CUTTING OFF THE HOMELESS: REEXAMINING SOCIAL HOUSING SERVICE AND ACTIVISM IN ONTARIO

by

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Abstract

The importance of housing has been discussed in several disciplines as a basic need, a fundamental human right, and a source of economic and social security; but the social housing system in Ontario has been downloaded from higher levels of government to municipalities with little to no increase in funding or program governance. In this thesis, I argue that the policies and programs that govern the social housing system in Ontario focus on a service provision perspective that maintains the status quo, particularly the stigma attached to social housing projects and homeless people. Using interviews with activists and a review of the literature, I suggest that activists have a role in changing the way this service-oriented perspective works by bringing forward the realities of homelessness in the public realm to alter social thought, agendas, and actions.

Keywords: social housing, Ontario, activism, social service
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To my family and friends: thank you for your understanding and support while I went through many days of research, writer’s block, and productive work. You have unconditionally accepted and motivated me to continue on with this thesis, and I could not be more indebted to all of you.
“My message to you all is of hope, courage and confidence. Let us mobilize all our resources in a systematic and organized way and tackle the grave issues that confront us with grim determination and discipline worthy of a great nation.”

Muhammed Ali Jinnah, lawyer, politician, statesman, and Quaid-e-Azam (“Great leader”), founder of Pakistan in his Eid-ul-Adha Message to the Nation on October 24, 1947
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Chapter One: Introduction

A year into his role as Deputy Governor of the Bank of Canada, Jean Boivin reflected on what he titled the “great” recession between 2007 and 2009 and the subsequent sudden slowdown and rapid recovery phases that followed (Boivin, 2011). He addresses concerns over household debt, Canada’s competitive position internationally, and productivity and investment as issues that will affect the standard of living across the country in the long-term. Though he makes note of the need to pay attention to “the structural issues that persist in the Canadian economy”, along with the national and global economic indicators (Boivin, 2011); he has not mentioned what happens to those who were already poor to begin with.

Recovering from a recession does not mean that demand for social services will decrease, as many indicators like social housing waiting lists will point out. The provision of social housing, like many social services that cater to the poor, relies on the existence of poverty in order to function. Housing is generally considered “affordable” if it accounts for 30% or less of a household’s total income, though some financial experts would push that number to 35% of a household’s net income. This 30-35% is supposed to include rent or mortgage payments, electricity, and running water, among other things. Yet, 1 in 5 tenants living in Ontario spend more than half their income on the need for shelter, according to the last census data published in 2006 (ONPHA, 2010). ONPHA highlights that with the recent recession, this issue was unlikely to have improved (2010). Furthermore, statistics often underestimate the degree of poverty on Canadian streets, as individuals experiencing observable and hidden homelessness are unaccounted for in the national census. The few Canadian homelessness counts, like that carried out for the City of Toronto annually since 2006, would not account for under-housed individuals or families.
The importance of housing has been discussed in several disciplines as a basic need as a fundamental human right, as a source of economic and social security, and as an indicator of quality of living. Social housing\textsuperscript{1} encompasses all non-market forms of housing, such as public (or social) housing and not-for-profit housing; as well as housing units that are offered to low-income families at the average market rent (based on location) with the guarantee that these will be affordable relative to their incomes. Its significance as a social issue has risen given the rise of homelessness since the 1990s. Since the 1990s, there has been an increasing awareness that homelessness does not affect only those who “deserve” to be homeless, such as individuals with mental health issues and/or addictions. Secondly, a plethora of research has uncovered “hidden homelessness” in places where homelessness was thought to be a non-issue, such as in suburbs like York Region. Thirdly, there has been an evident pattern of shelters shifting away from their original mandates as temporary and emergency places to sleep for a few nights. They had instead moved towards becoming semi-permanent residences for individuals who had not been able to access the necessary supports that would help them maintain housing for the long-term.

This last trend in particular shows that homelessness is not just a matter of the lack of housing, especially when other factors of their lives need to be addressed. Hulchanski (2005) talks about the need to rethink Canada’s housing affordability challenge by outlining Canada’s “incomplete housing system” and the conceptual framework used to address it so far (2005). Specifically, he encourages adding more to the continuum of housing with supportive housing; and of addressing supply, affordability, and rehabilitation of housing units (p. 11-2). Many groups, like the Social Housing Services Corporation (SHSC) and the Ontario Non-Profit

\textsuperscript{1} Though other terms like “public housing”, “not-for-profit housing”, and “affordable housing” are also used, I will stick to the term “social housing” for most of this thesis. I prefer the term since it will encompass the social values that we attach to social housing: it should be affordable, adequate, and appropriate.
Housing Association (ONPHA), also advocate for a rise in quantity and quality of social housing options that cater to local needs and the growing realities of Canada’s demographic shift.

**Personal Introduction**

The discomfort started in university, a time when I expected enlightenment, as I broke free of the chains that high school imposes onto teenagers. However, I felt uneasy with what we were being taught in this new space I was exploring called urban planning, particularly when it came to “educating the public”: we, as planners, had a job to do, a “moral” responsibility to ensure the public’s best interests were upheld. The phrase was uttered numerous times, but no one seemed to notice that the audience was already on the side of a system where we were trying to force members of society to accept a set of predetermined principles of good planning. I would look around but I felt alone in my hesitation to completely embrace this ideal. Where were the people who looked a little more like me and who shared some of the same views as I did? Yet I kept this discomfort to myself, not knowing what to do with it.

The unease continued to gnaw at me as I went into the social housing industry. It felt a bit better than before: I was doing something “social”. Yet I was back where I was, in that hard and cold seat in planning school among the many in the room that all faced the front towards the teacher, the only body of knowledge in the room. This time, it was the consultants and developers and policy makers and the service managers: the people who knew what the problem was, what to do, and how to do it. The person who would supposedly benefit most from the development of social housing, the real public, was never at the front leading the research on what the problem was and what needed to be done.

This did not feel like community development. Community development is about developing and furthering the capacities of all individuals in a community, and about balancing
individual and societal rights. In particular, we have to consider the social, that is “the ongoingconcerting and coordinating of individuals’ activities” – not, as Smith stresses, an “entity separable from the actual people and the activities in which we find it” (1999 p.6). Service Canada’s definition of community development also emphasizes longevity, inclusivity and equity, and capacity building. Yet that is what we were calling our work.

According to Razack, “responsible research and writing begins with a critical examination of how relations of power shape knowledge production. [...] Knowledge about the social, David Goldberg reminds us, is not produced in a vacuum” (Razack 2009). I have consistently noted that many of the problems that troubled me most pointed towards authority and power when wielded through “public systems” that we considered beneficial to society; such as planning and policy, education, and social housing. That uneasiness from planning school seemed to make more sense as I started to peel back the layers by examining our approaches to these systems, and the justifications underlying such systemic distinctions in the name of the public good.

I began to realize how some of my planning contemporaries often viewed housing as a handout rather than a hand-up, particularly when the possibilities of fraud or socially unacceptable behaviour were discussed. Here, an approach, a certain body of knowledge that is never articulated but is inherently known, about who is helping who, or about what kind of bodies help other kinds of bodies, has been created in order to assist the “othering” of these people. Othering refers to the process, as Aladaylah (2010) describes, where “the Self is centred, glorified and made visible while the Other is vilified, silenced, and made invisible. The strategies of Othering are manifold and include the use of binary oppositions, unvoicing, and dehumanizing” (Aladaylah 2010). Those strategies are used within housing policy and studies in order to verify the expertise status of policy makers and consultants as the only voices capable of
decision-making and resource allocation in the public sphere. Here, we control who, how, and why social housing applicants and residents will receive assistance. By creating a set of rules as to how they are to be governed while living in these accommodations, an exception to the norm or an abnormal other is created. To cement this thinking further, the conditions placed on them are now used to explain how they do not fit the norm, though these are the very rules placed on them if they want to access this form of assistance.

Marginalization happens when we view certain people as not belonging to society, as we push them to the outskirts of the community. If they are not the Other, society cannot define who fits the norm. Therefore, society collectively does not want to empower them since they will then join the norm, not stay as the abnormal. This fits into critical discourse studies. However, I am not interested in evaluating specific policies and programs within the social housing system. I instead aim to look at the very thought that shapes these operations.

It is important to recognize that as researchers, we do have an impact on society through our work. What do we teach through such knowledge production? We learn, informally, that poor people (or this “other” 20%) are somehow different and not like us and so we should not be helping them succeed. If we do help them with housing, why should they benefit from other ways of helping themselves? Are there not other people to help?

When I had first started work on this thesis, housing was barely talked about, barely seen as a subject on the news; despite the (eventual) unveiling of a national housing strategy in 2010. However, with a federal election that took place this May, housing is suddenly on the agenda for more community groups and citizens than I had realized before. In Ontario, this momentum can possibly continue until the provincial elections this fall.

I started this introduction with a brief overview of the need for housing in Ontario, before a personal introduction into my role in housing as someone who is curious about and interested
in the social housing movement. In order to show the audience where the thesis is coming from, I have had to place myself on the map of where I stand within the social housing system in Ontario. As a spectator of this system, I concede that I have a particular perspective undertaking this study and that certain factors influence how I have engaged in this research, including my methodology. After I address my research objectives for this thesis, I then outline what I will be doing in the remaining chapters, allowing the reader to see what they can expect in reading the rest of the thesis.

Key Question and Research Objectives

With this thesis, I argue that the policies and programs that govern the social housing system in Ontario focuses on a service provision perspective that maintains the status quo, particularly the stigma attached to social housing projects and homeless people. I believe though that activists have a role in changing the way this service-oriented perspective works by bringing forward the realities of homelessness in the public realm to alter social thought, agendas, and actions.

More specifically, the objectives of this research study are:

- To outline Ontario’s social housing system’s focus on social services
- To explore the role that activists can play in bringing forward the realities of homelessness and poverty within the social housing sector

Reading This Thesis

I have divided this thesis into chapters, each of which focuses on a particular aspect of the research. After having introduced the topic to you – the reader – through these first few pages, the next chapter explicitly states what I had done in order to put together this research. I
start first with the literature review, which I had used to discuss how I academically looked at this notion of housing as a discourse, by comparing the ways in which different authors sought to look at the topic before I undertook my own thesis. I discuss the interviews with housing activists I had undertaken to see what they say about Ontario’s social housing system and how it could change. Here, I also set out the limitations for my research, knowing that I could only capture a certain piece of the topic in question.

In Chapter Three, I look at the failures of the social housing system in Ontario, which come as a result of its service orientation, since I argue that this perspective does not adequately link social housing to the issues behind homelessness, especially that of stigma within the community. I first start out with a sketch of Ontario’s social housing system; by examining the social housing sector and its purposes, the history of social housing policy and programs in Ontario, and the failure to address stigma in developing and providing social housing. I believe the issue of stigma is important to consider because though poverty is not a desirable situation for anyone, poor and homeless people are the targets of this dislike since communities block access to the social and affordable housing which could otherwise reduce homelessness.

In Chapter Four, I argue that activists have a role to play in delivering the messages that they have identified as critical to their work on the causes of homelessness and the role of social housing in doing so. Their work can help the way we view housing and homelessness in Ontario, as we can now account for this examination of the realities of the homeless population instead of relying on best practices of social housing alone. I conclude this thesis in Chapter Five by summarizing the argument made so far while making the theoretical and practical applications I hope to have made.
Chapter Two: Methodology

Methodology in the social sciences is significant since our research places a great emphasis on how the research is done, due to our concern as educators and as advocates for better communities and consequently for ethical and fair treatment of others during the process of conducting our work. This is particularly true when you consider that one cannot just discuss social issues in a critical light while using the same methods that perpetuate those issues in the first place (Smith, 1987). However, it is important to remember that a method is only one or a few of many ways of looking into certain kinds of questions: “the questions themselves and the way one understands the questions are the important starting points, not the method as such” (van Manen, 1997 p.1). This led to my interest in van Manen’s Researching Living Experience, where he hopes “to show that there is a way to deal with methodological concerns that is undecidedly unmethodological in a purely prescriptive or technocratic sense” (1997 p.3). I understand that there are criticisms to this approach, especially as van Manen aims to blur some of the lines between interpretation and experience: they seem to go almost hand in hand in his writing and teaching, so much so that you cannot see the difference at times. However, I use van Manen’s work as "inspiration", just as Dowling (2007) suggests.

Yet, his concern for pedagogy, the actual process of teaching, resonated most with me over other ways of dealing with such concerns, particularly when I already had experience in the field conducting research. In order to move away from some of the assumptions that I have noted before, I felt it was important to bring a qualitative aspect to “the housing field” so that I could truly examine what power truly means within the housing system. I started this process by borrowing from the theoretical fields of sociology and adult education to update my understanding of the discourse in social housing that is mostly embedded in other fields through both theory and practice like urban planning and public policy, as this is where housing lies is
physically and socially situated within community development. However, I do not focus on pedagogy in this thesis, as there were many other threads of interest to follow once I had transcribed my interviews. Perhaps this is because I do not see myself as a sociologist, even if I borrow many of my ideas from there. I definitely identify with the idea of belonging to the community development field, since it encompasses all my different interests in one place. Therefore, I tend to refer to it throughout this thesis, and I speak from that “perspective”.

Perhaps this is why I chose not to focus on discourse, though this decision came about later on. In summary, discourse is about knowledge, power, and materiality (Hook, 2001). Though not always the case, discourse analysis often involves a linguistic analysis of communication to “understand how people use language to create and enact identities and activities” (Starks and Trinidad, 2007 p.1373). This process helps to “find patterns of questions, who dominates time and how, [and] other patterns of interaction” (Methods). Phenomenology, on the other hand, emphasizes describing the meaning of the lived experience of a phenomenon (Starks and Trinidad, 2007 p.1373) and this usually starts with the individual.

I acknowledge that my ideas and writing will predominantly stem from a particular perspective or two. Similar to how Smith (1999) describes her own writing in her book as intertwined and not so clear cut: similarly, my ideas also “might be described as originating in the intertextuality of my own experience as a reader” (p.1). As the reader, you can see I wrote about what stood out to me, for the most part, even as I discuss particular books and articles in this thesis. After all, I am still writing from my own experiences, ideas, and interests; I am not “positionless” (Smith, 1999 pg. 8). A friend once updated his “status” via his social networking page: “I just realized that my opinions for things, people and events are only reflections of the opinions of other people around me. It's time I make up my own mind!” Another friend replied wisely, “That will always be the case. Our opinions are always relative.” As these two people
allude, my opinions may not be completely new, but they are newer in that I hope to link different ideas together to think about social housing and activism in a different context than what may have been written about before I wrote this thesis.

As one of my supervising readers pointed out during his feedback of the thesis, the two approaches do not mesh well under most circumstances. I realize that the concerns behind my thesis lie deeper within the experience of social housing and anti-homelessness activism in Ontario, rather than looking at how policy has shaped the availability of such programs for example. However, the concept of discourse is important in shaping this thesis since I was able to start putting that earlier “discomfort” into words once I came across the concept of discourse and the idea that knowledges can act as catalysts for social thought and action. It was where I started to unearth just some of the roots of social housing issues in Ontario, with greater clarity for what they really were.

Though I aim to keep my thoughts on housing discourse to a minimum, I cannot completely ignore the role it has in this research, since there are instances that this discourse was raised in the course of my interviews and literature review. With the interviews in particular, I realize I was also asking participants to give me their experiences of working with that discourse within the anti-homelessness/pro-social housing movement sector in Ontario. Many pointed to this discourse, even if they did not label these ideas as discourse. I also refer to works discussing discourse in housing since I believe it matters to a great degree, if language is able to create and justify the power struggles that maintain poverty and simultaneously can influence social and individual actions.

It is also clear that "hermeneutic phenomenological research is fundamentally a writing activity. Research and writing are aspects of one process" (van Manen, 1997 p.7). This spoke to me: I had lost my love for writing over the course of my academic and professional career, for
reasons unknown but sensed. Only when I really sat down to write this thesis – and really forced myself to put pen to paper – did I realize why I needed to do this thesis. It was not just the means to an end - the last requirement for my Masters of Arts - but it adds to the process of establishing that there are other voices out there beyond those of the formalized and funded for purely political agendas. During this writing process, there were patterns evident that I could not see before. This realization helped me to use the writing process to further my analysis throughout this thesis, so that I could weave the chapters together more seamlessly.

For this study then, methodology was certainly a concern, since I wanted to bring forward a different perspective than what came through many of the research studies I had worked on during my relatively short career. I wanted to ask different questions, beyond the importance of housing. The research there has taken place many times over and I have much of the literature out there regarding this vitality to communities. Rather, I wanted to look at what lay beneath the surface beyond the symptomatic issues we saw within the social housing system. Who is this system supposed to benefit? Was it working? These were just some of the questions that led me to the formation of this thesis; some of these have been explored in depth whereas I have left others for a different study at some other point.

I used a combination of primary and secondary sources to examine different perspectives and gain further insight into particular details of the arguments presented in this thesis. My primary research consists of interviews with housing activists on how they see the social housing system operating in Ontario currently and idealistically; while my secondary research complements and adds to my understanding and analysis throughout this thesis. This chapter outlines what I sought while conducting this work, as each method contributes to this project differently. As noted before, many of the principles and ideals behind hermeneutical analysis
have influenced my approach to this thesis, more specifically in terms of the importance given to context and interpretation.

In this chapter, I explicitly state what I did in order to put together this thesis. I start first with the literature review, which I used to add to my own understandings of the topic by comparing different perspectives and ideas against my own. Then I conducted nine interviews with housing activists to see what they say about Ontario’s social housing system. This data revealed much more to me than I had anticipated, and so for this purpose, I reframed my argument to reflect my findings more clearly. I will conclude by explaining the need for both methods and the purposes they serve in this thesis. With that, I set out the limitations of my thesis since each method can only capture a particular angle of the topic at hand.

**Literature Review**

Generally, the secondary research provides the contextual theory and fills in the gaps from the primary research, while providing names and concepts to the ideas that I would come across during the course of collecting the primary research through interviews. For my initial literature review, I had narrowed my examination to look at how social housing is a discourse in itself, by looking at how the issue of discourse has developed in social housing and homelessness. This range of studies mostly falls within the social sciences (mostly in sociology) and the humanities (such as philosophy) and so within these areas, there is are certain ways in which the literature is structured, particularly in what assumptions are made in these fields about social housing and its explicit relationship to homelessness. I had taken my general definition of discourse – as comprised of knowledge, power, and materiality – from Hook (2001); however, I did not conduct a discursive analysis in the same manner that he suggests as a methodology since I did not focus on any key text to analyse.
Instead, I use this literature to support and explain gaps in my primary research. I then had to engage in reading these pieces in relation to the context of social housing in Ontario. I used this literature to fuel these discussions because I realized that I could sway my participants’ opinions on the subject if I explicitly discussed the idea of the housing system’s reliance on service work. For instance, a participant might feel like I was criticizing their efforts to help the homeless if it sounded like I believed their service work was further marginalizing and disempowering their clientele. I wanted instead to see how much of this they brought up themselves. Two of my participants did point to a specific aspect of charity in their work, while many others made connections to other areas of their service work not being "enough" and the conscience that they had to work on both short and long-term goals and outcomes for greater impact. Therefore, these answers could come from them.

To prepare myself, I reviewed articles on methodology in order to determine and understand the epistemological and ontological grounds for community development as a discipline. Undertaking this exercise helped illustrate where assumptions within the research were most likely to form, so that these would be noted in this thesis. It also assisted with the ability to define and refine my research process, as I was able to explain why certain choices were necessary during the recruitment and interview processes, even though I have similar experience in conducting such work within the field and so instinctively was able to relate to most of what I found in the literature.

For my analysis, I looked at the literature present so that I could add the voices already present in academia while simultaneously checking for the gaps in research that has been conducted so far. I felt it was essential to move forward and to avoid recreating the wheel. Of course, it is still very easy to miss something, as was the case with Cathy Crowe’s (2007) book *Dying for a Home*. Perhaps I would have taken a different approach or looked to talk to different
people had I read it before it was recommended to me by the author herself halfway through my research. Perhaps my research would have followed the Toronto Disaster Relief Committee specifically in an ethnographic fashion to open up other questions and ideas not covered in her work, or to put a name to different ideas just grazed upon in the book. However, I address these issues to a very different set of readers, knowing that I needed to paint a quick picture of its presence in the way we address social issues. I chose to focus on the social housing system in Ontario, since I could explore this newer thought in a space I was already familiar with as opposed to political systems I am just learning about such as education or health. My audience, realistically, is the academic community and ideally, the participants of this study will extend what I give them to others they know, maybe just to satisfy a hunger for thought and maybe to fuel actions they choose to take knowing that others see these ideas too.

Interviews with Housing Activists

My primary research served to make my work relevant to the social housing movement by looking at how activists experience the system as it currently is today. I interviewed nine activists who work towards issues of homelessness, welfare, and poverty across the province of Ontario. They were asked to participate via email in a semi-structured interview to discuss their understandings of social service, social activism, and social housing in Ontario in a location convenient to them, such as their workplace, or over the telephone if they preferred this route. Since the aim of the study was to look at how social housing in Ontario can be reframed from an activist perspective, they were also asked to imagine how social housing in Ontario could be redesigned from their perspectives. Here, their “voices” serve to paint multiple pictures of what activism can do for the housing sector in Ontario.
The interviews were initially analyzed with an emphasis on how these activists would re-imagine social housing in Ontario. Inspired by the hermeneutical phenomenological perspective put forward by van Manen (1997), I considered the main premises on which he builds his research to look at how these housing activists interpreted their ideal visions of the social housing system, even if they had not lived these experiences themselves. I analyzed each of the interviews from my interpretation of the themes that I saw in the data, as I tried to situate their experiences and ideas within certain contexts.

