

Interviews with People without Homes Fall 2014

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Summary

This report summarizes some of the themes that have emerged while talking with people without homes in Grande Prairie in the fall of 2014. The main issue identified involved the challenges of finding and paying for affordable, appropriate housing. Housing First was seen as a valuable service to those who had accessed it.

Methodology

Appendix 1 is the research proposal and it describes the methodology used. In summary, I talked with people at various agencies throughout Grande Prairie including the Salvation Army, Rotary House, the Friendship Centre, ASLS, Odyssey House and Sunrise House. The topic was introduced as gathering information for the city “about what works and doesn’t work and what you need around housing.” People volunteered to share through informal conversations. There was a great deal of willingness to participate. Notes were transcribed afterwards in a way that would prevent identification of individuals. As I continued the conversations I found similar themes emerging indicating that I had reached an appropriate threshold of interviews.

With the agencies visited, I would most often make an announcement about the purpose of my visit as per the script given. I then invited people to come and talk to me. Most people approached me freely. In some cases I went around to various people in the room and asked them if they would be interested in talking to me. So those who provided information did so voluntarily. I told them that the information given was anonymous. In one instance I sat down and nobody came to me (at the Salvation Army) but there was a baby nearby and as soon as I started cooing with the baby, the mother brought her over and talked to me and others then approached me as well. In some cases the conversations were with individuals, in some cases they were with small groups. Sometimes a conversation with one or two people found other people nearby chiming in with agreement with a certain point. Not everyone who was in a room came forward to speak with me. I did not pressure people if they didn’t volunteer.

There was only one time when people openly choose not to participate. In one case it was a worker of the agency who encouraged a young man to come and talk to me. He was reluctant and walked away from her and me. Another time someone had a few questions of the purpose of my activity, asked for my business card and then willingly shared. A visibly Aboriginal woman and the Friendship Centre took my number and said that she had lots to tell me but that this wasn’t the place and that she’d call me but I never got a call. A technique I used with Aboriginal people was to talk in my limited Cree which opened doors immensely, usually starting with laughter.

I always asked people whether they had a home or not before interviewing them. In one case I talked to someone who had a home but was about to lose it due to eviction. I also spoke to another man who had been on the street in Grande Prairie for years but had recovered from his addiction and was visiting Grande Prairie and his old friends and agencies to thank them for their help and support. The others all reported verbally that they were without homes.

When people began talking to me, I let them tell their story. I often summarized what they said to make sure that I understood them. This summarizing also opened them up to either clarifying if I hadn't understood properly or continuing if they felt heard and had more to say. Either way, it seemed encouraged the conversation. I then asked them what was working, what was not working, what did they still need and what would they like to see changed. Sometimes I asked specifically about Housing First if that had not come up in the conversation.

The information often came out in their stories more so than as direct answers to questions. For example, someone talked about how a Housing First worker helped them get Alberta Works funding after they had tried to get it on their own. Obviously, the advocacy role of the Housing First worker was helpful to this person. When asked what they still needed that they were not getting the answer was most often help in finding a place that they could afford that was suitable.

People's willingness to share was notable. At least twice people said that they really hoped I could bring their concerns forward because it was important to them that the decision-makers heard what they said. In those cases I made a particular point of repeating the message and telling them again my purpose as per the script. People clearly valued being asked for their opinions.

Approximately 44 people were interviewed. After each group of interviews/focus groups, the individuals were categorized in order to understand which groups were bringing up which issues. The categorization was done based on their behaviour, how they looked/smelled (i.e. alcohol smell, mickey sticking out of a pocket, visible Aboriginal features, youthful appearance, child in tow), and how they talked (paranoia, slurred speech, Cree accent). The first eight categories are exclusive. For the working poor, this category was designated based on their stories.

Single men	10
Single men with visible addictions/mental health issue	7
Single women	6
Single women with visible addictions/mental health issue	4
Single women with children	3
Couple with children	5
Couple with visible addiction/mental health issue	2
Youth	7
Visible Aboriginal	18
Working poor	14

Results

When asked what works, people said that having a **Housing First worker as an advocate** was a great help and they really appreciated this assistance. This was particularly true in having to deal with Alberta Works. Some talked about hitting walls with agencies until they had a Housing First worker. Though someone also mentioned that one housing related agency had not been willing to have the Housing First worker advocate for this individual in terms of appealing a decision. The consensus was that the Housing First workers were very helpful as advocates.

