poverty with policy-makers and service providers connected to the welfare system here in Newfoundland. Knowing that I have contributed to change has been a meaningful experience for me."
Patti Delisle	Duncan BC	Red Willow Womyn's Centre *http://www.facebook.com/people/Red-Willow-Womyns-Centre/100000860080880* *http://www.volunteercowichan.bc.ca/?red-willow-womyns-centre,108* Patti is one of the co-creators of Red Willow Womyn's Centre, a collectively operated womyn's storefront, social enterprise, and gathering space. "We are specific to womyn in poverty with barriers and disabilities. We are very grassroots and most of us are Aboriginal womyn. We are all marginal and considered 'hopeless' by the system, yet we are empowered by the audience as we gain our wings and fly."
Terrie Meehan	Ottawa ON	Canadian Homelessness Research Network, Welcoming Involvement of The Homeless Terrie is a member of many activist initiatives, including: the Inclusion Working Group of the Canadian Homelessness Research Network (www.homelesshub.ca); the Steering Committee of The Alliance to End Homelessness (www.endhomelessnessottawa.ca) in Ottawa; the Board of Citizens With Disabilities Ontario (www.cwdo.org); the Board of the Ottawa Centre Legal Clinic; and the Board of Ottawa Women's Credit Union (www.owcu.on.ca) – North America's only women's credit union. She is also currently part of a working group to organize the next All Our Sisters national forum in Ottawa. "In all I do I strive for inclusion. As a person with a visible disability I have learned to see societal barriers as a challenge to be surmounted so that hopefully people who come after me have less of an uphill battle when seeking their basic human rights."

NAME	WHERE	ORGANIZING TEAM
Sherry Bardy	Toronto ON	We're Not Asking, We're Telling: Building on Good Practices in Services with Women and Families Facing Homelessness
Patricia Cummings Diaz	Toronto ON	FORWARD For Women's Autonomy, Rights & Dignity We're Not Asking, We're Telling: Building on Good Practices in Services with Women and Families Facing Homelessness
Monique Nind	Yellowknife NWT	Centre for Northern Families *http://www.northernfamilies.org* Monique works at the Centre for Northern Families, which provides shelter and advocacy for women and families who are homeless in Yellowknife. Monique used to be a resident at the shelter and brings her lived knowledge into her work. She is completing her degree in Counselling.
Emily Paradis	Toronto ON	Cities Centre, University of Toronto *http://www.urbancentre.utoronto.ca* We're Not Asking, We're Telling: Building on Good Practices in Services with Women and Families Facing Homelessness Emily has been an activist, advocate, front-line worker and researcher with women facing homelessness for more than 20 years. She got her PhD in Adult Education 2009. Her PhD research was a feminist, participatory human rights project at Sistering called "Claiming Our Rights," in which women developed and delivered a report to the United Nations about women's homelessness in Canada: http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cescr/docs/info-ngos/forward.pdf
Janet Mosher	Toronto ON	York University *http://www.osgoode.yorku.ca/faculty/full-time/janet-mosher* Janet is a teacher and researcher whose work focuses on issues of poverty, violence against women (and the connections between the two), and access to justice. She serves on a number of community boards and is currently the academic director of Osgoode Hall Law School's Intensive Program in Poverty Law at Parkdale Community Legal Services. She is a co-author of the report "Walking on Eggshells: Abused Women's Experiences of Ontario's Welfare System" and "Welfare Fraud: The Constitution of Social Assistance as Crime."
Amy Siegel	Toronto ON	University of Toronto
Mary Choy	Toronto ON	York University

Appendix B:
Guide for Grassroots Groups Considering CBPR

Guide for Grassroots Individuals and Groups Considering Community-Based Participatory Research on Women's Homelessness

What is community-based, participatory research and how can it be useful?

Many excluded and marginalized groups—including Aboriginal peoples (First Nations, Inuit and Métis), people who are homeless, low-income people, drug users, people in prison, sex workers, and women survivors of violence—have had research "done on" us for a long time. Researchers from the government or universities come into our communities and take away information that they use to write reports or make policies about us, based on their own interpretation of what they have seen and heard. Often the reports and policies that have come out of this type of research treat us as "the problem," and the "solutions" they propose are not appropriate or helpful.

Community-based participatory research (also known as CBPR) is an approach that challenges this way of doing research.

