WITHOUT INTENTION:
RURAL RESPONSES TO UNCOVERING THE HIDDEN ASPECTS OF
HOMELESSNESS IN ONTARIO 2000 TO 2007

by

Brenda Mary Elias

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Graduate Department of Adult Education and Counselling Psychology
Ontario Institute of Studies in Education
University of Toronto

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Abstract

This thesis analyzes the impact of the political decision to broaden the scope of the Government of Canada's 3-year National Homelessness Initiative (Human Resource Development Canada, NHI, 2002) from an urban focus to one that includes smaller communities. This change provided the opportunity to study the phenomenon of homelessness and how rural responses are formed. This author postulates that this focus of attention on an almost invisible phenomenon—rural homelessness—and the accompanying community planning processes funded by the Supportive Community Partnership Initiative (SCPI) will impact local social policy development. A multi-dimensional analytical approach was adopted and considered three components: first, a policy review, a broad look at the policy agenda framework in Canada; then, a case study to illustrate implementation issues related to the National Homelessness Initiative; and, finally, a reflection on current practice in order to realize a holistic critique of public policy.

The influence of socio-economic, political, and cultural factors on local planning and capacity building will be highlighted. Various models of governance were adopted across the country and guided the collaborative processes. This thesis presents an in-depth look at the community action plans and activities of the Simcoe County Alliance to

End Homelessness (SCATEH) in both the rural and urban settings of Simcoe County. The processes adopted, capacity building components identified, and outcomes over the 7 years covered by the SCPI agreement are examined. The limitations of using participatory local action planning to respond to complex issues such as homelessness are detailed along with a modified community-based policy development model recommended as a learning tool to be used by those volunteers acting as agents of change.

It is widely recognized that safe, affordable social housing is a fundamental need, and one that is extremely difficult to meet. The contribution this research makes is to reveal how effective government-community partnerships can be in a rural setting.

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Chapter One:
Overview

Evidence of homelessness in rural Ontario is hard to find. Visible signs of homelessness, such as people sleeping out of doors, are quite rare in small towns and open countryside. This may be due to the survival instincts of homeless rural people to become invisible.

Cloke aptly summarizes this situation:

Notions of rural idyll, and particularly ideas of problem-free country spaces, have remained largely unchallenged within academic and policy discussions. Issues of rural homelessness are conspicuous in their absence within recent rural policy documents in Britain. There is evidence of denial by rural dwellers themselves that homelessness exists in their place. (Cloke, 2001, p. 55)

The purpose of this thesis is to examine homelessness in the rural context. In order to understand this context, government–community partnerships created to deal with the phenomenon will be examined to determine whether characteristics of rural communities affect responses to homelessness. It is all too easy to assume that one of the reasons homeless people in a rural setting are hidden is because they have been forced to move to an urban center to find shelter and support services and that is the end of the issue. But this is not true of the current reality, as those with rural roots search for options and assistance to stay in their own communities.

There is debate in the academic literature about how best to define homelessness in contemporary society, and, however it's defined, whether homelessness even exists in rural areas (Carter, 1990, Chamberlain & MacKenzie,

1992). A thorough discussion of the various approaches to grounding the concept of homelessness will be presented in Chapter Two. Definitions range from the narrow view, defining homelessness in terms of access to housing or "houselessness," to definitions based on an expansive, multi-dimensional understanding of "home." The importance of sorting through the range of definitions in order to arrive at a clear understanding of what it means to be without a home should not be underestimated. The criteria used to define the term "homelessness" inform resource and policy decisions, which in turn affect the way the problem is dealt with. To quote a leading U.K. researcher in this field, "Ignorance about the problems and behaviors of homeless people leads to distorted images and stereotypes, and over the years has generated policies of both restraint and assistance" (Crane, 1999, p. 1).

The announcement of the National Homelessness Initiative (NHI) represents a dramatic shift in Canadian social housing policy in the 21st century where the emphasis of the federal government is on creating a short-term demonstration project rather than on establishing a national housing strategy for the longer term. The Government of Canada designed the initiative to help ensure community access to programs, services and support for alleviating homelessness in communities located in all provinces and territories across the country.

During Phase I of the Initiative (December 1999 to March 2004), communities focused on the most pressing and urgent needs of their homeless populations. They invested primarily in emergency shelters, established new ones, renovated and upgraded others while enhancing support services and facilities such as food and furniture banks. One component of NHI was called Supporting Community Partnerships

Initiative (SCPI) and was focused on assisting groups to develop community action plans.

Based on the successes and the lessons learned from Phase 1 as well as consultations with stakeholders, Federal, Provincial and Territorial representatives, together with the continuing need to support homeless people, the Government of Canada extended the Initiative until 2006. The extension of the Initiative was meant to help communities continue their efforts to reduce and alleviate homelessness and allow them to focus on longer-term solutions such as transitional and supportive housing.

Part of the effect of the National Homelessness Initiative has been an effort on the part of the federal government to "involve community" in both policy development and service delivery decisions (Phillips et al., 2003, p. 1). However, this approach to engaging community was viewed as "top-down" and raises many concerns about local participation in policy formulation and the need for a more "grassroots" approach (Leo, 2004). One issue to be addressed in this thesis is how these opposing approaches coexist within a local community-based planning process to address the complexities of homelessness in a rural setting.

This intersection of government social housing policy and community-based policy development forms a framework in which a critical theoretical approach may be applied. A brief history of social housing policy in Canada will be outlined in Chapter Two, as this background is profoundly important to understanding how we have reached this juncture (Bruce & Carter, 2005; Rose, 1980).

A predominant Canadian social value is the recognition of the basic human right to housing, ideally, through home ownership (Hulchanski, 1998). Policies related to social housing only truly gained momentum after the post-war years when from the 1940s onwards housing was first made available for returning soldiers and their families. Graham, Swift, & Delaney (2003) describe the Marsh Report on Social Security, released in 1943, as the turning point for social policy in Canada. Over the decades following the report, institutional and statutory measures put in place to provide indigent and vulnerable adults with shelter gave way to the creation of supportive housing models. Rapid expansion in new construction of social housing stock throughout the 1970s and 1980s in Ontario was accompanied by the development of an integrated approach to dealing with poverty that linked services, security of tenure, and income.

In Canada, homelessness is seen as a national disgrace. In response to increased awareness there has been an upsurge in willingness among many organizations to act on behalf of communities working tirelessly to prevent evictions and support people in their struggles to maintain their housing. Freezing to death on the street is seen as evidence of an obscene abuse of a human being's right to adequate shelter, and housing advocates have launched community actions to examine, respond to, and report on this specific rights violation (Crowe, 2004). By adopting a critical lens and specifically looking at communicative action strategies, as described by Edgar (2005), the steps involved in making changes to social policy at the community level will be considered.

"Community-centred programming" (Phillips et.al., 2003, p. 1), which must address historical, demographic, community health, social, ethnic and cultural, economic, and political factors, is complex enough when it involves municipal governments and geographically bound neighborhoods or relatively homogenous social or cultural communities. The situation becomes even more complex when the national government attempts to forge collaborative arrangements with local communities crossing several layers of jurisdictional boundaries. In spite of these challenges, the Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative operated in Canada for over 7 years under the direction of the National Homelessness Secretariat. The history of the SCPI experiment provides an opportunity to explore the difficulties and possibilities of this type of government partnership, and its effects on the development of new social policy.

Chapter Two also explores the relationships between partnering, community-based policy development, and capacity building related to planning for new units of social housing (Rice & Prince, 2000; Salamon, 1987; Smith, 2003). Key questions, such as how the SCPI governance model was chosen and structured, who the community leaders involved were, and how many partners signed the agreement, will be addressed in the case study. The various steps in the process of creating and implementing a Community Action Plan will also be described.

The federal community-based SCPI program was designed as an intervention to reduce homelessness with enough flexibility to respond to regional disparities (Phillips et al., 2003). Descriptions of government policy and programs, including the highlights of an extensive collection of facts and figures gathered from 1,800 projects nation-wide

in 61 different communities, are on the NHI website and are used as a primary data source (Human Resource Development Canada, 2007).

Rural Homelessness

This thesis looks at "homelessness" from an interdisciplinary perspective, and a brief review of the vast homelessness literature follows as I explore what the term means from a rural perspective. Key issues include the definition of homelessness, the scope of homelessness, its heterogeneity, intentionality, and competing explanations of homelessness which need to be explained in order to understand what the definition of rural homelessness becomes.

There are many pathways to becoming homeless and each individual story is unique, often involving both health and social support needs. Homeless people suffer from higher levels of disease from a complex set of causes (Crane, 1999; Crowe, 2007; Hwang, Tolomiczenko, Kouyoumdjian & Garner, 2005). Efforts to reduce homelessness and improve health have included biomedical, educational, environmental, and political strategies. While health and social supports are essential for the individual experiencing homelessness, and are a focus of debate, particularly related to escalating health care costs, this study focuses on the provision of social housing that is adequate, affordable, and embedded within support systems in the community.

Reid (2006) used the following five questions in her investigation of the various perceptions of homelessness:

1. What do people believe to be causes of homelessness?

2. Who is responsible for homelessness?

3. Who is responsible for "fixing" homelessness?

4. What solutions are seen as appropriate?

5. How does exposure to homelessness shift perspectives of stakeholders and the public?

Although these five questions are not explicitly part of this study, they do provide a general context for the focus group discussions that bring to the forefront various perspectives and opinions about what actions are possible. An integrated approach is required to deal with these perceptions about homelessness, i.e., an approach that draws on the breadth and depth of understanding of various local stakeholders. For purposes of this thesis a stakeholder is anyone who has a share or interest in the project outcomes and includes the voices of the homeless themselves. These voices are essential to this type of investigation and are central informants in the case study component of my research design.

There are significant gaps, i.e., research opportunities, in academic discourse about homelessness, and, unfortunately, the definitions used are often ambiguous. Strategic community-based research requires stakeholder and community engagement and more rigorous methods of investigation (Frankish, 2005). The SCPI Community Action Plan may prove to be one way to measure the engagement and level of understanding of homelessness in a community. A key assumption in this thesis is that an effective comprehensive planning process involving many stakeholders and partners has the potential to contribute directly to community capacity building related to developing policies and plans for supportive housing (Smith, 2003). In order to define

the desired social action which is linked to community planning, in a practical sense, it is helpful to adopt the theory of communicative action put forward by Habermas (1990). He distinguishes between strategic action which is oriented toward success and thus seeks to manipulate social "objects" and communicative action, which in contrast, is oriented to mutual understanding. The time spent by groups of people in discussion about the meanings and changing nature of homelessness is then critical to developing an action plan that is understood to be worthwhile and achievable. This thesis strives to find evidence linking the steps to developing these community action plans to outcomes that could actually end homelessness.

Very little attention has been given to rural homelessness by the NHI Secretariat. Chapter Three addresses the question: What is rural homelessness? First, a brief historical synopsis of rural development in Ontario will be given along with a summary of some of the documented features of rural communities. The definition of homelessness in the rural setting will draw upon legislation and responses that have been documented in studies conducted in the U.K. and the U.S. (Cloke et al., 2000a; Crane, 1999; Fitchen, 1992). Following that, there is a review of some of the major rural research programs and studies underway in rural Ontario that may influence the outcomes of government initiatives, initiatives that assume an infrastructure that may not even exist today. This lack of resources available in rural settings is another factor incorporated into the research design, and considered in Chapter Four.

Statistics Canada's definition of "rural" and "small town" will be adopted for the purpose of setting the population parameters. Statistics Canada (2008a) defines "rural"

as areas outside of centers with a population of 1,000 or more persons. The more technical statistical definition of rural follows in Chapter Three.

Based on 2001 Canadian census data, a 3-year study directed by Keating, Chapman, Eales, Keefe, and Dobbs (2004) explored the diversity of rural communities in the first such description of rural communities ever conducted in Canada. They observed: "Rural communities are not all the same and the usual portrayal of rural as the default of urban masks the heterogeneity among rural communities themselves" (Keating et al., 2004, p. 263).

The demographics of rural communities and their proximity to service centers are two features investigated by Keating et al. (2004) to seek correlations with the strengths of local social networks and links to relationships with formal, family and friend, and volunteer networks of support. One particular volunteer network, the Simcoe County Alliance to End Homelessness, is used in this thesis as the primary example of how volunteers operate in the rural setting. Reimer (2002) and Halseth & Ryser, (2006) look at economic aspects of capacity to determine whether a rural community is leading or lagging in development, and this provides another lens through which to view the characteristics included in the environmental scan of Simcoe County.

Although community groups are aware that the characteristics of rural homelessness can be very different, landmark studies such as the Mayor's Task Force on Homelessness by the City of Toronto (1999) have reinforced the idea that homelessness is an urban phenomenon associated with deteriorating inner city neighborhoods. Little research has been undertaken to determine how widespread this

problem is in rural areas where homelessness could be characterized as "invisible" and not confined to a particular kind of neighborhood. Exploring this hiddenness is a key aspect of this research, as outlined in Chapter Four.

The challenge of searching for data sources and estimates of the incidence of homelessness in rural communities is addressed through an examination of the British model, which includes a statutory requirement that statistics on homelessness in all rural districts be reported (Cloke et al., 2000b) and then through a search for comparable sources of data for rural Ontario.

While there are many nostalgic images of rural life and perceptions of the countryside as a warm and friendly place to live, modern, alternative definitions characterize "rural" as on the edge of civilization, where development and urban sprawl runs out, where the pavement ends, beyond the boundary of populated areas, or as disappearing landscapes and remote, isolated and uncaring places on the margins of society (Caledon Countryside Alliance, 2005; Norris, 1993).

It is particularly difficult to develop policies and programs to support those living in rural areas where small, dispersed populations mean that urban models of shelter and support solutions may not be appropriate. Rural gentrification of abandoned farmhouses and cottages, uncontrolled real estate development, and the diminishing supply of more congregate-style housing stock such as boarding homes and rest and retirement homes will be explored as these relate to the research on rural homelessness and the legislative framework already in place in the U.K.

Although this analysis of secondary census and housing market data does not measure homelessness per se, it does provide an indicator of the potential strengths and weaknesses of rural communities.

In addition, the highly charged theme of welfare reform (Bashevkin, 2002; Baxter, 1991; Glendinning, Powell & Rummery, 2002) and how changes to social assistance have influenced the current state of homelessness are reflected in the discussion of policy development.

Most of the federal SCPI allocations (80%) flowed to municipalities in urban areas, while another 20% of the SCPI funds were awarded to projects undertaken in smaller communities that demonstrated a high prevalence of homelessness. Simcoe County, Ontario, was one of the large rural areas successful in building a community model of governance and presenting a convincing case for federal funding even before the NHI was announced.

Chapter Four elaborates on the research design, which includes a review of the policy agenda in Canada, a case study, and the researcher's reflections on current practice. It describes the methodology used to examine the planning processes in three small towns and surrounding rural areas in Simcoe County. NHI policy documents and reports from Statistics Canada are the major sources of data informing the policy review. Most of the information originates from the federal government NHI website and from interviews with stakeholder and government representatives, focus groups, and a review of the Community Action Plans and SCPI (Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative) guidelines. The key principles for implementing local SCPI projects required

that formal partnership agreements be put in place that demonstrate an understanding of how to increase a community's capacity to respond to homelessness.

Given the overall goal to reduce and prevent homelessness, it should be possible to assess the impact of SCPI funding by looking at absolute numbers of those who were and are homeless. However, the National Homelessness Secretariat did not set any specific numeric targets for reduction of the number of homeless people or units of housing to be created, and this makes the evaluation of quantitative outcomes quite difficult, since the focus was on strengthening the support services rather than on building units of housing.

The main focus of SCPI was to support capacity building, yet the program left this element open-ended and flexible to enable local community planning processes to take advantage of whatever partnering opportunities arose. As a result, the local action plans themselves are the most reliable source of targets against which to compare program outcomes. Thus, for this research, I use these plans (from 2000 to 2007) as the unit of analysis on the community level.

The overall goals of this research are reflected in the following three research objectives:

1. To document and understand the nature of rural homelessness;

2. To see whether new synergies have been created by the Simcoe County Alliance to End Homelessness that have addressed rural homelessness both in practice and in the creation of helpful policies;

3. To identify policies, practices and review legislative options to address rural homelessness.

A detailed description of the local context of Simcoe County is presented in Chapter Five along with the results of the qualitative data, i.e., recordings of focus groups and interviews with key stakeholders and government officials.

Through a review of the community planning process and the outcomes achieved, and a journalistic account of what it means to be homeless, a determination is made about how this SCPI funding has impacted the day-to-day operations of service delivery in rural areas. Chapter Six provides a discussion of the community-based policy development process from the perspective of communicative action theory and describes how social policy and rurality intersect.