However, it became clearer that there were deeper issues to look at before this reimagining could take place. I revisited their interviews again, this time seeing that there was a particular story that I had to focus on first, the need to address these deeper issues by having activists bring these realities forward.

**Participant Selection and Recruitment**

I conducted interviews with nine homelessness, welfare, and anti-poverty activists across the province of Ontario. Most of these activists worked in organizations listed:

- under the label of Housing and Tenants within Ontario as identified by the site PovNet.org ([http://www.povnet.org/find-an-advocate/on/housing-and-tenants](http://www.povnet.org/find-an-advocate/on/housing-and-tenants)), a site that aims to build an online anti-poverty community in Canada; and/or

- as partners for the initiative Stableandaffordable.com ([http://www.stableandaffordable.com/content/partnership](http://www.stableandaffordable.com/content/partnership)), a network of community groups and organizations dedicated to pushing stable and affordable social housing onto the agenda in Ontario.

These activists all operated, at least to some degree, outside of a service model in order to raise awareness about their selective issues and to frame their importance in society, based on certain goals and principles as collectively defined by organizations and individuals identifying
with a particular movement. However, my sample of nine includes an activist who was not on these lists; instead, this person was referred to me by another participant, who highly recommended them based on their wide range of work within the homelessness and social housing arena.

I recruited all participants via email (see Appendix A) to each of the organizations’ directors, unless a specific contact person was provided on each website within roles of education, advocacy, or activism. Since this is a collection of agencies, they were located across Ontario, though most of them are located in the Greater Toronto Area, with the exceptions of Ira and Tina who work in Chatham-Kent and Simcoe County respectively.

*Risks and Benefits Analysis*

All research involving human contact requires an ethics review through the University of Toronto’s Office of Research Ethics. There were minimal risks with this research project as the vulnerability of the activists as a group was low. Though I came across activists who identify with other marginalized groups on the lines of race, gender, and other variables, they have the privilege of working within conditions that support their human rights for the most part. Unlike many others, they are also able to express and advocate for their rights.

However, I understood that some activists could feel uncomfortable discussing their work, if they knew that their work would be negatively portrayed. This is important to note in a field where direct service is the main focus and where some stakeholders regard activism work to be controversial and aggressive. Participants had the option not to answer certain questions and/or to withdraw from the study if they choose. Since their ideas about social housing were the central focus of the research study, their experiences as activists are meant to provide context to their discussion of these ideas.
Consent was first obtained through an informal agreement via telephone or email that the participant is willing to engage in the study and it was confirmed when they set a time and date with me to meet and/or talk. If we met in person, they were requested to sign the form agreeing that they have consented to participate; giving them another opportunity to decline if they chose to do so. Those who were interviewed were able to fax their consent forms directly to me at a number bought specifically for the month. The participants were always requested before the interview began whether they would be fine with the audio recorder.

I was unable to provide compensation due to my limited resources for this project. However, like in other community-based fields of study such as education and health, I wanted to collect information on their knowledge as activists working within and relative to issues of social housing. It is my hope that they benefitted in having the opportunity to reflect on their experiences and share their knowledge; and that in the long run, it could benefit their activist attempts. Also, once the thesis has been approved by the thesis committee, participants will have a chance to request for a copy of the thesis report after they have all received a copy of the executive summary if they had indicated this on their participant information sheet and consent form.

_The Participants_

Most of the participants in this study had several years of experience in the social housing field; or had come from other parts of the social service and social movement sectors to housing. Their relations within the housing field vary, as some work directly with clients within the community while others work to influence the broader political agenda.

I will note that most of the participants here were women, though many of the big names in the social housing sector are men. Perhaps this is because of the roles that these workers play in their organizations, or it could be a reality of the social service sector in general. I also
recognize that most of my participants are White, and that there is little racial diversity within the housing sector generally. This is also something that I have had to comprehend, particularly since this had contributed to my sense of belonging within the housing sector. Being younger, of a visible minority, and female is not your average writer in the housing field. This is something I feel needs to be a concern when looking at why people are involved in the cause at all, as I discuss later on.

Here, we meet each of the nine participants whom I had interviewed either in person or by telephone, as agreed upon when contact was initially established:

Nicole is the executive director of an social housing centre in the Greater Toronto Area. The centre currently operates in three areas of work: a housing registry program that also advertises to its clientele through online adverts, an identification clinic, and as of more recently, a community support and education program. The last program specifically aims to help "those individuals that fall through the cracks" [because] "for whatever reason, that can’t get their needs met because they don’t meet another agency’s intake or mandate for service". Therefore, her advocacy work aims to help the client by helping them navigate the social service sector system.

Adam is a director with an organization that organizes and educates social housing providers while engaging within and advocating for social housing issues to be placed at the forefront, while keeping their membership up-to-date on current issues and important skills.

Like Nicole, Tina is also at the helm of an social housing centre in Ontario, where they provide services for both tenants and landlords while working with multiple levels of government to raise awareness about the need for social housing in the region. She stresses that their advocacy work is undertaken when it "might be in the best interests of the clients that [they]"

2 Pseudonyms have been used to maintain the participants’ anonymity.
serve, if there’s something that could benefit them if there were a change” (Tina, personal communication, July 27, 2010).

**Kevin** coordinates research and community planning within his organization, situating his work particularly within the province's poverty reduction strategy. His organization was also involved in the formation of the Housing Network of Ontario, which has "essentially been working on the social housing component bit of the poverty reduction strategy" (personal communication, August 4, 2010). His other area of work revolved around social assistance reform and dimensions of poverty reduction. After work, he is on the board of an social housing non-profit corporation that is currently being developed under the Canada-Ontario Social housing Program.

**Ira** is a housing support worker with a family and community services organization located in small-town Ontario. The agency works for persons of low-income and for the homeless population, with a number of services made available to their clientele,

> whether that’s to find them a place to live, put them up in emergency situation, send them to a shelter in one of our outlying cities in Windsor/London, I pay utility bills for low-to-no income who have exhausted all of their avenues, I, umm, I forget what I do because I wear so many hats. I mediate with landlords. We give presentations on what’s going in Chatham-Kent as far as the low-to-no-income and homeless population. We advocate on behalf of our clients so we mediate, refer, do whatever; attend employment, I feed food, people living on the street – they know they can come here for food and hygiene supplies and everything (Ira, personal communication, August 5, 2010).

She then sees her role as an activist as "advocating for" the clients at the organization, as she believes that advocating for the things they need is, in itself, a service if it is being done for the client.

As an anti-poverty campaign organizer, **Quinn** understands the role of social housing in her work even though she works towards advocating for a broader set of policies. Similarly, the organization which she works for engages in public education around issues of poverty while advocating for policies and programs that they believe will reduce and eliminate family poverty in Canada.
**Natalie** is an executive director at a community centre in the City of Toronto, that works for a diverse clientele including immigrants and refugees, older adults, and members of the LGBTQ community. The centre's work in homelessness and housing began when they noticed the need for drop-in programs that invited their homeless clients into the community, at least for a few hours. The community can also access different services each day of the week at the centre through referrals and service drop-in programs.

Coming from a diverse background where she examined issues concerning at-risk youth, food security, and poverty, **Paige** is a long-term activist at the helm of a homelessness coalition in Ontario. Alongside engaging the community and facilitating solutions to homelessness and poverty in the region, she also partners with academics as a community-based researcher as she feels that her work is about "really trying to get at the root cause of issues and address issues at the root, rather than reacting".

**Zoe**, like Paige, has a background as an activist, particularly with HIV/AIDS. However, she currently works in the social service sector for an outreach mission and social housing provider as a housing and support services supervisor. Her work involves two follow-up programs that focus on the homeless populations living on the street and living in hostels. This, however, along with the issues of organizational capacity in the social service sector, leaves little time for advocacy or activism work, as she explains later on in this piece.

**Interpretation and Analysis**

After interviews were conducted with participants, I would transcribe each session recording into Microsoft Word with the time during the recording noted for each part of the dialogue. I avoided analyzing the interviews before they were all done as I wanted to ensure that I went into each interview with minimal biases and understandings from the previous ones. This left me open to newer possibilities in what participants were saying to me. Once the interviews
had all been completed and transcribed, I thematically organized their responses, sometimes ensuring that they all had something to contribute to a “discussion”, like when defining activism for example, or by topic, as seen in many other parts of this thesis. I ruled out using analytical software as such computer programs often place an emphasis on structure rather than on content.

During my analysis, I realized the role of context and interpretation would have to be taken into consideration here, and this is evident through the words of the participants that I have chosen to include. I analyzed these interviews with an emphasis on how these particular participants, as a group and/or as individuals, would like to experience their work related to, but not necessarily limited to, issues of social housing. Many of the principles used in hermeneutical analysis were applied to the interview data, particularly the understanding that description is in itself interpretation (Manen, 2002, Hermeneutical). However, I used Manen’s ideas more as inspiration, since it gave me a starting point from which to explore, rather than as specific guidelines for how I approached this analysis.

Since I understand that the data reflects just a piece of what I was able to capture and frame, I attempted to minimize my influence as a researcher as much as I could. This included allowing participants to talk with few interruptions and basking in silences as needed when participants needed to reflect further on what they had told me. When discussing her work with a colleague, Smith (1987) notes that their interviews were otherwise open-ended even though their interests or “enterprise” dictated and designed their interviews. In spite of this, they felt they had to give their informants the freedom to “explore their situation and experience in fully open-ended ways [...] because how informants tell the story of their work is essential to the analysis that defines the problematic of the second stage” (Smith, 1987 p. 187).

Rapley (2009) underlines the importance of analyzing and discussing the researcher’s role during an interview, particularly in the way they ask questions. This is important to note
during the interview processes due to the role of the “passive interviewer” as the ideal-in-practice; in reality, the interviewer is not a passive subject speaking to an active object (the interviewee) as an interview is a dialogue between two people (p. 316). As Smith (1987) continues about her work with Griffith,

They spoke very fully and freely and for the most part very concretely. They controlled the ways in which their accounts were sequences, the temporal juxtapositions and continuities, their narrative method. The terms they used were theirs and not outs. We had certain topics we wanted to cover, but we were not held to specific questions (p. 187).

This process came to me somewhat naturally, as I realized I had engaged in these practices before Smith’s The Everyday World as Problematic. This sentiment is also carried over in Young and Tardiff’s (1992) article titled “Interviewing: Two Sides of the Story” where the dual perspectives of the researcher-interviewer and the interviewee are presented and reflected upon. My discussions with my participants were unique, in that each conversation felt new even if some of them may have shared similar perspectives when answering some questions.

Generally, I did not expect my participants to speak in theory (by using words like charity, discourse, or different approaches to service, for example). However, like Smith (1987), I aimed to “persuade people to talk about the everyday worlds in which they are active” (p. 188).

Certainly, some participants were more comfortable with me than others may have been. I saw this ease verbally through their comfort with sharing personal details and taking further interest in my research through suggestions or questions about the project or my own background in housing. It certainly can be acknowledged that generally, the four participants whom I saw in person for these discussions were able to speak to me for longer and the interviews naturally felt more personal, unlike most of the interviews conducted via phone. However, I had offered the choice to participants since they were contributing their time to speak with me. Yet I am honoured to say that all the participants were at least intrigued by the ideas I hope to present...
through this thesis: they all requested the summary document that will be made available to them after the completion and approval of this thesis.

Assumptions in Research

As part of this research, I analyzed the assumptions prevalent in the housing research that dominates the theoretical field and impacts the work carried out in practice. However, I have to examine my own assumptions first, so that I am aware of what I may believe to be generally true aside from the arguments presented here. Firstly, I consider social housing and homelessness are connected to each other. I maintain them as separate as much as possible but I have used the terms interchangeably throughout this thesis, as I feel that homelessness is what makes the lack of affordable, adequate, and safe housing visible. However, as I explain later, they often dealt with differently, as best exemplified by the different government initiatives and community organizations that deal with social housing and homelessness as separate exclusive social problems.

I also believe that housing is important. I have had limited interaction with people experiencing poverty, but as van Manen (1997) puts it "we feel a special sorrow for the homeless because we sense that there is a deeper tragedy involved than merely not having a roof over one's head" (p.102). Theoretically, the reasoning behind social housing seems like a good idea, and I believe that people do not choose to be homeless, as Natalie elaborated for me when talking about homelessness in the community:

I’ve not met a lot of people in my life who enjoy being homeless. [...] There’s lots of people who are engaged in that and that’s the sort of cycle that they’re in their lives but you know, the vast majority of people wanna feel grounded, they wanna feel that they have [something], that they’re living in a space that’s safe and that it’s well-maintained and that they feel part of the community. Certainly that it’s safe and all that kind of good stuff but that I think most people really, whether it’s the dream is appropriate from a political perspective or not, people dream about owning their own homes, something that’s tangible for them. I think that for lots
of folks who wind up there, that would be a dream they’re never going to actualize but they certainly would love to be able to have home ownership; that would be important to them (Natalie, personal communication, August 11, 2010).

However, I would wonder how many people actually feel that it is as much a priority as other ways to address poverty. Therefore, if we also sense this sorrow, we have to look deeper to find why so little has changed in how we think about homelessness and social housing.

**Limitations within Research Process**

As this project is a Masters’ of Arts thesis, there were certainly limitations present within the project that affect the research process, most notably of time and resources. This limits then what I am able to explore and do in my research. I had initially required ten to twelve interviews but due to the time constraints, I was not able to conduct interviews beyond the month of August as I was to hand in this report as per certain deadlines. However, I am content with the material presented here, particularly as I realize that no amount of interviews will ever feel like enough.

With regards to the interviews, my only limitations were that since each participant’s experiences, and therefore ideals, fit within certain environments and contexts, I had to ensure that I purposely hide certain pieces of information – such as the municipalities in which they are located and the organizations for which they work – in order to conceal their identities. This affects the way I can illustrate the context in which these activists operate.
Chapter Three: Ontario’s Focus On Service In Social Housing

There are almost 1,500 non-profit housing providers and almost 300 housing cooperatives that provide 267,888 social housing units in Ontario, by the last count done by the Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association in February 2009. Overall, in the social housing stock, 33.5% of units are found in organizations that were created by combining local housing corporations and municipal non-profit organizations during the downloading process from the province to its municipalities. However, some local housing corporations and municipal non-profits have been able to remain separate, though they constitute a smaller portion of the housing available (about 19.1%). Private non-profit corporations are organizations owned and managed independently by organizations like faith groups, service clubs, and community agencies; and these provide 31.1% of social housing in the province.

Local housing corporations, municipal non-profits, and private non-profits are organized in similar ways. Like many other community agencies and non-profit organizations, all of these municipal and private non-profit corporations have professional staff and a volunteer Board of Directors. They provide rental housing, where rents are determined based on tenants’ incomes (this is known as rent-geared-to-income housing) and a few provide units capped at market-value rents. Most importantly, they all receive funds from municipal, provincial, or federal programs to bridge that gap between actual costs and tenant rents. Some non-profit groups also provide services for their residents, particularly when they belong to vulnerable populations such as the elderly or people with disabilities, in order to address the realities of their target groups. However, supportive housing units only constitute a small minority of units and are unable to accommodate the true need that exists for such supports.

In Ontario, 83.6% of social housing units are based in non-profit organizations as described above, while the other 16.4% is made available in housing cooperatives. The Co-
operative Housing Federation (CHF) of Canada states that about half of the housing cooperatives in Ontario were developed under federal government programs; while the other half were created under provincial housing programs and follow the regulations set out in Ontario’s Social housing Reform Act. All cooperatives are non-profit organizations as well and so they too have a Board of Directors. Unlike the rental units in the non-profit sector, residents own and manage their own units in the cooperative corporation though they do not have individual ownership rights as they would in a condominium complex for example. Regardless, this fundamental difference in corporate structure means that members have more say in how their housing is managed and administered than is possible in other social housing models.

All of these forms of social housing, however, are subject to many of the same regulations, particularly in terms of the types of applicants that they take in. They also all take their residents from a specific pool of applicants in the provincially mandated coordinated access system organized by coordinated access centres or housing registries across Ontario. These centres manage the waiting lists for all social housing providers in the area through one common application form and consistent information about eligibility criteria, allowing applicants to apply to multiple social housing providers with one document. The exception to this is that some organizations choose not to take applicants from the general pool and may instead require direct applications to those housing projects.

On the other hand, there is very little information on how many organizations are operating within the realms of housing activism and advocacy in Ontario. To exemplify this gap in knowledge about housing activism in Ontario, the Wellesley Institute’s online interactive map is supposed to show local housing initiatives across Canada on their website. It differentiates between these initiatives as falling under policy and information, service providers, shelters,
networks, and resource links. For Ontario, it pulled up approximately 51 items to look at, most of which are service providers. Additionally, the overwhelming majority of activity it showed was unevenly concentrated in the City of Toronto, especially when it came to other functions outside of service providers. When I was speaking to my participants, Ira mentioned these difficulties in seeing social housing as a social movement for people who work outside of the Greater Toronto Area like herself. Most of the activity happens in Toronto, but she has a more urgent caseload requiring her attention as one of the few local housing agencies (personal communication, August 5, 2010).

According to PovNet, an online resource that aims to build an anti-poverty community on the web, there are 17 housing advocacy organizations in Ontario. Combined with the 18 organizations that I identified from the Homeless Hub’s website and others I may not have identified specifically in this count, I estimate there are approximately fifty to sixty organizations that could fit into this broader category of housing activism and advocacy in Ontario. Yet, as mentioned earlier, there are about 1,800 housing providers (both not-for-profit and cooperative organizations), leading to a very big gap in between these two distinct parts of the sector.

These advocacy and activist agencies could be operating locally by focusing on a specific municipality or region, or these could be looking at the province as a whole. However, the same provincial regulations bind local municipalities and regions. Therefore, many of the same issues come up across the social housing sector in Ontario, particularly through organizations that already cater to the service sector as well like the Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association (ONPHA) and networks like the Social housing Coordinated Access Network of Ontario (SHCANO). For the agencies gathered under these networks, their primary work may often

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3 The Wellesley Institute had initiated the map with a few dozen initiatives. However, the growth and expansion of the map is largely dependent on users adding to it so I use this map only as a starting point. The map can be accessed at [http://www.wellesleyinstitute.com/local-housing-initiatives-across-canada/](http://www.wellesleyinstitute.com/local-housing-initiatives-across-canada/).
focus on servicing clients through housing provision and may engage in advocacy only on the side; or their work may look at housing as one issue within the larger context of poverty; or it could be a bit of both.

Yet this failure to notice the role of activists in the housing sector as a distinct group of people with a specific role to play is not new. For example, Sousa and Quarter’s (2003) stakeholder analysis of non-profit housing models in Ontario is divided into two groups: primary stakeholders, who are critical to an organization or sector’s operations and mandate, and secondary stakeholders, who may support but are not necessary to the organization or sector. They use these definitions in terms of the role that the individuals serve in the system but they note that the status of the groups can change according to the changes in function that come about with different policies, funding models, and housing patterns. Since the unit level in their analysis was the organization level, the primary stakeholder group for each not-for-profit housing organization included the tenants (or “users of the service”), board of directors, professional management, non-market housing associations and development groups, and government housing agencies (2004). Their secondary stakeholder groups consisted of independent funding organizations or foundations, other community agencies, and community representatives. They also note that the significance of a particular stakeholder changes in the type of social housing, such as the role of government in local housing corporations and/or municipal non-profit organizations. In this case, government employees and appointees also serve on the board of directors as representatives (2004); and so the role is significantly larger than in other not-for-profit housing organizations. I can presume that community agencies and representatives would include activists but the fact that their role is not significantly explicit is disconcerting.
I believe the social housing sector in Ontario focuses almost too much on the development and service provision, while ignoring other means of moving along actions taken to improve and build upon the social housing system. Kemeny (1988) points out that “housing research is a vast field, ranging from ethnological studies of behaviour in local housing milieu and the psychology of living in flats on the one hand to wind-tunnel studies of construction and design and other technical and engineering problems on the other” (p. 208). Having a place to call home is about more than the architecture, engineering, and finances. “Home” is a place that holds many social, economic, and political implications for us as individuals, as families, as communities, and as a society. Therefore, the research and actions taken around social housing (the housing meant to assist the marginalized and consequently economically disadvantaged) should be looking at more than one side of the equation when looking at addressing poverty and/or homelessness.

In this thesis, I have to emphasize that I include people who are inadequately and under-housed within this category of “homeless” as they may still be looking for a better unit to call “home”. Such a situation develops a state of temporality, a feeling that one has not yet reached that level of comfort that should ideally be in every home. Cathy Crowe (2007) puts it best: “The issue of charitable relief efforts in times of crisis has been controversial. Charity is certainly necessary in the immediate crisis until the appropriate level of government can respond. But for fifteen years?” (p.15). However, authors like Stapleton (2007) and Hulchanski (2001, 2005) have written that social housing in Ontario was not originally designed for alleviating poverty, since wait lists continue to grow while intergenerational poverty persists even with the provision of social housing. I also add that governments, as elected and appointed representatives of the communities they serve, also serve as homelessness makers; by the policies enacted and
programs implemented in Ontario since the social housing was initially established since the Second World War.