- CBPR begins in communities.
- It is grounded in lived experience and informed by people's questions and needs.
- Community members* are directly involved in CBPR and have control of the process of the research.
- People with lived experience are active and equal members of CBPR research teams.
- In CBPR teams, all forms of expertise are honoured, all voices are heard, and all skills are recognized.
- CBPR is based in relationships of reciprocity, trust, respect and collaboration. Building these relationships takes time.
- Participation in CBPR empowers people, enhances self-confidence and self-esteem, and breaks social isolation.
- CBPR teaches professional researchers how to work respectfully with communities.
- CBPR uses non-invasive methods for gathering information or "data." It uses open questions, clear language, and methods organic to the community, not based in scientific observation.
- Action is central to CBPR, and projects incorporate action plans from the beginning.
- The community retains ownership of its information and ideas, and shares control of CBPR projects, which it is free to use in the service of action for change.

CBPR projects can provide many benefits to communities and groups. CBPR can answer questions, support advocacy, and initiate actions to address community problems. Also, working together on a research project can bring a group or community together, help people develop new skills, and may even provide access to research funding for wages and activities.

When considering a CBPR project

Here are some questions that community members can ask when assessing whether, and how, to become involved in research, or to evaluate research projects you are currently involved in:

Questions to ask professional researchers who approach you / your community to be involved in research

- There is lots of research on homelessness - why are you doing another study?
- What does research already show about this issue?
- What will be done with our information?
- What will come back to us from this project?
- What role will we play?
- How much direction are you willing to take from community members & organizations?
- What is your stake, what are you in it for, what are you gaining?
- What is your experience with advocacy?
- What support will there be after the project to make change?

* In this guide we use the terms "community members," "grassroots," "with lived experience," "first voice," and "facing homelessness" interchangeably to describe individuals and communities involved in CBPR.

Questions to think about when planning CBPR projects

- Who is the research for?
- What is the project purpose?
- Who is funding the research?
- Where is the research going to go?
- What action is the research leading towards?
- What are the alternatives to research?

Questions to think about when assessing CBPR projects

- Are people with lived experience at the table whenever decisions are being made?
- Can we challenge the authority and existing barriers in the project effectively, or are we punished and face consequences?
- How flexible and transparent is the professional researcher willing to be?
- Are we gaining the skills, networks, and resources we need to use the research on our own behalf?

Where to learn more

- The Ontario Women's Health Network worked with women facing homelessness to develop a research method called "Inclusion Research." You can download their Inclusion Research Handbook and Guide to Focus Groups here: http://www.owhn.on.ca/inclusionhandbook.htm or call them at 1-877-860-4545 to get a copy.
- Your Rights in Research: A Guide for Women provides information for women who are street-involved and who are considering participating in research. You can call BC Centre of Excellence in Women's Health at 1-888-300-3088 ext. 2633 or download it at http://www.bccewh.bc.ca/publications-resources/documents/YourRightsinResearchAGuideforWomen.pdf

Appendix C:
CBPR Guide for Professional Researchers

Guide for Professional Researchers Considering Community-Based Participatory Research on Women's Homelessness

What is community-based, participatory research and how can it be useful?

Many excluded and marginalized groups—including Aboriginal peoples (First Nations, Inuit, Métis), people who are homeless, low-income people, drug users, people in prison, sex workers, and women survivors of violence—have had research "done on" us for a long time. Researchers from the government or universities come into our communities and take away information that they use to write reports or make policies about us, based on their own interpretation of what they have seen and heard. Often the reports and policies that have come out of this type of research treat us as "the problem," and the "solutions" they propose are not appropriate or helpful.

Community-based participatory research (also known as CBPR) is an approach that challenges this way of doing research.

- CBPR begins in communities.
- It is grounded in lived experience and informed by people's questions and needs.
- Community members* are directly involved in CBPR and have control of the process of the research.
- People with lived experience are active and equal members of CBPR research teams.
- In CBPR teams, all forms of expertise are honoured, all voices are heard, and all skills are recognized.
- CBPR is based in relationships of reciprocity, trust, respect and collaboration. Building these relationships takes time.
- Participation in CBPR empowers people, enhances self-confidence and self-esteem, and breaks social isolation.
- CBPR teaches professional researchers how to work respectfully with communities.
- CBPR uses non-invasive methods for gathering information or "data." It uses open questions, clear language, and methods organic to the community, not based in scientific observation.
- Action is central to CBPR, and projects incorporate action plans from the beginning.
- The community retains ownership of its information and ideas, and shares control of CBPR projects, which it is free to use in the service of action for change.