The biggest obstacle people found was simply **finding affordable housing**. Several people talked about looking for housing most commonly with Kijiji but also by “going around.” An older gentleman even talked about having a brother in another city doing the internet work for him because he wasn’t computer literate. They talked about how having a bad credit rating was an obstacle when they applied for housing. There was some frustration about answering ads in Kijiji and then finding out there wasn’t really an opportunity there. Young people were frustrated by their inability to legally sign a lease because of their age. Some said that the only affordable places were in a “seedy” part of town and they felt unsafe there.

People expressed lots of frustration over the **cost of housing** in Grande Prairie. A few talked about the need for rent controls. Some talked about the need for subsidies. Those who had applied for subsidies talked about the long waiting list there to get help.

People need **help with finding housing they can afford**. That is what was most frequently mentioned as a need.

The other need was the initial **cost of damage deposit and first month’s rent**. The working poor talked about how once they had this initial help they were well on their way if they could just overcome this initial hurdle. Finding something affordable for them and getting this initial help was all that they wanted or needed. However working sometimes precluded them from getting the help they needed. Some were even willing to pay back any initial help they got.

With the lack of affordable housing, people were puzzled why the **low income houses on 108th Avenue** were closed. Those who were familiar with them say they were in better shape than some of the places they have seen to rent.

Some people talked about **Fletcher House** and would like to see something similar again.

Lots of people talked about either themselves or people they knew **being banned from Rotary House for life**. When asked why individuals were banned, those who were banned were mostly unable to clearly articulate a reasonable reason. The one who did talked about efforts to become reinstated having failed. Those who weren’t banned were also puzzled by why some people were banned. The latter felt that everyone should have a place to go and when Rotary House turns people away there is nowhere for them to go. It isn’t truly a homeless shelter and more a hostel for those who can pay the nightly fee (unless they are accessing the mats program).

Someone expressed gratitude for the **free meals** available at various agencies because after the rent was paid there was nothing left over for food. Someone said that they really appreciated the bagged lunches that the Salvation Army used to provide for those who couldn’t make it to their meals for various reasons but they have been discontinued. Someone mentioned that food vouchers would be a help. Likewise, help with transportation was always appreciated as that was another cost that was hard to meet. For those sleeping rough, blankets would be welcomed.

Several people talked about how they felt that **if their circumstances were different they would get better help**. In one case it was someone who had a boyfriend saying if she was single with her child she feels she might be eligible for more help. Another fellow talked about having had a common-law spouse before he moved here and somehow that prevented him from being looked at favourably for a program that might have helped him otherwise. Another person talked about the need to say you have

addictions or mental health issues in order to access programs for housing, somehow being the working poor was not enough. Someone mentioned that this tension between your reality and having to appear a certain way to be eligible for a program chipped away at their self-respect. This theme suggests that the greatest amount of flexibility is required in programming as individuals come with a variety of issues.

Flexibility in the length of Housing First programming was also very important to people. Sometimes people need help for a short period and other times for a period much longer than a year.

Various people talked about the help they got from family and friends. Originally, many of them had stayed with other people but their welcome always wore out suddenly when it was no longer working for one or the other of the parties. That's when the crisis happened for them, suddenly and without any warning they may have been asked to leave or the family needed the space for someone else or the friends were moving on or other circumstances changed. Then, when they were in crisis, they turned to help but found **waiting lists**. They said that the waiting lists are a big problem. Some people heard about the waitlists with Housing First so they didn't even go there. Others applied and were frustrated waiting. They wanted more action in a more timely way.

Making and keeping **appointments** was a difficulty some people expressed. For those working, being able to meet with people about housing at times other than the business day presented a challenge. Because of the housing situation, landlords have the upper hand in setting meetings times. Getting to appointments with landlords was also a challenge given work hours, transportation issues and child care. A suggestion for improvement for Housing First would be to have hours on evenings and weekends.