Chapter Seven includes conclusions drawn from examining the 3 overall research objectives, my contribution to the best practice literature, along with recommendations stemming from the findings of this study. Finally, I explore future possible roles for government-community partnerships in tackling difficult social policy issues such as homelessness in rural Canada.

The NHI federal funding initiative that invested over $1.3 billion in 61 communities across Canada was unprecedented. The basic program goals set out a clear path for establishing priorities, planning and decision-making to stimulate local action. My view is that without this declaration of intention at many levels, both federally and locally, rural homelessness would have remained a hidden issue. The SCPI investment in the voluntary sector, in conjunction with newly established, local private

and public partnerships, has been a concrete and creative attempt to build the community capacity of networks and the social capital required to address social housing as an important issue (Putnam, 1998; Reimer, 2002). If it has been successful at all, there should be evidence of a measurable impact on at least some of the infrastructure issues in rural communities. Results from this policy analysis will frame recommendations about the steps required to further refine the role of government, governance structures for organizations, and community partners, and propose future social policy directions. The discussion also includes consideration of rural homelessness in both its cultural and policy contexts to explain why it remains hidden in the countryside.

My Connection to the Study

As the researcher, I bring both an insider and outsider perspective to this study. I have been both a policy-maker and funder during my years in the Ontario public service. I have also worked as social policy advocate, service provider, and more recently as Chief Executive Officer of a supportive housing agency working directly with the homeless and many SCPI community partners.

As well, throughout my career I have been an adult educator in the college, university and non-profit systems and have participated in the voluntary sector in a variety of roles such as founding board member, fundraiser, and volunteer program coordinator. In addition, my small town Ontario farm family heritage brings a United Empire Loyalist, 8th generation Canadian and Methodist perspective which has instilled in me a pioneering spirit that places a high social value on helping one's neighbor. This

combination of historical context and life experience informs my perspective and also reflects my inherent bias as a practitioner, which inevitably shapes this critique of this government-initiated approach to community development.

There are widely held perceptions about rural life that can mask our understanding of the realities of countryside, which is being reshaped constantly as the population grows, new houses are built, and economic development continues. The purpose of this dissertation is to examine the National Homelessness Initiative as an innovative experiment in social housing policy development in Canada.

Chapter Two:
Canadian Social Housing Policy

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a general introduction to the history of social housing policy in Canada. The national strategy to address homelessness will be described as an example of a contemporary approach to social housing policy.

A comprehensive and wide-ranging discussion of how the concept of homelessness has evolved follows, drawing upon statutory definitions from the United Kingdom (Cloke, 2000a; Crane, 1999). The definition of the U.K. Housing (Homeless Persons) Act, passed in 1977, defines who is and is not considered to be homeless in a relatively restrictive manner. Absolute homelessness is defined as no fixed address as well as being in a priority housing need category and/or "threatened with homelessness". The threat must be imminent and the persons must be deemed not to have made themselves "intentionally homeless" (Crane, 1999, p. 187). By comparison, the broadest conception of homelessness is presented by the United Nations declaration that adequate housing is a human right and that people without it are to be considered homeless (Hulchanski, 1998; Malpass, 2000). This range of views forms the background to the discussion of a made-in-Canada conception of homelessness that will be presented subsequently in this chapter.

Finally, an exploration of the Supportive Communities Partnership Initiative (SCPI) will be presented from a community development perspective, along with a description of how communities became directly involved in the development of social housing policy through an examination of their partnerships with government, their

selected governance models, and the designing of their Community Action Plans to address homelessness.

One of the earliest Canadian papers, Carver (1948), defines "the ultimate housing problem" as the supply of low-rent housing. In this paper, he states the objective of a national housing policy as simply "the provision of a decent dwelling for every Canadian," and the ultimate test of the effectiveness of a housing policy as "the condition of the worst housed families in our communities" (pp. 123–124). The evolution of housing policy has been thoroughly documented by Rose (1968), who emphasized that Canada, as a federal state, has assigned the constitutional responsibility for the provision of housing to the provinces, originally outlined in the British North America Act and now under the Constitution Act, 1982. In order to explain Canadian housing policy and the role of government, he first identified the major components: legislation, financial resources, responsibility for initiating action, and appropriate administrative arrangements (Rose, 1968).

Policy can only emerge when the central government and the governments of the provinces and territories agree on a course of action. To quote the background paper by Rose (1968) "it must be emphasized that housing policy never built a single housing unit" and he goes on to predict that "no modern country can afford to neglect its existing housing stock which will simply mean that the 21st century will be the slum century in Canada" (p. 101).

Rose would not be surprised that his predictions about the future of social housing are indeed coming true. He articulated the "great discouragement" felt by those

in the voluntary sector in the face of outright antagonism towards public interventions on behalf of the poor and hostility towards public housing programs. Public attitudes about housing policy have changed very little in the last 40 years until the introduction of the National Homelessness Initiative which recognized the growing concerns about persons living without adequate shelter.

A study commissioned in 1972 to prepare recommendations for revisions to the National Housing Act looked at both the economic and social situation in five regions of the country. The study, by Dennis and Fish (1972) makes it clear that the poor and moderate-income households bear the brunt of our haphazard system of housing in Canada. An analysis was made of the policies and programs of all three levels of government and their interactions with housing producers and consumers. The authors reviewed policies and structures adopted in other jurisdictions, both in Europe and the United States, to inform and advocate for possible directions for the Canadian government.

Their recommendations for a national housing policy include estimates and projections of housing requirements for the whole country over the long term based on a comprehensive definition of housing needs, taking into account not just new construction but also all aspects of housing stock, as well as planning for anticipated shortages across the country (Dennis & Fish, 1972). At that time, homelessness was not even a consideration. The recommendations of this commission were not implemented; however, the primary planning role described for a Canadian federal housing agency is still needed. From a social housing perspective, the two existing major instruments for national research and long-range strategic planning for housing,

namely, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation and Statistics Canada, have not been mandated to carry out these recommended roles (Dennis & Fish, 1972). The corresponding provincial role would be to implement the goals established by the national housing policy and define courses of action to meet the unique needs of its people; these would be implemented by the level of government that is closest to the people – the municipal level – with participation of the users and potential users. Social housing policy would be thus carefully integrated into the overall municipal plan.

The thinking behind a national policy framework is well-established, but a reluctance to interfere with the free market in housing development persists in Canada, resulting in a wavering of the political will related to social housing (Federation of Canadian Municipalities, 2001; Shapcott, 2004). According to Hulchanski (2004), the lack of federal and provincial commitment to housing for all Canadians over the past 15 years contrasts not only with housing policies in most other Western nations but also with the philosophy of successive Canadian governments from the 1960s to the mid-1980s. Before the mid-1980s, there were very few homeless people and few, if any, homeless families in Canada (Hulchanski, 2004).

Drier, Mollenkopf, and Swanstrom (2001) state that "where we live makes a big difference in the quality of our lives, and how the places in which we live function has a big impact on the quality of our society" (p. 1). Therefore, citizens and governments have an interest in developing policies that recognize the importance of housing as a critical foundational element in society. In 2002, SCPI was selected as the winner of the UN-Habitat Dubai International Award for Best Practices. Yet, in spite of this award, putting an end to homelessness remains an urgent social problem.

SCPI in Perspective

SCPI involves a different approach to homelessness. SCPI Community Action Plans have forced stakeholders to agree on stated priorities and set aside other agendas when dealing with the difficult problem of homelessness. In a paper called "The New Trilateralism: Experiments in Federal–Municipal–Community Relationships," Phillips et al. (2003) describe new trends that have led governments at all levels in North America and Europe to attempt to involve community in both policy development and service delivery decisions.

The process of community-centred programming crosses many disciplines, and must, to be effective, address historical, demographic, community health and social services, ethnic, cultural, economic, and political factors. The process is complex when it involves municipal governments and geographically bound neighborhoods or relatively homogenous social or cultural communities at the local level. If this multi-dimensional concept of community is taken into account at the federal level, it adds another layer of complexity to the already complex situation created when a national government attempts to forge collaborative governing arrangements with local communities crossing several layers of jurisdictional boundaries. The creation of complex jurisdictional arrangements such as these creates a shift in the existing provincial, regional and municipal relationships with local communities that can impede local collective action (Abelson, Pierre-Gerlier, Eyles, Smith, Martin & Guavin, 2003; Chaskin, 2003; Healey, 1997, Hudson & Hardy, 2002; Lowdes & Skelcher, 1998). The emphasis on local communities is built into the clearly stated objective of SCPI, contained in the Terms and Conditions section of the guidelines: "to strengthen the capacity of communities by

bringing local service providers together to develop plans that address individual needs in a seamless and coordinated fashion" (Human Resource Development Canada, NHI, 2007, p. 10).

A cornerstone of SCPI is the establishment of a Community Action Plan in each selected community, i.e., a plan that takes into account the unique circumstances of each province, region and municipality. An important assumption in this thesis is that a comprehensive planning process involving many stakeholders and partners contributes directly to community capacity building. This work is, of necessity, interdisciplinary in nature because of the complexities involved in defining and framing community development, capacity building, governance, partnerships, and homelessness. A thorough review of the term *community* and what it means will be presented, as SCPI is discussed.

The success of the Supportive Communities Partnership Initiative, i.e., the reduction in absolute numbers of those who are homeless, is measured according to targets set out in each Community Action Plan. Skeptics have argued that SCPI, although laudable, is a short-term fix for the longer-term homelessness issue (Leo & August, 2004). What is required is sustained community action (Leo & August, 2004). The UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the World Health Organization (2008) have admonished Canada, as a wealthy country, for allowing homelessness and inadequate housing to grow to such proportions and for the decline in social programs that once set an example for the world (Hulchanski, 1998; Martin & Fontana, 1990).

Possibly in response to this criticism, the federal government allocated an unprecedented source of new funds to address poverty and homelessness in 1999 after large cuts to social programs at all levels of government. The Government of Canada announced the $305 million Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative (SCPI) as one component of a 3-year, $ 1.3 billion commitment of the National Homelessness Initiative (NHI) to address the growing crisis of homelessness in Canada. This NHI partnership program targeted 10 major Canadian cities and 51 smaller communities across the country in which over 1,800 projects were funded.

In 2003, SCPI was extended for another 3 years, to 2006, with an additional $258 million to build on successful projects that ranged along a continuum from providing street outreach to the homeless to securing shelter and self-sufficiency for individuals. For researchers interested in social housing policy, SCPI represents a unique opportunity to review and evaluate an experiment that has been extremely well-documented over a 7-year period. Have new synergies been created by these new partnerships and stimulated shelter solutions or has another level of frustration and bureaucracy been introduced for the voluntary sector to contend with? This question will be examined within the context of the Simcoe County case study in Chapter 5.

In addition to injecting badly needed funds to local communities, the National Homelessness Initiative has created a totally new funding model and program structure. It also provides a standardized set of criteria, terms, and conditions for one period of time, 1999–2007, which allow for the collection of data in order to compare communities and projects across the country. This provides researchers with a rare opportunity to measure a wide-range of community development efforts with a national scope.

The implementation of SCPI projects required formal partnership agreements, an understanding of how to strengthen community capacity, a recognition that a continuum of supports be incorporated into the plan ensuring as much flexibility as possible. On the part of the government, assurances were given to keep the "red tape" to a minimum to expedite the community planning process with the single focus of the alleviation of the hardship of those who are homeless.

Various models of governance with collaborative community planning and decision-making processes ultimately resulting in a Community Action Plan were adopted across the country. A critical analysis of SCPI as a community-based mechanism to address homelessness needs to be undertaken. Although early SCPI project outcomes have been recorded and some national data have been tabulated, the final results have not yet been published (Personal interviews: NHI Director, August 2006, and NHI Data Manager, June 2006). The NHI Secretariat had earmarked significant funding for project evaluation by independent research teams, and numerous case studies have been conducted. However, the impact upon homelessness seems minimal compared to the reports of success in these case studies (Leo & August, 2004).

What has been learned from these projects will chart best practices and solutions to fill in the gaps in our understanding of how communities go about coordinating resources, skills, and experiences into a consolidated response to those who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.

Over the last 20 years responsibility for social housing policy has been downloaded from the federal government to the provinces. With the exception of

housing for Aboriginal peoples, the federal government ended its involvement in social housing by 1993 (Hulchanski, 2006). In Ontario, the responsibility was then shifted again to the municipal level through the passage of the Social Housing Reform Act in 2000. As of 1996, the Canada Assistance Plan (CAP) was dropped by the federal government, a change which discouraged activity within the field of social housing. It is ironic that the acronym CAP now refers to Community Action Planning after many attempts at various levels of public–private social housing partnerships have failed over the years. The emergence of the term *homelessness* and the evolving role of governments and partnerships are key factors in framing this study, as outlined in the definitions to follow.

Definitions of Homelessness

Although a person living without shelter is not a new phenomenon, the term *homelessness* is relatively new when applied to conditions in developed countries (Hulchanski & Fallick, 2002). Because this is a socially constructed concept, we need to understand the knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and values of individuals and groups engaged with homelessness in order to define it. Homelessness has been associated with vagrancy and vagabondage in Britain since A.D. 368. A vagrant was first defined as a person without a settled home or regular work, a wanderer, or someone with "an insane or uncontrollable impulsion to wander away from home" (Crane, 1999, p. 9).

In the United States, since at least the early nineteenth century, a distinction was made between hobos, primarily single male workers who wandered about, and vagrants, which usually referred to those who occupied skid row (Johnson & Schwartz,

1994). As early as 1911, Alice Solenberger associated homelessness with the absence

of social relationships rather than with a lack of accommodation, and observed that

semi-protective residential settings such as hostels, lodges, and boarding houses were

the choice of preference for many of the 1000 men that participated in her study

(Solenberger, 1911).

Sociologists acknowledged that economics and unemployment were contributory

factors in causing homelessness, but proposed that individual responsibility and

personality factors were critical in differentiating unemployed men who became

homeless from those who remained settled (Crane, 1999). *Homelessness* is not a term

commonly found in the social policy literature prior to the 1990s; more prevalent were

concepts such as "living in poverty" and "unacceptable housing conditions." More

recently, the following definitions, which express a myriad of perspectives on the

phenomenon, have appeared in the literature:

Homelessness is "an odd-job word, pressed into service to impose order on a

hodgepodge of social dislocation, extreme poverty, seasonal or itinerant work, and

unconventional ways of life" (Hopper & Baumohl, 1996).

"The truly homeless are not simply houseless; they are also friendless, foodless,

moneyless and ultimately optionless" expressed in the form of conservative ideology

that emphasizes individual responsibility (Gordon Chong, Chair of the Social Housing

Services Corporation, Toronto, 2003).

In Ontario, the Ministry of Health and Long-term Care (2000) included those who are seriously mentally ill. The Ministry not only included people living in emergency shelters but also those "at imminent risk of becoming homeless."

The City of Toronto, *Report Card on Homelessness* (2003, p. 58) describes the homeless population in two ways: as absolute homelessness "a condition of people who live outside, stay in emergency shelters, spend most of their income on rent" and also as "a condition of being at imminent risk of homelessness for those who live in overcrowded, substandard conditions and are therefore at serious risk of becoming homeless".

In Ontario, programs recognize this continuum of homelessness, and the goal of most municipal programs is to provide a range of supports and services to people who are homeless: emergency shelters, rooming houses, out-of-the-cold programs, meals and food programs, and street outreach. "Homelessness" has become an extremely politicized term that brings attention to those with "no fixed address" both in Canada and around the world. Many other definitions can be found in the literature.

> The United Nations definition, for example, focuses on security of tenure: "Homelessness refers to the millions of people with no home—the pavement dwellers, those who must sleep in doorways, subways, and recesses of public buildings and those rendered homeless by natural and man-made disasters, but also the hundreds of millions who lack a real home—one which provides protection from the elements; has access to personal safety; is within easy reach of centers of employment, education and health care; and is at a cost which people and society can afford." (United Nations, 2000, p. 12)

Shelter is a complex and global issue. It is not simply an issue of poverty.

It is also instructive to look at how homelessness has been defined in legislation. Prior to the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act, 1977, local housing authorities in the U.K. provided housing to people deemed to be in need, according to criteria that varied from one housing authority to another. Once the Act was passed, statutory duties were imposed on local authorities to house people considered to be "homeless" provided that they were in a priority need category or "threatened with homelessness" and that the threat is imminent and that they have not made themselves "intentionally homeless." This label of intentionality is applied to those who conceal the fact that they have no home and that the necessities of life are lacking. Crane's research also found that homelessness is sometimes indicative of poor competence in everyday affairs. Thus the legislation created two groups of homeless people: those who are officially registered under the statute in the local authorities and those who are homeless but not recognized as such. Only the former are included in the official statistics of homelessness; the rest are "hidden" (Crane, 1999, p. 15).