A fundamental aspect of CBPR is that it is not done only to advance knowledge. Instead, the process *and* products of CBPR projects should directly benefit grassroots individuals and communities. The products or results of CBPR projects can answer questions, support advocacy, and initiate actions to address community problems. But the process of CBPR should also hold intrinsic benefits for community members. For example, working together on a research project can bring a group or community together, help people develop new skills, and may even provide access to research funding for wages and activities. CBPR projects should be planned with these individual and community benefits in mind.

Planning CBPR projects on women's homelessness

Women clearly state that CBPR must include first voice people in all project planning and decisions. Just involving community members in data gathering does not meet this standard. Here are some questions professional researchers can ask when considering CBPR on women's homelessness:

- There is lots of research on homelessness - why do another study? What are the alternatives to research?
- What does research already show about this issue, and how can this information be made more accessible to grassroots individuals and communities?
- Do I have the networks and connections I need to form equitable working relationships with women facing homelessness and grassroots organizations, right from the planning stages of this project?

* In this guide we use the terms "community members," "grassroots," "with lived experience," "first voice," and "facing homelessness" interchangeably to describe individuals and communities involved in CBPR.

- What is my stake in this issue? How does my own lived experience inform my perspective?
- What am I in this project for, what am I gaining, and how can gains from this project be equitably shared?
- What skills do I need in order to carry out a CBPR project (such as advocacy, community development, group facilitation) and do I have these skills?
- To what institutions am I accountable in this project (the University, the funder, my employer), and how do the requirements / restrictions of these institutions affect the project? What are strategies for ensuring an equitable project in the context of these restrictions?
- In what ways can the process of research directly benefit participants, co-researchers (or "peer" researchers), and their communities?
- What support can I offer the community during and after the project, so that the research can be used for action and change?

Where to learn more:

- The Ontario Women's Health Network worked with women facing homelessness to develop a research method called "Inclusion Research." You can download their Inclusion Research Handbook and Guide to Focus Groups here: http://www.owhn.on.ca/inclusionhandbook.htm or call them at 1-877-860-4545 to get a copy.
- Your Rights in Research: A Guide for Women provides information for women who are street-involved and who are considering participating in research. You can call BC Centre of Excellence in Women's Health at 1-888-300-3088 ext. 2633 or download it at http://www.bccewh.bc.ca/publications-resources/documents/YourRightsinResearchAGuideforWomen.pdf

Appendix D:
Guide to Sustaining CBPR Partnerships

Guide for Grassroots and Professional Researchers on Doing Community-Based Participatory Research on Women's Homelessness

Considering Community-Based Participatory Research

Community-Based Participatory Research (also known as CBPR) is research done by, with, and for grassroots communities.* Our other Guides describe CBPR and suggest questions that women with lived experience, and professional researchers, can ask when considering CBPR on women's homelessness.

A grassroots group might decide to do research in order to answer questions, support advocacy work, initiate action, build skills, create employment opportunities, and / or gain access to research funds. When deciding whether to work with professional researchers, there are advantages and disadvantages to consider.

Possible advantages to doing CBPR with professional researchers:

- Professional researchers might have access to funds, resources, and networks that communities do not.
- Professional researchers have expertise in carrying out research.
- Professionals can be powerful allies who can open doors that would normally be closed to women facing homelessness.
- Policy makers and others might pay more attention to research if it is done with professionals.

Possible disadvantages to doing CBPR with professional researchers:

- Institutions like universities might impose restrictions that make it difficult for professionals to share power and resources equitably with communities.
- Professional researchers may not have skills in doing equitable teamwork, advocacy, community development, and action with grassroots communities.
- Professionals might be more focused on research than action.
- When meeting with CBPR teams, policy makers and others might only listen to the professional members, and disregard the expertise of grassroots members.

Finding professional researchers to partner or advise on CBPR projects

- Ask other grassroots groups who they have worked with and how it went.
- Check the websites of local universities and colleges. Programs in social work, planning, education and criminology may have professors specializing in the issue you want to research. Some institutions publish listings of their experts in specific areas.
- Some non-profit organizations—like social planning councils, health research centres, or large multiservice agencies—have researchers on staff.

Doing grassroots research

Professional researchers are not the only people capable of doing research. Grassroots research can be planned and carried out by people with lived experience.