A theme that came up was people wanting front line **workers to have a good attitude**. They wanted workers who had the time and interest to listen and be responsive to their situation. They wanted workers who understood what it was like to live on the streets. They wanted them well trained and happy. They talked about better screening, incentive programs and good enough pay to attract good people. Sometimes they found workers not having enough time to be attentive. Other times they found workers very good but they complained about those higher up restricting access or creating road blocks. They wanted the workers to be "civil and humane." They recognized that the programs they were running couldn't bend so far that people took advantage of them. They would have appreciated an acknowledgement of the efforts they were making. The working poor, in particular, wanted to be acknowledged for their efforts but how they still faced barriers.

A couple of **people who had been helped by Housing First some time ago** talked about the good service they had but they found themselves in a bad situation again. When asked what could have been done differently the first time, they weren't really sure. A conversation exploring what went wrong in all three cases involved the social aspect. All of them talked about how they were very kind and generous and not very good at discerning who to share with and who not to. So they found themselves in situations where other people took advantage of their new, more stable housing situation. Not being able to say "no" they welcomed these dysfunctional people into their lives and ended up paying the price. One mentioned that better monitoring early on might have helped. Another talked about the need to learn some different social skills to be able to be more assertive but in a good way although he admitted that he wouldn't have been open to this suggestion at the time.

Those wanting to work mentioned that it was readily available here but they had a bit of a **merry-go-round getting tickets** to help them be work ready. They needed an employer ready to hire

them to get help getting the needed training but nobody was interested in hiring them without the training. Though this is not specifically a housing issue, it affected their ability to get the jobs they needed to find and keep housing. Beyond this immediate concern was the ability to get the training they needed to get the better paying jobs to be able to afford the high rents. Help with writing the apprenticeship entrance exam was mentioned in particular. Being an apprentice would solve the housing issue permanently.

The **advocacy role** in a larger sense than Housing First was talked about. Having someone on your side help when there's a problem accessing a program was very valuable to people. Housing First seems to meet that need but there is only so much they can advocate for and if you don't have a worker yet what do you do when you need advocacy?

Some people who I encountered did not know what I meant when I asked about their experiences with Housing First. They were looking for help but didn't know there was a service that might be able to help them. **They hadn't heard of Housing First.** Most of them talked about their search in Kijiji and some might not have been eligible for Housing First. However it might be worthwhile to occasionally place an ad in Kijiji about the Housing First program.

Help dealing with addictions was a common theme. The time period was a big issue. Several people said they when they felt ready to deal with their issue there were long waitlists or they were told that in a couple of months they might get into a rehabilitation centre. That kind of response was discouraging. One Aboriginal couple said that they didn't understand why rehab. had to be individual and why couples couldn't go together to support one another. I mention that they are Aboriginal because of the cultural importance of relationships being a factor in this desire for mutual support versus the more independent, individualist approach more common in the larger population.

Young people wanted **help with landlords** understanding their particular situation in terms of not having a rental history and not being able to sign a lease.

One person mentioned that the **emergency fund** at the city could only be accessed once a year and that simply wasn't enough for people in some cases.

Help with setting up a **trustee** situation was mentioned by one person, particularly when they had a large influx of cash from a certain settlement.

An innovative idea that someone mentioned for the chronic homeless was a **booth** like the smoking booth outside the casino that has a button people can press to get heat for a period of time. Another expressed physical need was **public washrooms** with a shower somewhere or a port-a-potty where people sleep rough.

There is a need for **more month-to-month** rentals instead of only year long leases. Some also talked about the need for a hostel with more privacy.

In summary, the main ideas involved the challenges of finding and paying for affordable, appropriate housing. Housing First was seen as a valuable service to those who had accessed it. There were a variety of ideas of things that could be addressed. These are summarized in the table on the next page where an X indicates that this issue was identified by one or more people in the group indicated. Also, the list is in order of issues most discussed versus those who fewer people addressed.