In 1987, the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act was passed in the U.S. to provide federal policy direction and funding to the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) for homelessness assistance programs. Over the past decade, a few bills have been introduced in Congress to extend these assistance programs, but none has succeeded. The Services for Ending Long-Term Homelessness Act (SELHA) has been drafted and although it has not yet been passed, advocates are optimistic that federal policy on housing and homelessness is about to change because of momentum growing across the United States. Part of the explanation for this change is contained in a November 2006 report issued by the National Alliance to End Homelessness in the

U.S., which reviewed 220 community plans to end homelessness. What is significant about the plans is that they not only include strategies to end homelessness in 10 years but, just as important, include steps to prevent homelessness from occurring in the first place (Berkeley, Goodall, Noon, & Collis, 1995; Berstein, 2002; Burt, 1996; National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2006).

In Scotland, the Homelessness Act, introduced in March 2003, seeks to ensure that by 2012 everyone who is unintentionally homeless has access to permanent accommodation (Habitat for Humanity, 2006). Unlike these other jurisdictions, Canada has not yet contemplated drafting legislation to respond to homelessness but has chosen to focus on pursuing both private and public sector voluntary partnerships to try to find local shelter solutions. One stated purpose of the SCPI experiment was to explore options other than legislative. In Chapter Six, as the findings of this thesis are presented, the legislative approach will be revisited as one of the possible options available to address homelessness.

Canadian Definitions

The literature on homelessness has grown exponentially in recent years, as evidenced by hundreds of doctoral theses published since 2003, when this author began to monitor research on this subject. To arrive at a made-in-Canada definition, the scholarly literature, as well as working examples taken from practices of the non-profit community service sector and the treatment, particularly, defining the *intentionality* of the concept is explored through the analysis of media articles. The final definition

selected for this study follows and comes from The Simcoe County to End Homelessness.

In defining the word homeless, Hulchanski (2009) uses the *Oxford English Dictionary,* which says it means without home. He goes on to say that adding the suffix—ness makes the word homeless into an abstract concept: homelessness. As such, it allows users of the term to imagine whatever they want (Hulchanski, 2009, p. 4).

The rapid growth in the number of Canadian articles has been captured with the creation of The Homelessness Research Virtual Library by Frankish (2005), an online resource at the University of British Columbia. Canadian definitions of homelessness have been expanded, particularly in urban settings, through the influence of community organizations such as the United Way of Greater Toronto. Its criteria are broad and recognize the visibly homeless, those living on the street or using emergency shelters; the hidden homeless who live in squats or temporary accommodation; and those who are vulnerable to homelessness, under-housed or at serious risk of becoming homeless, including those spending more than 50% of their income on shelter (United Way of Greater Toronto and Canadian Council on Social Development, 2004). Raising the Roof, a Canadian charity for homelessness, offers a concise definition: "the absence of a place to live" (Shared Learnings on Homelessness, 2008).

This thesis also opts for a relatively straightforward definition, as developed by the Simcoe County Alliance to End Homelessness:

> Homelessness is the absence of a continuing or permanent home over which individuals or family groups have personal control and which provides the essential needs of shelter, privacy and security at an affordable cost, together with ready access to social and economic public

services (The Simcoe Alliance County to End Homelessness (SCATEH), 2006, p. 2).

The SCATEH definition not only makes conceptual sense but the process that led to it was also important. Over 75 stakeholders came together in Simcoe County to respond to what they viewed as a "national disgrace," and to develop a Community Action Plan to address concerns about the growing prevalence of homelessness in Simcoe County (The Simcoe Alliance County to End Homelessness (SCATEH), 2006). Chapter Five describes the context of Simcoe County, its SCPI projects, and the community consultation process in detail. There has been an upsurge in willingness among many organizations to act on behalf of communities county-wide, and to work tirelessly to prevent evictions and support people in their struggles to maintain their housing.

Who Represents Community?

Phillips (2003) describes the "language of 'community' to be sufficiently elastic that its meaning remains contested," and yet governments at all levels are looking at how to involve "community" both in the process of policy development and in service delivery (p. 1). One way to look at community, as articulated by Christenson, Fendley, and Robinson (1994), is: "A community is defined as people that live within a geographically bounded area who are involved in social interaction and who have one or more psychological ties with each other and with the place in which they live" (p. 9).

This leads us to a definition of "community development" as "a group of people in a locality initiating a social action process (i.e., planned intervention) to change their economic, social, cultural and/or environmental situation" (Christenson et al., p. 12).

Where initiatives are taken to tackle social problems, a contemporary approach is to form partnerships with those who share the same goals. For example, the recognition of the presence of higher education as a community-based resource for problem solving and the corresponding intellectual energy available to assist in community projects is often overlooked by groups (Hall, 2008). The sense of community instilled through community groups is very powerful and significant skills are acquired in learning about organizing, lobbying, advocacy and bringing attention to issues which are all part of awareness raising and creating sustainability (Minkler, Wallerstein, & Hall (2002, p. 44). SCPI provided yet another mechanism for augmenting this sense of community through the formation of community partnerships which did include college and university partners.

When groups try to decide how to involve new community partners one option is to introduce a competitive bidding process called Requests for Proposals (Osborne, 2000; Pratchett, 1999; Rhodes, 1996, 1997). This was the method required as one of the eligibility considerations for federal funding of SCPI communities, where agencies with clear geographical boundaries were asked to post an open call for proposals from their local communities to address homelessness.

Unfortunately, economics play a large part in shaping the capacity of communities, and economic inequalities in Canada are increasing (Rupnik, Thompson-James, & Bollman, 2001). This growing inequality has a devastating impact on the social infrastructure of communities and the corresponding efforts to build local decision-making and resilience which take time and experience (Hall & Banting, 2000; Leviten-Reid & Torjman, 2006). Further, better resourced communities can mobilize to

respond to a call for proposals more easily than poorer ones (Scott, 2003). Writing a

proposal requires the availability of resources to respond in a relatively short time, and

often agencies with limited finances lack the resources and contacts to mobilize quickly.

Even a well established organization like the Salvation Army made a corporate decision

not to respond to any of the NHI's call for proposals. This community partner preferred

to use its limited resources in direct service to clients rather than for the considerable

paperwork required by SCPI (Personal interview with the Executive Director, United

Way of Greater Simcoe County, 2004).

The SCPI guidelines stated that in addition to reducing incidences of

homelessness, attention should be directed at "community capacity building." The

introduction of this terminology with similarities to "community development" was

forbidding to some agencies and discouraged them from applying to SCPI (Human

Resource Development Canada, NHI, 2002). Nevertheless, community capacity is a

critical concept for understanding community development.

Smith (2003) reviewed 123 articles as part of a research project to define and

measure community capacity from a health perspective. While "community capacity"

was often used loosely and at times without definition, several definitions did appear in

this literature review:

1. "the characteristics of communities that affect their ability to identify, mobilize,

    and address social and public health problems" (Bopp, as cited in Smith,

    2003, p. 10)

2. "the sets of assets or strengths that residents individually and collectively bring to the cause of improving quality of life" (Laverack, as cited in Smith, 2003, p. 17)

3. "a holistic representation of capabilities (those with which the community is endowed and those to which the community has access) plus the facilitators and barriers to realization of those capabilities in the broader social environment" (Goodman et al., as cited in Smith, 2003, p. 12)

4. "the interaction of human capital, organizational resources and social capital existing within a given community that can be leveraged to solve collective problems and improve or maintain the well-being of a given community" (Chaskin, as cited in Smith, 2003, p. 14)

Attempts to make these definitions more specific usually involve articulating how to measure capacity with respect to different aspects or domains required for capacity building. Smith presents the following table with a number of different possible research frameworks:

Table 1

Domains of Community Capacity by Selected Authors (Smith, 2003 p. 17)

Source	Bopp et al., 2000	Laverack, 2001	Goodman et al., 1998	Easterling et al., 1998	Chaskin, 2001
Domains	Shared vision	Resource mobilization	Sense of community	Skills and knowledge	Sense of community
	Sense of community	Participation	Resources	Leadership	Level of commitment among community members
	Participation	Leadership	Skills	Sense of efficacy	
	Leadership	Problem assessment	Citizen participation	Social capital	Ability to solve problems
	Resources	Asking 'why'	Leadership	Culture of learning and openness	
	Knowledge and skills	Links with other people and organizations	Critical reflection		Access to resources
	Communication		Community power		
	Ongoing learning	Organizational structures	Social and inter-agency networks		
		Role of outside agents	Understanding of community history		
		Program management	Community values		

While these dimensions, as outlined in Table 1, include such concepts as shared vision, leadership and participation, which may help to provide clarification as to the scope of the domains, there is no definitive set of characteristics that describe a capable community. So the lesson gained from examining these frameworks is that flexibility is needed in the evaluation of each community. It is also true that labels go in and out of fashion, and there may be multiple and perhaps conflicting perspectives on the

measurement of community capacity that researchers and practitioners must take into account (Smith, 2003, p. 17).

This is the challenge, then, to assess and define the level of participation of all of the stakeholders who have committed time and expertise to the SCPI in order to measure the change over time in community capacity.

The literature review by Smith (2003) also reveals a disconnect between the theoretical measurement of capacity and the practice of community capacity building and states that tools used for measurement do not report on practice. Moreover, practice-oriented organizations tend to describe process with measurement of outcome as a secondary objective. No one tool or method is yet available in the literature that is well-grounded in theory and practice (Glen, 1993; McLean, Ebbesen, Green, Reeder, Butler-Jones, & Steer, 2001; Smith, 2003). As noted, SCPI policy did not provide a regulated format in which to record targets and measure outcomes, thereby making comparisons across projects difficult.

The literature also fails to consider that multiple, and perhaps conflicting, perspectives on community capacity measurement may exist in practice and that researchers must take into account these unique characteristics, needs and circumstances and often the tensions that arise when tailoring plans to local realities. Other factors of importance are the insider versus outsider view and the motivations behind the creation of measurement tools by funders. Certainly the SCPI evaluations and case studies that have been conducted included questions and criteria provided by government directives.

In summary, to measure community capacity seven common domains have been identified:

1. Participation;

2. Knowledge, skills, and resources;

3. Shared vision;

4. Sense of community;

5. Communication;

6. Leadership; and

7. Problem-solving ability and ongoing learning of the community.

All of these domains have been incorporated into the interview guidelines and data collection methods used in the phase of this research that focuses on the SCPI Community Action Plan and its committee structures and processes (to be outlined in Chapter Four).

This discussion begs the question introduced earlier: who represents community? With regard to housing policy, homeless people themselves must have input into the planning process as significant stakeholders, even though representatives are sometimes difficult to engage. Also a broad range of citizens as well as elected officials, service providers, faith-groups, the private and voluntary sectors, government staff, and researchers all have a role to play in declaring safe and affordable housing a basic foundation to a healthy neighborhood, where we all deserve to live. Therefore, building a broad coalition is basic to a community development process to address

homelessness even more generally (Fung, 2003; Fallis & Murray, 1990; Fawcett, Paine-Andrews, Francisco, Schultz, Rishter & Patton, 2004). Using the social capital framework of Putnam (1998, 2000), bridging capital is needed. Similarly, Marcuse (2004), in his plenary address to the conference on *Adequate and Affordable Housing for All*, stated that researchers must provide a bridge across the housing system as a whole, not limit discussions to social housing alone. Put differently, it is not possible to separate an analysis of homelessness from housing policy more generally. Moreover, in order to address homelessness, it seems important to have a broad alliance of all the stakeholders associated with housing. That was the strategy taken in Simcoe County, the case study for this thesis.

Partnerships: Conceptual Framework

The models of governance adopted in SCPI partnerships reflect the nature of power-sharing and accountability that was built into the community agreements members signed with the federal government. Taking on these partnership agreements represents a shift in role for the government: under these agreements, multiple stakeholders share the planning and finding of solutions to problems, a role once solely that of the funder. Figure 1 illustrates this shift to community partners, while acknowledging that this is in the context of existing traditional and long-term relationships among the three tiers of government in Canada. The evolving role of governments in partnerships, as defined by the National Homelessness Initiative, is a key factor in reviewing the four SCPI governance models critiqued by Phillips, Graham, and Ker (2003).

Federal Government

Province

Region/ Municipality/ County

Community (Private & Voluntary Sector Organizations)

Service Delivery   Advocacy
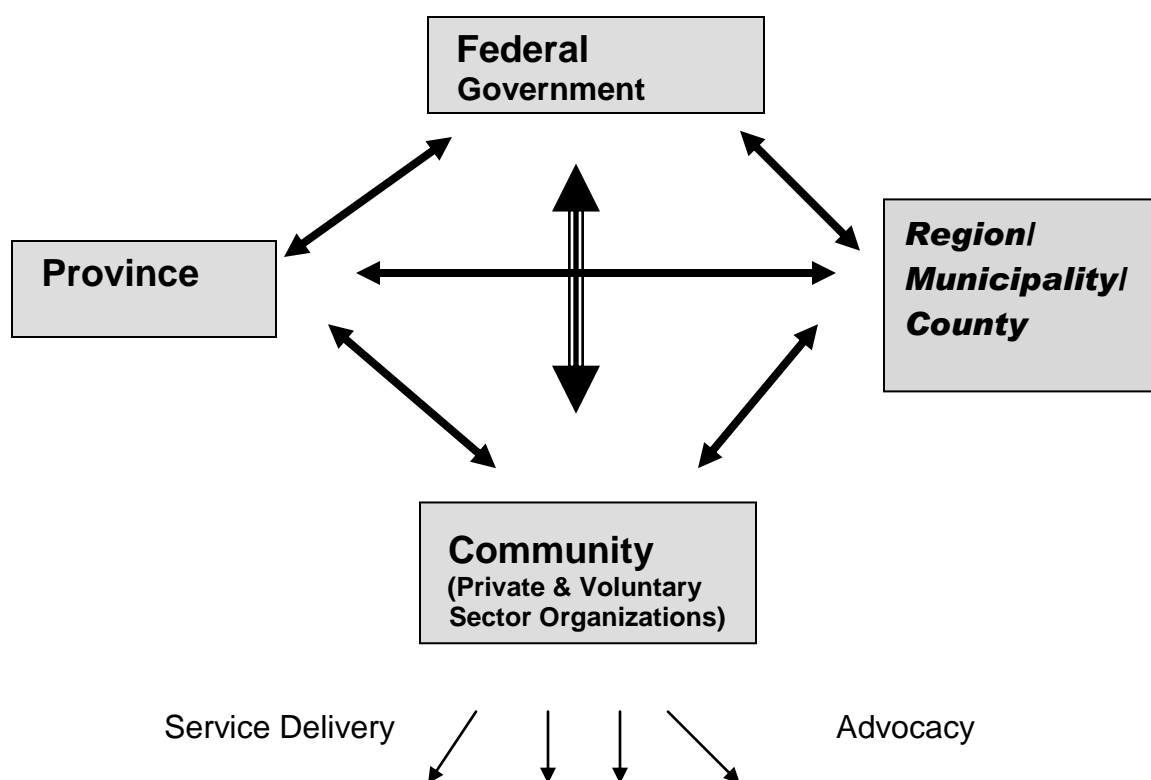
Figure 1. **Partnering relationships affecting community-centred programming.**

This thesis proposes to examine these new SCPI governance arrangements from a community development perspective. The role of governments and the various community partners and stakeholders are presented as key factors in the outcomes of these new models of governance. Understanding how to alleviate homelessness is critical to preserving the social fabric of Canada for future generations, and the intent of this discussion is aimed at shaping the ongoing social housing policy debate. SCPI offered a new way to introduce funding at the local level directly from the federal government, bypassing existing governmental agreements. It involves the non-profit sector in a partnering relationship that, in fact, has the potential to place them in a

conflict of interests. For example, in the formation of a consortium, those joining the table should have expertise in the sector and have input to funding decisions. This author has observed that these same agencies are often those involved in developing proposals for funding within the network of service providers. Particularly in small communities, these conflicts cannot be avoided, but they may present barriers to the design of effective and innovative governance structures. In their excellent analysis of the case study materials, Phillips and her colleagues (2003) outline the following four models of governance found in SCPI agreements:

