

Aging in the Right Place: Temporary Supportive Housing for Older Male Veterans in Calgary, Canada

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AIRP
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Aging in the Right Place

Aging in the Right Place (AIRP) recognizes that where an older person lives impacts their ability to age optimally and must match their unique lifestyles and vulnerabilities. As a concept, AIRP involves supporting older adults to live as long as possible in their homes and communities.



Almost 100 years old. Copyright iStock Getty Images.



Agenda

Purpose

Background

Research Design

Findings

Conclusion



Purpose

Safe and inclusive temporary housing for older Veterans with experiences of homelessness is a key community support intervention. Accordingly, this multi-methods study aims to understand the socio-spatial needs of older Veteran shelter residents.

Homes for Heroes Foundation



Our villages for Veterans consist of 15 to 25 individual “tiny homes” arranged in a park-like setting. All homes face inward to facilitate peer-to-peer support:

Each home is less than 300 square feet in size, but fully equipped with all the features of a larger home
Each village also incorporates a central resource centre, social workers office, community garden and other amenities

CDiggon. Cities / Homes for Heroes Foundation
<https://homesforheroesfoundation.ca/calgary/>

Veteran Homelessness in Canada

- Recent estimates indicate 3,000-5,000 Veterans have experienced homelessness in Canada.
- Approximately 2,250 Veterans use homeless shelters every year.
- Veterans make up 2.2% of the homeless population and represent 1.7% of the overall population.
- 87.6% of the Veteran homeless population are male and older Veterans are over-represented in the homeless population, with nearly 50% age 50+.



Homeless Man Pulling Cart. Copyright iStock Getty Images

(Ellis, 2019; Forchuk et al., 2022; Government of Canada, 2022)

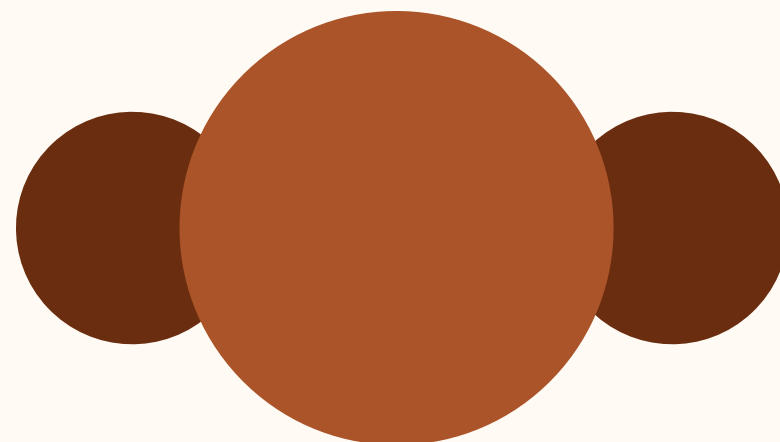
Pathways to Homelessness

Veterans

- Addiction/Substance Use (19.3 %)
- Housing Affordability (15.6%)
- Illness or Medical Condition (15.6%)
- Job Loss (14.6%)
- Conflict with Spouse or Partner (14.1%)
- Unsafe Housing Conditions (11.1%)

Non-Veterans

- Addiction/Substance Use (25.4%)
- Housing Affordability (19.2%)
- Illness or Medical Condition (10.9%)
- Job Loss (13.7%)
- Conflict with Spouse or Partner (14.5%)
- Unsafe Housing Conditions (9.9%)



(Government of Canada, 2022)

Veteran Vulnerability

“We know that there are many pathways into homelessness, such as poverty, lack of affordable housing, job loss or instability, mental illness and addictions, physical health problems, family or domestic violence, and family or marital breakdown. What sets veterans apart is that they not only deal with all of these same issues but they also struggle with their transition from military to civilian life. I talked about the military being a unique culture. Well, now the veteran is trying to adapt to a new civilian culture, feeling as though they have lost their identity and doing so without the social support network that was always so important”

(Lowther, 2018, 1530).

Research Design: Data Collection Tools



What is Photovoice?