In this chapter, I start with a historical overview of social housing in Ontario, where my timeline starts from the end of World War II and the establishment of the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC). As the federal government’s crown agency to implement many of their housing policies and programs, the Corporation plays a big role in how housing operates in Ontario, even if their role is often unrecognized. I certainly admire their research collaborations and celebrations of good ideas and best practices; but their purpose, to a great degree, is to carry out the Government of Canada’s housing agenda, especially in regards to funding provision.

I then move onto briefly discussing the social housing service sector in Ontario, before I explain the failure of the affordable housing system to address the stigma of poverty. I point to this stigma as the starting place for maintaining homelessness by making the existence of poverty invisible, undesirable, and illegal. Poverty is not ideal by any means. However, this aversion becomes directed towards the people who are poor instead; by attempting to hide the fact that they exist, by engaging in not-in-my-backyard approaches, and by refusing to legalize alternative forms of shelter. That brings us to the end of the chapter when we discuss the consequences of looking at housing with only a service-oriented perspective.

A Historical Overview of Social Housing in Ontario

Social work, urban planning, and public health are just some of the fields of practice that have been fashioned, in part, by the need for social housing. In the mid- to late-1800s, the

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4 I use poverty in this context because I believe homelessness is the visibility of poverty, when you can see that that state of poverty clearly for what it is because it is when poverty is the most extreme.
tradition of charity in social work started to take root in Canada with organizations and movements like the Charity Organization Society (COS) and the Settlement House Movement (SHM), initiated primarily by wealthier women “who responded to the [social distress of the] underprivileged through charity work based in Christian morality” (Jennisen and Lundy, 2011 p.2). This work was accepted as most suitable since it was seen as “an extension of the caring role assigned” to women, especially since these charity responses initially were organized to focus on “the problems of neglected delinquent children and chronic poverty” (2011 p.2). Since then, this approach has been extended to other populations like people with disabilities, seniors, youth, immigrants and refugees, and women.

Yet the attitude towards poverty that left it to the third sector to address is not new. Upper Canada, or what is now present-day Ontario, had adopted English civil law before Confederation; each of the four provinces had already established their own approaches to social policy and programs (Jennisen and Lundy, 2011 p.3). However, the province also excluded the poor law explicitly, meaning that the responsibility for the poor rested with the individual, the family, or the community. If this failed, voluntary associations and/or fraternal organizations and agencies would have to step in to assist people in poverty (Jennisen and Lundy, 2011 p.3), since there were no government agencies or programs put in place.

According to Leung (2003), “the planning profession has its roots in the problem of “workers’ housing” and the provision of housing has always been at the centre of planners’ preoccupations” (p.11). Since urban planning is an administrative function of local and higher authorities, governments have always had a role to play within the housing sector; since the first Canadian housing program was established in 1919 to help veterans buy homes after World War I (Hulchanski, 2006 p.225). The Government of Canada passed An Act to Assist Returned Soldiers in Settling upon the Land in 1919, following the passing of An Act to Assist Returned
Soldiers in Settling upon the Land and to Increase Agricultural Production in 1917; both of which were attempts to integrate veterans back into civilian life in Canada (Neary, 2004).

However, concern for housing – particularly inadequate housing – had been on the public agenda for a while. In the earlier part of the twentieth century, public health was increasingly becoming a cause for concern. As noted by social housing activist and academic John Bacher (Purdy, 1993 p 141): “an increasing proportion of the workforce [was] face with the choice of accepting shelter that was overcrowded, poorly serviced, or below minimal building-code and sanitary standards, or sacrificing other necessities of life” (Purdy, 1998 p. 497). Findings like this from Bacher’s work on the effects of the “economic boom” on working-class housing conditions at the turn of the century, coupled with the sensational publicity in newspapers (Purdy, 1998 p. 497), helped the emergence of “the modern public health project” or the public health movement at the turn of the twentieth century. Some of the first public health measures taken by municipalities within housing involved building codes, sanitary controls, and the power granted to local officials “to inspect, condemn, clean, or destroy what they considered inferior dwellings” (Purdy, 1998 p. 497).

Yet as stressed by Purdy (1998), the public health movement and the actions taken there had not been extended into publicly funded housing provision; until the “housing crisis of the war period” (p. 498). At this point, the ideology and justification for direct, public intervention in the housing market took hold with the legislative and regulatory actions that followed (Purdy, 1998 p. 499). This included the 1935 Dominion Housing Act and the 1938 Housing Act. While the 1935 Act aimed to assist in improving housing conditions and the economic recovery, the 1938 Act replaced it to focus more on promoting new construction and repairing and modernizing existing housing stock (Villiard, 2001; CanadaMortgage, 2011). However, it was
not until the end of World War II that programs had been developed and established particularly in the form of social housing.

**The 1940s to the 1960s: The End of the Second World War to the Establishment of CAP**

The 1940s brought about the end of the Second World War after six years, along with a wave of immigration from Europe. After the end of World War II in 1945, the federal government had a significant impact on cities, though there was no particular strategy in place to coordinate the programs and policies implemented that would affect urban affairs (Hulchanski, 2006 p.234-5). However, before the official end of the World War, the federal government had enacted the 1944 National Housing Act to address concerns over incomes, family formation, and urbanization (CanadaMortgage, 2011) as soldiers started to return home from the War. Under this Act, the Government of Canada established the crown agency, the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) on January 1 1945 to house returning veterans and to take the lead on national housing programs. These programs and policies were developed out of CMHC’s basic functions to administer the National Housing Act and the Home Improvement Loans Guarantee Act, and to provide discounting facilities for loan and mortgage companies (CMHC History). However, the CMHC was required to focus these public funds almost exclusively towards the homeownership sector (Hulchanski, 2006 p.224). As Hulchanski (2006) frames it, this Act essentially provided slum clearance to cities (p.234), which by creating the CMHC, encouraged the growth of the suburbs where veterans could build families in homes they had purchased under the programs implemented through this Act.

According to Sousa and Quarter (2003), this is when the first transition they identified in the Canadian government’s involvement in social housing took place after World War II, when the government started to own and administer “non-equity housing” in the form of public housing (p.560). However, their critique is that instead of offering incentives to not-for-profit
organizations and housing cooperatives who specifically focus on social housing, the government’s main approach to encouraging homeownership and building social housing was through financial incentives to businesses within the private sector since the early 1940s (p.561). As noted throughout this section, this issue has come up at several points, particularly more recently as part of federal economic efforts.

By the end of the 1940s, the federal government had created social and rental housing programs (CMHC History), something that had not happened since the veterans’ housing program in 1919. Yet, Hulchanski (2006) highlights that after the 1940s, the social security welfare state emerged alongside the social assistance welfare state. The former kind of welfare is about providing social insurance to protect against recognized social conditions like poverty and unemployment, whereas the latter instead focuses on assisting individuals and families who are already facing such conditions. However, he argues that the social security welfare state was never meant to be “an anti-poverty welfare state” (pg. 237), where the social insurance could also have been guaranteed to people using social assistance in order to allow them to build assets on the side.

The 1950s were marked with the Industrial Revolution, the Baby Boom, and the increasing linkages to the United States as Canada started to separate its foreign policy away from the British. This was also a period highlighted by the city building efforts that took place, as CMHC launched new programs for loan insurance and public housing projects in order to keep up the with shifts that took place in design and construction and in policies and programs available (CMHC History). On the design front, housing construction and designs went from bungalows towards more pace, convenience, and modern living (CMHC History). Within communities, the federal government started providing grants to encourage cities to tear down their dilapidated buildings, and to support the establishment of municipally owned housing
corporations (CMHC History). For example, the City of Toronto’s Regent Park became the first project built under this program in 1950. This focus on “urban development” also became a priority in the federal government’s funding and direction under the 1954 National Housing Act (Hulchanski, 2006 p.234).

In 1951, the federal government expanded on the National Housing Act (NHA) to allow chartered banks to enter the NHA lending field. Prior to this change, mortgage funds were provided by the government or selected lenders, who mainly consisted of insurance companies (CanadaMortgage, 2011). The federal government then introduced the Mortgage Loan Insurance program to take on mortgage risks with a 25% down payment (CMHC History), with assistance from the Mortgage Insurance Fund introduced in 1954 (Hulchanski, 2006 p.224). This meant home ownership became more accessible as an option to individuals and households (CMHC History), as the supply of mortgages available increased.

As the physical landscape began to change in urban areas though, the cultural landscape in Canada also began to change, most notably because of the Immigration Act’s new openness to non-Europeans. By the 1960s, the federal governments of both Canada and the United States realized that larger public housing projects were not feasible because they were too expensive to build and maintain. The negative publicity that many of the larger public housing projects (Sousa and Quarter, 2006 p.562) received also were hindering the use and necessity for social housing, since they were looked upon badly for the ghetto effects they would create.

Perhaps because of the negative publicity, and the growing concerns around the environment, the federal government now, through their arms-length corporation CMHC, shifted their focus from municipal planning and development towards helping cities deal with rapid urban growth taking place (CMHC History). This meant that their work was no longer proactively taking place and instead was reacting to issues on the ground. Additionally, the
National Housing Act as enacted in 1964 NHA was about “urban renewal” (Hulchanski, 2006 p.234), taking it away from the development focus and instead looking at the need to “improve” on urban areas.

During the 1960s, it became clear that many federal programs were actually urban programs, which technically infringed on the provincial jurisdiction of municipal affairs (Hulchanski, 2006 p.235). To correct this, policy changes in 1963 took place, where a program required joint provincial funding with the federal government. The federal government began to provide directly subsidized rental housing for low-income households (Hulchanski, 2006 p.223-4). With the ability to do more, the Ontario Housing Corporation (OHC) developed most of the public housing in Ontario over the course of the next ten years, which was to be managed then by the local housing authorities (LHAs). Between 1964 and 1975, the OHC would create 84,145 housing units in Ontario (ONPHA, 2008).

This increase in housing was possible, in part, due to different funding programs like the Canadian Assistance Plan (CAP). “Considered by many as a keystone of the Canadian welfare state”, the legislation behind the CAP passed in 1966, required the federal government to take on half the cost of social programs that fell under the provinces, mainly social assistance (Drislane and Parkinson, 2002). In this manner, the federal government could set standards for provincial social programs to ensure consistency and quality across Canada (Drislane and Parkinson, 2002). Jennisen and Lundy (2011) write that the policy came about easily between the two orders of government, as the “ultimate in cooperative federalism” (p.248). They noted that the CAP had also incorporated the principles from the Canadian Welfare Council brief “Social Security for Canada” (2011 p.248), suggesting that they were able to take into account multiple perspectives and considerations when developing the CAP policy and program. Two years later, it was suggested, in Canadian Association of Social Workers’s 1968 comprehensive brief to the Federal
Task Force on Housing and Urban Development, that the funding arrangement used for the CAP should also be applied towards housing. This would mean that the federal government would take the lead for financing the program but would engage in partnerships with the provinces and municipalities for some of the costs and for the policy’s administration (Jennisen and Lundy, 2011 p.254).

The 1960s was also a decade of firsts. With rising prosperity, houses were becoming even bigger and basements were now being used as living spaces, adding to the square footage of the average household (CMHC History). These changes were showing within the community, where urban design was becoming bolder. Thanks to increased partnerships with not-for-profit sector organizations, public housing was being integrated into communities. The first housing cooperatives and multi-unit apartment buildings were starting to appear here as well (CMHC History), though cooperative legislature would come about later in the 1970s.

The 1970s: Housing and Urban Policies in the Trudeau Years

Much of the policies and programs adopted and implemented in the 1970s seemed to encourage homeownership, just as Hulchanski (2001, 2006) asserts in his works. These included the exemptions made regarding capital gains taxes, home ownership and maintenance assistance programs, and the focus on neighbourhood improvement. One can agree that the business of selling and owning homes supports many industries (providing employment and contributing to the economy) and to own one’s home is certainly a valuable asset that only appreciates over time. However, this has sometimes been done at the expense of renters, as funds and efforts that could help them are instead redirected towards those who already have the upper hand.

When the capital gains tax was introduced in the early 1970s, effective lobbying ensured that homeowners selling their primary residences were exempt from these taxes. This meant that the owner would have paid no tax on any profit made between buying and selling the house if
they had occupied it as their main residence (Hulchanski, 2006 p.224). This created yet another
tax break for those who can afford to pay more taxes; while creating a large shortfall in funds
that could be used towards assisting renters in both private and social housing units.

CMHC’s main role would be for them to act as a guarantor of subsidized mortgage
(Sousa and Quarter, 2005, p. 564) – “direct mortgage financing” “which guaranteed lower
mortgage rates” (p.563); while supporting these other federal initiatives and agendas. CMHC
also introduced an Assisted Home Ownership Program in 1971, with the intention to stimulate
the private sector market and to appeal to particularly first time homebuyers (CMHC History). A
major concern in the private sector was the affordability of homeownership; and developers
reacted to this by reducing lot sizes and increasing the density of housing units created in each
development (CMHC History). A similar program, called the Winter Warmth Program, was
launched in the same year; in order to address the needs of Aboriginals and the northern and
rural portions of Canada (CMHC History). Since heating is a large part of the maintenance of
homeownership in these areas, CMHC may have felt funds would prove more valuable in this
manner rather than if resources were directed towards encouraging developing and purchases. A
few years later, CMHC introduced the RRAP program in 1974 to address issues of health and
safety and concerns for access for people with disabilities (CMHC History; Hulchanski, 2005
p.11). This, too, aided in the deinstitutionalization movement to help people with disabilities
move into the community by addressing barriers in the built environment to some degree and by
bringing back housing stock that was otherwise unsuitable and inadequate for living.

Canada had continued into the 1970s with new social and environmental concerns and
ideologies. Pierre Trudeau also served as Prime Minister for most of the decade, and his interests
in participatory democracy and a just society were evident in his work, even though this often
favoured the role of the federal government over that of the provinces. It had then become a
matter of politics at this point when discussing the federal role in urban affairs and housing. In January 1973, the urban minister argued at the Federal-Provincial Conference on Housing that:

housing and urban programs are "matters of national concern"; that block funding would "clearly weaken the Federal Government's role in providing leadership and co-ordination in housing and urban programs across Canada"; and that housing "has obvious social and economic impacts on the country -- and is relevant even to the question of national unity" (Hulchanski, 2006 p.231; originally from Canada, Ministry of State for Urban Affairs, 1973 p.8).

The 1973 National Housing Act, in turn, emphasized this position by focussing on "neighbourhood improvement" (Hulchanski, 2006 p.234), by encouraging the development and provision of other forms of housing (Sousa and Quarter, 2005 p.562). Before the late 1960s and early 1970s, there was no condominium form of ownership housing (Hulchanski, 2006 p.227). Since the provincial legislation around condominiums was put in place (Hulchanski, 2006 p.227), rental housing providers have had to compete for residential sites with condominium developers, who can easily outbid them (Hulchanski, 2005 p.6). Sousa and Quarter (2003) also point to the second transition of the government’s role in housing that came about with the formation of partnerships between levels of government and non-profit organizations to build housing (Sousa and Quarter, 2005 p.560). This led to the establishment of the cooperative sector when it was encouraged to extend to and thrive in the housing industry (p.564), in addition to the existing non-governmental social housing sector. Hence, by the mid-1970s, many federal public housing programs had been replaced with decentralized, community-based programs provided by third sector organizations (p.224).

In the mid-1970s, housing starts and rental starts fell rapidly and so did vacancy rates. The government’s concern was reflected in the federal budgets for 1974 and 1975 when they introduced several policies and programs (Hulchanski, 2006 p.242), including those implemented by CMHC. However, these usually tend to favour homeownership, which is essentially taking away responsibility from the government and placing it with the private and/or
not-for-profit sectors. As capitalism was reinventing itself as neoliberalism around this time, the governments were also being pressured by “conservative and business forces” to cut back social programs and services because they argued that the government was overspending in these areas and “creating an unreasonable reliance on the state” (Jennisen and Lundy, 2011, p. 268). Efficiency, private enterprises, and open markets are some of the concerns and characteristics in neoliberalism used to justify the need to minimize the role of the state in areas outside of rights protection. The appeasement, then, seemed to include reducing public spending and shifting responsibility back to the communities (including the individuals and families affected) and the voluntary sector, though this was “reversing a trend” of developing social welfare state that had been progressing since the Depression of the 1930s (2011, p. 268).

In 1978, the first federal social housing program began (ONPHA, 2008). From 1978 to 1985, the federal government would lead the funding and administration of social housing in Ontario, including the 52,189 units that were created during this time period (ONPHA, 2008). At the same time, the province and municipalities were providing partial assistance for rent supplements (including some money to private landlords) and some grant money to lower operating costs for 10 to 15 years (ONPHA, 2008).

By the end of the decade, in 1979, the Ministry of the State of Urban Affairs (or MSUA) was abolished at the federal level (Hulchanski, 2006 p.235) since they wanted to be sensitive to the province’s influence here (p.241). After this, the federal government directly funded new projects built by non-profit organizations and municipal housing corporations (p.234).

*The 1980s: The New Face of Homelessness*

The 1980s were ushered in with higher homeownership and rental prices, due to significant spending cuts and the rise of baby boomers in the market (Hulchanski, 2006 p.226). Despite these high interest rates, houses kept getting bigger; yet people were more interested in
renovations than in purchasing new homes, comparing businesses and services against their budgets more carefully (CMHC History). The economic downtown was of big concern, yet as Hulchanski (2006) states: “public policy decisions since the mid-1980s have further privileged the ownership sector” (p.226). In 1981 and 1982, the budgets announced a number of new federal housing initiatives designed to “spur the recovery of the housing industry” (Hulchanski, 2006 p.242). Two months after Progressive Conservative Brian Mulroney was elected Prime Minister with the largest majority government in Canadian history, the November 1984 economic statement reduced the number of nonprofits and rural and native housing subsidy units, eliminated RRAP money available to non-profits, and reduced the research budget for CMHC (Hulchanski, 2001 p.A2). Hulchanski (2001) estimates the overall impact of this move alone stands at about $217.8 million (p.A2).

The following year, the federal government stopped their housing programs in 1985 when the recession set in and interest rates went up to 20%, making funding for lower mortgages expensive (ONPHA, 2008). Therefore, as a way of cutting costs, the federal government downloaded housing onto the provinces (Carter, 1997; Sousa and Quarter, 2006). This meant that the province of Ontario and its municipalities then became the dominant source of funding (Sousa and Quarter, 2006 p.562). The province responded by starting up their own housing programs in 1986, and by building 37,844 units between 1986 and 1995 (ONPHA, 2008). Consequently, this allowed the federal government to diminish their role in funding, while they let CMHC offset a percentage of the costs of the program due to the changes (ONPHA, 2008). All of these changes impact the private and public rental housing markets, taking away funds from programs that helped lower-income families and individuals while making concessions for people who could already afford homeownership.
In the meantime, CMHC continued to play a large role in financing housing development (mostly in homeownership and mortgages) and in research and development. In 1986, they introduced the Mortgaged Backed Securities (MBS) as an alternative to investing in individual residential mortgages. The MBS helped to ensure a ready supply of low-cost funds for housing money and to keep mortgage lending costs as low as possible for homeowners (CMHC History). Additionally, they continued to work on their research and development on indoor air quality, ventilation, and moisture, which helped to bring about new products and practices (CMHC History). In 1983, CMHC was awarded the United Nation’s 1982 Peace Medal for promoting better understanding amongst the Economic Commission of Europe nations as a host for a study tour on housing, building, and planning (CMHC History); and in 1988, the CMHC established the National Housing Awards (CMHC History).

Most writers cite the 1980s as when homelessness – in its contemporary version – really became visible (Crowe, 2007; Hulchanski, 2006, Hulchanski, 2009). Prior to this point, homelessness looked a lot different, as described by Hulchanski (2009):

Before the 1980s, large numbers of people in developed countries were, in contrast, not unhoused, not homeless. They had housing, although for many, that housing was in poor condition. There were also some transient single men in many cities who were assisted by organizations like the Salvation Army. These men were referred to at times as homeless, though they generally lived in poor-quality “skid-row” rooming houses and flophouses (p.2).

Since the need to find housing in general was not as dire, the focus had been on finding better housing, as an alternative to inadequate housing. Therefore, until the recession hit many Western countries in the 1980s, “urban planners, public health officials, social workers and related professionals were focused on rehousing people into better housing and neighbourhoods” (Hulchanski, 2009 p.3). However, action – in the way of public policy and programs – had yet to take place, even if this was necessity had been recognized: in 1987, Councillor Roger Hollander tried to bring forward a motion to Metro Council to declare Toronto a homeless disaster zone.
because it was a public health emergency (Crowe, 2007 p.22). It was also clear to people in other professions, such as those who became “street nurses” around this time, that there was a need to cater to the homeless population and that social housing could play a role in alleviating many of the problems that came with homelessness (Crowe, 2007). However, public awareness about the existence of poverty continued to grow, particularly into the 1990s, as the face of homelessness became more visible and had started to change.