Finding research funding:

- Read reports of other research projects – they usually say who funded the project.
- Ask non-profit organizations who funds them – sometimes these funders also fund research and action.
- Funders might have criteria that exclude grassroots groups (e.g. charitable status, affiliation with a university) – but it might be possible to partner with a researcher or organization who can act as "trustee" for the purposes of the funding application.

Learning about how to do research:

- The Ontario Women's Health Network worked with women facing homelessness to develop a research method called "Inclusion Research." You can download their Inclusion Research Handbook and Guide to Focus Groups here: http://www.owhn.on.ca/inclusionhandbook.htm or call them at 1-877-860-4545 to get a printed copy.
- Our Common Ground is a guide to doing CBPR on women's health issues. You can download it at http://www.cwhn.ca/en/node/42004 or call the Canadian Women's Health Network at 1-888-818-9172 to get a printed copy.

* In this guide we use the terms "community members," "grassroots," "with lived experience," "first voice," and "facing homelessness" interchangeably to describe individuals and communities involved in CBPR.

Sustaining CBPR partnerships

Whether grassroots groups work on their own or with professional researchers, CBPR requires relationships of reciprocity, trust, respect and collaboration. Some ways of fostering successful CBPR projects include:

- Hold frequent, regular team meetings throughout the project, from the planning period right through to the action and follow-up stages.
- Make group guidelines for communicating with each other.
- Set clear agendas and maintain focus at meetings, while allowing time for dialogue.
- Share leadership roles (such as chairing meetings) among all team members.
- Discuss team members' goals and expectations for the research, what their accountabilities and responsibilities are to their institutions and communities, and how the project can meet these.
- Train professional team members on working respectfully and effectively with grassroots, on grassroots research methods, and on how to recognize and draw upon the skills of all team members.
- Train grassroots team members on formal data gathering and analysis methods, presentation, writing, and speaking to the media and policy makers.
- Bring each step of the research to the whole team for consultation, even parts that professional researchers normally take on alone (such as ethical reviews).
- Include an action plan as a central part of the project and reserve some project funds for carrying it out.
- Ensure that grassroots team members can use research products for change

Appendix E:
Guide for Setting Up a Network

A Brief Guide
Questions to Consider in Setting Up and Maintaining a Research Action Network

What is the network's overarching purpose?

- what is the collective frame and how broadly will it be defined?

What are the goals/objectives of the network?

Among the possibilities:

- sharing of questions, challenges, resources, information and expertise
- creating safe spaces to tell and share stories
- building of capacity, including to support grant writing, research and advocacy
- conducting and sharing research and connecting research to practice and policy
- advocacy
- education
- formation of strategic alliances to bring about change
- developing a unified strategy

Who are its members?

- what are their responsibilities?
- what are the benefits to them of membership?
- what interests, voices and perspectives should be reflected?
- will there be more than one category of membership?
- will any category of member be required to pay a membership fee?
- if there are different categories of membership, will one category have voting privileges and another play a supporting – not a decision-making – role?

How are network goals accomplished?

- how will members connect and how often?
- is there potential to connect to and work with other networks?

What will be the structure and what values will inform that structure?

- what structure is necessary to accomplish the goals?
- will there be one central organizing group (a hub) and if so, will this be a single organization or made up of people from many groups/organizations?
- how closely will the members work together in joint actions?
- will the emphasis be on creating strong horizontal links between groups and organizations and/or on vertical links connecting local groups to a central co-ordinating hub?
- will all members have an equal voice?
- what will be the process of decision-making?

Who will be responsible for the day-to-day activities of the network?

- these activities will vary depending upon the goals/objectives but may include
    - keeping listings current on the website
    - posting new information to the website
    - moderating e-forums
    - regulating multi-directional flows of information
- to the extent that a network seeks to engage in more co-ordinated forms of strategic action the need for devoted staff time increases

What tools will be used?

- website
    - document repository for resources and information
    - notices of important events
    - interactive discussion forums
    - training modules and/or materials
- bulletins (on website or via email)
- membership directories
- social networking tools
- on-line courses
- conference calls
- webcasts and web meetings
- YouTube videos
- NING – an on-line tool to facilitate networking, action, collaboration and change
- creation of Virtual Model Community

Funding

- a successful network requires some level of staffing and this must be funded
    - research grants
    - charge membership fees (including two categories of members – fee paying and non fee paying)
    - foundations and non-governmental organizations.