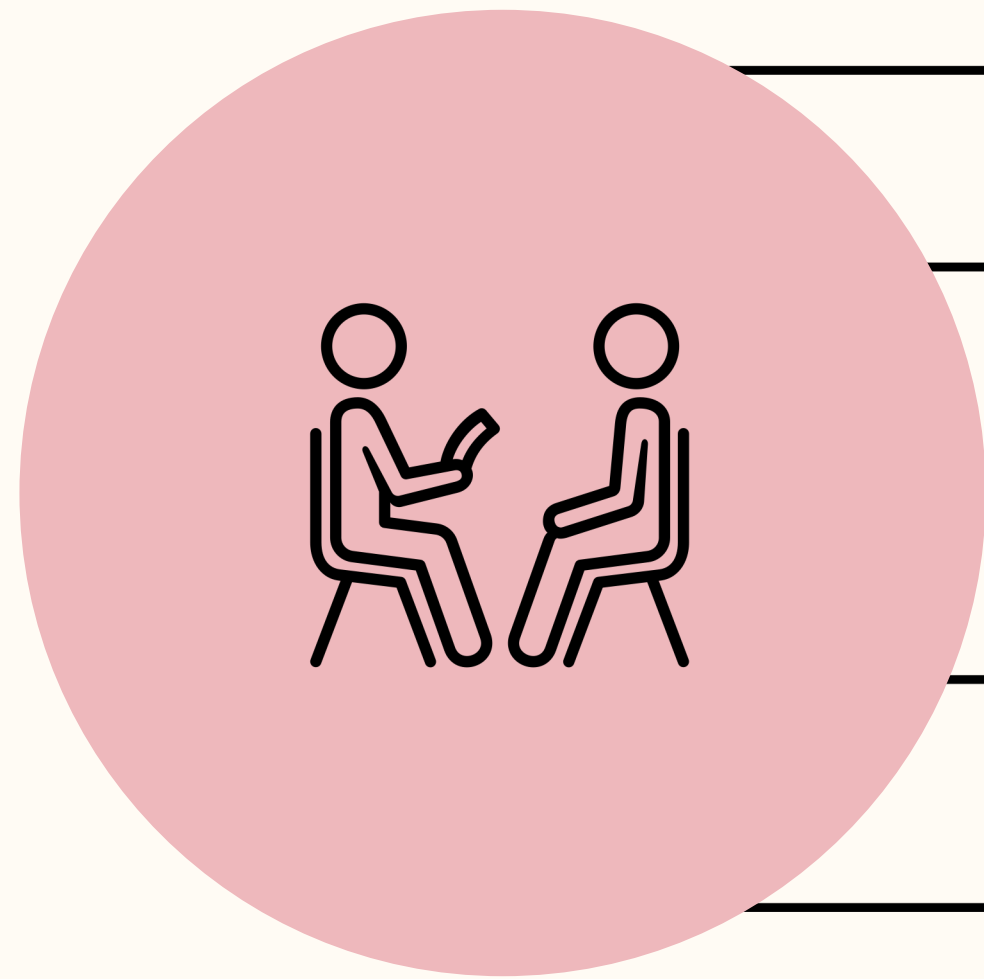
Photovoice is a qualitative method used in community-based participatory action research to document and reflect reality in a hands-on manner (Wang & Burris, 1997; Chaudhury et al., 2012)



- **Clients took photos that represent aging in the right place to them, to visualize, and illustrate perceptions and perspectives.**

Findings

Themes: Provider Interviews



→ Program Specific Challenges

→ **Eligibility Barriers**

→ Promising Practice Context

→ **Promising Practice Strengths**

→ **Systemic Barriers and Challenges**

Promising Practice Strengths

“I think it's a strength over, say a weakness...the village concept where they're together with former military members as well, peer veterans. **Sometimes that can be a negative because there can be some friction between people** and the village concept where you're living almost communally, but you're not, **can create relational dynamics...** Whereas, say maybe an apartment block where it's **an affordable housing apartment block or I lived in a condo and I couldn't tell you my neighbour's names,** you probably wouldn't see them half the time, you take the stairs, you take the elevator, you go into your condo, and it's not like you can see your neighbors. **You can't sit out on your patio and talk across the patio to your neighbour. So, in our communities, everything, all the doors face inwards, you can't help but walk past people because their front porches all face the walkway in the village.** The resource center, the common area are shared. That's where the laundry facilities are. **So, you can't help but get to know all your neighbours. And sometimes you can't expect everybody to like everybody.** So, you're gonna just have friction, relational dynamics, and stuff. So, **but I think generally speaking this aspect of this Veteran's Village is probably, I would on the whole, say absolutely, it is a strength of the design.”**