*The 1990s: The War on Poverty Continues*

Yet, even into the 1990s, the growing homelessness, and the public awareness surrounding it, did not result in government actions that even attempted to result in fewer homeless people (Hulchanski, 2006 p.243). The official opposition formed the National Liberal Caucus Task Force on Housing, “in response to requests from numerous citizens groups, interested associations and members of the National Liberal Caucus, that realistic solutions to the present crisis be presented directly to the Conservative government” (Martin and Fontana, 1990). Chaired by future Prime Minister Paul Martin and Joe Fontana, the “official Opposition critic for Housing and Urban Affairs and Associate critic” respectively, the Task Force released twenty-five key recommendations in May 1990 (Hulchanski, 2006 p.232-3). In September 1991, when the federal government tabled proposals for constitutional change, housing and “municipal and urban affairs” were two of the six sectors that were offered up as exclusively provincial domains (Hulchanski, 2006 p.229). It was determined that these were “more properly the responsibilities of the provinces”. This was ratified then in August 1992’s Charlottetown Accord (Hulchanski, 2006 p.224). In 1992, the federal government also created the First Home Loan Insurance Program, a temporary program which would later became permanent in 1998 (Hulchanski, 2006 p.224). At the same time, the 1992 federal budget introduced the Home Buyer’s Plan to allow potential homeowners to use up to $20,000 in tax-sheltered retirement saving as part of a down
payment (p.241). The emphasis on homeownership continued: in 1999, the National Housing Act and the CMHC Act were modified to introduce a 5% down payment program after the pilot initially took off in 1992 (CMHC History).

This was all taking place as the federal government was ending social housing programs (Hulchanski, 2006; Quarter and Sousa, 2003) and as the effects of homelessness were showing up in the media and in documents like the “Street Health Report” (Crowe, 2007 p. 10). By 1993, the federal government had stopped all direct funding (Sousa and Quarter, 2006 p.568) after announcing that they would not provide any new funding for social housing (ONPHA, 2008; Hulchanski, 2006 p.234). The Liberals were back in power but they ended up implementing the previous Conservative government’s termination of social housing supply program, failing to address any of their own recommendations from the 1990 Task Force report (Hulchanski, 2006 p.232-3).

The funding cuts here were also eliminating key welfare programs that, along with social housing, supported the social safety net. Federal Finance Minister Michael Wilson’s 1990 budget imposed the “cap on CAP”: a 5% ceiling on annual increases of CAP funding for British Columbia, Alberta, and Ontario – the three richest provinces (Jennisen and Lundy, 2011 p.278). Later, the money from CAP and the Established Programs Financing became a single fund called the Canada Health and Social Transfer (CHST); setting the process, of ridding CAP, in motion in February 1995 (Jennisen and Lundy, 2011 p.279).

After the 1995 election in Ontario, the new Progressive Conservative government placed a freeze on building new housing and cancelled existing contracts, in the hopes that private sector would take care of it (Sousa and Quarter, 2006 p.568). They abruptly cancelled provincial housing programs, but continued to supply a limited amount of funding for supportive housing (ONPHA, 2008). At this point, a third transition was taking place: there was a fundamental shift
towards a public housing model and simultaneously in public housing towards social housing. In essence, a convergence of non-equity housing models into a single model called social housing was taking place (Sousa and Quarter, 2006 p.560), because the relationship between governments and non-profit organizations and cooperatives started to change in the mid-1990s with these changes in funding and administration. There was also the influence of neoliberal, market-driven policies at play, coupled with the influence of the United States’ experience of devolving housing5, as the Canadian government started to rethink its own role at this time (Sousa and Quarter, 2006 p.568; Hackworth and Moriah, 2006).

This would become the first extended period without government support in about 50 years (ONPHA, 2008). I am positive there are many who can attest to the horrors of operating in housing, education, healthcare or any other social sector, within what I have come to understand as “the Harris years”. Some lost their jobs or businesses, had to go on strike, or struggled to make their jobs work; while the general public watched the social safety net in Ontario unravel. Many programs came to an end, like the Canada Assistance Plan in 1996 (Hulchanski, 2005 p.7), while demand for social services increased, as Crowe (2007) attests to seeing the number of homeless people in drop-in centres double months after the 1995 provincial welfare cuts (p.18). One of these cuts included 17,000 units of housing under development – “units that could have housed up to 40,000 people” (Crowe, 2007 p.12).

In March 1996, the federal budget was released, where the government announced the transfer of administration of federal social housing to provinces and territories. (Hulchanski, 2006 p.230). This marked the end of 50 years of direct involvement from the federal

5 As the United States of America was emerging and becoming the model for modernity (Goldberg, 2005 p.91), Canada had started to shift away from the influence of the British and had started to align itself more closely with the United States economically and within international relations. This had become particularly noticeable in the 1990s, when discussions of free trade between the countries were on the public agenda.
government. In 1999, the federal government offloaded social housing funding and administration to the provinces through a federal-provincial agreement (ONPHA, 2008). Also, in order to address the Prime Minister Jean Chretien appointed Claudette Bradshaw as the Minister Responsible for Homelessness, while the federal housing minister was not given a mandate or budget for social housing (Crowe, 2007 p.25). Bradshaw met with the National Housing and Homelessness Network (NHHN) and agreed to about half to half of their demands, from which stemmed the Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative (SCPI). However, this felt like “lip service” (Crowe, 2007, p. 25): it was clear that one of the main supports required to reduce homelessness had to be the provision of social housing, yet the federal and provincial governments had cut off their involvement with it.

The Twenty-First Century: Devolution of the Social Housing System

The negative effects had already started to show when the federal government began to withdraw their involvement by downloading social housing onto provincial governments in the 1990s. Their financial support has also waned with their roles and responsibilities in ensuring the development and provision of social housing. This impacted the social housing industry particularly when capital costs were not cheap and when environmental considerations are increasingly being taken into account through energy saving and other green measures (Carter, 1997).

However, this continued when the province decided to follow suit. In 1998, the province developed the legislation to transfer social housing to municipalities. This became the Social Housing Reform Act (SHRA) of 2000, with the reasoning that the housing administration would be most effectively provided “by local governments who are closest to the people they serve and who best understand the needs of their communities” (Sousa and Quarter, 2006 p.568). In January 2001, devolution became a reality (Sousa and Quarter, 2006 p.562). The housing system
was handed down to municipalities through the enactment of the Social Housing Reform Act (SHRA) in 2000 and the creation of 47 Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (CMSMs). Though the province still provides a good portion of the funding and they determine the administration and regulations behind the industry, they do not attach their name as the Government of Ontario as the organizational body behind the development and administration of most processes in housing. When social housing tenants have an issue with regards to the services they are being provided, they do not speak to employees of the Government of Ontario; they are instead speaking to representatives from one of the service managers. Since the higher levels of government are the actual funders, as they collect and redistribute taxes between the provinces, it becomes problematic when they would prefer not to touch the issue: “out of sight, out of mind” has become the new way to deal with social issues for higher levels of government.

Yet, as Hackworth and Moriah (2006) outline, the neoliberal premise behind the province of Ontario’s decision to download the social housing system clearly is problematic due to three factors. While senior governments downloaded responsibility onto Service Managers, they did not download the autonomy to create more flexible housing options (p. 518). Additionally, they point out that many funding requirements are difficult to fulfill without violating other conditions within the funding system (p. 519) and that social housing providers have had to look to sporadic entrepreneurism that social housing providers to become more market-oriented, by viewing their obstacles as challenges (p. 523). Therefore, the province retains a great degree of control over the social housing system in Ontario, without claiming responsibility for these issues.

Additionally, the Social Housing Reform Act changed not only the way that public not-for-profit housing (the organizations started up by municipalities and senior levels of government) worked, but also started to regulate the private not-for-profit sector. Before the SHRA, private not-for-profits and cooperatives had more autonomy from the government in
tenant selection: now, most were also required to take in people from the centralized waiting list (Sousa and Quarter, 2006 p.578).

The rest seems like history. Senior levels of government are starting to recognize the role that they could play in the provision and administration of social housing, though these changes are coming slowly and somewhat reluctantly. In 2004 and 2005, the federal budgets allocated new money for housing and municipal infrastructure (Hulchanski, 2006 p.236). Developments like the Government of Canada’s Economic Action Plan during the recession added to this issue further, by providing housing under the basis of infrastructure and economic revitalization. Because of the Economic Plan’s emphasis on “shovel-ready”, or projects that were closer to getting started and therefore required less time to acquire funds, many projects that were selected in each of these rounds were not put forth by non-profit organizations who usually would create such housing. Instead, many private developers who were looking to break into social housing as a sector were being offered deals instead as their mandates were much more flexible and willing to conform to what the government was looking for.

The problem here lies in the fact that these private organizations already have financial stability and so if funds should fall through from the Economic Plan, they may actually not cater to low-income people through social housing since they see this as a business, albeit a less profitable one. On the other hand, the not-for-profit groups have certain clients whose interests they care to serve, one of them being social housing. Yet, this will still be considered social service: after all, it serves to help the economically marginalized by directly providing housing that will be labeled as affordable to certain income levels. Clearly, the neoliberalism that informed the Harris cuts in 1995 still have a strong place in Ontario’s public policy process.

The plight of the homeless was certainly far from over. The City of Toronto was witness to the forced removal of residents from Tent City, “Toronto’s first major squatter settlement in
recent history” (Gallant, Brown, and Tremblay, 2004 p.2). Home Depot hired security guards to force the residents to vacate the site on September 24, 2002 (p.2). Some residents were able to get back some possessions, while many were unable to obtain the few belongings they had. Though many residents (if not all) were housed afterwards through a program specifically aimed at re-housing the Tent City residents (Gallant, Brown, and Tremblay, 2004 p.2), amongst the media frenzy surrounding Tent City, it was a rude awakening in society regarding the impact corporations had on individuals, especially the most disadvantaged in society.

However, there is a growing recognition within the community interested in social housing and homelessness issues, about how service work can also aggravate the effects of homelessness in particular ways. In 2000, two particular community initiatives were discontinued – Project Warmth and the Christ Church Deer Park’s Out of the Cold program. The founder for the former, businessman John Andras, felt “it was no longer an adequate response” to collect and distribute sleeping bags to the homeless. The Christ Church Deer Park instead wanted to focus on develop social housing. (2007) states these are important because “these relief efforts had been normalizing two very abnormal practices” – the public sight of homeless people and the “forced nightly migration of hundreds of people from church basement to church basement in search of a place to sleep. Sleeping bag distribution and church basements had become an excuse for City Hall not to enact emergency by-laws to open more shelters” (Crowe, 2007 p.15).

Over Time: Influences and Patterns in Social housing Policy

State theory, essentially, refers to what the state is and is not, particularly in terms of its role(s) and function(s), as the main political institution in a given area. Though there seems to be little academic consensus on this definition, Max Weber’s (1918) commonly used characterization in his 1918 lecture Politics as a Vocation defines the state “as a human
community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory”. The physicality of this force requires itself to manifest into the physical, social, economic, and political landscapes of a given territory; therefore, the effects are very real in that this plays out in observable ways. In Canada, capitalism\(^6\) has always been the approach to economic and social programs. This started with the establishment of companies like the Hudson’s Bay Corporation and promotional offers of land and work to agricultural settlers in Western Canada. It has then continued into the newest extension of capitalism: neoliberalism is the market-driven approach applied to economic and social policy, as based on neoclassical economic theories.

In turn, this has affected how social policy is conceptualized and implemented. For example, there are differences between means-tested service provision and human rights approaches, the former requiring an analytical evaluation of whether a particular individual or household is eligible for services as opposed to the latter method that emphasizes upholding human rights without the need for rigid criteria. In practice, the welfare and social housing systems in Ontario that are currently in place follow the means-tested tradition, while many activists argue for a human rights approach to delivering housing when lobbying government through efforts like Right to Housing and the Red Tent Campaign.

Since WWII, the federal government’s housing activists have been part of the national focus on achieving high and stable levels of housing starts, the number of housing units (houses, condominiums, and apartments) in the private sector on which construction has started within a particular timeframe. This concern with housing starts relates to the concern to maintain high and

\(^6\)“Capitalism is a social system based on the principle of individual rights”, thereby aiming to establish an economic system that emphasizes property rights, private and corporate ownership of production and distribution, and little to no state intervention (Landauer and Rowlands, 2001). In capitalistic societies, the state’s main role is to protect these rights.
stable levels of mass consumption then, which is unrelated to concerns over the lack of available housing (Hulchanski, 2006 p.238). The households that can afford new housing units, particularly as homeowners, are more likely to have choices available to them within the housing market. They are not experiencing or at risk of becoming homeless, with which social housing and homelessness policies and programs should be concerned.

Indeed, Canada has developed more not-for-profit housing than the United States of America since World War II (Sousa and Quarter, p.563). However, according to an Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Synthesis Report (1988), the United States’ government involvement ranked high in terms of government loans and subsidization, whereas Canada only ranked low in all categories except for subsidies (Dupuis and Goldstein, 1998). This is despite the view Canadians normally hold about themselves as a more socially involved nation, with a government that is supposedly more concerned with the welfare of its citizens, in comparison to the United States’ views on government involvement and private market interference. Though these comparisons of government involvement include 14 other countries, including 10 European nations, we still lag behind most countries in credit control and construction as well (Dupuis and Goldstein, 1998).

During the 1970s and 1980s, there was a consistent pattern of introducing short-term programs for private sector subsidies (Hulchanski, 2006 p.242). Beginning in the mid-1980s, the federal government started withdrawing transfer payments from the provinces (Hulchanski, 2006 p.235). Since the early 1990s, under the dynamics of “globalization”, the welfare state has been under a historic shift (Hulchanski, 2006 p.237). The dualism also explains the political will to help housing in the 1960s and 1970s but not in the 1980s and 1990s. The new economic realities since the early 1990s are that of “globalization”, which include things like more flexible labour markets (Hulchanski, 2006 p.240).
The issue of accountability has played a big factor in looking at the history of social housing policy in Ontario. If the Governments of Canada and Ontario are not taking as much responsibility for social housing programs, who is? It is well recognized that community groups and non-profit organizations are now playing a greater role of building and operating social housing projects. As mentioned previously, the private industry is also stepping to the challenge of developing housing that is meant to cater to low-income households, though they already cater to such clientele through rent supplement programs as a result of agreements between the Service Manager and the landlord. Individuals are also being pulled into “bear a greater share of the cost of social housing” (Carter, 1997 p. 629) through donations to these groups, particularly where private non-profit organizations with other services are concerned, and through other collective actions to build and establish social housing. Higher levels of government are also supporting more initiatives like the Government of Canada’s Economic Action Plan to build upon the private sector, all in the name of job creation and market revival. We need to consider the deeper issues that clearly aid in maintaining homelessness, beyond job creation and economic revival.

Clearly, focusing on those issues for the most part does not allow social housing to be effective in helping the homeless. Over time, “institutionally differentiated spheres were developed as professional and or bureaucratic forms that managed different aspects of the issues and problems arising for people as a total experience of living” (Smith, 1987 p.217), housing being under one jurisdiction. “If class is less visible today as a basis of struggle, it is in part at least because the institutional organization of ruling has dispersed class over a range of sites” (Smith, 1987 p.217). In order to acknowledge this, we must consider how service provision and activism play out in the social housing industry in Ontario.
Service Work in the Social Housing Context

Social housing, like many other parts of the not-for-profit sector, fits into the social economy, which as defined by the Social Economy Centre at the University of Toronto, is:

an overarching framework addressing the entire array of organizations with a social mission ranging from market-based co-operatives, community economic development corporations, and other social enterprises to nonprofits in public service to the many nonprofit mutual associations. Our initial working definition is of organizations with a social mission that either have explicit economic objectives, as is the case of market-based organizations, or that create economic value through employing people and through providing services. Our approach also emphasizes the interaction between the social economy and the private and public sectors (Social Economy Centre, Introduction).

This last point is crucial to note, as it acknowledges and accepts the presence of the private and public sectors in relation to the social economy or the third sector. The relationship with the public sector is particularly interesting as it is the part of the general economy concerned with providing basic government services and so it is not included in the social economy. Government structures came about with the establishment of settlements and collective populations and most introductory texts on the topic will historically show how the establishments of governments are, in essence, establishments of a political and social order. This also includes the initial establishment and the constant evolution of a legal system which allows for political and financial maintenance of the state and its various functions (such as the military). In turn, this structured group ensures and maintains the physical and social safety of its members. However, social housing, as we know it in Ontario, falls within both the public sector and the social economy. Hence, the role of government in the provision of social services as found in the social economy is to ensure the basic well-being of all their citizens, particularly for those that require and identify their need for additional assistance, even if organizations operating within the social economy also step up to fulfill this need.

This definition of the social economy also specifies that these organizations have a social mission and create economic value either through specific economic objectives or through
employment and services. Yet, organizations that run on volunteers and/or that engage in activism/advocacy work – instead of having paid staff and/or providing services – can also be part of the social economy as they have a social mission and are able to create a social value that impacts the economy. However, social activism differs from social service, where direction action is taken towards improving the outcomes of the current norms, and social enterprises, which operate on a social philosophy to take “direct action and generate a new and sustained equilibrium” (Martin and Osberg, 2007). Still, both social service and social enterprises provide a type of service. Instead, social activism aims to influence others to generate a new and sustained order (Martin and Osberg, 2007), often through social movements.

To clarify, I define this service model as the part of community development and social action that provides direct social services, mostly on a personal and social level instead of at a wider community level, to help individuals meet their present needs. As Rengasamy summarizes, this is the “provision of a range of services that restore and, as possible, enhance the capacity of people to meet their social obligations” (2010, p.6). In housing, the entire social housing system is the base of the social services in addressing affordable housing and homelessness, while relying simultaneously on the emergency shelter system and support services that allow people to stay in their homes like home care.

However, I maintain the assertion that we cannot rely on social services – within the service model – alone, since it clearly maintains the status quo while providing people the means to simply better their situations just enough to get by. Each of these three components of community development – social activism, social entrepreneurship, and social service – affects each other: what happens in one realm influences the others, often as a reaction or response to a series of events or to emerging discourses affecting their constituents. To take one example, the work of activists may put pressure on the government to consider certain items on the public
agenda, particularly if activists organize themselves into a social movement with large campaigns and a variety of repertoires, while standing their ground on the issues. If the targeted government and other social service agencies deem that the issue at hand requires some direction, a policy that may be formulated, adopted by legislature, and implemented would certainly impact social service providers and perhaps some social entrepreneurs who operate in that realm. In turn, the policy or other actions taken (including no action at all) may be analyzed and evaluated by stakeholders, including activists. Social activism then plays a certain role in moving along community development, particularly through the formal acknowledgement or establishment and use of social movements.

In housing, it is very clear as to what service work would entail: this ranges from the provision of housing itself to support services that are provided to clients directly in order for them to gain access to and/or to maintain their housing. This can include but is not limited to services like housing registries, housing allowances, and support services. None of these particular services provide the housing itself but instead aim to improve access to social housing by providing information on rentals to the public, individual funding to cover the shortfall between what is considered affordable and the actual rent, or services that will help keep clients in their homes.

These services though differ than the ones provided in social enterprises or activist agencies. Recall that social enterprises are about changing the equilibrium through direct action. This could perhaps look more like a business attached to a social housing project that aims to help its members gain employment skills and experience; like Eva’s Initiatives Phoenix Print Shop (also known as Eva’s Phoenix) in Toronto which provides a training program for youth living in its Phoenix housing project. Activism agencies instead aim to change thought and knowledge so would instead prepare reports, workshops, and demonstrations – amongst other
tools – in an effort to raise public awareness about issues of interest, such as organizations like the Ontario Coalition against Poverty (OCAP) and the York Region Alliance to End Homelessness (YRAEH).

**Beneficiaries of the System: the Social Housing Client in Ontario**

As established earlier in the chapter, the Social Housing Services Corporation cites particular reasons for the establishment of the social housing system in Ontario. They actually note that these benefits extend to communities as well, since the system works to assist neighbourhood strategies in replacing low-quality housing and ensure mixed-income neighbourhoods while provide new rental housing where the private sector does not. However, as SHSC also states, the housing system provides affordable rents for low-to-moderate income households; and supportive housing for population groups whose needs are not serviced by the private sector or who require additional services attached to their housing. In Ontario, certain eligibility criteria are standard across the province for all social housing applicants who want to be considered for geared-to-income housing assistance (District of Thunder Bay, 2011):

- Each member of the household is a Canadian Citizen, landed immigrant (permanent resident) or refugee;
- At least one member of the household is sixteen years old or older, and is able to live independently;
- No removal order has become enforceable against any member of the household;
- No member of the household owes money to a housing provider, under any program administered by a Service Manager or the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing; and
- No member of the household has been convicted of misrepresentation of income or a crime under the Criminal Code regarding the receipt of rent-g geared-to-income assistance.
With just this basic criteria alone, it is already being determined that only a select well-behaved group of people are allowed to take part in just the application process. In order to prove citizenship or permanent residency, for example, a person will require very specific documents, though many homeless people have no identification whatsoever due to varying circumstances. Though there are identification clinics that are now in operation for this very reason, it is highly doubtful that these records will always suffice.