	Single men	Single men with visible addictions/mental health issue	Single women	Single women with visible addictions/mental health issue	Single women with children	Couple with children	Couple with visible addiction/mental health issue	Youth	Visible Aboriginal	Working poor
Housing First worker as an advocate	X	X		X	X		X		X	
finding affordable housing	X		X		X	X	X	X	X	X
cost of housing	X		X		X	X	X	X	X	X
help with finding housing they can afford	X	X	X	X	X			X	X	X
cost of damage deposit and first month's rent	X				X	X		X		X
low income houses on 108 th Avenue	X					X			X	X
Supportive living like Fletcher House		X		X			X		X	
being banned from Rotary House for life	X	X	X	X			X		X	X
free meals	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X
better help with different circumstances						X				X
flexibility of hours	X								X	X
waiting lists					X	X		X	X	X
appointments		X		X	X		X		X	
workers to have a good attitude	X	X		X			X	X	X	X
helped by Housing First some time ago	X	X							X	X
merry-go-round getting safety courses/tickets	X							X		X
advocacy role	X	X		X					X	
hadn't heard of Housing First	X				X	X		X	X	X
help dealing with addictions		X					X			
help with landlords	X	X	X		X	X		X	X	X
emergency fund		X								
trustee		X								
A heated booth	X	X								
public washrooms				X					X	
More month to month instead of leases	X									X

Sometimes a group may not have mentioned a certain issue that may be of concern to them because the conversation took a different for direction. For example, men and women with visible addictions never talked about the cost of housing being a barrier to them. For them, the issue of being treated with respect was of utmost importance. That is not to say that the cost of housing is not a concern for this group. It just means that it was not brought up by them in the interview/focus group.

**Appendix 1 - Research Proposal
To the City of Grande Prairie
From Moniyasko Consulting Ltd.
August 29, 2014**

Goal – to gather information from homeless people to assist in focusing the direction of the next five years of the Housing First Program

Method – drop in visits at locations where homeless people are located and have informal focus groups/conversations with them to gather their ideas and input

Locations:

- Friendship Centre - 2-3 times
- Salvation Army at meal times – 2-3 times
- ASLS drop in room – 2-3 times
- Rotary house – 2-3 evenings
- Talk to the outreach worker about possibly talking to families in hotels
- Odyssey House – 1-2 times
- Sunrise House - 1-2 times

Introduction – introduce researcher. “I’m contracted to the City to help them figure out how to better help homeless people find and keep housing. I’d like to ask you’re a few questions and hear what you have to say about what works and doesn’t work and what you need around housing. What I learn will be used in the city’s Housing First plan for the next five years. Are you interested in sharing your ideas with me?”

Specific questions:

1. What do you find helpful in helping you find and keep housing?
2. Is there anything you need that you are not getting?
3. Do you have any suggestions of what would help with the housing situation in Grande Prairie?
4. If there was one thing you could change in the Housing First program in the next five years, what would it be?

Information gathered will be written up in raw form including observations of the respondents (i.e. someone who clearly has mental health issues, people with visible addictions, Aboriginal people, families with children, etc.). Emerging themes either that are repeated or original ideas will then be drawn out of the material and described as relevant considerations for the future plans. A short report will address these themes and notes from the entire conversations will be included as appendices in the report.

Appendix 2 – Notes from meetings

Salvation Army – September 15, 2014 - Afternoon

- Spoke with two men, one homeless and one formerly homeless
- Both spoke highly of the help they get at the Salvation Army
- They talked about how difficult it is to get the right type of help for what they needed.
- One said that getting help from Housing First was as easy as walking through a wall. He said they asked what he was doing or trying to do and asked if he had an address which he didn't and said they can't help him.
- The other said that he wanted to get rehab help and someone at AADAC was trying to help him but it was near impossible to make appointments because his life was so chaotic. When asked for rehab he was told he had to wait several months.
- They seemed very confused about the rules at Rotary House, particularly concerning being "banned for life." They felt these decisions were made arbitrarily. They also felt that there was no flexibility around payment. Some of the workers there are very compassionate and even bent rules to help people out. They wondered if Rotary House was even full now given all the rules and how many people they knew that couldn't stay there anymore. Though the building is newer, they missed the Wapiti Dorm and felt they got better service there.
- One talked about a Christian recovery house he went to in another place. He got a referral from an individual who worked in an agency and then help from the Salvation Army for a bus ticket to go there. There are various houses from 5 to 10 beds each. They learned about the bible and ate well. He learned how to cook and clean. People stayed there for varying lengths from 3 months to 18 months. He said when they go there in the summer they're more likely to succeed because they really want it, in the winter they might just be wanting to get out of the cold. There was also a third stage house for people who were working but still wanted support.
- One concern that they had was that sometimes the workers don't really understand. Maybe they could try living on the streets to truly understand it.
- One talked about how 3-4 people got a house some time back (it sounded like the beginning of Housing First) but that they weren't monitored so eventually dealers were working out of the house.