Appendix F:
Expression of Interest Form

Expression of Interest
All Our Sisters Conference
London, Ontario, May 8 -12

The "Women, Homelessness and Community-Based Participatory Research Project" has a small grant from the Canadian Homelessness Research Network that enables us to cover all expenses and provide a modest honorarium for approximately 12 women facing homelessness from across Canada to participate in the "All Our Sisters" conference on women, homelessness and safe communities in London, Ontario from May 8-12 (see the website at http://www.alloursisters.ca/ for more information about the conference). If you are interested in the possibility of participating in the Conference, please fill in the form below. In selecting women to participate, here are the things that will be considered:

1. Whether you are a woman or transwoman facing homelessness (this includes all of us without adequate, stable, safe housing, or with incomes too low to afford decent housing and other necessities).
2. Whether you have participated in one or more of the following types of activities:
    a. A research project on issues connected with women's homelessness, that you helped to carry out, for example as an interviewer, in figuring out the research questions, drafting a report or using the research to take action.
    b. A self-advocacy group, for example an anti-poverty group, that has used research to take action or is interested in learning more about how to do this.
    c. An agency, for example a drop-in or shelter, where service users have been actively involved in planning and carrying out research and action on homelessness.
3. What part of the country you live in (we want to try to have women from across Canada).
4. Whether you and / or your organization are part of a specific community (such as an Aboriginal community, ethnic community, disability community, LGBTQ community, etc.) Again, we want to ensure a diverse group.
5. The kind of project you participated in and the sort of actions taken to change front-line practices or policies – here too, our goal is to try to have a diverse set of projects.

You can complete this form by hand or on a computer. Please respond to all the following questions to help us in our selection process. You can provide as much or as little information as you want in each question – feel free to use more space or to attach documents (such as reports) with this form. There is space at the end for you to add any information we didn't ask about.

Name: _____

Town/City where you live: _____

Province where you live: _____

The best way to reach you is (phone or email):

_____

Please provide a phone number and / or email address where we could reach you (if you don't have email access or your own phone, please provide one from a friend or an organization if possible).

_____

Please provide a mailing address where we could send you information (your own, or the address of a friend or an organization).

_____

Do you consider yourself to be facing homelessness - this includes all of us without adequate, stable, safe, accessible housing, or with incomes too low to afford decent housing and other necessities.

_____

Please note: you do not have to explain or justify your answer - we believe you are the expert on your own experience.

Tell us a bit about the research project, self-advocacy group, or agency you were (or are now) involved in. Please include the name and purpose of the project, time period, etc.

_____

_____

_____

_____

What is / was your role in the research project, self-advocacy group, or agency? For example, have you been a peer researcher, volunteer, community organizer, peer worker, etc?

_____

_____

_____

_____

What kinds of actions have come out of the research project, self-advocacy group, or agency? In what ways has it helped women facing homelessness to become active as speakers, leaders, researchers, activists, etc?

_____

_____

_____

Are you – and /or the research project, self-advocacy group, or agency – part of a specific community (such as an Aboriginal community, ethnic community, disability community, LGBTQ community, etc.)? If yes, which community?

_____

_____

_____

Why would you like to participate in the All Our Sisters Conference? How would you bring what you learn at the conference back to the groups, projects or communities you are connected with?

_____

_____

_____

Are you available to travel to London, Ontario for the conference from May 7 or 8 and stay until May 12 or 13? In order to make the trip, are there any supports you will require, for example childcare, accommodations for a disability, specific dietary needs, etc?

_____

_____

_____

Is there any other information you would like us to know?

_____

_____

_____

_____

Thanks for taking the time to fill this out! We will be in touch very soon. While we would like to be able to fund everyone who is interested in attending we will have to make some difficult decisions given our limited funding. But even if we are not able to fund your participation in the conference we will definitely keep in touch – one of our key goals is to find ways to connect those of us doing this work across the country!

Please send the completed form back to us

By email to e.paradis@utoronto.ca

Or by fax to Cities Centre, attention Emily Paradis, at 416-978-7162

If necessary you can mail the form to Emily Paradis, Cities Centre, 455 Spadina Ave., Toronto Ontario, M5S 2G8 – but this will delay our ability to consider you and might mean that the spots are already filled before it reaches us, so we encourage you to email or fax if possible.