1. Federal-Community Model,

2. Pure Municipal Model,

3. Community Consortium Model, and

4. Pure Community Model.

These models describe how relationships among the partners are shaped and how responsibilities for the work to be accomplished are assigned. There is a range of expectations depending on the perspective of the stakeholder. For example, there is an emphasis on accountability and a desire in the Federal-Community Model for increased public visibility of the government role, while the Pure Community Model places more emphasis on maximizing participation of community members and striving to achieve representational diversity. The role of community partners is both to deliver services and to advocate for systemic and policy change. Some of the models outlined in Figure 2. may require that the advocacy function be supported in different ways.

```
                    ┌──────────────┐
                    │ Community    │
                    │ Consortium   │──────┐
                    │ Model        │      │
                    └──────────────┘      │   ┌──────────────┐
   ┌──────────────┐        ╱              └───│ Pure         │
   │ Federal –    │───────╱                   │ Community    │
   │ Community    │                           │ Model        │
   │ Model        │───────╲              ┌────└──────────────┘
   └──────────────┘        ╲             │
                            ╲  ┌──────────────┐
                             ──│ Pure         │
                               │ Municipal    │
                               │ Model        │
                               └──────────────┘
```

Emphasis on:

⟵————————————————————⟶

Accountability   Participation

Visibility (for government)   Community Capacity

                    Representation of Diversity

                    Community Ownership
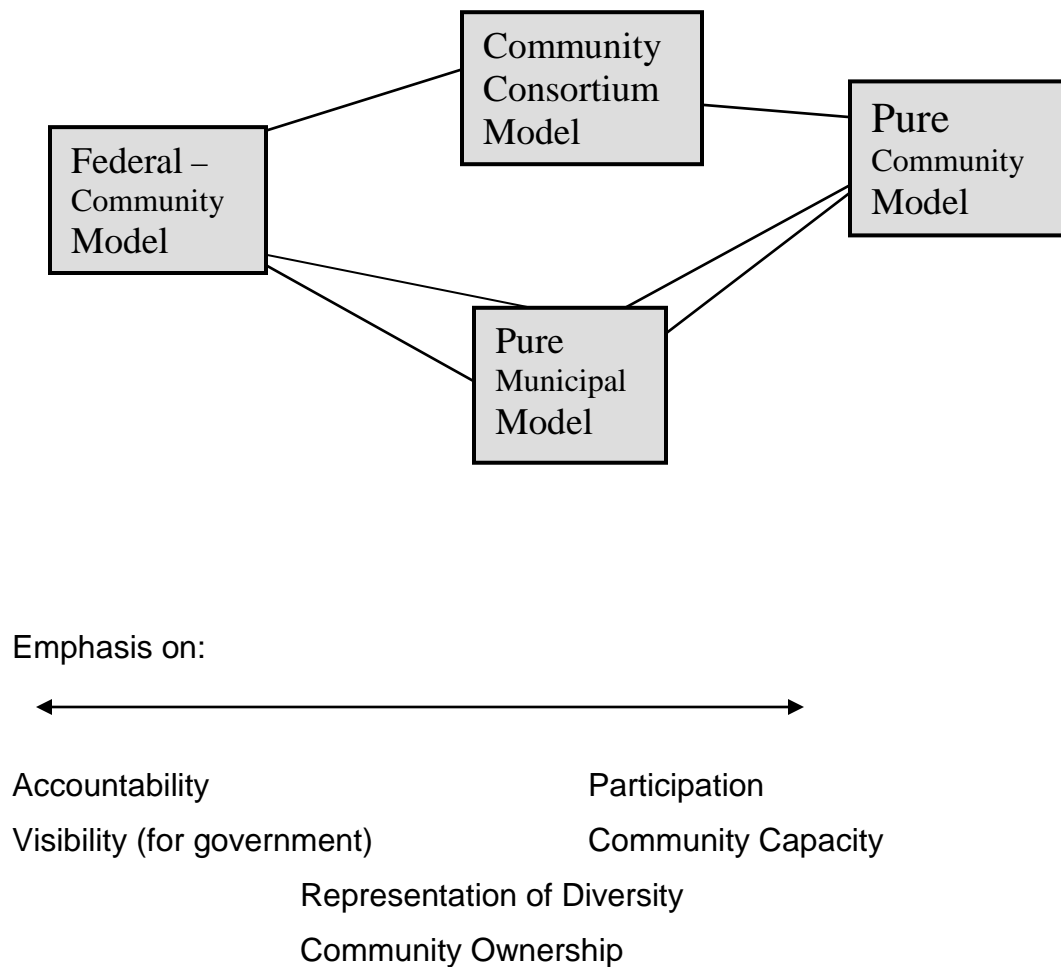
Figure 2. **Governance models for community-centred programming.**

The most restrictive of the models is the Federal-Community partnership in which

considerable federal control is retained through a "shared model." The St. John's SCPI

project is one of the few examples of this direct collaboration with the federal

government to the exclusion of decision-makers from other levels of government. The

community advisory body provides advice and designs the Community Action Plan, but

the Minister has the power to overturn decisions made locally. Administration is either contracted out or done by federal staff, thus reducing the burden of paperwork on the service providers (Personal interview with Bruce Pearce, St. John's, Newfoundland, SCPI project, June 2004).

The Community Consortium Model engages communities through an existing incorporated community body with a wide-range of representatives. This model has the potential to bring different community players together, including elected officials, to assume full responsibility for decision-making and program implementation. On the downside, this model can impose a significant administrative burden on the local community. No examples of this consortium model were present in Ontario because with the exception of Simcoe County all of the rest of the SCPI funds were allocated to municipal government models.

The Pure Municipal Model designated the municipal government, as the legitimate and accountable voice of the community, to plan and implement federal programs according to local priorities. The SCPI projects in the cities of Hamilton, Ottawa, and Toronto provide good examples of this type of governance model adopted in Ontario. In each case, extensive community consultations have been held to establish priorities for their respective community plans. For the purposes of this study, only the Community Action Plans prepared in the geographical areas surrounding the city of Toronto will be highlighted because each of these areas include both urban/suburban high population growth communities and more rural areas. This includes municipalities/regions located in what is referred to as the Greater Toronto Area (GTA): Halton, Peel, York, and Durham. Governments in the GTA that are all

seriously looking at the homelessness issue, developed their own Community Action Plans but were not awarded major SCPI funding. The only other SCPI recipient in Ontario was Simcoe County, which is why this community was selected as a case study for this thesis. The Simcoe County case is an example of the pure community approach.

The Pure Community Model establishes a new community entity to assume full responsibility for program decisions and administration. The contractual agreement is between the community group and the federal government. This is the model with the most flexibility and greatest potential for capacity building and community engagement; but because it does not specifically involve elected officials, there may be an inherent risk to local democracy as it could be seen as relieving politicians from their fundamental responsibilities. Although there are many examples of the Municipal model, only one Pure Community Model was attempted in Ontario, in a municipality that refused to take responsibility for "social issues." The resulting Community Action Plan was submitted to the federal government by the Simcoe Alliance to End Homelessness, an independent community entity. The findings derived from an examination of how this model of governance worked will be reviewed in detail in Chapter 5.

The concept of community-centred programming has been incorporated into all four models of governance described by Phillips & Orsini (2002). The Community Entity may participate in the RFP process and act on behalf of governments to make funding decisions and distribute SCPI funds locally. The intent under the SCPI agreement is not for the Community Entity to deliver programs directly. Determining the rules of the game and thus how it is to be played by the community partners is the first step in the SCPI process.

All partnerships are expected to be open, equitable, and transparent. The federal government approves the terms and conditions of a formal contract that allows funds to be transferred to the Community Entity. The Community Entity is then authorized to fund services according to the priorities set out in the Community Action Plan(s).

In the case of the community planning process in Hamilton, three types of potential partnership developments were revealed that were central to the SCPI implementation: forced partnerships, mediated or brokered partnerships, and evolutionary partnerships. Forced partnerships were the least successful and were strictly determined by a representational selection of service providers and community members invited to sit at the planning table. The most successful were evolutionary partnerships allowing time for the process to be based upon learning as the community plans began to take shape. The mediated or brokered partnerships coincided with the amalgamation of the municipal governments in the Hamilton area and this interfered with the timing and selection of representatives for this SCPI initiative. As the partnerships evolved over time there was evidence of strong leadership provided by one or two main stakeholders that was noted as an indicator of early success in achieving the goals of the Community Advisory Committee (Personal interview with Susan Phillips, June 1, 2004).

Salamon (1987) reminds us that government does play a significant role as both a funder of community development activities and a partner to the non-profit sector. How is value added to planning activities through the role of government? We know that community development is a bottom-up, long-term process that integrates the various

aspects of community well-being (economic, social, environmental, and cultural) and has an improved quality of life as its main goal.

On a broad scale, a multi-layered partnership initiative, such as SCPI, has the potential to draw on government resources that are not always available to small communities, which is a significant advantage of this type of model. In the *Report to Canadians* (2002) on the St. John's, Newfoundland experience, Bruce Pearce identified the unwillingness of the community-based, non-profit sector to be burdened with the administration of the SCPI project as one of the factors leading to the success of the shared model of governance. In this instance, federal government staff made up 50 % of the membership on the Community Advisory Committee, including two representatives at the Assistant Deputy Minister level, and took on all of the management of resources. This strong collaborative partnership was developed through the federal department of Human Resource Development Canada (HRDC). External assistance, such as that provided by government staff to SCPI projects, illustrates how they act as community development agents and play a key role in offering expertise in planning, accounting, and analysis in order to complete an action plan for a community project which would be directly managed by local leadership. In May 2002, a federal roundtable on communities was held; the follow-up report, *Stories on How HRDC Works with Communities*, describes the implementation of these partnership roles for government.

Business planning and a competitive bidding process (RFP), sometimes referred to as "managed competition," are now features of community planning; and this shared federal-community governance model permitted the community to do what it does best:

provide services directly to the clients who are at risk and avoid the paperwork, according to Pearce (2004).

The St. John's governance model confirms that successful relationships and a strong community plan, developed and prioritized by the community, are the key ingredients to building capacity. In this case the stakeholders were able to achieve their collective goals (Personal interview with Bruce Pearce, St. John's, Newfoundland, SCPI Project, June 2004).

Timing is everything when establishing new partner relationships and non-profits have to be ready to move quickly when funding becomes available. This involves having the capacity to adapt as necessary to conform to shifting priorities and rules, i.e., to be able to accommodate the possibility that vision and agendas at play among partners will not always match up. Otherwise, the passion and commitment referred to by Saunders (2004) will give way to volunteer burnout and frustration, features that limit the scope of partnership realities. It is noteworthy that one of the recommendations of a recent Senate Committee report on rural poverty (2008) is that the federal government should either simplify the application process or provide funding to help rural communities complete funding proposals (Senate Committee, 2008, p. 113).

There is also a risk that the federal community SCPI model may actually erode capacity for service delivery to a wide and diverse population. Evidence suggests that in Hamilton and Winnipeg there has been a negligible impact on sustainable capacity building as this SCPI planning process was seen to be operating outside of existing longer-term community development efforts. In a paper presented at the international

conference on *Adequate and Affordable Housing for All* by Professor Leo (2004, p. 30) on the Winnipeg SCPI experience, an analysis of government documents, interviews with officials and community leaders, and secondary sources reveals that "the program has fallen short of its promise." In this case the community perceived the mandate of SCPI to be too narrow, i.e., that it precluded the types of long-term solutions and priorities put forward by community members and stakeholders (which, in fact, were largely ignored), first in the creation of the Community Action Plan and then in the funding decisions. This study (Leo & August, 2004) shows that the federal government recognizes in theory that members of local communities may be best placed to come up with solutions to their community's problems, but in practice, has been reluctant to relinquish power. This intersection of social policy, the role of government, and community development forms the theoretical framework for the research questions on rural responses to homelessness, to be explored in the next chapter.

According to Myles Horton, "people know an awful lot," and this subjective knowing and ability to articulate life experience is vital to social change (Horton & Freire, 1990, p. 21). What is the best way to involve people in the community and maximize participation and the use of these scarce human resources? Only over the long-term will it be possible to know if SCPI has resulted in stronger community capacity to deal with homelessness and in governance models that survive as ongoing community entities.

In the past, the role of the federal government was primarily that of a funder of a social safety net able to respond to changing social and economic needs by providing minimal but adequate levels of support such as social assistance and social housing (Prince, 2000). However, over the last 20 years, funding cuts have weakened these

critical programs with the result that many people are struggling to find housing with less money in a private rental market prone to rising rents.

These public policy decisions have contributed to the homelessness crisis. Even in the largest municipal model in the country, the City of Toronto, with $106 million committed to SCPI from 2000 to 2006, very few housing units have been developed. Building housing takes time. There is no quick fix to homelessness. However, one positive comment by street nurse Cathy Crowe gives some hope; she said this pot of (SCPI) money definitely, in her opinion, has saved lives. It can be accessed directly from the streets in Toronto, which shows respect for the front-line workers and responds to the multitude of needs determined by the homeless people themselves (Personal interview, June 2004). How have things unfolded in the rural communities in Ontario that received SCPI funds? This question will be examined in Chapters Five and Six by reviewing components of the Community Action Plans to see whether in fact rural homelessness has been addressed, and by looking at the rural responses to homelessness in Simcoe County.

Chapter Three:

Homelessness in the Rural Setting

Introduction

Historians have noted that the opening decade of a new century often brings new optimism. The opening decade of the 20th century saw many important changes in rural development in Ontario (James, 1914). How will the first decade of the 21st century be viewed by those living in rural Ontario? Attention has been drawn to homelessness as a social condition that, although it is not new or unique, has rarely been studied in the rural context. This chapter begins to explore what is known about homelessness as it occurs in smaller, rural community settings.

It was through the strong lobby efforts of groups representing large urban areas that the National Homelessness Initiative was launched. Coincidently, small towns and rural areas of Canada also became beneficiaries of these efforts when Minister Claudette Bradshaw, the Federal Coordinator on Homelessness, was convinced to broaden the original, urban scope to include smaller communities (Human Resource Development Canada, NHI, 2007). When I began to review the early NHI outcome reports, I was curious about whether the decision to include smaller communities had, in fact, produced significant data about how rural communities have responded to homelessness.

As mentioned in Chapter Two, SCPI funding was allocated 80% to large urban areas and 20% to medium-sized cities, smaller towns and rural areas. This dissertation looks at the impact of this SCPI funding on addressing homelessness in rural areas,

described as a phenomenon "hidden on the sideroads," about which very little is known (Canadian Pensioners Concerned, 2006, p. 4). In this chapter the terms rural and small town are defined, and some of the documented features of rural communities in Canada and the United Kingdom are explored. Then there is a brief review of some of the major rural research programs currently underway in Ontario that highlight characteristics of, and challenges faced by, rural communities. The general research questions for this thesis flow from this discussion of homelessness in the rural setting.

Features of Rural Communities

The literature on rural communities utilizes features such as population size and density, distance from service centers, and social aspects of communities including age, gender, culture, living arrangements, migration patterns, and unpaid work or level of voluntarism, when looking at community as the unit of analysis (Halseth & Ryser, 2006; Keating, 2001). These features may also be used to distinguish rural from urban solutions to homelessness, and are considered as factors that shape both the partnership agreements with the federal government and the community consultations to develop the SCPI Community Action Plans. Additional challenges based on these unique rural characteristics are the limited availability of human resources to carry out research and the distances to be covered in conducting consultations within communities.

Contextual Background

Although community groups are intuitively aware that the characteristics of rural homelessness can be very different, landmark studies such as the Mayor's Task Force

on Homelessness (1999) have reinforced the visible face of homelessness as urban and associated with deteriorating inner-city neighborhoods in Toronto and other major cities. Research on homelessness in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) has extended to surrounding regions: Halton, Peel, York, and Durham. All four GTA regions, including the city of Toronto, have recently produced Community Action Plans to address homelessness. Yet few studies have been undertaken to determine how widespread homelessness is beyond the suburban fringe to where its presence could be characterized as "invisible." Practitioners such as Voakes (2006, p. 2) have pointed out the importance of understanding the social and cultural differences between big cities and small towns and "how rural/town people can be seriously stigmatized" if they are part of a homeless count. Voakes goes on to say that rural homeless people resist leaving their communities, but cities are where their best survival options are.

There are many nostalgic images and perceptions of the countryside as warm and friendly places to live (Berry, 1979; Norris, 1996). A recent study in the U.K. found that "in-moving affluent groups are attempting to preserve a picture postcard village environment through gentrification of country homes" and a similar situation exists in Simcoe County where people move out of the city to purchase second homes and then frequently relocate permanently. This process has led to the loss of private rental rooms offered by the former owners (Cloke et al., 2000b). According to this research, most local residents in the rural UK found it to be unbelievable that there were homeless people in their communities, and that it was common for "newcomers" to deny that social problems are present in these idyllic rural settings (Cloke et al., 2000b).