As can be seen from the reasons behind the establishment of the social housing system and the criteria used as standards of eligibility to apply to the system, there is no mention yet about homelessness. However, I use the term “the homeless” to include a wide range of people who would be considered in need of social housing services including people living on the street and/or within the emergency shelter system; deemed “hard to house”; living in inadequate housing; and at risk of experiencing homelessness due to a large range of factors. This is based on the ETHOS typology put forth by European Federation of National Associations Working with the Homeless (European Commission, 2007).

Having a home can be understood as having “an adequate dwelling (or space) over which a person and his/her family can exercise exclusive possession (physical domain); being able to maintain privacy and enjoy relations (social domain) and having a legal title to occupation (legal domain)” (European Commission, 2007). By this scheme, housing situations range from rooflessness, houselessness, insecure housing, and inadequate housing. Other Canadian studies have also used this system, since Canada has no official definition of homelessness that can be applied uniformly to a greater consensus. However, the issue of definition and enumerating the homeless has certainly been on the Parliamentary agenda from time to time, particularly due to the United Nation’s pressure on examining homelessness as a national disaster. Echenberg and Jensen (2008) of the Parliamentary Information and Research Services’ Social Affairs Division
discuss that homelessness can be seen as a range of housing conditions (absolute, hidden or concealed, and relative homelessness) and/or as differing by element of time (chronic, cyclical, and temporary homelessness).

The homeless person is a visible conception, though this is most accurately observed in particular spaces. At the worst, this person is visibly roofless: they are either living rough in public or other external spaces or are living in emergency accommodations like an overnight shelter. At best, this person may be living in inadequate housing, especially in is obviously a temporary or non-conventional structure like a mobile home or a makeshift shelter (European Commission, 2007), or are living in social housing. Though each person’s living situation and the circumstances that brought them to that point differ, particular images are still conjured of this homeless person: “slackers”, “lackers”, and “unwilling victims” are the images that Rosenthal (2000) describes in his research on the distinctions between “deserving versus undeserving” images within anti-homelessness movements. He points out that these images vary in their degrees of “competency” and “ability”; and so based on those standards, spectators to this situation judge whether that person deserves charity, aid, autonomy, and/or respect (2000). These categories also determine whether the homeless person is allowed to be visible and to be heard. Those persons acting as native informants would almost never fit the slacker category, since the assumption is that they are “incompetent” because of their own faults and therefore undeserving. This is in contrast to the lackers who are incompetent through no fault of their own (perhaps they are children or they have a disability) or the unwilling victims who have fallen prey to circumstances beyond their control (like layoffs or abuse).

Yet even the unwilling victim is perceived to be incapable of being able to contribute meaningfully to decision-making processes in the affordable housing sector; as they are not “expert” enough. As outlined earlier, many experts in the field will cite their academic and
professional backgrounds and particular proficiency and skills in knowledge gathering practices as the basis for their expertise in affordable housing. Anyone who falls outside of that cannot be an expert. I stated in my literature review that these Othering strategies are used within housing policy and studies in order to verify the expertise status of policy makers and consultants as the only voices capable of decision making and resource allocation in the public sphere. However, this is only one way of Othering, between the homeless person and stakeholders like consultants and policymakers. For this chapter, I focussed on how communities and local governments, as representatives of these communities, socially distance themselves from homelessness by making them invisible, undesirable, and illegal.

Much of the material in the literature review spoke to this sense of power and hierarchy in the social housing system. It can be observed that housing is treated as a resource belonging to the state to be used by those whom the state considers civilized or acceptable enough. Because these belong to the state, the language and power relations arising from this work continues to replay this claim of ownership. Therefore, it becomes more apparent that wider systems also affect the development and provision of housing; particularly the political sphere from which the power to allocate monetary resources, human capital, and public concern matters most. Ideology also affects housing, as neutral as we like to think we are about it. This is particularly in the case of policy makers, because neutrality will be an issue in the work they produce if they hold onto certain values and beliefs. Bryant (2004) builds on her previous work of the knowledge paradigms framework of policy change while studying the case of the recent housing policy changes made by the Government of Ontario to the Tenant Protection Act in 1997. Bryant concludes that political ideology plays a particular role in policy change by shaping perspectives on social issues and policy responses developed to address these issues. This includes what they deem effective and ineffective, good and bad, right and wrong, normal and abnormal.
Similarly, many other supportive programs used as measures beyond the provision of affordable housing, such as requirements to look for formalized work or education in order to access social assistance in conjunction with housing, do the same. Formalized and public education arose out of the need to be able to discipline and regulate students into being and becoming what society desired of them for the demands of the workforce; and these measures act as informal ways of spreading the same kind of knowledge about what is and is not acceptable.

The norm will continue to remind the other of that difference; through their “assistance”, their speech on behalf of the other, and their categorization of public and private housing. There is no reciprocity in this relationship; as it is deemed the social housing tenant has nothing of value to provide to others within this society. When this is made clear, the social housing tenant – like other marginalized bodies – has been warned that they are incapable of value, and of producing any effects that may be deemed worthy to this society. As described earlier in the process of othering, the Other is made voiceless and invisible; if they cease to exist, there is only the Self left for the most part when housing as a service is conceptualized and carried out. Therefore, the other voices that could be are unable to conceptualize a different way to address the same issues that the affordable housing system claims to handle. Only the other stakeholders who are given any authority to speak on housing issues such as the developers, consultants, and legislators become the faces of the one voice. They are the figures of authority who define the normative rules that Jiwani (2006) lays out in her mapping, which are used to justify how the Other is evaluated as a body within the Canadian landscape.

Similarly, social housing tenants know their place, even when they are not explicitly and directly told this: this comes across in the terms used, under the conditions by which they must abide, and by the way they understand how society views them according to their individual condition. Jacobs and Manzi (1996) identify specific examples whereby housing policy has
undergone various changes in Ontario by charting the way in which key terms are used within policy debates and how these have moved from discussions about numbers of units needed, towards questions of obligation, responsibility and affordability (p. 558). They take a more traditional approach to linguistics and discourse with the concern that language is affected by ideology; as they argue that it is impossible to divorce the use of language from wider social practices and that a focus on power and discourse can illustrate how certain terms affect the nature of the policy problems that can be addressed. Hence, they believe insight can be gained from analyzing the way in which certain terms gain acceptance in order to understand how housing policy is generated (p. 558).

**Presumptions and Realities of Homelessness Making**

In 2008, the Social Housing Services Corporation launched their “Ideas into Action” consultation process within the affordable housing sector in order to help stakeholders in this area of the social services spectrum talk to each other outside of their immediate regions and jurisdictions. The consultation participants included “representatives from service managers, housing providers, sector organizations, the Ontario Municipal Social Services Association (OMSSA), the Institute of Housing Management (IHM), the SHSC Board of Directors, staff and consultants, and students” (SHSC, 2009). The following year in 2009, SHSC produced a state-of-the-art report as “an overview and assessment of what could quite possibly be the future of social housing”. With this, they provide examples and recommendations of how these ideas can come to fruition within the province. They believe the following five steps will work towards improving the social housing system in Ontario: filling in funding gaps, improving livelihoods through housing programs and supports, managing assets effectively, building capacity within the sector, and valuing social housing as infrastructure (SHSC, 2009).
In a Toronto Disaster Relief Committee discussion paper and worksheet (Appendix A), Hulchanski (2000) stresses that the weather and other natural disasters are not causing homelessness across the country but that there have been several “homeless-making processes”. He (2000) outlines the homeless-making processes, pressures towards homelessness, and homeless-makers that he sees in five sectors that impact people’s access to shelter (housing sector), livelihoods (public assistance and employment), and support services when required (health, mental health, and substance; and family sectors) (p.1). The worksheet stresses that it is recognized that many homeless people do have personal problems and that some may have made poor decisions about options in their lives, all of which could have played a role in their homelessness (Hulchanski, 2000 p.1). However, the reason homelessness seems to be so much more visible since the 1980s is that these homeless making processes were set in motion from that point onwards. Some of these were not around before the 1980s while some of these processes did not play out in the same way before then (Hulchanski, 2000 p.1), like the inability to access affordable and/or supportive housing, employment, and/or public assistance.

As outlined earlier when we reviewed the history of affordable housing in Ontario, much like a hot coal, the affordable housing problem keeps being tossed around from place to place as much as possible and has been downloaded slowly from each senior level of government to the next. It is clearly not just about the housing system overall: it also includes the tenants in the affordable housing system, who are deemed to be part of this inconvenience. This particularly arises from the fact that affordable housing is usually considered “a good thing”; you will rarely hear sentiments of negativity regarding the ideals behind developing and establishing such social systems. If it is such a good thing, where is the affordable housing? The one concession I find here is when it comes to tenants. When I talk to my former classmates from my planning program regarding my thesis and my interest in affordable housing and homelessness, housing
fraud and the supposed rise of criminal behaviour that come about with a concentration of low-income people somehow are part of our discussions. There is this public need to monitor and manage tenants, individually and as a group, on what is deemed to be anti-social behaviour and on other legal conditions placed on them. It can be clearly noted, though, that these social and legally binding conditions are often not placed on other residents within the state.

In what he titled a broader trend towards conditionality in welfare, Deacon (2004) examines the debate about the appropriateness and effectiveness of coercive approaches to “anti-social” tenants and how the explicit use of welfare is utilized to define and enforce obligations to claimants is justified in terms of contractualism, paternalism, and mutualism (p. 911). He concludes that by putting forward a “pluralist justification”, these obligations are compatible with policies to widen opportunities for self-fulfillment and to reduce social exclusion (p. 912). He concludes that: “The claim that someone’s right to housing is balanced by an obligation not to abuse that housing is one that accords with basic sentiments of fairness and reciprocity” (p. 923). I can agree to some degree to conditions in general with regards to that fine balance between individual and housing rights, it becomes personally disconcerting that “the obvious limitation of the contractualist justification is that the contract is explicit only when a claim is made upon the state” (Deacon, 2004 p. 919). In other words, because the person is claiming this service for social housing out of a particular need, they are subjected under the watchful eye of the state and the public; whereas residents in the private rental or homeownership systems are not to the same extent. Also, in the case of social housing tenants, they are also more likely to lose the service upon the discovery and ruling of such behaviour while others are not.

We have to wonder where such ideals are coming from. Why should social housing tenants be held to such conditions if others are not? Responsibility, duty, sympathy, and self-sacrifice have been described as the markers of civility (Coleman, 2008, p. 19) in literary texts
that add to the national myths underlying Canada. Civility and morality, the concern with good (versus and over “evil”), go hand-in-hand as each of these informs the other: civility is assumed to be moral and morality is a notion of civility. Haworth and Manzi (1999) look at the moral discourse of housing management in managing the “underclass”, by examining practices and social policy emphasizing duty over rights. Here, they look at the moral foundations of social policy; theoretical perspectives that inform such policy such as ethics, moral hazards and panics, and foundationalism; and the particular contemporary housing management initiatives used to address these concerns such as tenancy agreements and the creation of “balanced communities”. They demonstrate the emphasis placed on individual condition and behaviours within these morals, theories, and practices; with the conclusion that such conditions and behaviours in large conglomerations is undesirable (p. 162).

Philosophically speaking, social theorist Michel Foucault (2003) considers power to lie in technologies of discipline and regulation, by using the “norm” (in this case, communities through their governments) to the body that one wishes to discipline and a population that one wishes to regularize and regulate for this discipline (the homeless population). In this case, the need for affordable housing acts as a technology of discipline by laying out the rules of who can ask for that kind of assistance and as a technology of regulation by demonstrating for society to who is and who is not to be regulated for not following those rules of discipline.

There are local governments too that recognize barriers to affordable housing that they help to create through their policies and programs as regulatory devices. The Town of City of Grand Forks in North Dakota conducted an analysis of impediments to fair housing choices\(^7\) in

\(^7\) In the United States, fair housing or open housing policies refer to the regulations put in place mostly in the 1960s to bar discrimination in rental housing and homeownership processes. This has even included related practices such as mortgage lending, homeowner’s insurance, and zoning. It is meant to protect renters and home buyers from discrimination when dealing with landlords and home sellers at the most immediate level, while also being assured that other institutions like banks will not discriminate against them based on race or other aspects of identity.
both the private and public sectors. They found that the public sector alone contributes to such barriers through the minimal regulations used for land use and zoning and new construction; a shortage of public investment outside of a few areas; the limited scope of the local Housing Authority; and the lack of fair housing enforcement (City of Grand Forks, 2010). Similarly, the Town of Morinville (2008), Alberta was able to identify barriers to affordable housing in their preliminary report. In particular, they were able to identify the very impediments that I believe aim to make poverty invisible (like inflation of free-market development and lack of regulations for mechanisms to encourage affordable housing), undesirable (not-in-my-backyard opposition), and illegal (such as restrictive by-laws and limited zoning incentives) (Town of Morinville, 2008). I provide examples of these issues then, in the next section.

**The Role of Local Governments in Homelessness Making**

During the interviews, some participants had discussed how poverty and homelessness/under-housing are hidden through private and societal mechanisms in their respective areas. In this section, I list just three of the ways in which communities and local governments use their control of the affordable housing system to make poverty invisible, undesirable, and illegal. I feel I quickly need to substantiate that this is not, by any means, a neoliberal stance on politics. At least I will claim that it is not. However, it could be observed that bodies of governments have been running in a neoliberal fashion, maintaining these machineries of impoverishment. The push towards economic liberalism and government cutbacks in public spending are just a part of this picture, especially when the political parties in power subscribe to those values that prefer letting the private markets handle social issues like housing.
I narrowed my discussion within this thesis on the role of the municipal government, because housing is always going to be a local issue. Many residents do not know which levels of government are responsible for different social services. Yet since the lack of social and affordable housing is most visible at the local level, many people will take it up with local agencies and governments to do something about it.

I also would like to look at the local level after coming across a municipality (during my time as a consultant) where they seemed to be working on social housing issues in a manner that I truly admired, even if it was always going to be a work in progress. They valued partnerships and discussions amongst many of the key players in housing across the private, public, and not-for-profit sectors. They shared resources – particularly knowledge and know-how – across the board as much as possible with each other. They formed multiple coalitions and activist groups; and even the municipal contacts developed an advocacy approach towards the provincial government when it came to funding, especially when they preferred block funding over program or population-specific funding that catered to the political agenda of the day. They were not always successful but they felt that as the local authority, they would understand local needs much better.

Many of my examples here indefinitely have taken place in York Region\(^8\), though I include other examples provided to me by interview participants or as I have witnessed in other locations across Ontario. I have lived and worked in the Region for most of my academic and professional life, and so have been able to follow this area with a more critical eye than I have elsewhere. Its unique location just north of Toronto also provides for some interesting contrast in

\(^8\) York Region is the region directly north to the City of Toronto, south of Lake Simcoe, and falls within the Greater Toronto Area. Municipalities include Aurora, East Gwillumbury, Georgina, King, Markham, Newmarket, Richmond Hill, Vaughan, and Whitchurch-Stouffville. The Village of Markham (29.1%), Town of Richmond Hill (17.7%), and the City of Vaughn (28.0%) all border the City of Toronto; and have the majority of residents, accounting for almost three-quarters of the population in the Region (York Region, 2010).
terms of the big city versus the suburb, particularly since I could see these differences going to school in the city and living the rest of my life in southern York Region.

*Making Poverty Invisible: Hiding the Ugly Truth*

On a greater scale, many municipalities, like the ones exemplified below, attempt to portray themselves as places of wealth and opportunity. However, what this ignores is the reality that not everyone in the said community lives this way:

How we portray ourselves: it’s always been a very prosperous place – Richmond Hill’s sort of slogan is “a little bit north, a little bit nicer”. I mean, Vaughan is “the city about Toronto”. York Region’s slogan is “Ontario’s rising star”. There is this image of “we are amazing” and though yes, there is this incredibly prosperous community, we have this whole other side of growing vulnerability. It makes no sense to not be honest and trust ourselves about who we are and the kinds of communities we need to build. Housing is implicit within that. I think that it’s [housing] been marginalized. There was first downloading in 2000. The whole notion to have to think about affordable housing, people were not very happy about that (participant who lives and works in York Region).

In such places, hidden homeless is on the rise, as demonstrated by studies like the Wellesley Institute’s “Housing and Homelessness” and the joint venture between Ryerson University and York University titled “Immigrants and Homelessness - A Risk in Canada's Outer Suburb”. In many of these communities, homelessness exists; as Paige reminds us, this reality needs to be made visible again:

We did – I don’t know if you’re familiar with it – we did a Hidden in Plain Sight photo exhibit. [...] We had no idea when we started what was going to come out of that but it has been very powerful in terms of people, because so much of this is invisible and whatever people can’t see doesn’t exist. You’re trying to tell a story about something that’s invisible and also for many people, there’s an enormous shame, right, and that has to be repelled (Paige, personal communication, August 13, 2010).

This is a lot harder to uncover so I use two examples across the province to examine how communities hide this ugly truth of poverty: the research and reporting of poverty by government agencies, and the availability and access to services within communities. I use these two measures because data produced by local governments, as the centrally located political force in
the community, is best able to determine where resources from senior governments could be allocated at the local level. Even Members of the Provincial and federal Parliaments (MPPs and MPs) are local residents who represent their own communities in their ridings; they too are locally connected. These resources from government agencies also include the funding provided to social service organizations within their respective communities, including the resources required to be accessible and available to their clients such as staffing, locations, and materials.

When there is a lack of research and reports that is specifically mandated and/or carried out by local government agencies, it is often due to the pressure placed on them by other individuals and groups, particularly those of the advocacy and activist kind. This also publicly acknowledges that the issue is now on the public agenda and that something will indeed get done about the situation. This is very different then from concerns raised by community agencies, who are empathetic to their clients’ needs and realities, and by academics, who may witness these issues and how they theoretically work out. This acknowledgement also becomes part of the public story:

It’s a nightmare in this region, in terms of the data. Nobody really knows what the story is around homelessness because our ability to collect data that’s meaningful, it’s very bad. If you don’t have the data that can tell a story, then you don’t have a story. [...] The Region should have it but they don’t always tell that story, or tell the story right (Paige, personal communication, August 13, 2010).

This also points to the need to tell the entire story of homelessness in the community.

When looking at homelessness in particular, the population count is often a conservative estimate since data from social service agencies alone does not capture a large portion of the homeless population since not all homeless persons are able to access help from that particular sector. Some people may be sleeping on the streets, some may be secretly homeless while they are forever in transit between friends and/or relatives’ couches, and some may be living in inadequate conditions even if they have a roof over their heads.
However, many government agencies may be unwilling to re-examine the issues of homelessness with a more critical eye within their jurisdictions; if this requires directing resources towards this kind of work, possibly away from other programs, that does not show immediate results like direct service provision might. However, this changes the way in which government services and communities agencies are accessible and available in a given area. If communities and governments alike established and operated services that helped support the poor in ways that were accessible to them, it would show that they acknowledge the realities of people in these communities facing poverty.

When we speak of accessibility, we refer to much more beyond the physical layout of a building for people with disabilities. We can also consider locational accessibility, which is based on distances to services and facilities; temporal accessibility, which looks at the timeframe in which people have to use the service (such as opening hours); and effective accessibility, based on whether there is a recognizable need and individuals can use the service (UN ESCAP, 2003). As Nicole points out, this can translate into a lack of services for those who may need it most:

Take a look for instance with the homeless shelter for women. We have no homeless shelter for women. We have two shelters for women who are victims of abuse [but] we don’t have a homeless shelter for women. If you are a homeless woman, we have no place to put you (Nicole, personal communication, July 21, 2010).

Though the good news is that this shelter is now in the process of starting up due to some political championship from the local MP, the fact that this shelter had not been established earlier points to the justification of acceptability for who deserves aid as opposed to those who do not. Women who have suffered abuse and as a result have become homeless “deserve” such

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9 For a more comprehensive list, we can even consider the intellectual, technological, and self-managerial forms of accessibility that recognizably can be limiting to people who may need a particular service as presented by Halloran and Calderon-Vera (2005).
assistance, unlike women who are homeless due to other circumstances. In a woman’s case, abuse has become the acceptable reason for homelessness, and so she must be an unwilling victim of abuse in particular, if she wants to receive help faster or sometimes even at all. Regardless of what the circumstances are that have brought someone to that situation, the homeless person deserves to receive the necessary assistance to move on.

*Making Poverty Undesirable: Re-enacting NIMBYism*

People who are homeless and/or of low-to-no income face great stigma when homeless shelters and affordable housing projects are developed, most commonly in the form of Not-In-My-Backyard syndrome (also known as NIMBYism). In this way, relations between people of different economic classes are already structured by predetermined biases against poor people, for the very reason that they require such housing.

Kevin describes very well how NIMBYism typically plays out, as he illustrates with his experience while working on the board of directors on an affordable housing project:

Our housing project in that little neighbourhood Davenport [...] we’re going to convert [that] into housing. We had community meetings in our church because we have that location and there had been [a] campaign promoting [to] the community that we’re opening a crack house and we’re going to put people on social assistance to live in this place; it would destroy the neighbourhood property values and all this stuff. We had maybe a 100 people came, including a person who attacked me at the front of the room as we’re talking about this (Kevin, personal communication, August 4, 2010).

However, NIMBYism is not always limited to the potential neighbours within a residential area who may have their own personal biases against the poor and the homeless; and/or who have believe certain myths about affordable housing like its ability to decrease property values and increase crime rates. Often times, this also comes out in the way local politicians and governments may take such proposals to develop affordable housing as negative. Some activists even call this NIMTOOism (Not-In-My-Term-Of-Office syndrome) (AlSayyad, 2009). In this scenario, politicians and other representatives resist taking unpopular action since
they do not want to confront their constituents as they deem the political cost too high to risk their political careers (AlSayyad, 2009).