-Provider 1

Systemic Barriers and Challenges

“I think personally it's because **Veterans can leave service with trauma that is not necessarily experienced by the average citizen.** And so sometimes they need a **little extra help or they get help because of their trauma or other physical injuries** that they **acquire during service.** They can **fall into housing insecurity quite easily perhaps compared with other demographics.** And for me personally, the Veterans, as far as social programs go, can be the thin edge of the wedge, so to speak. **So for example, it's very hard politically to say no to the needs of a Veterans in our country, right? You can't be perceived as being discriminatory against veterans or whatever. It's not socially acceptable. So if you can advocate on behalf of Veterans because they need the services that they need, it also becomes easier down the road to advocate for civilians as well, because the need is demonstrated on a very comparatively small demographic, if that makes sense.”**

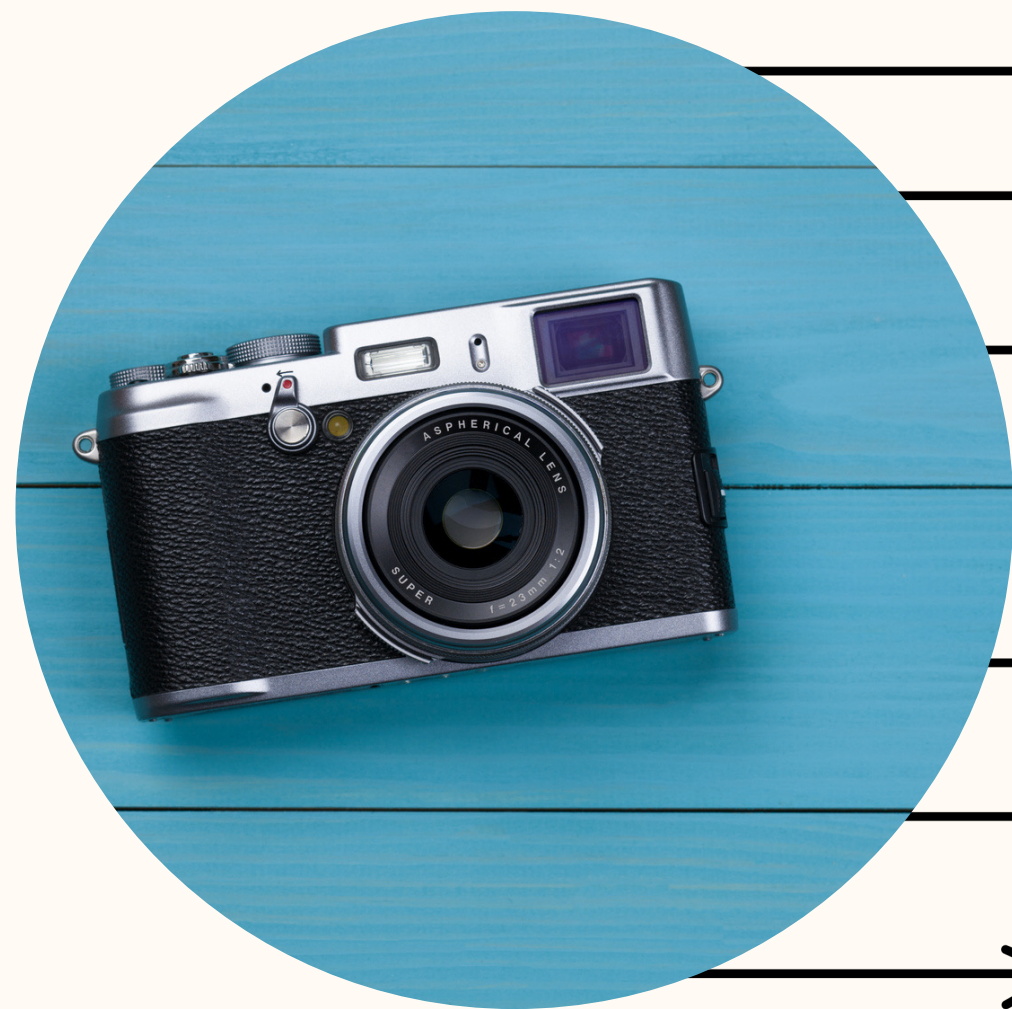
-Provider 4

Eligibility Barriers

So, what happens with the new tenant, they come in and they close the door and they feel safer, weak, and they don't engage if we've not done a job properly in regard to the assessment, and usually it's around drugs and alcohol. So, we assess, and we make sure if there's somebody with drug and alcohol abuses, we get them into a program before they move into the village. So, we have a lot of post-traumatic stress and drinking and abuse it's not something that's gonna work within that community atmosphere. So, it's not a dry facility, but the fact is, you know, any substance abuse is a real problem. So, it usually tends to be with new tenants and we've misdiagnosed the issue and then they start drinking or doing drugs and then they're causing a disturbance within the village. And that can lead to violence and that can lead to people fighting and that can lead to the police. And police show up with someone with post-traumatic stress. That's a problem. I mean, we had an instance where a new tenant, ex-wife called the police and said he had a gun. Now he didn't, but the SWAT team came, had 13 officers and you know, basically SWAT teams come in the village. And that set back three of our tenants. I mean, it took us good three weeks to get them able to leave their housing.

-Provider 4

Emerging Themes: Client Interviews



→ Autonomy

→ **Belonging, Community, and Connection**

→ Ageism

→ Routine and Daily Rhythm

→ **Safety**

→ **Recognition**

→ Built Environment

Safety



“Just Another Part of the Unit”

-Participant 4

Participant: Well, when I'm out on the street or something like that I don't have a fridge. So, that's like a treasure chest...

Interviewer: What in this photo contributes to your idea of living or aging in the right place?