Under the 1996 revisions to the Housing Act in the UK, there is a form of homelessness characterized as 'intentional' (Crane, 1999). Statutory duty of local authority includes the following criteria:

1. applicant must be in priority need,

2. have not become homeless intentionally, and

3. have a connection with local area in which they are seeking to be rehoused.

According to Cloke (2001), there is substantial freedom to interpret circumstances that constitute intentional homelessness and there are wide variations in the judgments made by local authorities. Homeless people in UK communities who are characterized as intentional are unlikely to receive assistance. Because it does not appear in legislation in Canada, there is no exploration of the concept of "intentionally homeless" in the academic discourse here. This is a theme that can be explored from many different vantage points from individual behaviors to the articulation of a community-level response. It appears throughout this study and is revisited in the discussion in the final chapter.

Cloke (2001) reviews factors that affect the availability of housing and describes characteristics of physical locales such as size, land use, population density, type of housing stock, and proximity to urban centers as well as other significant features such as the presence and quality of social housing stock, real estate prices, the presence of rural gentrification, and uncontrolled real estate development. Rural communities are not just defined by geographical areas, but also by a close network of social systems (Carter, 1990). However, modern alternative definitions characterize rural as the edge of

civilization, where urban sprawl runs out, where the pavement ends, beyond the boundary of populated areas, or as disappearing landscapes and remote, isolated, and uncaring places on the margins of society (Caledon Countryside Alliance, 2005).

In his doctoral thesis about the experience of homeless men in Toronto, which confirmed disproportionate numbers of homeless men of Aboriginal origin migrating to urban centers, Menzies (2004, p. 8) provides a more culturally appropriate definition of homelessness as "the resultant condition of individuals being displaced from critical community structures." One risk factor cited as significant for people in rural areas was living in unsuitable, unaffordable and substandard housing conditions (Menzies, 2004). The majority of participants in this Toronto study were from northern Ontario, both on and off reserves, but primarily originating from a rural way of life, close to nature, and then forced to migrate south to cities searching for, but often excluded from, mainstream resources and services. This is in keeping with Hulchanski's (2002) observation that homeless people are a group with "no fixed address," unable to gain the same benefits from society because of their lack of status. Menzies's description of staying in motion as a way of coping conjures up images of the vast stretches of rural landscape traveled by the homeless with intentionality. Although the focus of this dissertation is on the community-planning and policy-making processes, much can be learned from the structural causes and displacement issues identified in the Aboriginal experience of homelessness, however, SCPI funds for Aboriginal persons in Simcoe County were allotted separately and therefore not included as one of the sub-population groups in this study (see Appendix H) .

While there is natural beauty in the surroundings of the countryside, there is also abundant affluence and wealth as well as a long history of hidden poverty making this a challenging and complex residential environment to describe using community as the unit of analysis. From a historical point of view, pioneer life was difficult in Ontario, and the pioneers built agriculturally based communities as a means to survival. These communities were well-established and expanding rapidly at the beginning of the 20th century. By 1905, the population was shifting away from the primarily rural base of over one million people to about a 50/50 rural-to-urban ratio in Ontario (James, 1914). The number of farms has continued to decline to about 450,000 after the Second World War and then to only 250,000 in Canada today (Tait & Qualman, 2004). This economic shift altered the need for transient labour and also changed the housing options available for the transient worker away from the farms. Today, most of the growth in rural population is in areas adjacent to metropolitan areas where family farms have been converted to other land site uses such as housing and industrial subdivisions, which allows for increased population densities.

Concerns at the turn of the 20th century were similar to today. There were fears about uncontrolled growth, spread of disease, and other public health issues such as sanitation and protection of clean water (Ambrose, 1996; Snell, 2003). There were also concerns about depopulation of rural areas, or out-migration as it is now referred to, and destruction of the environment and sense of community (Bruce & Carter, 2005). Education was aggressively pursued and expanded as a means to guide early reforms in social and economic policy. However, there is a misleading impression today that

"rural" is synonymous with "agriculture," which is no longer the case (Senate Report, 2008, p. ix).

Recent studies have pointed to high levels of poverty, economic recession, and the lack of low-income housing as major factors associated with homelessness (Rupnik, et al., 2001). It is also thought that this problem is more common in urban centers; however, in one American study conducted in rural up-state New York, Fitchen (1991) reports that "rural homelessness" is prevalent for many of the same reasons as it is in cities: lack of employment opportunities, lack of low-cost housing, and an increase in poor, single-parent households. Like their urban counterparts, rural homeless people live on the street or in a shelter, and where the opportunity is available use a variety of short-term resources including relying on family and friends for shelter. For people in rural areas, reliance upon family and friends may be a primary option, as shelters are less prevalent than in urban settings (Fitchen, 1991).

Therefore, shelters are an example of an urban solution not readily applicable to rural settings in part because the population is dispersed across vast areas, not concentrated within certain neighborhoods. In the Cloke et al. (2001) study of the UK, it became clear that the towns that served these areas are also key to serving rural homelessness, for it is in the towns that lowest-order facilities are provided and where homelessness first becomes visible.

Even though this thesis uses the community level of analysis, it is informed by the experience and voices of individual homeless people, a perspective that adds

richness to the descriptions of the basic demographics that follow (McDonald, 2007; Menzies, 2004; Older Women's Network, 2000; Saulnier & Storey, 2002).

The basic approach to describing a rural area in Canada is to look at the population statistics. Census rural was the term originally adopted to define the population living outside of settlements of 1,000 or more inhabitants, and has changed over time. For the purposes of this thesis the rural and small-town definition used by Statistics Canada (2008c) is adopted and refers to areas outside Census Metropolitan Areas (CMAs) and Census Agglomerates (CAs). A CMA has a total population of 100,000 or more with 50,000 or more in the urban core and a CA has an urban core of 10,000 or more. Both CMAs and CAs include neighboring towns and municipalities where 50% or more of the workforce commutes to the urban core. According to Statistics Canada, 13% of Ontarians live in rural areas, based on their definition of "rural." Although rural populations in Canada and Ontario declined between 1991 and 2006, more than 1.5 million individuals continue to live in rural and small town Ontario (Statistics Canada, 2008a).

Rural areas also can be described according to a number of criteria including their relative proximity to an urban center; geographical location (northern versus southern areas); the main industry or type of industry, for example: agricultural-dependent versus non-agricultural-dependent or the dominant cultural community; for example, Aboriginal or francophone (Barr, McKeown, Davidman, McIver, & Lasby, 2004).

In a study prepared for the Foundation for Rural Living, it was noted that Ontarians living in rural areas have a higher old-age dependency ratio (defined by Statistics Canada as the number of people 65 years of age or older for every 1,000 people of working age 15 to 64 years of age) and lower incomes than those living in urban areas (Halseth, 2003). Rural Ontario diverges in a number of important ways from patterns found in the rest of rural Canada (Delaney, Brownlee, & Sellick, 2001). For example, at 4.3%, the unemployment rate in rural Ontario is much lower than the overall rate for both urban and rural Canada. Rural areas bordering on the Greater Toronto Area have a high proportion of people who commute to work (Bollman & Clemenson, 2008). Further, despite generally lower incomes, the level of poverty is lower in rural areas because of lower costs of living, particularly the cost of housing (Rupnik et al., 2001).

Housing prices are increasing in rural areas within commuting distance to large cities as well as costs associated with such basics as taxes and utilities. The University of Guelph was one of the original rural research centers established to provide leadership in rural Ontario (Snell, 2003). However, after the midpoint of the 20th century, this role waned. There was a brief revival in the 1970s with the re-emergence of rural social work and sociology as a field, which coincided with attention to the plight of the rural homeless (Collier, 1993; Johnson & Schwartz, 1994). Today, Guelph has evolved into a small city, and the university's interest in rural issues has declined over the years.

A characteristic of rural communities that in theory should bear upon homelessness is mutual aid. In reference to rural societies, Ferdinand Tonnies (1855–

1936), an early German sociologist, coined the terms *Gemeinschaft* for a society based on close interpersonal relationships (Tonnies, 1940). In contrast, Tonnies (1940) characterized social relations in urban centres as *Gesellschaft*, or individuals relating through structures in the community. The idea of mutual aid is acknowledged by social service practitioners as a vital resource in rural communities, exemplified by, for example, farmers helping each other during harvest and neighbors in small towns depending on each other during crises such as a death or illness in the family. An example of mutual aid is described in Chapter Five, as part of the local context of Simcoe County. A spontaneous community effort in the town of Orillia (2003) started Jubilee House to provide permanent housing for four homeless women and their children. This voluntary initiative occurred outside of the formal SCPI partnership activities (Orillia Focus Group, 2005).

Mutual aid has the advantage of being relatively non-intrusive, culturally relevant, inexpensive, non-stigmatizing, and relatively anonymous. It is the simplest approach to helping others and seems to work most effectively when the people helping and those being helped have similar values, come from a similar culture, or have a similar lifestyle (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993). Later in this thesis the concept of mutual aid is discussed in more detail as one of the cornerstones of capacity building.

Major Rural Research Studies

There are at least five major Canadian research programs that look at different aspects of rural life in the 21st century that are presented as background informing this study :

1. The New Rural Economy Project was founded under the auspices of The Canadian Rural Revitalization Foundation to perform research and education on the changes taking place in rural Canada. In 2003, a network of more than 32 rural communities, 30 partners, 25 researchers, and 18 universities was formed to examine present and potential economic and social capacities. This work is ongoing. Of particular interest to this thesis is the paper by Halseth and Ryser (2006) on innovative services and voluntary organizations, which examines how service gaps are addressed in four rural settings, as agencies cope with pressures associated with economic and social change.

2. The Sustainable Rural Communities Program was formed at the University of Guelph to look at economic, social, and environmental conditions in rural communities including the rural voluntary sector. One study, conducted in 2004 (publication pending), looked at land stewardship in southern Ontario (Personal interview with Lee-Ann Milburn, doctoral candidate, July 24, 2006). In addition, Wall (1999) conducted case studies in Tweed and Blenheim, Ontario, looking at local focal points, such as post offices, seniors' centers, recreational or cultural organizations, and schools, of networks and how these can be mobilized as social capital to cope with stressful community events.

3. *The Rural Charitable Sector Research Initiative: A Portrait of the Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector in Rural Ontario* was prepared for the Foundation of Rural Living and the Canadian Centre for Philanthropy (now Imagine Canada) to aid in the understanding of trends and patterns affecting the rural sector (Dow, 2001; Reimer, 2002). This is included as a major source of background

material on the rural setting for this thesis and is discussed in the final section of this chapter.

4. *Cornerstones of Community: Highlights from the National Survey of Non-profit and Voluntary Organizations* analyzes results from the National Survey of Non-profit and Voluntary Organizations (NSNVO) (Statistics Canada, 2003b). The survey gathered data from representatives of about 13,000 incorporated non-profit organizations and registered charities in 2003. The respondents were asked to report on the characteristics of their organization and the factors that influence the capacity of their organization to achieve its mission. The survey was a collaborative undertaking of Statistics Canada and a consortium of organizations led by the Canadian Centre for Philanthropy. Although this study was not specifically about rural regions, it provides evidence related to the human resource and administrative challenges experienced in the rural setting.

5. Caring Contexts of Rural Seniors, based on 2001 Canadian Census data was a 3-year study exploring the diversity of rural places. It examined the lives of older people and their support networks in what is believed to be the first such study of rural communities ever conducted in Canada. Norah Keating and her associates posed the question: "Is rural Canada a good place to grow old?" The study found that "rural communities are not all the same and the usual portrayal of rural as the default of urban masks the heterogeneity among rural communities themselves" (Keating et al., 2004, p. 4). Demographic composition and proximity to service centers of rural communities were two

features investigated and linked to relationships with formal and family and friend networks of support in this Canadian study of 2,759 rural communities (Keating et al., 2004). It is particularly challenging to develop policies and programs to support those living in rural areas where small, dispersed populations mean that urban models of shelter and support may not be appropriate. Although this analysis of secondary census data is not measuring homelessness per se, it does provide an indicator of the potential strengths and weaknesses of rural communities on which groups can begin to build capacity and will be captured in detail in this thesis.

Confirming the linkage to support networks identified by Keating et al., Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) identified issues such as changing demographics, population mobility, changes in health service delivery and economic decline as affecting social housing in rural areas (Bruce & Carter, 2005). There has been a long-term trend of out-migration and population decline that, in conjunction with the aging population, has changed the population ratios in rural communities in general.

Aside from the traditional structural factors such as presence or absence of natural resources, location, economic investments, and enterprises, usually considered in studying rural development, a new approach has been proposed in the New Rural Economy program. It looks at the dynamism of the community and identifies leading and lagging variables. Halseth et al. (2004) define leading research sites as those typically identified by characteristics such as low unemployment, higher levels of education, high percentage of income from employment, lower housing costs, high rates

of home ownership, and low levels of divorce and separation. Some of these variables are used to determine if rural sites in Simcoe County would be classified as leading or lagging, and are discussed in the local context section of Chapter Five.

Simcoe County, Ontario, was selected as the case study area for this thesis because it contains both small towns and rural areas and is adjacent to a high-growth metropolitan area. There is evidence of in-migration of newcomers, including new retirees, and net population growth that has created pressure on voluntary agencies. As noted, it was also the only rural SCPI project funded in Ontario that adopted the NHI "community entity" model of governance. A detailed description of the characteristics of Simcoe County that are seen as contributing factors to the development of the Community Action Plan is presented in Chapter Five.

There are two major recent studies (Keating, 2005; McDonald, 2004) that offer some evidence about age composition, gender, and other factors, and describe the supports available to older people. The first is a significant study on homelessness that points to the fact that older homeless adults have been largely ignored in both the gerontology and homeless literatures. An interesting finding from interviews with 91 homeless older adults in Toronto (with aged defined as over the age of 50 since evidence-based research suggests that persons living in poverty and or experiencing the emotional, physical and psychological trauma associated with homelessness suffer accelerated aging) is that almost 70% first became homeless between the ages of 41 and 60 (McDonald, 2004). Although men outnumber women, as they do in the general homeless population, in the older general population, those most at risk of becoming homeless are women with low incomes. This reinforces the importance of participatory

action research projects such as the one carried out by the Older Women's Network in six communities across Ontario including communities in rural areas and on reserves.

In addition to holding focus groups and interviews with mid-life and older women, the Older Women's Network received 1,242 responses to a questionnaire that outlined many concerns about housing and support services. The findings indicate a number of disturbing factors including an overwhelming desire by the women surveyed to age in place, not only in their own homes but in their own communities. Financial concerns dominated all other factors in relation to availability of housing. Transportation and mobility issues were central to their wish, that is, to be able to walk to most of their activities. Accessibility and proximity to medical appointments, shopping and visiting friends and family were also important. Many of the women live with a number of fears about losing their housing and being forced to move away from small towns and the rural countryside as they age (Older Women's Network, 2000). This recognition of the complexity of needs of the older rural person and concerns about those who are forced to leave their home communities in search of supports and services and lower cost housing prompted Canadian Pensioners Concerned, in collaboration with four major provincial partner organizations, to conduct a study in 2005 of older individuals who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless in five areas of Simcoe County. The organization wanted to hear the stories about homelessness from older people themselves.

On average, according to 2008 census data, 15% of the population of rural communities in Canada is aged 65 and older. However, this average masks the tremendous diversity in rural Canada: the proportion of seniors in rural communities

varies widely, from as low as 1% to as high as 44%. The proportion of seniors living in a rural community may affect the availability of family and friend support. It is also noted by Keating (2004), in her review of the gerontological literature pertaining to rural communities, that locations with high proportions of older adults are more likely to have high levels of volunteerism as many older people are actively engaged in their communities (Hodge, McKay, & Breeckmans, 1993).

The participatory community-based approach assumes that the experts are the people who live the experiences that are being studied and that knowledge is something that is produced through the active engagement and interaction of all of the participants in the project. This subjective knowing is vital to understanding and moving forward with social change.

Findings from focus groups and interviews on homelessness conducted by Canadian Pensioners Concerned (2006) reveal four main themes: the presence of age and gender discrimination; diminishing supply of affordable housing; unrecognized poverty among older, rural people; and unattended health care issues. The main conclusion of the study is that the difficulties older, homeless people face in Simcoe County had some of the same features as those faced by older homeless people in urban areas. However, in addition to the obvious need for more affordable social housing, the isolation often experienced in rural areas underscores the need for better transportation and more accessible health and social services. In these respects, the rural dwellers appear to be worse off than their urban counterparts.