Salvation Army - September 18, 2014 - Lunch

- Several people said that they didn't think it was right to be charged to stay overnight at the Rotary House. One pointed out that he had stayed in homeless shelters throughout the country and nobody charged. They also mentioned that outstanding accounts from years ago are held against someone. They didn't feel it was right that after people stay so long or if they are repeat customers they are easily banned for life
- They talked about the merry-go-round with getting tickets. First you need a job confirmation to be able to sign up for the tickets yet you can't get an employer to hire you until you have tickets. Getting help with getting tickets was brought up again later as well.
- They spoke about how once you had a Housing First worker then Alberta Works seemed more willing to help.
- There continued to be complaints about the service received at Alberta Works. One person talked about it being easiest to get a bus ticket away from them rather than real help. They wished the staff treated everyone evenly and that you didn't get treated better after you went to your MP or MLAs office. They did understand that the system couldn't bend too far or people would take advantage of it however they felt that workers should be civil and humane

- Someone said that having guys just out of prison staying at Rotary House made it feel less safe because they act as if they're in prison still
- The hours for Housing First and other services are a problem because if you're working it's hard to get to a day time appointment. They would like things to be open evenings and weekends
- Someone who had had experience with Housing First a few years ago talked about how he was too nice and let people into his place who were drug dealers and ended up getting kicked out. He said it would have helped to have more monitoring. Regular (weekly) social worker visits at their new apartment going through a list of things with an emphasis on education, training, etc.
- There was also interest in having help doing the big learning like book learning to write the trades entrance exam.
- Someone talked about how at other places they have advocates who help people fight for their rights. For example if someone got kicked out of Rotary House the advocate would represent them to the authorities
- They talked about how important it is to pay social workers enough so that they're motivated to do their job well. They suggested incentives and screening people better. They would like to see happy social workers because they give better service then. They would like to see social workers who have experience having been on the streets.
- There doesn't seem to be a shortage of housing in terms of building housing but it all costs too much.
- There was some talk about harm reduction and some felt it didn't work. One person said that addictions and having a place don't go together.
- They spoke about the need to be flexible with program criteria
- One person felt that people shouldn't be put in jail for smoking marijuana – it's small potatoes

Odyssey House – September 19, 2014 - Afternoon

- Having access to resource people at Odyssey House really helps because they know where to get applications for housing
- Having access to funds for people fleeing violence is also a big help
- There was an impression that there would be more options for housing in Grande Prairie rather than in the smaller northern community from which one woman had fled. She was at a shelter elsewhere but transferred to GP feeling that there would be more options for housing.
- One woman was awaiting a meeting with Housing First
- The notion of advocacy and help from workers at the agency was reiterated.

Friendship Centre – September 19th, 2014 – Community supper

- What really helps is having services like the meals at the Friendship Centre because once the rent is paid there isn't much money left for things like food
- It's hard to find a job when you have low skills that pays enough to afford rent in this city
- They were wondering why the housing on 108th Avenue is sitting empty as it was in better shape than some of the rental units people are in right now
- They were also wondering why people can get banned for life from Rotary House. People should always have a place that they can crash no matter what

Salvation Army – September 25th, 2014 – Lunch

- A young couple with a baby talked about how they were from a lengthy commute out of town but wanted to move to the city. He was working during the day and so it was up to the woman and baby to look for a place. It was the man who had the rental history so that made it difficult as well. They were using Kijiji and landlords would want them to "come right away" to look at

something and they were from way out of town and it wasn't always easy to come in when it was convenient for the landlords.