I could already see this phenomenon of NIMTOOism taking place during the last municipal elections held in October 2010. Though I live in a town that is part of a two-tiered municipality (meaning the region is responsible for affordable housing, not the local town), some of the candidates for the local wards had promised to stop high-rise developments in the area that had been of quite some debate at Town Hall. I could only imagine the resistance that could come about if it had been an affordable housing project or a homeless shelter, particularly if the community had become very upset about it.

However, Kevin points out that sometimes, affordable housing is made in such a way that its very development is used to stigmatize its residents. Consider the reason he dislikes large-scale, congregative housing projects:

I would encourage smaller scale projects rather than big ones. I don’t support [it]; I don’t actively speak out against because some of my friends support it, big supportive housing projects. [...] That isn’t just NIMBYism; it is a general [reaction]. It is unfair to the people that are going to live there to set them up for stigma. [...] I would change in our housing activists’ perspective is this notion that everybody has a right to live in community, but we create certain models that are congregative of large, congregative living models that don’t well serve their interests in terms of becoming part of the community. [...] By asserting people’s right to live in community, we end up creating models that don’t really help them become an active part of the community. It actually creates more barriers: the larger the congregative living arrangement for people who are seen as different, who are negatively valued for that difference, the more likely you’re going to have resistance to them being part of the community. It was the same for the disability field in the ‘60s and ‘70s, which is why we moved to more individualized arrangements (Kevin, personal communication, August 4, 2010).

The same concerns about stigma also have gotten other social service providers and affordable housing activists alike to look towards alternate means of housing support outside of direct housing provision. For example, Tina explains why she feels the rent supplement and rent allowance programs in Ontario work:
In my view, those two programs are the very best of the best to serve people because they integrate people into market rent units that do not stigmatize them, that do not force them to live in a ‘housing project’ (personal communication, July 27, 2010).

NIMBYism, in particular, was a large topic for most of the interview participants, since many of them were witness to this through their own work as a service provider and/or advocate or activist. It did not seem to matter whether they were speaking from an urban or rural area or whether they were inside or outside the City of Toronto: many participants were witness to it and they knew it affected their work. The issues of stigma seemed to stem from here, and so I discuss this issue further in the next chapter as well.

*Making Poverty Illegal: the Legalities of Alternative Forms of Shelter*

It is one thing to dislike the idea of poverty and to perhaps hide it. It is completely a different story when people are punished for trying to handle their poverty in the only ways they can, by pushing back on the legalities of alternative forms of housing, like basement apartments and rooming houses. When there is a shortage of affordable rental housing in the private sector, other alternative forms of shelter will come up to accommodate the need for housing and to cater to the rental market. In some places, this has meant a rise in the use of basement apartments. However, this has been countered by the legality of such units, sometimes on zoning bylaw justifications that such units will allow more residents to fit into areas where the infrastructure and services available are only designed to accommodate a certain number of people (Madigan).

Where Nicole lives, only six out of nine municipalities have regulations for addressing basement apartments. She equates this to, at best, making poverty illegal, since the municipalities in the area know that this is how many poor people live yet they refuse to address it. People who are living in such situations then are subject to keep silent about their living arrangements because they know that they would in trouble for living in an illegal suite if anything goes wrong.
with the property owner. Therefore, the property owner is not held responsible and instead, the tenant is punished for being poor:

We have rentals [here], but they tend to be basement apartments so you can’t see them. There’s a perception that first, we don’t have poverty, we don’t have homeless people in [here] and you mean that there’s people that are poor living in [here]? There’s those issues that we have to face up on a regular basis. There’s also the issue of the fact that [here], [not all of the] municipalities have secondary suites. So we have a lot of people that are renting basement apartments that the basements are illegal and if the tenant were to call the by-law officer because of an issue, the person who is going to be asked to leave is the tenant because it’s an illegal unit (Nicole, personal communication, July 21, 2010).

Here, she brings it back to poverty is once again made invisible, literally by keeping it underground. However, the issue is that since many of these apartments are illegal, they are also not safe, particularly by the Fire Code (Madigan). However, when a person is desperate and can only afford so much, they may even consider taking such inadequate housing to support their needs. Paige also stresses the safety of such units. Yet, many municipalities are not willing to take up the cause of addressing such alternative forms of shelter, though they may be “encouraged” to do so:

We were involved in [the process] when the Region was redoing its official plan, trying to get them to say that each municipality will have regulations for second suites. Well, they didn’t put that word in. I think they used “encourage” or something; so it means that okay, each municipality [will do it on their own accord yet] we only have three out of nine municipalities that have now regulated second suites. It’s this kind of laborious effort that goes to [waste if] you have to [go] municipality by municipality [to get it done] (Paige, personal communication, August 13, 2010).

As Nicole and Paige both highlight, the homeless/poor person is punished for their destitution and desperation, should they choose to rent an illegal apartment that fits their budget instead of overpaying for a legal unit in a building or other more “acceptable” form of housing (Nicole, personal communication, July 21, 2010; Paige, August 13, 2010). The landlord may possibly be charged under the by-law and will lose that particular source of income. However, it
is the potential tenant who will suffer most because they are incompetent at finding a legal alternative to fit their needs.

The issue has also come up in the City of Toronto, particularly in Scarborough, where there are several rooming houses. As David and Kannamuthu (2010) stress, “restricting rooming houses in some parts of the City will force low income persons further into poverty and push them away from affordable housing because they will not be able to pay full rent to live there” (p.7). The article stresses the realities and effects of restricting alternative forms of shelter, as written from the eyes of a community legal worker and an advocate and member of a tenants support group, respectively (David and Kannamuthu, 2010 p.9). They mainly stress that choosing to make such units illegal (or by not making them legal) will lead to unsafe conditions in the units that people will live in regardless because they cannot afford anything else and that taking away one’s choice to live in a neighbourhood is discrimination (David and Kannamuthu, 2010 p.8). Kannamuthu provides his personal story then, to summarize his argument:

I am a person with epilepsy and I am emotionally disturbed due to a war in my country. I was a government officer back home. Due to my health condition and economic status, I am now in this living condition. I see many other immigrants, people with low-income in the same situation as me. We already face so many barriers to surviving in this city due to our status and health. Not allowing rooming houses in our neighbourhoods adds another barrier by making us occupants of illegal houses. The city is placing another barrier to our most basic right to affordable housing (2010 p.8-9).

The agency they work for caters specifically to Scarborough residents and so they reiterate that these issues will affect new immigrants, students, people with disabilities, and low-income families the most in their catchment area (2010 p.9). Kannamuthu’s statement resonates with Paige and Nicole’s argument earlier that the low-income or homeless individual is punished for choosing to make ends meet in this manner; even when they have few affordable options available to them to try to build their assets on the side as well (Nicole, personal communication, July 21, 2010; Paige, August 13, 2010). It is particularly an issue when social housing residents
and homeless people – simply by virtue of both requiring affordable housing assistance – are already stigmatized based on their positions and are deemed to fit certain stereotypes, as I expand on what my interview participants told me in the next chapter. These residents are being pushed into the very situation that they know they otherwise would not engage in, where they are being forced into “illegal” activity just to survive and make ends meet. No wonder these residents cannot avoid such stereotypes when this is their only other option.

The thread of power here is most important to think about for this thesis, as I am writing this thesis as part of the department of Adult Education and Community Development here at the University of Toronto. These two fields share common principles and practices, such as teaching/learning as dialogue, the importance of inviting a moral stance from the adult learner, and the need to understand learners’ demands and support. I recognize this particular kind of power, since we are now in the information age, where knowledge is power. Though I discuss how I see the affordable housing system unfolding in Ontario, I tie the rest of this thesis mostly to how I believe this is where activists – as both adult educators and community developers – can make the most difference.
Social activism differs from social service, where direct action is taken towards improving the outcomes of the current norms, and social enterprises, which operate on a social philosophy to take “direct action and generate a new and sustained equilibrium” (Martin and Osberg, 2007). Still, both social service and social enterprises provide a type of service. Instead, social activism aims to influence others to generate a new and sustained order (Martin and Osberg, 2007), often through social movements.

Social services can also encompass activism when it is undertaken for a client’s particular interests and benefits (Tina, personal communication, July 27, 2010; Ira, August 5, 2010). However, this requires a balance between what will ideally help their clients and their own limitations as a not-for-profit entity (Tina). However, Paige emphasized that activism is about being proactive towards societal issues and solutions, in relation to social services that are designed to react to a certain problem. She notes that it is not the job of social services to engage in activism as service agencies and their respective workers have to deal with the burdening workload resulting from their organizational mandates, and this is particularly true in the housing industry:

I think it’s difficult. I mean, social services are there to deliver service and depending on the resources that they have – even if they want to and feel compelled to – I think it’s very challenging to do advocacy; and advocacy can be hugely difficult for people because they find the environment [challenging]. I think that many of them just don’t have the time. I mean, they are trying to respond. They don’t have the resources and [they do not] have always the ability to see the big picture. They are delivering service in a particular way for a particular organization and that is their length, so their ability to step out of that and look at the bigger picture is very difficult. And housing is complicated (Paige, personal communication, August 13, 2010).
Though it is complicated work, most activists I have encountered are generally very
motivated by and concerned about the causes they take up. This motivation for activism has also
been a large component of many research studies. For example, the Anti-Poverty Community
Organizing and Learning (APCOL) Project, a joint university-community research project, is
focussing on how people learn to engage, re-engage, and remain engaged in various forms of
anti-poverty activism. Their preliminary survey findings\(^\text{10}\) revealed that about 54% of their
respondents were motivated to become involved in their activism because they wanted to make
change in their communities (APCOL, 2011 p.3) but only 13% of people stayed motivated for
this reason (p.9).

On the other hand, most activists (62%) chose to remain involved in their activism
because they enjoyed helping others, while many also responded that they cared passionately
about the issue (33%) and that it was an important part of their life or identity (26%) (APCOL,
2011 p.9). Some of the activists I spoke to, like Quinn, also had mentioned that they get
“personal satisfaction in being involved in activities that improve public policy and that help
make our society a better place” (personal communication, August 10, 2010). Other participants
mentioned how activism played an important role in their identity (Zoe) and allowed them to
contribute their experience, skills, and knowledge in a meaningful way, either as an individual or
as an organization (Kevin and Natalie). Many people also moved into housing issues from other
social movements, like food insecurity and poverty (Paige), and from other areas like the public
sector (Ira).

\(^{10}\) These questions were multiple-choice questions, where the respondents would provide an open-ended answer and
the researchers would check off and categorize their answers. However, I choose to use these findings; since the
research took place within the City of Toronto, one of the largest sites for activism in Ontario; since American
studies are not always useful due to the very different approaches to organizing and activism generally observed in
the two countries. Though I am aware that these surveys were conducted in lower-income neighbourhoods in the
City, I believe these answers still provide a good starting point from which I can observe my own participants.
In this chapter, I argue that activists have a role to play in delivering the messages that they have identified throughout this research process as crucial to their work, because their work changes the way we look at things by building relationships, getting things done, and allowing us to learn from each other (APCOL Conference, personal communication, 2011). I focus on this last piece – the learning – though I understand that they are all interconnected and that in my case, I am not limiting this learning to just an activist workshop, report, or demonstration. Our work as activists will always go beyond walls and will seep into the community. Also, teaching/learning is always a two-way street in community development: while there may be students and teachers, both can teach and learn from each other. I then choose to look at the learning in which activists find themselves engaged, whether this learning is amongst themselves, other stakeholders in the housing industry, or within the communities in which they operate. I then discuss the role of activists in social housing and poverty in Ontario, followed by the key messages that my research participants have identified and their contributions to the social movement and service sector.

The Role of Activists in Social Housing and Poverty

Quinn discussed activism as an interruption, or “an intervention” as she terms it, within the status quo of public policy formulation and adoption (personal communication, August 10, 2010). However, this disruption is carried out strategically: actions are thought out beforehand and are not anarchistic when they are mapped out within the space of different political and social opportunities that may arise within the communities in which these activists hope to make an impact. These communities range from the local to the national, as is the case with Quinn’s organization.
On one hand, there is a fear of using the word activism to describe someone’s work. For example, Adam uses words like “aggression” and “violent set of actions” to prove his point since the actions he recognizes as activism are of a more radical nature. He points to the possibilities of activism as a kind of performance that is only visible when carried out in the public eye. Therefore, there are actors who engage in this work (activists), a target audience (such as the government or a particular organization), and a secondary audience (the public). Depending on where you are situated in this picture, your view of activism differs from others within the system. While Adam, who works very closely with the provincial government as an ally, feels that activism is violent and aggressive, others whose target audience were governments felt that activists did more beyond protests, the kind of violent performances that Adam refers to in his answers (personal communication, July 27, 2010).

When Quinn and I were discussing what activism meant to us, she noticed I was hesitant about my own definition of activism. By this point in my interviews, I had become quite unsure whether the “a” word had become offensive, reminding me of my own experiences of being a “socialist”, a “feminist” and an “activist” in an academic circle of people who generally were not as interested in social and environmental justice issues. She elaborated on what she considered activism, and why she felt she fit the definition:

It sounds like you’re defining activism as a very visible kind of advocacy work. Just from your comments: rallies, marches, those types of things. From the work that I do, that would be one of the tools but it wouldn’t be one that we’d be using very much right now. The other advocacy tools that we do, that maybe you wouldn’t consider activism but [they] are things like: writing a report on child and family poverty and then releasing that every November to provide information to politicians and to the media and to the public and using that as an advocacy tool. Writing that report then gets us a meeting with the minister, [that] kind of thing. It gets us media coverage; and then forming a coalition that does presentations to government every time, the budget consultations or any poverty reduction consultations or the housing consultations. You know, providing public submissions to those kinds of consultations.

Lobbying MPPs, right, members of provincial parliament: that’s another tool that we use a lot as part of our advocacy work. These are all things that the Housing
Network of Ontario has done as well, over the past year, year and a half. So getting people out to public meetings, meetings with MPPs, making submissions, emailing MPPs; so I would consider that those are all important tools, in addition to what you’re – if I can interpret it somewhat – dare what I call activism (Quinn, personal communication, August 10, 2010).

Activism work diverges when the context changes for the activist between paid professional jobs, where they may feel bound by organizational mandates and funding limitations, and volunteer positions, where they feel they have less to lose. Earlier, I explained that all the interview participants were invited to participate in my thesis research because they were engaged in activism of some degree. However, I have to consider that most of them fit a very particular type of “activist” role, since they were all formally employed within housing (usually in support services) or in anti-homelessness or anti-poverty advocacy. This creates an “unresolvable contradiction”: interruptions or disruptions – if taken as a personal element of activism – can almost never be a sustained ongoing element of the various work roles these activists maintain in agencies and organizations, for example (Sawchuk, personal communication, August 2011). In this context, activism work might be seen as a supportive function to resolve – albeit disproportionately – issues around coping effectively, but not really working towards a resolution of these issues (Sawchuk, personal communication, August 2011). Also the activist practices in which they engage here also have to be placed in relation to the other roles they play. These may range from directly providing services as a caseworker and service coordinator to working in advocacy and policy as an advocate or a campaign coordinator. Therefore, they are not using just their knowledge as activists but their experiences, skills, and knowledges of being and interested within the social housing sector (Sawchuk, personal communication, August 2011).

Because of these multiple contradictions, we have to recognize that there may be different reasons for using activism – whatever form it may take. Many organizations and institutions do not always function purely to “[bring] social justice work back into the sector”
Some of the interview participants raised the issue of funding, particularly in terms of the limitations it sanctioned on the kind of work the activists could engage in. Restrictions, like these, may in fact have clashed with some of the participants’, even if it was understood that I was looking to speak with the individual during these interviews, not a representative of the organization. However, to separate oneself completely from their organization – the one at which they spend forty hours a week in order to make ends meet and hopefully to affect social change – is almost an impossible task. Just as I have embraced my role as a Masters student at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (“no, not U of T; I’m really at OISE”), many people’s identities are attached to what they do for a living and/or what they do for a significant amount of time on a regular basis. It would not be realistic to assume that people shed their other personal and professional selves outside of their roles as activists, to utilize one set of skills and knowledge to conduct their work then, when their identities are tied into many other places at the same time.

I alluded earlier to the fact that some interview participants were hesitant to call themselves activists. This use of the term “advocacy” instead of “activism” is interesting, since phenomenologically (in terms of what they actually experienced), there were some activities that the interview participants would be a part of and that they discussed in great detail, which I would define as activist practices. However, they would redefine these as being part of their administration and/or advocacy and/or service work, perhaps because labelling these activities meant that they had to own the possibility of being an activist when they might have been hesitant to be thought of in that way. Some of the researchers from the APCOL project mentioned earlier found that “paid activists seem to be very poor at articulating their situation as an unresolvable contradiction, but rather [...] they typically go about re-defining activism such
that it is virtually indistinguishable from their other roles” (Sawchuk, personal communication, August 2011).

Yet there were also participants who owned that “activist” label with pride, saying that this work mattered since they could see such efforts coming to life and affecting social change beyond their organizations and immediate jurisdictions. Natalie’s view on activism revolves around the existence of people openly and actively committing to a cause within a defined community. She is particularly aware, as she puts it best, that activism takes on different forms depending on the players and strategies used within this particular game (personal communication, August 11, 2010). One such strategy then to deal with some of the organizational issues that paid activists particularly feel can be to engage the community in advocating for themselves.

Despite these differences, activism requires certain principles, or what van Manen calls the essence, as that some- thing(s) that separate it from other work in the social service and educational sectors. Therefore, there must be certain skills, certain ideas, and certain knowledges that people need and use when engaging in activism. Social movements offer opportunities for informal and reflective learning to their members and the communities in which they operate. Hall and Clover (2005) provide the following definition:

Social movement learning refers to (a) learning by persons who are part of any social movement and (b) learning by persons outside of a social movement as a result of the actions taken or simply by the existence of social movements (as cited by Hall and Turay, 2006 p.6).

Much of the literature has shown promising “theoretical building blocks”: from interpretive frames to notion of social movements as privileged sites of transformative learning or emancipatory praxis, many sociologists and adult educators have been able to offer their ideas on what social movement learning is capable of.
In particular, the concept of cognitive praxis is able to examine “the creative role of consciousness and cognition on all human action, individual and collective” as introduced by Jamison and Eyerman (1991) in response to the feeling that “something fundamental was missing from the sociology of social movements” (Hall & Turay, 2006 p.7). They define cognitive praxis as “the general waves of social movements which are making ‘history’ by introducing new conceptual spaces”. Here is where Bostrom draws on different schools of thought to develop a new use of the concept of cognitive practice, which is comprised of knowledge, meanings, and rules (2004 p.76), as we previously related it to Hook’s (2001) idea of discourse. While practice refers to operation and customs, praxis refers to the process by which an idea is translated into action. Therefore with cognitive praxis, Eyerman and Jamison (1991) were examining the process of how conceptual spaces were being brought out of social movements, while Bostrom is trying to illustrate how people come to social movements how individuals contribute to social movement learning through their own novel perceptions and understandings (2004, p.76). These illustrations explain how each activist’s story had something new to tell: their experiences contributed to what they could bring to the discussion but the social movement has also influenced them conversely. It then goes to say that they are both teachers and learners within this system; and this requires a particular balance of their areas of expertise and issues they need to explore further.

Depending on how our conversations went, some of the participants told me what tools and methods they used when engaging in their work, as they were explaining to me what principles they kept in mind as activists. They mostly pointed in the direction of a few particular types of “resources” they used here: quantitative and qualitative information on homelessness and affordable housing, the requirement for strategy and credibility with public audiences, and the empowerment and engagement of people with lived experiences. Though I asked what
activism theoretically could do that social services did not or could not, Paige explained that one thing social services could do is provide good data:

One of the things that social service could do – that’s the whole notion of realizing that the data that they produce, related to the services that they provide, is absolutely critical; because of the extent to which services are provided in various areas, for example the homelessness. It’s a nightmare in this region, in terms of the data. Nobody really knows what the story is around homelessness because our ability to collect data that’s meaningful, [it] is very bad and that, if you don’t have the data that can tell a story, then you don’t have a story.

That’s hugely critical so in the sense that the importance of their ability and having the appropriate resources to generate that data is incredibly vital, I think, contribution to activists. I mean in theory, the Region should have it but they don’t always tell that story, or tell the story right. The community needs to be able to tell the story and they need to have data that’s credible or the capacity to do research that’s going to tell the story. We’re trying to build a relationship with a university and build the capacity of the community to do community-based research but it takes time and resources (Paige, personal communication, August 13, 2010).

I asked if the numbers were that important to them. She replied:

If we don’t have numbers, if we don’t have stories to go with the numbers, people will say you have nothing. How can you say there’s an issue? We are reliant at the moment on numbers that the Region puts out and they only put out certain kinds of numbers. Our ability to generate things independently and to organize – that takes some substantial effort (Paige, personal communication, August 13, 2010).

However, she is not alone in requiring facts and figures. Quinn adds that,

Also, [we have a] reliance on facts and good research. I work for a research organization as well, so we produce a report on poverty with the latest facts and figures. We’re working on it using facts and then using those facts to try to make persuasive arguments usually in plain language that the average person can understand as well; [which means] so can the average politician (Quinn, personal communication, August 10, 2010).