The study's recommendations highlight the urgency of focusing on older homeless people in rural areas. Contrary to the popular image, networks of mutual aid have weakened in rural communities. For example, older people participating in the focus groups recalled a time earlier in their lives when landlords were more forgiving, church groups never turned away anyone in need, and there was a general acceptance and tolerance in neighborhoods for diverse lifestyles (Canadian Pensioners Concerned, 2006).

Another significant finding is that there are fewer units reserved in social housing for seniors than there used to be (National Council on Aging, 2001; Ontario Coalition of Senior Citizen Organizations, 2004). Changes in provincial social policy have resulted in reduced access because age is no longer counted among the criteria for admission to rent-geared-to-income supportive housing units. Therefore the actual number of units available for older people has been reduced (Simcoe County, Social Services, 2008).

Norah Keating and her associates investigated how support provided to seniors correlates with different rural community characteristics (2004, p. 5). There has been little research to address two prevailing notions about rural communities. First is the idea that smaller is better and that those who live in rural communities are surrounded by networks of family and friends who will support them. The second is that rural communities afford reduced access to formal services due to distance from service centers. Nonetheless, there is some evidence that a number of social aspects of the community may influence the level of social support, including age and gender distributions, average income, migration patterns, and level of volunteerism in the community (Keating et al., 2004). Other important factors affecting the risk of

homelessness in rural communities are community economic indicators and length of residents' tenure in the community.

Living arrangements across the country also differ substantially by region. For example, Keating et al. (2004) found that communities in Atlantic Canada, on average, have higher proportions of persons living with four or more others, higher proportions of long-term residents, lower household incomes, higher seasonal and part-time employment, and fewer persons with at least some post-secondary education. Conversely, rural communities in British Columbia, on average, have a lower proportion of persons living with four or more others, a lower proportion of widowed persons, higher education levels, and the lowest proportion of residents who provide unpaid help to seniors. In the Prairies region, rural communities, on average, have the lowest levels of seasonal and part-time employment, the highest proportion of seniors, and the highest proportion of the population providing unpaid help to seniors, according to Keating et al. (2004). There is a paucity of empirical data relating to homelessness on the Prairies, although Saskatchewan was found to be the best place to grow old in Canada. While it is a question beyond the scope of this thesis, it would be interesting to see if the approach to assisting seniors generalizes to serving the homeless or even has the effect of preventing homelessness.

Rural communities that provide moderate and strong support to seniors have a higher proportion of residents who have lived in their community for at least 5 years. This suggests that familiarity and interaction among community members may reflect stronger social cohesion. These characteristics are typical of communities in which residents who have longer tenure have had opportunities over time to get to know one

other, share community experiences, and establish patterns of helping. This finding may be related in part to the dearth of formal services in rural communities.

Another study of rural communities indicates that a decline in formal services such as banking, local businesses, and health care services has been compensated by an increase in volunteerism (Bruce & Black, 2000). When the SCPI Steering Committee was formed, how was the level of volunteerism acknowledged and how were the community leaders assembled? These questions will be considered when reviewing the SCPI project outcomes in Chapter Six.

Communities differ with respect to population size, proportion of long-term residents, and average hours of unpaid work. While the reasons for such differences are not necessarily clear, these results point to the need to recognize regional differences in any discussion of the significant social and economic change rural Canada is undergoing. Such macro level influences are shaping communities' migratory patterns, demographic composition, and availability of essential health and social services, which, in turn, is postulated to have a relationship to the prevalence of homelessness.

These conditions present challenges for communities trying to find shelter solutions for their homeless population, and suggest the need to address some of the assumptions about rural Canada. Keating's (2001) study suggests that supportive communities are relatively smaller in size in which residents have lived for a long time, have a higher proportion of seniors, and a culture of helping one another.

Understanding the context is central to understanding whether a rural community is able to acknowledge the prevalence of homelessness and take steps to respond.

Rural communities have been characterized as warm and friendly places where people are surrounded by neighbors that care about, and care for, all of its citizens. An alternative, less positive, image of rural communities suggests isolation, lack of formal services, and physical features such as low population density which may limit a community's ability to respond to its citizens in need of assistance. Unfortunately, there is limited evidence to test these competing perceptions. Economies of scale make it difficult to provide residential services such as transitional housing, retirement homes, rooming houses, and emergency shelters in rural settings because there are few potential users spread over a large geographic area. The expense of building small facilities in a number of locations to service the small numbers in need would be difficult to justify.

Distance from a service center is a good indicator of the ability to gain access to needed services, particularly in a country in which the problem of distance can be intensified by severe climatic conditions. In recent research on small rural communities in Canada, Halseth (2003) found that the availability of essential services in one's immediate community had declined over the period from 1998 to 2002. Given this, it is not surprising that transportation is a pervasive theme in rural research (Schoenberg & Coward, 1998).

The supportiveness of rural communities is based in part on the availability of family to provide assistance. However, the likelihood of having proximate family

members is influenced by larger societal trends. The changing rural landscape has resulted in limited education and economic opportunities in many rural settings throughout Canada, both of which may contribute to out-migration and a declining volunteer base. Older adults play an important role in providing support to others. Rural communities with a high number of seniors have high levels of volunteerism and may be viewed as more supportive (Hodge, McKay, & Breeckmans, 1993). A study of rural and small town populations in Atlantic Canada also found a high level of volunteerism among seniors, especially among members of church groups. When seniors volunteer in various organizations, more support is provided by others in the community, especially others that are involved in those organizations (Bruce & Black, 2000).

Women are commonly seen as the main providers of support and care to family members, neighbors, and friends. Nearly 70% of all caregivers to seniors in Canada are women (Keating et al., 2008). Helping relationships in rural communities in Canada largely involve women, regardless of the task (Keefe & Side, 2003). More specifically, sisters and daughters (Kivett, 1988) are more likely than brothers and sons to help a rural family member.

Level of household income may also be related to community supportiveness. Researchers have found that civic engagement is more likely among households of higher socio-economic status while poorer households may have limited participation (Williams & White, 2002). Similarly, rural communities that are more affluent have greater participation in community groups and activities and may be in a better position to assist groups in need such as the homeless (Bennett, 1993; Tauxe, 1995; Wharf Higgins, Cossom & Wharf, 2003; Woodford, 2003).

Region of the country has emerged as an important determinant of the availability of publicly funded programs, which in turn affects the rural contexts of the region, and may influence the level of support available to those who are at risk of homelessness or are homeless. Not surprisingly, the presence and location of the regional offices of the federal Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC) and level of support to community planning was noted in the early outcomes evaluation as key to the successful implementation of the SCPI projects.

The diversity among rural communities and across regions in terms of physical locality (size, land area covered, population density, and proximity to urban centers), and social aspects of community in terms of demographic characteristics (gender and age composition, marital status, and living arrangements), socioeconomic status (educational attainment, household income, and seasonal and part-time employment), migration patterns, and unpaid work provide the context for this thesis.

There is some variation in the proportion of females in rural communities across Canada. The average percentage of females in rural communities is 49%, as reported in the 2001 Census, with a range between 36% and 59% (Bruce, 2003; duPlessis, Beshiri, Bollman & Clemenson, 2002). The average percentage of persons with at least some post-secondary education in rural communities is 43%, again with a broad range from 6% to 83% (Keating, et al., 2004). Persons with a higher level of education may influence the establishment of social support networks in their communities but may not reside in the rural community for an extended period of time (Rothwell et al., 2002).

At the national level, the average percentage of persons who are employed seasonally or part-time in rural communities is 53%, perhaps an indication of the nature of employment available in rural Canada (Reimer, 2002). While there is considerable diversity among rural communities with respect to the stability of their population, on average, 83% of the population has lived in their communities for more than 5 years (Keating, et al., 2004). This degree of stability will likely affect how well community members know each other and their willingness to provide assistance to neighbors.

While many of the findings by Keating et al. (2004) will resonate with Canadians, there are surprises. A better understanding of the places where we live and the influences that shape their demographic composition and availability of health and social services has been described by Keating et al. (2004). However, the community-context definition of supportiveness also has its limitations and there is compelling evidence against the assumption that rural communities are inevitably close-knit and caring (Keefe & Side, 2003). It was hypothesized by Keating et al. (2004) that communities that are high on supportiveness are ones in which there are greater links among citizens and that are highly cohesive. This should also hold true when assessing community-responsiveness to the homeless.

Small population size and higher proportions of long-term residents likely serve to foster links among community members. As well, highly supportive communities have greater proportions of women, and their citizens do more hours of unpaid work. Previous research has shown that women are more likely than men to provide support to older adults and to be the kin-keepers and connecting persons in families. Thus it is not surprising that at the community level their presence is associated with higher levels

of support. Hours of unpaid work may be evidence of supportive collective action, "activities based on shared commitment to a group and its members' needs and interests" (Keating et al., 2004, p. 9). And this is an indication of a community in which people are connected and working together in the face of adversity and in the provision of mutual aid.

As well, volunteerism may be a means of building social ties in rural communities. Evidence to support this comes from the National Survey of Non-profit and Voluntary Organizations (NSNVO), which found that in 2003, a greater proportion of rural than urban Ontarians donated to a non-profit or voluntary organization (85% compared to 76%), and that rural residents volunteered at a higher rate than urban residents did (31% compared to 24).

The most striking finding of the Rural Charitable Sector Research Initiative (2004) is that charities in rural areas accounted for approximately 20% of the total number of charities in Ontario but only 4% of the total charity revenue. That rural charities are smaller with fewer staff and receive relatively less government funding may explain some of this discrepancy. About 60% of the charities in rural areas are classified as having a "religious" base and religious congregations are a traditional source of social support. However, there are fewer "health, education and social services" in rural areas when compared to urban areas (22% vs. 39%) (Halseth, 2003).

Just over one-half of the non-profits reported having problems with planning for the future, recruiting the types of volunteers needed, obtaining board members, and retaining volunteers. Combined, Quebec (29%) and Ontario (28%) account for more

than one-half of all non-profit organizations in Canada and face the biggest challenges related to recruiting the numbers of volunteers required to ensure sustainability (Canadian Centre for Philanthropy, 2004). Many rural organizations lack the financial resources to invest in training, fundraising, and information technology, and therefore volunteerism alone may not be sufficient to afford the communities the capacity required to respond to complex issues such as homelessness.

Berry (1991) reminds us that rural people can teach us how to live more realistically and lightly on the land; however, issues such as homelessness take the true measure of our discomfort when shifting boundaries shake our allegiance to the way things are. A report called *Holding on to Housing* highlights the problem of rural homelessness:

> In the countryside there is a type of homelessness that is so much more hidden … finding the individuals is a huge challenge for the researchers, becoming aware of people living on the side roads, sleeping in vehicles, isolated on farms or properties that have been in the family forever. And yet, for those that are homeless or sometimes homeless, it is when there is a change in housing that support and services are most needed and moving into a more serviced area is not always the answer because it is new, unknown and overwhelming! What is needed is affordable housing in our rural areas and towns but the lack of services remains! (Canadian Pensioners Concerned, 2006, p. 5)

Is there a better approach to finding shelter options in rural communities or exploring the linkages between housing supports and social services? Is mutual aid an outdated concept in rural communities?

The scope of the non-profit sector's activities is widening in light of societal changes such as closures of institutions, limited investment in community services, and the lack of housing to accommodate their clients. Can a rural volunteer organization

such as the Simcoe County Alliance to End Homelessness (SCATEH) respond effectively to these challenges?

As stated, the overall goals of this research are:

1. To document and understand the nature of rural homelessness;

2. To see whether new synergies have been created by the Simcoe County Alliance to End Homelessness that have addressed rural homelessness both in practice and in the creation of helpful policies;

3. To generate policies and legislative proposals to address rural homelessness.

Non-profit and voluntary organizations are vehicles for citizen engagement and require a high level of commitment and energy (Julian, Reischel, Carrick & Katrenich, 1997; Kettle, 2000; Kooiman, 2000; Schurgurensky, 2003). Simcoe County Alliance to End Homelessness is one such organization that has focused on a single task for almost a decade and has acknowledged the tremendous challenges presented by the small towns and rural areas of the county. This chapter has described some of the characteristics of, and challenges faced by, diverse rural communities across Canada, and identified some of the features to be considered when looking at the impact of the federal SCPI funding. The next chapter discusses the research design and methodology.

Chapter Four:
Research Design and Methodology

This chapter will outline the design and methodology used to address my research questions about rural responses to homelessness, a hidden phenomenon. A holistic and critical lens is adopted in building a case study to examine the contentious area of social housing policy development as it relates to homelessness.

There are three components to the research design: first, a policy review, a broad look at the policy agenda framework in Canada; then, a case study to illustrate implementation issues related to the National Homelessness Initiative; and, finally, a reflection on current practice in order to realize a holistic and multi-dimensional approach to the critique of public policy.

Phase one is the gathering and critiquing of government documents that provide direction to the SCPI (Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative) in the social housing policy context. In addition, policy review interviews were conducted with researchers and practitioners in the field in Canada, the US and the UK. A discussion of SCPI governance models and community action planning has been outlined in Chapter Two. The findings of this phase include a critique of the governance structure and relevance of the community-based policy development model. Phase two is an in-depth examination of how the SCPI policy was implemented in Simcoe County. It uncovers the specific processes and plans created through a new community entity sponsored by the United Way of Greater Simcoe County. It has been said that the solution to every problem starts with a great plan. And one method of evaluating a "great plan" is to

examine the strengths and weaknesses of a particular community planning process conducted under its auspices. The results of this examination are relayed in Chapter Five using a case study format (Stake, 1995).

Finally, in the reflective phase, uncovering the actual practices related to community planning reveals the conflicts, contradictions, and dilemmas encountered by a participatory researcher that has been immersed in an evolving and experiential research project over a 7-year period. The rationale for using a practitioner-research approach and selecting Simcoe County follows, along with descriptions of several data collection techniques, sources of data, selection of the participants, methods of analysis, and a discussion of ethical considerations.

Various perspectives are captured through this multi-method research into the intersections between public policy development and partnerships with government. A reflective research approach is used to advance an understanding of the collaborative relationships between partners in a community governance model. These perspectives are reflected in the recommendations for possible modifications to the community-based policy development model in the Chapter Six. The issue of homelessness is used as an illustration of how a difficult policy issue can be tackled by community groups in the future.

Finally, the last section of this chapter includes a discussion of the challenges and limitations of this multi-dimensional approach to researching homelessness and public policy development.

Rationale for the Practitioner Research Approach

The theoretical basis for looking at group dynamics in applied social science research comes from the early work of Kurt Lewin (1946), who believed that knowledge is attained from problem-solving in real-life situations. Methodological choices depend on the context within which the study is undertaken, and research and action (including education itself) become a single process integrating theory and practice (Freire, 1970). Some of the ideas about critical theory presented by Habermas, the leading representative of the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory, particularly his work on moral consciousness and communicative action, serve to frame this rationale and policy critique (Habermas, 1983). The practitioner has to demonstrate an understanding of "morally obligatory relationships of mutual respect, even among strangers", in order to advance learning about group processes while drawing from theory and practice (Habermas, 1990, p. 250).

A definition of qualitative research offered by Patton (2001, p. 23) characterizes this approach as "a systematic inquiry into the nature or qualities of observable group behaviors." When active citizens join together to solve problems this has more recently been called community-based research (CBR) that attempts to harness intellectual energy through information sharing and engaging all members of the community towards gathering the capacity to act (Hall, 2009). This involves research done by community groups with or without the involvement of a university. CBR seeks to democratize knowledge creation by validating multiple sources of knowledge and promoting the use of multiple methods of discovery and dissemination with the goal of social action. Engaging in these efforts to raise awareness about homelessness, I

describe the basic learnings of adult education and see my role as a facilitator of

discussions, particularly in the focus groups. I bring both an academic and a practitioner

perspective, sometimes referred to as an insider-outsider perspective, to this thesis,

which provides insight into the nature of group behaviors from two distinct and different

vantage points that recognizes a range of various and sometimes conflicting

perspectives. The limitations to this collaborative approach are that this knowledge

transfer and application are very time-consuming, require an ongoing commitment by all

of the partners and a high level of energy and enthusiasm to be sustained across a

broad spectrum of many stakeholders. My contribution will be to direct what has been

learned in this thesis towards the continuing adult education field through dissemination

of findings to service providers, academics, students and community members.

Building on extensive time spent in the field allows for a cycle of inquiry that

combines traditional methods of data collection and the "plan-act-observe-reflect"

techniques advocated by those who follow a Freire-inspired philosophy (Herr &

Anderson, 2005; Morse, 1994). This cycle of inquiry spans the entire 7-year duration of

the NHI, from 2000 to 2007. I was an "insider," a policy-maker for over 20 years as an

Ontario Public Servant, before becoming a community partner with government, from

1999 to 2002, as CEO of a supportive housing non-profit agency providing service

directly to homeless persons with serious mental illness. Subsequently, I became an

"outsider" studying homelessness, from 2003 to 2007, as a doctoral student at the

University of Toronto.