- Someone said that Kijiji is frustrating because you look on in and see something new and when you inquire they say they don't have anything anymore.
- Someone suggested that it seems to be easier for single parents than for couples because single parents are seen as more needy than couples even though the couple may only have one person working.
- With the price of accommodation it makes sense to try to share but sharing with someone is hard if they're not reliable
- Someone was trying to move out of a situation where there were 11 related people of all ages living in a house with one bathroom
- Someone said that for the chronic homeless people it would be nice to have a shelter like the smoking booth outside the casino where people can push a button and get heat for a certain period of time.
- Someone talked about a good experience they had with Housing First a few years ago in terms of getting housing, help with addictions, help with trying to get on AISH and support from Grande Spirit. However over the long haul this person is back in crisis because they didn't change their friends. He talked about how he has trouble distinguishing between people who are trying to help him and those who are taking advantage of him. He has left a few of the latter into his life and they are causing problems for him now that is creating tension with his landlord. They come outside his place and throw rocks at his windows. He is scared to phone the police or do anything about it because he'll be called a "rat" but he fears the retribution he'll get for telling on people. He suggested that longer term follow-up might help. Also some skills about changing your life in terms of your friends but he admits he wouldn't have been that receptive to that at the time but now he sees where he went wrong. Unfortunately it might be too late for him.
- Someone suggested more help dealing with addictions could always be used
- The emergency fund at the city can only be accessed once a year and that wasn't enough for someone
- Help with food would be good – food vouchers
- Sometimes setting things up with a trustee, especially when there is a larger influx of cash for a certain reason, would be a good idea and one person would have liked help with that because they went through a large payment very quickly

Sunrise House – September 25th, 2014 – Supper

- The immediate response when asked about housing was to increase the minimum wage because paying for housing is so difficult. Food is expensive too. It isn't so much about money as the distribution of money
- Then they talked about lowering rent or getting support with rent. Affordable housing is really needed.
- Someone suggested building more houses but as they discussed this they realized that there are lots of new houses in the city but not many new apartments so they wanted to see more apartments built
- They said sometimes housing is available but in seedy neighbourhoods where people are unsafe. Someone talked about a 2 bedroom apartment for \$800 that was really small and the building had lots of "druggies" so they felt unsafe
- They were looking for places on Kijiji but when they went to them found that they were too young to sign a lease.

- They did not know about Housing First or ASLS
- They would like help with landlords understanding the special issues of young people and not discriminating against them because they are young
- One talked about a parent who had “been around and tried everything” to get housing. They talked about no luck at Grande Spirit or elsewhere. When asked what happened the impression shared was that the workers were lazy. They needed help finding a place

Friendship Centre – September 26th Community Supper

- Got kicked out of Rotary House and can’t even use the mat program anymore
- Couples are not allowed in detox, people want to do things together to help one another out, need to think about families working together for healing
- Attitude of the workers is critical. Sometimes the workers are really good but the management doesn’t have a good attitude. When asked more about this they said that you never know who they just had to deal with that made them grouchy
- Sharing accommodation never works and even though it seems to make sense at first because of the high rents the other person ends up bringing the wrong people into the mix
- It’s hard to get to services when you’re working, you only have weekends to get help and everything is closed on weekends.
- There seems to be some “run around” – go to housing first
- Having a Housing First worker really helps
- Appreciates getting rides to places they need to go
- Would like another Fletcher Building, not a Willow Place because nobody lasts at Willow Place
- The staff at Fletcher place was really good though it seemed a little over staffed

Rotary House – September 30, 2014

- Talked with one fellow who was working. He had come out and was staying with family for the summer but then they were no longer commuting to GP and he worked he but didn’t have transportation to he had to move here. He was looking for a place to stay. He went to Alberta Works and at first was told that they could help him with the first month’s rent and damage deposit. He found a place and went back two weeks later looking for that same help and was told that they couldn’t help him. He was told it was because he had a common-law wife where he used to live. He was unaware of Housing First. He has now found another possible place and is arranging to share it with another fellow from Rotary House. He is looking for help with the first month’s rent and the damage deposit and doesn’t know where to turn. He’d be more than willing to pay these things back.
- Another fellow had been staying with family when he first came here but after awhile that didn’t work out so he moved into Rotary House. He talked about trying FCSS and ASLS but was told that they didn’t have anything right now. That was a month ago. He’s looking for a one bedroom. He’s tried a few places but has bad credit so the credit checks don’t work out for him. He’s waiting and hoping. He really needs help with damage deposit and first month’s rent and that’s really it. He is on social assistance and is not eligible for work right now just having gotten out of the hospital, but that money isn’t enough to really help.
- Another fellow talked about being very misunderstood. He appears to be strung out because of a medical condition so people judge him negatively. He finds that at Rotary House there isn’t any privacy so there’s no place to really think. People steal things as well. He wants to have his own home for privacy’s sake. He’s unable to work because of his medical condition. He believes that he’s now cut off of social assistance and is in the process of applying for AISH. He has heard that it would take 7-8 months to go through housing first so he hasn’t even bothered to try it.