The public is not the only audience that needs to see this: information like this also has to speak to politicians, as they theoretically represent public interests. This requires a need for strategy on the part of activists, in order to ensure their work speaks to the right people at the right opportunities. Quinn says that because of this need to talk to multiple audiences, “I would say that I try to be strategic in my work and in the work that I do with other activists, in terms of
identifying opportunities, political opportunities, timing opportunities to put our message forward in order to get results” (personal communication, August 10, 2010). She, therefore, cannot leave it up to chance. Natalie also understands the requirement to have credibility and strategy:

So to begin with, as a starting point, it has to be credible and it has to create – it has to be done in a way that is strategic. I mean, I don’t think you can, you can’t advocate with the federal government; the city mayor is advocating with the city government. So your strategies are there; and the approaches need to reflect how and who are the decision makers and how they’re going to make decisions and how do they like information and how do they want that information and what is the preparation that’s necessary to build a case for it. I think that in order to be effective, you have to have information as accurate and as sophisticatedly reliant; and what it has to be relevant to the story and the change that you want to happen with the decision makers. You know, strategies really are determined by the audience of who you’re wanting to affect change with (Natalie, personal communication, August 11, 2010).

Some of the participants also believed that in order to help people with issues of homelessness and/or finding affordable housing, you had to talk to people with lived experiences. As Nicole’s definition of activism highlights, such work requires an eye towards examining your definitions of knowledge, including the sources that inform these understandings and assumptions (personal communication, July 21, 2010). As a full-time activist, Paige points to the need for social service workers precisely because

They are connected with people who have lived experience. We need the voices of people who have lived experience to be part of activism and engaged in that activism. It’s not all about activists; we need those voices because they are very powerful and they need to be part of the work (Paige, personal communication, August 13, 2010).

Quinn also specifies that some of the principles that matter to her are the “involvement and inclusion of people who are directly affected by the issues that we’re working on; so involvement of people directly living in poverty” (personal communication, August 10, 2010). Here, people with lived experiences are seen as a valuable resource necessary to the community development process, in order to add credibility and reliability to their work.
People with lived experience provide more than testimonies to supplement other housing studies; they are capable of creating and illustrating their own experiences, as Paige told me of a photography project the homeless coalition had engaged in, similar to PhotoVoice\textsuperscript{11}. The pictures were then displayed in an exhibition in order to educate the region’s residents about poverty in the area or to “tell a story about something that’s [otherwise] invisible” to most others (Paige, personal communication, August 13, 2010). Similarly, Natalie discusses how their work eventually requires the community to get involved in its own development:

I think that one of the things that we’re working towards doing is developing the capacity of the community to self-advocate, or self-advocate on its own, on its behalf. And so part of our strategy next year is to host a public advocacy training sessions, because I think part of it is clearly, you’re not going to affect societal change if people are, again, [if there is] that kind of separation between the professional staff and the communities. It’s ineffective, in relation to broad, systemic change; so we’re going to focus some of our resources on figuring out how you actually help communities self-advocate for their own needs and their realities as well (Natalie, personal communication, August 11, 2010).

In Natalie’s case, they want to be able to empower the community with the skills they need to make societal change, while acting as a support agency within the neighbourhood.

The Key Messages: Discussions that Need to Be Public

The work that activists do – particularly the social movement learning that they attempt to engage others in – changes the way in which this discourse operates as the basis for knowledge changes within the sector, now affected by this examination of the realities of the homeless population instead of relying on best practices alone. The issues here require discussion on the public agenda so that they can bring forward the realities of people in poverty, who the

\textsuperscript{11} As a particular type of participatory action research (PAR), PhotoVoice is a research methodology that aims to bring about social change for marginalized communities by providing them with training in film and photography in order to document their own experiences. Communities are provided with skills that can empower members to develop and use for improving their economic and social situations; while academic or community organization researchers are able to have participants capture their own stories.
affordable housing system is supposed to serve. This includes demystifying notions like the “welfare bum” and the supposed higher crime rates and lower property values that come with social housing programs. The activists, whom I interviewed, identified certain key messages they feel are necessary to get across in order to address these challenges. These were not limited to simply busting myths about social housing and poor people, but also included the discussions about addressing issues of stigma and charity; responding to challenges in many government policies and programs; and using social movements as opportunities.

Addressing Stigma

As a society, we often need remind ourselves that people do not choose to be homeless, nor do they choose to be “dependant” on Ontario’s social safety net. Many people who require social/non-profit housing and/or welfare assistance do work and do not fit the stereotype of the “lazy bum”. However, welfare assistance alone is not an income on which one can live.

I think one of the real issues around affordable housing; it’s seen immediately as social or affordable housing for people who are different than us, people of low-income, people who are labelled in some way. In some ways, we’ve got to overcome this notion of what affordable means in people’s minds. It doesn’t mean people who are different than us. We have to somehow create the notion that everybody has a right to live in the community in decent and what they can afford type of living arrangements. That as much as possible, we should be encouraging different income levels and in all kinds of ways, people from diverse backgrounds and cultures to try to live in mixed communities. That affordable housing should be part of that mixed community type, because we are so diverse that we essentially have to bump up against each other and get to know each other and relate to each other. It should be the same for people who are low-income, right, and avoid some of the stigmatization and labelling (Kevin, personal communication, August 4, 2010).

Ira also points to the existence of the discourse still at play, saying that nothing has changed if people still do not want to discuss poverty and its effects on the community when they may be struggling to get by in “today’s economy” (Ira, personal communication, August 5, 2010). This is especially the case given that many municipalities in Canada were more affected if they were dependant on certain industries before the recession of the late 2000s.
How has [the system] changed? I think there are more groups, more non-profits have started, everybody sort of doing their thing. I still think that people don’t want to see [or] want to hear about the low to no income, you know? I really don’t think they want to hear about it. … I think that everybody knows it’s there, but it’s like, “Why should I fix it? In today’s economy, I’m trying to live on today’s economy, and I’m trying to put food on my table.” There’s still the old adage of the welfare people: “they don’t want to work, they’re just a bunch of bums, they don’t want anything” (Ira, personal communication, August 5, 2010).

People who are homeless and/or of low-to-no income face great stigma when non-profit and social housing is developed in communities, which comes out most in the form of stigma and not-in-my-backyard syndrome (also known as NIMBYism) (NIMBY, 2006). In this way, relations between people of different economic classes are already structured by predetermined biases against poor people, for the very reason that they require such housing.

Participants discussed NIMBYism happening within their communities, particularly outside of the City of Toronto. As Paige described this happening in her own area, she explained though that there were allies – like the homeless coalition for which she works for – that can help governments and other regulating bodies counter this reaction. However, Nicole and Paige both point to how municipal governments have to sell out to the demands of the private development sector, so that they were able to avoid the situation (Nicole, personal communication, July 21, 2010; Paige, August 13, 2010).

This NIMBYism comes out of both a lack of societal apathy for the poor and a misunderstanding of poverty in society. Ira works in an area greatly affected by the recession and she said that much of the problem lies in the lack of apathy to the plight of the poor, as many people feel they cannot empathize with anyone when they are already struggling for their own living (personal communication, August 5, 2010). Paige and Nicole also discussed how poverty and homelessness/under-housing are hidden in their region through private and societal mechanisms (Nicole, personal communication, July 21, 2010; Paige, August 13, 2010). Privately, the use of basement apartments has risen in the region to make up for the lack of other
rental units. However, this is countered by the legality of such units in the Region, where only six out of nine municipalities have regulations for addressing basement apartments. Paige equates this to making poverty illegal (Paige, personal communication, August 13, 2010), since the municipalities in the area know that this is how many poor people live yet they refuse to address it. People who are living in such situations then are subject to keep silent about their living arrangements because they know that they would in trouble for living in an illegal suite if anything goes wrong with the property owner. Therefore, the property owner is not held responsible and instead, the tenant is punished for being poor.

On a greater scale, many places attempt to portray themselves as places of wealth and opportunity. However, what this ignores is the reality that not everyone in the said community lives this way. In such places, hidden homeless is on the rise, as demonstrated by studies like the Wellesley Institute’s “Housing and Homelessness” and the joint venture between Ryerson University and York University titled “Immigrants and Homelessness - A Risk in Canada's Outer Suburb”. In many of these communities, homelessness exists; as Paige reminds us, this reality needs to be made visible again.

Society constantly needs to remember that people do not choose to be homeless or choose to be “dependant” on Ontario’s social safety net. Many people who require social/non-profit housing and/or welfare assistance do work and do not fit the stereotype of the “lazy bum”. However, welfare assistance alone is not an income on which one can live (Paige, personal communication, August 13, 2010).

Untangling Housing from “Charity”

Since charity is the concept I use to stress the importance of change in the way society views affordable housing, we can consider one definition as an introduction to this concept:

Charity comes from the Latin caritas, meaning “affection.” Scholars go to great pains to distinguish charity from other concepts of giving, such as philanthropy. [...] But in common usage, “charity” encompasses all these things as long as they involve a personal voluntary sacrifice for the good of another person (Brooks, 2007 p.4).
This particular description emphasizes the sacrifice of resources for someone else’s gain, without considering how this charity affects the donor as a member of society beyond the feeling of goodwill or “affection”. It also distinguishes that there are members of society who are capable of making this sacrifice and therefore in contrast, that there are also those who need to be gifted a particular resource owned by some other entity, be it the state or another human.

Consider how this concept may play out in addressing homelessness within the non-profit sector. There may be a homeless shelter, on the one end, that focuses on the current issue of homelessness as the agency sees it playing out in front of them. They may provide a bed for the night, one or two meals throughout the day, and perhaps a few more services such as a change of clothing or an on-site nurse. Conversely, there may be another organization, such as an alliance against homelessness or another community group, who may not provide service directly to people living in homelessness but will instead facilitate a broader understanding of homelessness, including its causes and effects. Their tools of choice will instead include research on the community and/or on homelessness, providing opinions to elected officials or other local groups on the issues at hand, and engaging the community in discussing and doing something about homelessness. In social work, the conception and rationale behind these services would be the primary difference between the two approaches of social charity and of social justice, as respectively illustrated here (Office for Social Justice, 2011). While the former focus is well intended, it seeks to pick up the pieces of the issue at hand by redirecting resources to help the homeless when they have already reached that state of destitution. The latter tactic instead aims to address the larger system by looking at causes and possible solutions to homelessness. Therefore, one approach requires homeless to be symptomatic, since it will only address what it can see happening, while the other strategy tries to take a more proactive stance towards the structural injustices that it can identify and resolve.
This is not to say that agencies and workers involved in direct service do not see the benefits of social justice work. Many such organizations and workers do get involved in activism work that has a social justice approach; and most are very critical of the fact that they cannot do more in their own agencies or that they have certain limitations in their work due to their resources as a part of the non-profit sector. Many of the interview participants for this thesis recognized that there is a discourse of charity within the affordable housing sector, though this sector would have spun out from the need to address homelessness. These participants made this point when particularly providing examples of their interactions with others who were not working within the realms of activism, such as this interaction with an Ontario Works government worker as described by Zoe, a housing support worker:

I went to house a client and he had gotten some money for transportation and then the [Ontario Works] worker said to me, “well, you know what, he can use that transportation money to go to buy food.” I was like “you’re kidding me. He needs to get to his volunteer appointment. He already bought this metro pass.” He’s like, “he could return the metro passes”. An OW worker’s saying that. [I felt like] I needed to end this conversation right now because it’s not going to go well. Like you’re really telling me that the one thing that a client feels that he’s doing meaningful, a meaningful contribution, by giving back. He doesn’t have the capacity to work because of health: he has seizures and they [any organization] won’t hire him. Within his volunteer placement, within a supportive environment where should he have a seizure, they have a place for him. And you’re saying to me that you’re not going to allow him to do that one thing that makes him feel good about himself? It’s those times when you feel like, who am I kidding here? Is this work really valuable? Are we really making impacts on people’s lives? It’s a struggle (Zoe, personal communication, September 2, 2010).

Zoe’s disbelief comes from the assumption that since this Ontario Works worker is witness to the realities of poverty, he must be understanding and sensitive towards these issues as well. However, there is this notion of charity that lies underneath this person’s responses to her in the way he suggests that the client simply reallocate his resources towards what he believes is a wiser financial choice between food and transportation to a volunteer position.

This NIMBYism comes out of both a lack of societal apathy for the poor and a misunderstanding of poverty in society. Ira pointed out earlier that empathy is hard to come by
when many people in her agency’s mandate are in tougher economic situations (personal communication, August 5, 2010). However, this does not mean that it has to take away from them.

Activists can begin to bring forth these realities in order to move beyond the perception that housing is as an act of charity done for “others”, not for the community as a whole. In particular, it needs to be emphasized that change needs to be for people, not just for the physical landscape. One way in which this can be done is for communities to engage in a process of understanding how diversity of people and housing structures actually contributes to places where people want to be, so that affordable housing and its users can be invited into these communities. Also, people working towards issues of housing and homelessness need to develop a shared language around these topics so that they can share their understanding of the issues at hand together. This can also include people with lived experiences in a respectful manner, since they feel heard when they are included to help develop a common understanding.

Demystifying Social Housing as a Liability to Neighbourhoods

Communities also need to invite affordable housing in, in order to invite people who use those services into the community. Perceptions of social housing that fuel NIMBYism, like increased crime rates and decreased property values, would need to be addressed in the community so that people already present in the community who subscribe to such views do not feel that people of low-to-no income are the reason that these things happen.

Community developers understand that social change is necessary in order to truly address the social, economic, political, and environmental problems faced by the marginalized groups that are often served by such work. Natalie emphasized that community development generally should be about creating opportunities for people to do better and about facilitating the development of relationships that they would never have had before. She suggested that
corporate help can go beyond monetary donations since partnerships, to provide employment and training opportunities for example, can help support housing efforts. She felt these were equally as useful since in her experience, corporations do want to help when they feel engaged meaningfully in a way that celebrates what they do best (Natalie, personal communication, August 11, 2010).

It’s not just about improving people’s quality of lives; it’s about affecting systemic change related to issues that impact people. It has to be understood broadly. I think there’s a benefit of moving beyond just this sort of just a simple, charitable model of service delivery and moving towards the intended outcome, which is to fundamentally improve people’s access to information, education, employment, income, and to do it in a way that empowers people in that process (Natalie, personal communication, August 11, 2010).

As Kevin also points out:

One of the main changes I would make is to avoid congregative-type living arrangements that house a large number of say, people with mental health issues or large numbers of people with low-income. I think more than strategies, affordable housing strategies, more about mixed income communities – so we have a smaller scaled project like ours, for example, where the province would like us to fill all twenty units of this place with people of low-income or people who have certain service issues; and that just creates what you call a “ghetto”.

You know, I worked in the mental retardation – what’s called the developmental/handicapped field, the disabled field now – but I used to work in what was called the mental retardation field. It was moving from big institutions to group homes and it was still stigmatizing communities to disperse living arrangements for people in apartments as much as possible; or living with another person who wasn’t disabled. To reduce the stigma of, you know, people who need special supports and who tend to be labelled as being “deficient” in some way (Kevin, personal communication, August 4, 2010).

**Responding to Government Policies and Programs**

In their introduction to *Finding Home*, J. David Hulchanski et. al discuss the word “homelessness”, how it has been used, and what it has come to mean. They like U.S. housing researcher and activist Cushing Dolbeare’s summary to the problem most when talking to others about homelessness:

The one thing all homeless people have in common is a lack of housing, Whatever other problems they face, adequate, stable, affordable housing is a
prerequisite to solving them. Homelessness may not be only a housing problem, but it is always a housing problem; housing is necessary, although sometimes not sufficient, to solve the problem of homelessness (Dolbeare, 1996, p. 34; Hulchanski et. al, 2009, p.6).

Similarly, in her research, Peressini (2009) explains that there are three paths into homelessness: “extreme poverty, an inability to find affordable housing, and interpersonal or violent conflict” (pg. 714-5). She breaks these down into a variety of factors in her study: poverty, interpersonal conflict, health, housing loss or housing unaffordability, addictions, deinstitutionalization, and social safety net failure (2009).

Despite being part of the same problem, government responses have been fragmented when addressing homelessness and social housing (Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing and the Ministry of Community and Social Services, respectively), despite being part of the same problem. At the provincial level, different ministries address housing and homelessness separately, treating them as separate issues. This also leads to other implementing bodies – like municipal governments, politicians, service agencies, and sometimes, activists – to address them without linking them to visionary ideals like healthy communities and vibrant economies, or other factors like income. Without thinking about these issues holistically, organizations in the housing industry do not work together since they are treated in relation to the other.

Nicole addresses the issue of fragmentation, a common complaint in many housing studies (Nicole, personal communication, July 21, 2010). Housing and homelessness are often isolated as issues on their own without regards to how poverty is established and maintained in societies upon marginalized communities by a handful of people. This is despite the fact that poverty is the main reason that people may be under-housed or not housed at all. In order to understand these issues better, people need to explicitly clarify and recognize how poverty is. Like in the social service sector, the social activism sector requires an overall strategy so that work is not redundant, particularly in areas where there are not enough resources as it is. The
region where Nicole lives and works tried to establish a social planning council but they were unsuccessful in starting operations. She points to the fact that if such a body existed, it would be helpful to have them coordinate activist efforts since social planning organizations have typically been helpful in doing that across the province (Nicole, personal communication, July 21, 2010).

Society can begin to bring forth these realities in order to move beyond the perception that housing is as an act of charity done for “others”, not for the community as a whole. In particular, it needs to be emphasized that change needs to be for people, not just for the physical landscape. One way in which this can be done is for communities to engage in a process of understanding how diversity of people and housing structures actually contributes to places where people want to be, so that affordable housing and its users can be invited into these communities. Also, people working towards issues of housing and homelessness need to develop a shared language around these topics so that they can share their understanding of the issues at hand together. This can also include people with lived experiences in a respectful manner, since they feel heard when they are included to help develop a common understanding.

**Stirring Up a Movement: Rebranding Social Housing**

Lastly, affordable housing is a social cause that, as Paige feels, needs to develop a profile and concurrently should be “re-branded” as a social movement (personal communication, August 13, 2010). Social housing as a movement can be framed from a number of perspectives, particularly as a matter of providing choice and dignity from a human rights framework that is more people-centred. She points to the fact that within the housing movement, governments and other implementing bodies have allies within the communities such as selected corporations, community agencies, and naturally people within the communities themselves. If a vision is developed together, it can then be put into motion as it will have multiple supporters.
“A social movement expresses multiple identities, internal differentiation and tensions” (Bostrom, 2004), where different actors who may share similar conceptions of the world and their common identification as belonging to the same movement may allow for solidarity (2004). In territorial movements, there are always at least three parties: a marginalized population who are the constituents; the community organization or non-governmental agency to some degree; and a level of government that is either directly stated as the target audience and/or “the public” that would indirectly influence government processes. Collective identities, as the homeless population or as social housing residents for example, are formed in relation to a movement at the individual and at organizational levels (Bostrom, 2004). I have chosen specifically to specifically that of the activism community at the individual level, though I understand that they will indeed identify themselves as representatives of particular organizations since their work will form a large part of who they think they are.

Though I collectively sought to speak to activists, some of the participants defined advocacy and activism as separate, distinct activities; they said they would not call themselves activists and would clarify that they were advocates perhaps, but not activists. Conversely, I believe that activism encompasses advocacy work. Though there are several models that have been put forward\textsuperscript{12}, I find Sen’s (2003) categorization most applicable in essentializing and constituting activism, particularly since we inherently feel we know what it is supposed to do but

\textsuperscript{12} I found many of the definitions which intrigued me on many websites, perhaps because these were sites aimed at having people understand what activism is about in the simplest of terms instead of academically focussing on one theoretical aspect of the process. For example, an animal rights activist named Carmen blogs for the Animal Liberation Front (ALF) and she divides the “spectrum of action” into four “zones” termed personal actions, proselytizing, organizing, and civil disobedience. On the other hand, Zoretic (2006) writes about the various forms of activism by stating that the four roles of activism are the change agent, the rebel, the reformer, and the citizen. Her definition then emphasizes the role in creating and implementing this activism, as opposed to Carmen’s focus on the movement as a unit of study. A third approach that could be taken is listed out in Martin’s (2007) contribution to the Encyclopaedia of Activism and Social Justice when he concentrates on when the issue took place at which the activism is directed at: past-oriented or reactionary activism, present-oriented activism which aims to change policies, and future-oriented activism that would change social relations, not politics.
are never quite sure what it truly encompasses. Sen is able to address both method (what I consider “the how” or the way in which it is done) and tools (the instruments or “the what” used to make it happen) from her own experiences as president and executive director of the Applied Research Centre, a prominent public policy institute in the United States. As summarized by Thorpe (2010), Sen (2003) breaks activism into five parts throughout her book Stir It Up: organizing, services, advocacy, mobilization, and solidarity.

When taken generally, organization is something that people have to do for themselves when “suffering from an abuse or injustice” by “taking action themselves to correct it” (Thorpe, 2010). She provides the example of fighting for access to decent housing; in Ontario, one such example would be the establishment of the Federation of Metro Tenants’ Associations. This process can often lead to the formation of new organizations or projects, which help to empower the citizens, as they are created that can work in harmony with the group’s goals. On the other hand, community organizing involves staff or volunteers from community organizations that attempt to engage and develop leadership within the target population.