Rationale for Selecting Simcoe County

In the social housing policy section of Chapter Two of this thesis, the Supportive Communities Partnership Initiative (SCPI) is recognized as an innovative experiment introduced by the federal government to address homelessness. Twenty per cent of the funding of that program was directed to rural communities. Since Simcoe County is the only predominantly rural area in Ontario to receive federal funding under the program, it became, almost by default, the geo-political area chosen as the field-research site. It also provides the only example of a SCPI community entity model of governance in Ontario. This county is situated between two large inland bodies of fresh water: Georgian Bay and Lake Simcoe, establishing it as a year-round draw for the tourism industry. Much of the county reflects dominant ideas of the rural idyll with its small, picturesque villages and rolling farmland. It is also placed beside the largest urban area of Canada, Toronto and the GTA, with a population of over 5.5 million that is experiencing the most rapid economic growth in all of the country. This makes it a distinctive and challenging region to study, unique in a changing rural setting, which, of course, becomes a major limitation for generalizability of the findings since the definition of rural homelessness placed here is unlike any other in Canada.

According to the boundaries adopted by the Simcoe County Alliance to End Homelessness (SCATEH), Barrie is the urban center of the Community Plan. The plan included submissions from six different chapters of SCATEH representing all geographical and political jurisdictions of Simcoe County. The submissions of three of these chapters, which form a triangle to the north, west, and south of Barrie, have been selected for inclusion in the case study as follows:

1. North Simcoe Community Plan;

2. Orillia Community Plan; and

3. Bradford Community Plan.

The Simcoe County Alliance to End Homelessness (SCATEH) is a group made up of over 70 community partners who formed a community coalition committed to developing and implementing strategies to eliminate homelessness. It is governed by a Steering Committee of about 20 representatives of community organizations as well as several local government staff.

The Alliance established the following five goals:

1. To increase public awareness of the impact of homelessness on the community and our determination to end it.

2. To increase understanding of the changing nature and causes of homelessness.

3. To create intervention and prevention strategies to end homelessness.

4. To advocate for the creation of safe, affordable housing.

5. To help coordinate a network of supports for those in housing crisis, as well as a support network for those working with people who are homeless.

Two of these goals, numbers 1 and 2, are of particular interest to this study because they address increasing public awareness and understanding. This allows a critique

using the theory of communicative action as described by Habermas (1990) which allows members of society to make sense of themselves and their social and physical environments to create shared meanings. SCATEH gathered people together to capture their thoughts and ideas on how to end homelessness and then incorporated this detailed understanding in a community action plan in a concrete attempt to raise public awareness. Quantitative data is possible to assemble related to goals 1 and 2.For example; one of the communication techniques used by social advocates and practitioners in the field is to enlist the assistance of the media in order to bring attention to homelessness. A collection and analysis of newspaper articles gathered over the course of this study is also included as one measure of communicative action with intention.

The other three goals of the Simcoe County Alliance to End Homelessness are more difficult to assess through the content analysis of the community action plans because "coordinating, intervening, preventing and advocating" are laudable actions but difficult to measure as these processes are difficult to capture in planning documents. Therefore, only observations about these goals will be recorded the author.

Three of the six SCATEH chapters, which have been defined by their geographical boundaries, were arbitrarily chosen for a detailed look at their specific contributions to the overall community plan. Time limitations made it impossible to study the contributions of all six chapters; however, other data collection spanned the entire 4-year period, from 2003 to 2007, and includes all of Simcoe County. The challenge of searching out data sources relating to the incidence of homelessness was somewhat alleviated by the availability of secondary-census and housing-market data. Shelter

usage, waiting-list statistics and numbers recorded as accessing the flex fund were

obtained from existing government data for Simcoe County. Although these may not

measure homelessness precisely, they do provide an indicator of the tangible assets

and resources, both in terms of the use of emergency funds and the housing stock

available, needed for the assessment of the potential for capacity building and related

responses to homelessness in rural communities.

Selecting the Participants

The criteria used to select individual interviewees for the case study were based

on voluntary membership in the coalition or being a community leader. Members

selected (see Appendices A, B, and C) were either part of the SCATEH Steering

Committee or chapter representatives, staff support to the committee, or

representatives of government:

Steering Committee
1. The Chairperson of SCATEH
2. A business partner
3. A senior official from the mental health sector
4. A senior official from the social service sector
5. A senior official from the housing sector
6. A leader in the faith community

Staff Support to the Alliance
1. Alliance Coordinator (s) – four incumbents in this position were interviewed
2. Executive Director of the United Way of Greater Simcoe County

Government

1. A senior public servant with the National Homelessness Initiative
2. A senior public servant with the Province of Ontario
3. A senior public servant with Simcoe County
4. The Cabinet Minister responsible for the National Homelessness Initiative

Of particular note is the remarkable ability of volunteers in these non-profit agencies and other stakeholders to make their time available for participation when time is such a scarce resource and some of the community leaders wear many different hats. Over 20 interviews were conducted by telephone and in person with members of the Alliance and 7 interviews were conducted with government representatives.

Each member responded to the requests to participate and signed a consent form (see Appendices D and E for consent and recruitment forms). There were a total of 27 key informants including Steering Committee members, government representatives, and local newspaper reporters interviewed with many spending over one hour in responding to my research questions.

The research questions were explored with every participant through open-ended interview questions intended to prompt reflection about his or her experience as a member of SCATEH and assess the effectiveness of the community planning process. Several times key informants were called upon after the initial interview to clarify points and provide further details about the community process and responded without hesitation. Transcripts of the interviews were coded and reviewed for emerging themes and selection of potential quotations for inclusion in the text. The interview questions are described in detail in the next section.

Data Collection

As mentioned above, a multi-method approach making use of several different data collection techniques was adopted for this study. The first is the environmental scan.

Environmental Scan

In formulating the research design, one of the first steps was deciding how to capture information about the characteristics of rural areas and small towns in Simcoe County. An environmental scan was completed relying on 2001 and 2006 survey data from Statistics Canada as the major source of information on the basic demographics of the area. Other data, income and level of education, real estate market changes, housing stock availability, rental and purchase costs, waiting lists for shelters and social housing, are indicators used to determine whether there is an equitable distribution of resources and access to the service system in place in each of the areas selected. Chapter Five includes a description of Simcoe County derived from the environmental scan.

In addition, several other techniques were adopted to collect data for this study: a review of public documents and media articles; recording of participant observations by gathering narrative information and attending public meetings; conducting focus groups; interviewing service providers, other stakeholders, and community leaders; and finally keeping a journal of activities, observations, and reflections.

Collecting Public Documents and Media Articles

Over the period 2000 to 2007, hundreds of public documents, media articles, and photographs dealing with the topic of homelessness were collected. Definitions of "homelessness" as reflected in the public documents and media articles were identified. During this first phase the full spectrum of the National Homelessness Initiative policy agenda was explored. Interviews were conducted with 12 researchers and practitioners from across Canada, to gain their insights into this experimental approach to dealing with homelessness and collect their written articles on various aspects of social housing policy and rurality. Also local newspaper articles were collected and interviews conducted with 2 local reporters in Simcoe County.

In addition, social housing policies in the U.S. and the U.K. have been examined, with a particular focus on how the hidden aspects of rural homelessness were dealt with. A site visit to interview Dr. Maureen Crane, a leading researcher at Sheffield University in England, enabled me to have a first-hand look at programs for the homeless and obtain important government reports for this general policy development review of legislation in place in the U.K.

Also, during this early phase, visual tools were created as an aid to evoke responses from colleagues and study participants in the exploration of the meanings of "homelessness" to illustrate the challenges of dealing with such an abstract term.

Raising the Roof, a national charity for homelessness, defines the term as "the absence of a place to live." SCATEH used "no fixed address" as the operational

definition to identify those who are homeless. For purposes of this case study the rural homeless are those persons with no fixed address.

Visual images evoke a variety of understandings of the word homeless. The uses of the word "homeless" and linkages to emerging themes collected from the interviews and focus groups, as well as stories portrayed by the media, are critical to the discussion of communicative action as it applies to the policy review, the case study, and the reflexive accounts of the observations that follow in Chapter Six.

Policy papers, community case studies, and reports from Statistics Canada, the NHI website, and Human Resources Development Canada are the other major Canadian sources of data. Policy documents related to the Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative (SCPI) and its key principles for implementing local projects were valuable sources of more specific information for this study.

Participant Observation

Another method adopted to collect information was the participation of this researcher as an observer at community events and public meetings hosted by the Simcoe Alliance. SCATEH declared its intention clearly and publicly, setting about to establish a transparent process. Ordinary people in the community were invited to participate as equal partners in a deliberate movement toward social change through the creation of enough good will, energy, community spirit, and sense of urgency to put into motion a new direction. In any social change process, there is a huge learning curve for all of the partners and stakeholders, and many variables that cannot be

controlled on the local level and the presence of the Alliance in organizing these

activities, as volunteers, was the constant over the 7 years of study.

The researcher, as participant observer, recorded notes on the SCATEH

meetings and public forums, and collected examples of various communication

strategies put in place by the Steering committee. These data were also organized by

themes related to policy issues, governance, partnerships, and service issues. The

limitation to this method is that the relationships and partnerships are not static in any

community and particularly one that is growing so rapidly. This constant change

demands continuous repetition of public events as part of the communication strategy to

keep people engaged, informed and developing skills about how to influence groups,

especially challenging when it comes to lobbying the politicians .

Interview Guidelines

In order to set up interviews with case study participants, communications were

cleared first through the United Way office on behalf of the Steering Committee of

SCATEH, then with the individual participant in the case of community participants. For

government representatives, the HRDC offices in Ottawa, Toronto (Regional) and Barrie

were contacted directly. Ethical standards, as outlined by the University of Toronto,

were followed in gaining the consent of study participants and releases to publish the

outcomes of the research (see Consent form Appendix D).

An interview guideline with three sections was developed:

1. Part A is a review of the terms and conditions of the SCPI agreement and includes questions about decisions made by SCATEH related to governance and funding;

2. Part B includes seven questions about the community action plan and the process used to develop it. This section also includes questions intended to identify champions, strategies, and public awareness; and

3. Part C consists of a single question about the role of government, its level of commitment and participation

4. In addition, one question was included to probe how each community responded to the challenge of reaching out to those that were "hidden." (see Appendix F for the entire set of interview questions).

These questions were all open-ended and prompted general comments. Participants were aware of the nature of the research, given a copy of the questions, and asked to sign formal consent forms. It was emphasized that there are no right or wrong answers, that their recorded responses would be kept confidential, and that a copy of the transcript would be available for their review if requested.

Appointments were set up with the selected participants either in person or via telephone. The interviews and focus groups took place in Midland, Orillia, and Bradford, in government offices, restaurants, non-profit agencies, and churches.

Focus Groups

With the assistance of members of the Steering Committee of SCATEH, three focus groups were set up and co-lead by the researcher and representatives of the local chapter of SCATEH. Community members and service providers were invited to discuss the community planning process and share thoughts and experiences about homelessness in their local settings. A total of 29 participants attended the focus groups (see Table 5 in Chapter 5 for a break down of the numbers for each focus group). The same basic three-part interview questionnaire described above guided the focus groups along with a general open-ended discussion of Reid's questions (2006) about the various causes and perceptions of homelessness, possible solutions and results of awareness raising strategies. Transcripts of the focus group discussions were coded and reviewed for emerging themes.

Also data were collected at public meetings held by SCATEH to increase public awareness of the issue of homelessness in Simcoe County. One example is the Annual General Educational All Day Workshop held by the Alliance every June to review progress made on the community action plans. Transcripts and tape recordings of these were compiled for analysis by themes and categories according to SCATEH's goals 1 and 2, described above (see also Appendix G).

Journal of Activities and Reflections

In order to record the wide array of activities and information and to capture the complexities of this endeavor in a more holistic manner, as it unfolded, I kept a research journal from 2003 to 2007. The purpose was to record a chronicle of my thoughts and

impressions, to reflect my increasing understanding of Simcoe County as time progressed, and to strive to find linkages and associations between practice and theory. The journal was also used to record ethical decisions made in the course of the research.

Journal keeping is recommended as an effective research technique for completing a case study by augmenting data sources (Herr & Anderson, 2005). Journal notes were used for the reflexive final phase of the research, which looks at policy-making and relates it to observations about practice to be discussed in Chapter Six.

Journal keeping was prompted by a quote translated from Habermas: "philosophy mustn't ignore the problems posed by life as we live it and communicative rationality pushes us everyday to give answers to the question… why?" (Edgar, 2005, p. 144).

This reflective journal served as another mechanism to help uncover plausible answers to the question: Why is SCATEH the only rural-urban community in Ontario declaring and organizing around its intention to end homelessness in this way, and will their efforts to deliberately shatter the myth of the rural idyll expose "hidden" rural homelessness?

Validity and Reliability

I made an effort to cross check or triangulate information from varying data sources (Simcoe County Corporation, 2008). In the interviews and focus groups, I was non-instrusive and encouraged respondents to state their views fully. I asked open-ended questions and attempted to identify recurring responses, and then compared

these to the documentary evidence. Transcripts were made from recordings to minimize errors. There was an openness and willingness on the part of respondents to share their knowledge, opinions, and experience. Key informants were very generous with their time. Many offered permission to be quoted in this thesis, emphasizing their commitment to using yet another communication strategy on behalf of SCATEH.

Analysis of Data

About the same time as the Canadian National Homelessness Initiative was announced, the National Alliance to End Homelessness, a non-profit organization in the U.S., announced a strategy to end homelessness in 10 years. They began by requesting that communities develop local action plans. In November 2006, a report was released summarizing the responses of 222 communities across the U.S., which contained a detailed content analysis of 90 community plans for action to end homelessness. This report informs the first phase, the policy review, of this thesis; although it was not released until after the bulk of my data collection had already occurred. Following the American Alliance's lead, the first method adopted to analyze the data for the case study includes a detailed content analysis of the local community plans created by SCATEH for Simcoe County.

Also, I reviewed and compared the steps in creating and implementing the community plan in the three selected rural communities, Midland (North Simcoe), Orillia, and Bradford (West Gwillimbury). In addition, questions asked about how each community acknowledged the challenge of reaching those that are "hidden" will be

analyzed. These steps were in addition to the analysis of the same question in the interviews and focus groups.

In order to frame the detailed content analysis of the Simcoe County-wide Community Plan, the guide provided by the Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative (SCPI) is used, as illustrated in Table 2 and the responses to these plan components are summarized.

Table 2

Components of the Community Plan

Component	Description
Geographic area	Simcoe County
Objectives	What is expected to be achieved?
Community plan development process	An explanation of the process and who was involved
Assets and gaps	Using a continuum of supports approach to list all services for homeless people (assets) and what is needed (gaps)
Priorities	Identify for each community
Sustainability	How will efforts continue after federal funding ends?
Evaluation strategy	Outline methods to be used during and after the funding period to determine if the community plan has met its stated objectives

Component	Description
Communication strategy	What is planned?
Community financial contribution	Identification of confirmed non-federal funding sources to match federal funds 50-50

Although each chapter of SCATEH submitted its own plan for inclusion in the overall Simcoe County Community Plan, only the three rural areas selected will be analyzed in detail, and in comparison to the overall plan.

To summarize then, the methodology used in this case study will focus on the community entity the Simcoe County Alliance to End Homelessness and the local community plans developed by its rural chapters, plans that were combined with the urban plan prepared for the city of Barrie. Given the overall goal to reduce and prevent homelessness, it should be possible to assess the impact of SCPI funding by determining whether there was a reduction of absolute numbers of those who are homeless over the longer-term. However, the National Homelessness Secretariat did not set any specific numeric targets for reduction in the number of homeless people or target numbers of units of housing to be created because this was left up to the determination of the local governing bodies.

Instead, the main focus of SCPI was to support capacity building. So how did these three rural communities measure progress in this area over the 7-year period? The local community planning processes were open and flexible to take advantage of whatever partnering opportunities arose. As a result, the local action plans themselves

become the most reliable source for examining program outcomes. Thus I have chosen

to look at the content of these plans in detail, as the unit of analysis at the community

level for this research and will identify themes that emerge from this review. Success

factors will be indicated by the completeness of the plan components that correspond to

the policy review and the aggregated responses to the research questions and issues

that arise in the analysis.

One of the overall goals of this research is to see whether new synergies have

been created by community-government partnerships, whether community capacity has

been strengthened, and whether a revitalizing energy to stimulate shelter solutions has

been infused through the creation of one new community entity, the Simcoe County

Alliance to End Homelessness (SCATEH).