- A lady talked about how she has been both phoning and going into ASLS to get help daily for the last two weeks. When she goes in she's told to phone. Nobody ever answers the phone so she leaves a message. Nobody ever phones her back. She has had a couple of phones stolen but she still feels pretty sure that they haven't phoned back. Alberta Works turned her down for help because she wasn't at Odyssey House even though she was fleeing abuse. She had been at Odyssey House but didn't like it there because it made her feel worse.
- A fellow came to GP and some friends said they'd help him out but after a week and a half they asked him to leave. By that time he had a job. He talked about have a brother in another city look online for a place for him because he wasn't computer savvy. He figured it was easier for single ladies than men based on what the ads were asking for. He, also, needed help with the damage deposit and first month's rent
- In terms of solutions, some of the suggestions involved getting better/more shelters with more resources at the shelters so that there can be more privacy – more places where people can rent a room on a monthly basis.
- They talked about how workers need to have the time to hear the entire story and need to have flexibility to deal with varying circumstances because everyone is different and needs something different. They would like to see more effort in flexible programming.
- They talked about how there seems to be a disadvantage to being simply the working poor, that somehow you have to have something else going on before you are eligible for help
- Someone talked about how some people need help for longer and some for shorter depending on what is happening
- Credit checks seems to be a stumbling block for some people in looking for housing
- There needs to be some assessment of people who are making an effort, maybe going to work daily for cash, being consistent, having good intentions
- They talked about the need for subsidies for people who don't earn enough
- There was some talk about how the hoops you were required to jump through to get help often chipped away at your self-respect by asking you to be something you weren't. For example, if you don't have an addiction you don't get help
- They said that everyone has a unique story
- Workers aren't given enough flexibility to really hear people's circumstances and respond to their realities. They need more time with individuals.
- They talked about the satisfaction of getting a paycheque and being able to make your own way without any help, paying all your bills and having a bit left over for yourself.

A homeless family living with friends

- They have two kids
- They had come to Grande Prairie over a year ago and while he had work right away, it took a little while for her to find work because it needed to be close to where they lived (they only had one vehicle).
- At the beginning of their year in GP, because of only having one income, they struggled to meet the rent every month. It was particularly hard when the payday was within the week after the rent was due because he was paid every two weeks. Several times they missed the rent and got notices but they always eventually got it together
- The ladies at the property management company were very good and always understanding but they said it was the owners that made them do the things they had to do when they gave notices
- When it came time to renew their lease, it wasn't renewed because of the struggles they had had at the beginning of their year. They now have a bad reference as well.

- Thank goodness they were evicted in the summer when the kids could go spend time with their grandparents while the couple crashed with friends.
- Now they are still crashed with friends – all four of them – things are crowded and it's tough going. They've been on the list at Grande Spirit for over a year and haven't heard anything. They hadn't heard of Housing First.

ASLS – drop-in, October 7, 2014

- Having workers who respect you, who accept people, are kind and don't look down on them are so important. Having people understand what they are going through is important
- You have to be ready to overcome addictions
- Being banned from Rotary is a problem, trying to get back in after being banned is a problem. Even asked the Housing First worker to advocate for being let in again and Rotary refused to work with Housing First worker as an advocate. Also banned from soup kitchen
- Feels banning is unfair.
- Soup kitchen doesn't give out lunches anymore so the people who can't get there because of health or being banned can't have someone bring them a lunch
- Housing First are good advocates, tried on own but needed an advocate
- Grande Spirit waiting list is a problem
- Need for port-a-potty, free water for a shower, an outdoor washroom where people are sleeping rough
- Or give out blankets
- One guy had a place of his own for three years but he let the wrong people in and then lost it.