Services, for the most part, are provided to those deemed in need by certain criteria, such as income in the housing field. The sector is used to seeing this form of activism materialized in many forms mostly the development and consumption of affordable housing units in not-for-profit and cooperative complexes; as well as in support services such as housing registries and access centres, legal aid clinics, and community centres. Ira and Tina (personal communication, July 27, 2010; August 5, 2010) both point to how advocacy is a service when done for someone else, and this would involve “lobbying for and acting on behalf of a group in need, without much involvement from that group” (Thorpe, 2010). The “without” here emphasizes the main difference between organizing and advocacy. Though the environment is used as an “extreme case” since “it has no means to advocate for itself” (Thorpe, 2010), I disagree with Thorpe on the
basis that humans are indeed part of the environment. For instance, housing has been framed as environmental issues in many parts of the world, including North America, when concerns about pollution nearby have been the driving force to make change.

Organization can also lead to mobilization, which would involve the “large scale show of concern, such as petition signing or marches, but without expectation of repeat or continued involvement of the participants” (Thorpe, 2010). This is one kind of performance that Adam refers to in his definition of activism, though this particular part of the movement does not expect to retain members and so people are free to move in and out as they see fit (personal communication, July 27, 2010). The mobilization instead aims to show the target audiences that there are many people, who at that particular performance, also agree with the message at hand. Protests, however, are not very prominent in housing activism in Ontario, as I explain when discussing the Canadian context. Lastly, solidarity aims to “change the terms of cultural discourse, through opinion pieces, framing of the issues and so forth” (Thorpe, 2010); as a promise to ideologically and materially stand by others in the cause. This would involve building coalitions and partnerships like the Ontario Housing Network and Campaign 2000, both of which are organizational networks with multiple agencies that all support each other’s work.

**Their Contributions: Changing the Way We Talk About Social Housing**

Activism work here holds the principle of anti-oppression as vital to its being: you are engaged in activism when an oppressive force is present. Zoe talks about voice, and how this work is done when it is recognized that there are others present who have been silenced (personal communication, September 2, 2010). Yet an activist still requires a special attention to what you know and what you can share with different audiences. The work that you do may include service work, but this may actually be where the realizations that spark activism in the first place
occur. This means that you would want to do something with that knowledge, whether that is to influence political decisions or to educate people in the community about the realities that many people there have to live with, in order to better the situations that you see arising out of a system in place.

I asked participants how they felt activism affected communities and if so, in what ways they have seen this manifested in the province of Ontario’s affordable housing system. Most of my participants could point to such impacts either theoretically or as seen in experience, but some were also able to point to times where there seemed to be no change, even when efforts were taken by activists across Ontario. Some participants saw activism work most visibly as part of the agenda setting and policy formulation stages of the policy process, just before a policy is adopted, implemented, and evaluated. Work done at these stages is crucial to putting the issue on the public agenda and ensuring the public is interested and concerned about the cause. Additionally, activists can unearth the structural factors, in order to challenge assumptions and common practices to improve in both conception and execution. The way in which activism is carried out has a large impact upon the public impression of activists, particularly since Canadians generally romanticize our roles as peacekeepers. Therefore, people deemed “violent” and “uncivilized” are often not the kind of activists with whom some participants said they would not want to be associated.

At the community level, activists can inform, engage, and influence other people who previously did not understand these issues in their community to take action. Such actions can include but are not limited to learning more about the issues and proposed solutions, disseminating such ideas to others in their social circles and communities, and joining an organization or interest group. Had they not had that experience, perhaps they may never have gotten interested in the cause at all. Certain challenges can be framed as opportunities to learn
and do more when activists can work together, particularly when the policies, programs, or projects have been pushed onto the community from a higher level of government. Here, the activists made it known that they too were concerned about such issues, which ensured that the municipal government knew to include them in decision-making processes. Their commitment was benefitted the city, as their own expertise was made available for public use.

Activists can act as evaluators and critics to ensure that effective policies, programs, and projects are not cut from federal and provincial budgets; in favour of ideas that may cost less but are not as effective. When there is enough noise, politicians and public sector staff notice and are able to incorporate other evaluations of their work during their own evaluative processes. Though she found it “really hard to pin down”, Tina said that she could see how this could be the case, particularly to hold the government accountable for funding programs:

> There was a partnership between the federal and provincial government for a long time; the Government of Ontario was holding back and didn’t pick up on […] the opportunities that were there. I think some of the advocacy work that was done on that front put some pressure on them to move forward with […] that opportunity. And there has been some success with getting the rent bank annualized and so again, that was a specific advocacy movement that increased pressure on the government to do that (Tina, personal communication, July 27, 2010).

Involving multiple organizational and interest groups is a demonstration of a coalition strategy, which is one of three ways in which a movement can expand, as theorized by Ferree and Miller (2007, p. 49). With this particular approach, the movement “attempts to mobilize ideological commitments held by members of already existing groups”, rather than seeking converting others into the cause or taking direct action (2007, p. 49-53).

Some participants were engaged in housing issues as part of the overall work that they do, since they could see where affordable housing and homelessness issues stood relative to their main interests. It is important to define these issues as part of a larger set of issues that people in poverty have to live with. This perspective shows then that housing is just one part of the picture, and so it needs to work with other support systems to be most effective. By professionalizing
some activists’ jobs with monetary payment (wages) and other benefits (such as health and dental insurance) in organizations, activists are often able to do more as they are now dedicated to the position on a more regular basis. It also adds value to this line of work, since it contributes to society by producing social capital as opposed to money, goods, or services. Therefore, an organization or group is more able to attract the best people to do this kind of work, while acknowledging and compensating for these particularly valuable skills and knowledges.

Working across sectors is also valuable, and so these alliances between the public and not-for-profit sectors need to be built since they contribute to the system differently. Through such collaborations, each party learns from the other, adding to their knowledge base of the system. There also has to be a commitment across multiple levels to engage in the process of building knowledge and ideas together, if they each want to be able to better their own work. Particularly, people in positions of power need to be able to take interest in such matters; as they are in positions where they can actually make a difference in determining where public resources are allocated and distributed amongst varying interests in society. Nicole acknowledges this value of a politician when they are at the helm of a social movement in the public eye, even when she knows that they were not the first to voice such opinions (Nicole, personal communication, July 21, 2010).

Sometimes though, it feels like there is no change. Understandably, Zoe feels like she has not seen any changes in the affordable housing system and the way it is, since she feels any advancements always feel like placation rather than really assisting and empowering her clients (personal communication, September 2, 2010). Higher levels of government are just beginning to make commitments to housing, though there were no comprehensive plans until this year. If senior governments cannot promise to do more for housing, local municipalities and regions cannot expect to allocate most of their limited resources to housing either.
I provide just two examples of how some of the participants have successfully managed to create alliances or target specific groups of people in their activism, in order to help their clients and their communities. This ranges from working with local governments and corporations to overcoming NIMBYism within communities.

**Natalie: Working with Corporations**

Natalie believes that taxpayer dollars, alone, cannot shoulder the burden of funding the not-for-profit housing system. Affordable housing benefits other entities, such as businesses, and so they too should be contributing to the scheme by providing better job opportunities and training, while getting to know some of the poor people that they are helping in the process. She also emphasises that this does not need to be monetary, as demonstrated by the social enterprise set up at her organization; and that it does not have to become daunting. Her organization has set up a social enterprise where their clients can get job training from corporate employees and experience from the cafe, restaurant, and catering business that they run. The clients and the corporate employees directly interact with each other, where the not-for-profit organization initiates the first meetings. These partnerships are established so that these interactions will be meaningful and can create job opportunities. (Natalie, personal communication, August 11, 2010)

Whether it’s the terrible service or the non-profit business, for lack of a better word, we have to shift our business models and our thinking in relation to activism to move beyond the concepts of sustaining a particular or the existing systems. I’m not sounding particularly revolutionary [but] I don’t think we’re going to be particularly effective: we’re expecting tax payers to shoulder the burden of affordable housing. It’s probably unrealistic. I think, again, there has to be a greater investment impact in affecting and reducing poverty levels, and increasing people’s ability to generate adequate living incomes and providing skills and opportunities to contribute differently. That is as critical and in the development of relationships whether that’s with corporations or other partners; we have to be more strategic, I think, in relation to using corporations and partnerships that can be developed with corporations in terms of creating employment opportunities, developing skills, relationships with those to affect some of that change for people. I think it would be interesting. I think it’s
important to continue to look at alternative ways to generate change for individual people and not just continue to develop affordable housing. It has to be that sustained [initiative], it has to be that sort of connective strategy that looks at helping people reduce poverty, and make the connections in terms of employment and education, and focusing on that as much as possible too (Natalie, personal communication, August 11, 2010).

As Natalie puts it herself later on, “If businesses and non-profits and corporations begin to think differently about the value of creating, the benefits of social inclusion and the outcomes of what that means, everybody is in that circle” (personal communication, August 11, 2010). That way, they are focussing on the other issues that also contribute to homelessness with other groups outside the housing social movement to look at how they can help this particular group of individuals in the long-term.

**Kevin: Building Social Housing and Overcoming NIMBYism**

As previously introduced before, Kevin is on the board of a non-profit housing corporation and the project’s construction – which requires converting an old building into housing – is currently underway. Though they have the building now, they had to have community meetings as required by planning law in order to check for community opposition.

Kevin explains then what unfolded at the meeting:

> We had community meetings in [the local] church because we have that location [nearby] and there had been [a] campaign promoting [to] the community that we’re opening a crack house and we’re going to put people on social assistance to live in this place; it would destroy the neighbourhood property values and all this stuff. We had maybe a 100 people [who] came, including a person who attacked me at the front of the room as we were talking about this (Kevin, personal communication, August 4, 2010).

Not surprisingly, the APCOL survey participants who were involved in activism at the time of the survey said that one of the most prominent difficulties they experienced during their work was when others do not get involved (12%) (APCOL, 2011 pg. 7). This can be particularly frustrating when the community is involved and when people are not able to relate to each other
in a positive manner. However, he continued his example to tell me about some learning was simultaneously taking place:

But other people in the community also, who came to find out about it, seeing what was happening and some of the feelings about people’s right to feel like who their neighbours could be. People came forward from that group, people who were neighbours in the community who owned houses or were renting in the community; they came forward to volunteer to be part of an advisory group to actually make this project happen. Now we have some of those people on our board of directors. These were people who weren’t engaged in any way previously in the initiative; who got an awareness of the needs of people who didn’t have adequate housing. [They] saw unfair prejudices in the community maybe trying to block our project; and that notion that this injustice was not right to these people who seemed to have a reasonable proposition to make for what this place could be in the community; in fact, even possibly increase property values (Kevin, personal communication, August 4, 2010).

This seems consistent with the APCOL findings, where many survey respondents who had never been involved in activism said that they would be motivated to get involved if they had more information on the activity (20%) and if they felt needed (17%) (APCOL, 2011 p.13). Education then plays a strong role in motivating others to change their thought, and possibly their behaviour. In this manner, activism can inform, engage, and influence other people who were previously did not know about certain issues in their community to take action. Such actions can include but are not limited to learning more about the issues and proposed solutions, disseminating such ideas to others in their social circles and communities, and joining an organization or interest group. Had they not had that experience, perhaps they may never have gotten interested in the cause at all. Though such meetings are sites of clashing ideas and interests, they are also opportunities to educate and inform others of the multiple perspectives and the diversity of realities that exist. This exemplifies the realities of social movements, where

In this chapter, we looked at how social activism provides a different perspective to the social service-oriented system that currently frames social housing in Ontario. Here, the aim is to influence others over the long-term using the social movement. The activists here have a particular part to play in the establishment, maintenance and progress of the social housing
movement in Ontario, as they use their roles, expertise, and skills to educate others about the realities of poverty and homelessness. They also share their knowledge and learn from others, in an effort to better their work and to influence social policy and thought. Though there is resistance from many people to use the word “activist” to describe what they do, their advocacy and social service work often falls under this umbrella when looking at the tools they use and the goals they hope to achieve through some of their work. This is especially the case when such work is carried out with or on behalf of their clients or constituents, where they are challenging a figure of authority or source of power on the grounds of social injustice.
Chapter Five: Conclusions and Future Research

A society grows great when old men plant trees whose shade they know they shall never sit in.

- Greek Proverb

Over the course of this thesis, I argued that the policies and programs that govern the social housing system in Ontario focuses on a service provision perspective that maintains the status quo, particularly the stigma attached to social housing projects and homeless people. I believe though that activists have a role in changing the way this service-oriented perspective works by bringing forward the realities of homelessness in the public realm to alter social thought, agendas, and actions. My key actions through this thesis were to outline Ontario’s social housing system’s focus on social services and to explore the role that activists can play in bringing forward the realities of homelessness and poverty within the social housing sector.

After I introduced the topic and the research methodology, we looked at the establishment of the social housing system in Ontario. I argue that the actions taken by senior levels of government and by other agencies of power have maintained the issue of stigma in social housing, as projected onto homeless and poor people. I then discussed what the roles, key messages, and contributions to developing and improving the social housing system and its related structures like shelters and support programs; as provided by my interviews with activists and the literature reviewed. I now review the conclusions I have drawn from this research and what I think can be done with it, including future research that can be undertaken to continue asking these questions about the place of social housing activism in Ontario.
Conclusions Drawn From This Research

Research, much like activism, is about creating interruptions and interventions in our thought and theory. Out of my research, I felt there were two major conclusions I could draw out of this work, regarding the reliance on social services to normalize homelessness and the need for social housing activism to grow as a movement.

There is a very heavy emphasis on social services to address social problems like homelessness. In my historical overview of the social housing system, I focused on the policies and programs at the federal and provincial programs for the most part, because these policies and programs as designed and legislated by senior levels of government have an enormous impact on community groups because these dictate what they can and cannot do. Even when an agency wants to engage in advocacy work, the reality is that operating within the not-for-profit sector has its challenges. However, as Chris Harris points out, agencies and individuals are willing to take on these challenges to bring social justice work back into the sector (APCOL, 2010). This is particularly necessary considering the emergency shelter and social housing systems are both at capacity, with waiting lists continuing to grow. Though social services are necessary in order to address the short term, they normalize these social problems by trying to relieve the symptoms yet without touching the root cause of the issue. If we do not discuss the realities behind homelessness and poverty, there will never seem to be a real need for social housing.

Anti-poverty and homelessness activists can change the way we talk about social housing in Ontario by bringing forward their data and clients’ stories, their knowledge and best practices, and their ability to coordinate and educate different groups of people of these realities. I believe we also need to encourage more activism so that we can attract the best and brightest towards the social housing sector. There is a movement but it is not as cohesive as it can be. This may require studying other social movements so that we can look at how we are engaging and motivating
people to take action. We need to encourage membership so that people know and identify with the movement. Having mass appeal will also encourage identifying as an activist, and this can be done through multiple ways of framing the issues behind homelessness and social housing. The environmental movement, for example, has a large membership and is able to bring this hip, cool edge to it. I understand that “housing is not sexy” as a movement (Paige, personal communication, August 13, 2010). Yet if we can address the stigma behind poverty and social housing, we may be able to spin these social issues as part of a larger social justice and environmental movement.

I hope that these issues will be explored further through academic and community-based research, while providing a space of reflection and a new perspective for our ideas and actions.

The Future of Housing Research

Even as a young child, I have always been curious about anything and everything, coming up with my own theories and ideas about how the world around me worked. Though I am at the end of this thesis, I have so many more questions and ideas that could be explored in social housing and/or activism. I have listed just some of my ideas as to possible research ideas to carry out from this point forward, should you be looking for inspiration and something to consider. At best, I have written a thesis that will make one “look back and talk back” (Smith, 1987 p.8) to the ideas and viewpoints encompassed within these pages. As Kemeny stated earlier, housing research spans a large range of studies; my questions have naturally done so.

I mapped out a history of social housing in Ontario, revolving around mostly policy and programs to outline how the social housing system was not established to help the homeless, as Hulchanski (2001, 2005, 2006, 2009) points out that this was the case for renters in general. Including the activist perspective on this history would really complete the picture of this history,
and perhaps provide insights on strategies, successes, and failures from the past. This history can also be drawn in relation to other social movements around the time to see how framing and progression took place within the social housing movement. For example, the civil rights and feminist movements will have had a different spin on the right to housing, in contrast to the environmental and public health movements.

On the other hand, a study can also focus on activists who are specifically social housing residents and/or who have “lived experience” as a homeless individual or family. Activism can also be studied within particular household types (families with children, couples, individuals, seniors, etc.) to see how these people fight for their rights to housing, including the stereotypes and obstacles they face in doing so. On the other hand, a study similar to this thesis can look at how social enterprises are changing the face of social housing, along with other forms of active community development. Community gardens, tenant groups, job training programs, and youth councils are all just examples if one wanted to focus on specific actions or types of programs in social housing buildings and complexes. I would also be interested to know what would happen if we returned to a public health frame for social housing: we could connect it to the environmental and green jobs movements, and it may involve more people beyond the academic and practitioners’ circles already engrossed in the social justice and poverty social movement sectors.

For something more abstract or philosophical, one can elaborate further upon the issues of charity and/or stigma within the social housing sector. It could particularly paint a picture about the feeling of being homeless, much like Frantz Fanon’s “The Lived Experience of the Black”. Should it be written with the first-person perspective, it could be used as an educational tool for social justice. However, this would have to come directly from a person who has
experienced or is experiencing homelessness; and/or someone who has lived through the stigma of living in social housing.

**Summary of Contributions from This Thesis**

As I pointed earlier, according to Razack, “responsible research and writing begins with a critical examination of how relations of power shape knowledge production. [...] Knowledge about the social, David Goldberg reminds us, is not produced in a vacuum” (Razack 2009). Community development is about developing and furthering the capacities of all individuals in a community, and about balancing individual and societal rights. Incremental changes are being made within the system but the root causes of homelessness and of not having decent housing are not being addressed by the system as it is, though that is implicitly what the affordable housing system is meant to do. The façade erected by the authority and power wielded through “public systems” considered beneficial to society such as planning, policy, and affordable housing appear clearer may often go unnoticed; and may feel like an unsettling feeling, an “uneasiness” when engaging in this kind of work. Peeling back the layers of this discomfort – that “sensation of disquiet”, as Dorothy Smith would put it (1999 p.1) – can allow society’s approaches to such systems and the justifications underlying such systemic distinctions in the name of the public good to become visible to those who wish to explore that tension.

Theoretically, I anticipate that this work sheds some light on what it means to shift our understanding of the social housing system from one that favours and promotes social services as the main solution to issues of homelessness and inadequate housing, to one that is punctuated with other models of community development. By examining movements and activism alongside social services, the point at which affordable housing is a hand-up and not a hand-out can be traced as the long-term impacts of activism, which is critically proactive in nature, are made clearer. This, in turn, can create real change beyond incremental actions that do not address the
root causes of the lack of affordable housing or of homelessness. Ideally, this work will bring forward some voices from within the activist and advocacy communities that work towards issues pertaining to affordable housing, homelessness, and poverty, broadening the frame to include this activity within the larger picture of affordable housing in Ontario.

In practice, I believe this conversation has to continue and be taken up between activists with each other and with others in the communities in which they operate, particularly service providers, government officials, and residents. The activist community also needs to encourage others to get involved. The stronger the movement is, the more pressure there is for agencies in power to do something about the issues at hand while addressing their assumptions and generalizations. Their work re-informs society about who homeless people are and the purposes behind social housing. Conceptually, we all agree that integrated neighbourhoods, social housing, and the like are necessary. On the other hand, there are barriers put up to prevent particular people from moving into many neighbourhoods and from establishing social housing to meet the real demand in communities across Ontario. As Nicole shows, most people believe in the ideal that everyone has the right to a roof over their heads that is safe, stable, and affordable:

In the ideal world, I’d love [for] everybody to have a home. By having a home doesn’t necessarily mean own a house. A place that they have where it’s a roof over their head where they feel safe and secure, where they don’t have to worry about neighbourhood violence, or bed bugs, or you name it (Nicole, personal communication, July 21, 2010).

Yet this ideal has not translated very well into action. Manen merely observes the instant feeling when passing people who may appear homeless: "we sense a there's a deeper tragedy". I hope it will get activists to think more about how they can conceptualize, strategize, and act on these issues together in order to touch on this man-made disaster (Crowe, 2007). Maybe it will also get them to ask how they can organize differently: if this only works for people in the largest urban areas, we should be considering what is necessary so that the social housing movement becomes more widespread and can be applicable to stakeholders in smaller and/or rural areas.
Recalling Quaid-e-Azam’s words at the very beginning of this thesis, I hope this thesis shows a peek of that glimmer of hope, courage, and confidence in what we can achieve as a society.

Overall, I want this piece of work to be used much like a beautifully designed place of worship by people who do not usually attend services in those places: a space where you can lose yourself in reflection, deliberation, and contemplation regarding the work that we do as activists, as community developers, and as educators. I am not trying to force anyone to confront this collective philosophobia in social housing or in activism generally. I realize research on activism still has to be movement-relevant; after all, we are in the business of developing communities. However, we have to continuously ask ourselves why we do what we do and why we do it in certain ways.
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