Participant: Just security, I guess. Security, dignity, not going hungry, stuff like that.. It's a place to live. Sure. Yeah... I don't just feel comfortable here. Yeah know, I get along with everybody. I've haven't really had a fight with anybody here. I've been here a year and a half and, you know, they mind their own business. I mind my own. Socialize once in a while, you know, and we see each other and stuff and that's great. It's just good for me.

Belonging, Connection, and Community

“I didn't want to get to know the guys that far. **I just wanted to be myself, get to know them too within reason...**I just don't wanna get too close to the guys that much. **Like they taught us in the military,** I talked to a couple people who don't understand the military way of thinking. **Don't get close to your comrades too much.** You don't know.

They said, well, you're military people. Yes, we military people. **But when you're in combat, you're comrade could be shot, murdered or whatever. You're gonna sit there, and bang, you're gonna have your whole unit gone. So don't get close. Get close, but don't get too close.** So, this same thing here. We're getting close, but we're also staying our distance, cause we don't wanna get too close cause we know what's out. **We already lost two guys here.** Unit eight and unit ten. So, we got to know them, feel sorry for them. **We feel sorry for us for losing them.** Okay. **But we're not gonna sit there and cry. Maybe it's worth crying inside. At the same token too, I just knew darn well we all gotta push on sooner or later.”**

-Participant 2

Recognition

“The interesting thing for me was the fact that the amount of time that was taken and a number of people involved in coming down our street to recognize our contribution to Canada as Veterans. And that to me was a pretty moving scenario. There was a few of these kinds of things. I didn't get any of the really big pictures. Like the ones where you'd have like, about a hundred vehicles down the road. They were waiting to come up, but they all had signs on them like this, where the kids had flags and were waving them. The main point was that they were recognizing what we did as veterans...More recognition of us as veterans than not. And for me, that was, that was important. That was the first time that I really felt that what we did was recognized...”

-Participant 5



Conclusion

- These are preliminary findings as the data collection and analysis is ongoing
- Photovoice can be an effective research methodology to engage older adults experiencing homelessness in participatory research and promote a sense of empowerment among study participants
- Housing policy initiatives that promote aspects of AIRP highlighted by participants and the right to adequate housing can support older adults to age in the right place given their unique circumstances and vulnerabilities

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