Challenges and Limitations of this Research

A limitation of this research is that the outcomes are not generalizable to other

communities. SCATEH is one of a kind in Ontario and it could be argued is a very minor

player in setting the overall national housing policy agenda and also the rural and small

towns selected in Simcoe County are unique to the geographical space on the periphery

of the City of Toronto and the GTA. But my contention is that even small towns and rural

communities can have an impact on local policy-making that can surface at any level of

government and demonstrate what is possible and challenge the status quo.

While efforts were made to include a broad cross-section of persons informed

about homelessness in the targeted community, no claim is made that all relevant

experiences or opinions are represented. For example, while the researcher and

participants included a reasonable gender balance, all were white and English-speaking, so the experiences of Aboriginal, francophone, and other culturally diverse persons are not reflected. Another challenge was related to consistency of key informants as there were constant changes to project staffing levels including 4 staff incumbents in the Alliance co-coordinator position and 3 Executive Directors of the United Way over the 4 years of the data collection phase of this study. The Alliance was unable to secure base operating funds and staff had to shift to other employment opportunities. This unstable funding is disruptive to the partners trying to make system changes and may have an unintended influence on the findings of this case study. Consistency is fundamental to service provision to those who are homeless as it takes so long to establish a trust relationship which is the same strength required as well for capacity building. (Personal interview with Gail Saulnier, Steering Committee member, 2007).

The founding volunteer members of the Steering Committee remained constant over the entire study time period and provided the continuity needed to sustain the Alliance governance structure. In addition, community partnerships were influenced by the retirement of key government and agency staff during the course of the project, thereby limiting the historical and corporate memories, another factor that challenges and may influence outcomes of this research.

However, determining what factors influence policy development is a very complex process and by looking at how community partnerships intersect with government through a critical theory lens may be a way to discover aspects overlooked until now.

By conducting an in-depth examination of the community planning process and its outcomes, a determination will be made about the multifaceted relationship between the principles of supporting partnerships and actual capacity building that occurs through these partnerships. Assisting practitioners to identify and articulate how these SCPI agreements and the Alliance network have impacted the day-to-day operations of service delivery in rural areas will be my contribution to the best practice literature, and the conclusions of this research will explore future possibilities for government-community partnering and models of policy development related to homelessness.

Chapter Five:

Environmental Scan and Community Action Plans of Simcoe County

This chapter looks briefly at some of the socio-cultural, political, and economic features of Simcoe County and then describes the formation and structure of the Simcoe County Alliance to End Homelessness (SCATEH). The purpose of this chapter is to place the Community Action Plans of the Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative (SCPI) in the context of the history and traditions of this part of Simcoe County.

This chapter addresses the first two research objectives: To document and understand the nature of rural homelessness; and to see whether new synergies have been created by the Simcoe County Alliance to End Homelessness that have addressed rural homelessness both in practice and in the creation of helpful policies.

In order to address these objectives, an environmental scan of Simcoe County, including demographics, a map depicting key geographical features, and the locations of the three community planning sites, is presented. The terms and conditions of the SCPI agreement are reviewed along with the community plans and project outcomes.

Simcoe County, which lies due north of the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), was selected as the case study site to examine rural homelessness because of its proximity to the largest metropolitan area in Canada which offers a distinctive rural context unlike any other. As described in Chapter Two, Metropolitan Toronto plays a major role in influencing national social housing policy in Canada. It also received the largest share of National Homelessness Initiative (NHI) funding in the country as a result of its success in profiling homelessness as a serious concern (see Table 3).

Table 3

SCPI Funds Allocated to Toronto and Simcoe County

Province	City / County	SCPI Funds
Ontario	Toronto	$53,054,849
	Simcoe County	$ 421,602**

Note. Source: Human Resource Development Canada (2000, June 2).
** includes funds for extension approved to 2006.

The changing scale of rural homelessness can be attributed directly to increases in the prevalence of homelessness in the both the suburban and urban centers of Toronto and the surrounding GTA. Simcoe County received a SCPI allocation that was reasonable and recognized the significant growth of Barrie as the fastest growing city in Canada (Table 5). Coincidentally, with a population of 422,204, this allocation is almost one dollar for every resident that lives in the county (Statistics Canada, 2008a).

The relatively small amount of $421,602 for Simcoe County was primarily directed to emergency shelter and housing support services, which is consistent with the distribution of SCPI expenditures across the country (see Figure 3). However, some of the allocation was used by SCATEH to develop communication strategies that included establishing a website, offering educational workshops, and implementing a consultation process to create community action plans. Without these resources used to hire the SCATEH Coordinator, these planning and communication activities would not have been possible. This provides evidence that allocating even small amounts of money to assist small towns and rural areas in dealing with homelessness strengthens local capacity. It is postulated that this funding, will in turn, have an impact on local policy development related to the urgent need for social housing in rural areas.

Distribution of SCPI Expenditures to Date

Emergency shelters 21.4%

Public Awareness 1.5%

Capacity building 6.8%

Support services 29.7%

Transitional/ supportive housing 32.7%

Support facilities (e.g., food banks) 7.8%

Source: NSH financial databases (July 2002)
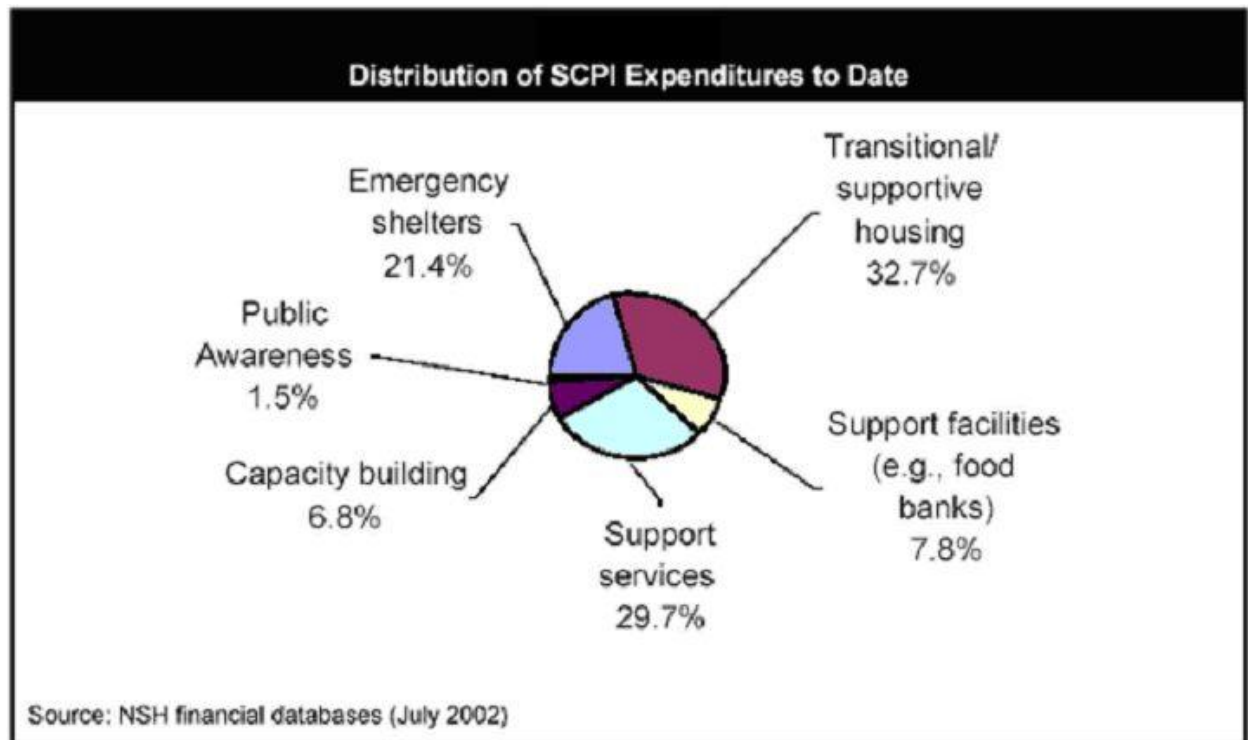
Figure 3. **NHI / SCPI expenditures.**

Note. Source: Human Resource Development Canada (2004).

In 2006, according to Census data, the total population of Simcoe County was 422,204, a 19.2% increase over 2001. The Census data show that Simcoe County is experiencing very high growth rates (Statistics Canada, 2008a). There are 18 municipalities (7 townships, 8 towns, and 3 cities) in the county, making it one of the last remaining three-tiered county governments in Ontario. In the rest of Ontario, many municipalities have amalgamated into regional governments, but this has not occurred in Simcoe County.

Roughly half of the population lives in the larger, more urban communities of Barrie (177,060—up 19.2% from 2001), Orillia (30,259), Bradford (24,039), Midland-

Penetanguishene (24,530), Collingwood (16,040), and Wasaga Beach (12,420).[1] The remainder lives in the townships, small towns, villages, and hamlets, and on farms widely dispersed throughout the county.

Simcoe County (see Figure 4, map of Simcoe County) is situated between two large inland bodies of fresh water: Georgian Bay and Lake Simcoe. Much of the county resembles dominant ideas of the rural idyll, consisting of picturesque small villages and rolling farmland and, on the surface, reflects what Keating (2008) refers to as a "unidimensional view" of rurality. By zeroing in on three different rural areas of Simcoe County, the intent is to get beyond this view of rurality and uncover the community responses to homelessness and the poverty it conceals.

When the map (Figure 4) is examined the distinctive geography surrounding the 3 research sites (marked with purple circles) is revealed and described further in the Community Action Plans to follow. Midland (North Simcoe) is located adjacent to a major waterway that connects directly to the St. Lawrence Seaway through the Great Lakes. Orillia is located on Lake Simcoe, a major inland, freshwater lake and adjacent to the Rama Reserve and Bradford (West Gwillimbury) is part of a large agricultural area. This positioning begins to detail the diverse characteristics of these three rural and small town settings.

[1] Population figures are as per the 2006 Census.
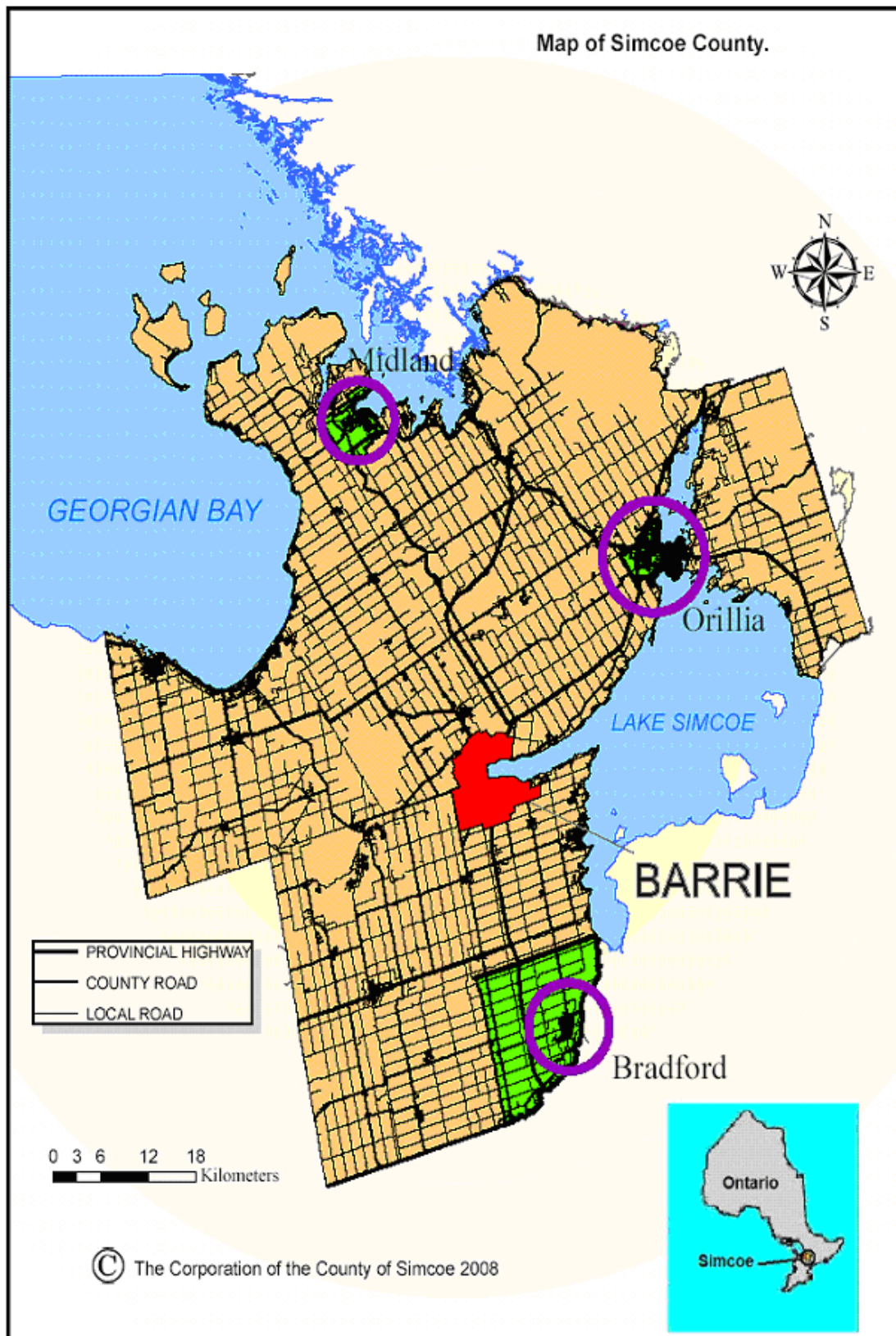
Figure 4. **Map of Simcoe County.**

Note: Source: The Corporation of the County of Simcoe, May 2008.

Located in the Pre-Cambrian Shield near Ontario's largest beaches, with many rivers and small lakes, Simcoe County contains eight provincial parks and many smaller conservation areas, which provide a draw for tourists, vacation homes and the development of retirement lifestyle communities. There are major ski resorts, golf courses and other recreational activities that provide employment and opportunities for community economic development. However, some residents face challenges resulting from isolation, poverty, harsh climate, and limited access to social service infrastructure (Simcoe County, Social Services, 2008).

Simcoe County, with 4,842 square kilometres, is slightly smaller than the province of Prince Edward Island but has a considerably larger population. Barrie is the fastest growing city in Canada; Wasaga Beach, located west of Midland on Georgian Bay is the fastest growing township (Statistics Canada, 2008a).

Socio-Cultural Features

Simcoe County is named after John Graves Simcoe, the first Lieutenant Governor of Upper Canada, serving from 1791–1798. He is credited with designing and building the first main road in Ontario, Yonge Street, along the fur trade route from Lake Ontario to Lake Simcoe, and setting up the first provincial government structure. There are two nationally significant historic sites in Simcoe County, both located in Midland, one of the selected planning sites:

1. Sainte-Marie Among the Hurons (1639–1649) was established as a French Jesuit mission for the Huron people, and

2. Discovery Harbour (1817–1856), a waterside historic site that tells the story of the original 19th century naval and military outpost built to defend Upper Canada.

Today, there are several First Nations settlements, both on and off the Rama Reserve, that predate the arrival of the white settlers, and there is a significant francophone community stemming from the early 17th century Jesuit mission settlements. Although SCATEH received funds to target these two subpopulations, the First Nations and francophone community action plans were developed under separate processes, and are outside the scope of this thesis (see Appendix H).

Traditions established by the Roman Catholic Church are still in evidence today: the non-profit organization St. Vincent de Paul has ten affiliates in Simcoe County and a track record of providing assistance when all other avenues in the social welfare sector have been exhausted (Personal interviews with four retired managers from the Ministry of Community and Social Services, 2006).

Protestant churches, such as the United Church of Canada, Anglican, Presbyterian, and Baptist, were also all part of the early rural communities but presently suffer from declining membership and limited resources. Leadership by the Salvation Army, an organization that has a strong national reputation for serving the homeless, is also evident: a main office has been established in Barrie with ten satellite service centers located across Simcoe County reaching out to those needing food and emergency shelter. A service provider with the Salvation Army in Barrie described one episode in which two elderly sisters arrived at the emergency shelter but were turned away since there are no beds for women and certainly none suitable for these women in

their 80s. The worker took both women home to live with her until suitable arrangements could be made. This is a clear example of informal or mutual aid not as prevalent in the 21st century as it has been in the past when neighbors helped each other informally. While this provides anecdotal evidence in support of the romantic vision of rural citizens helping each other, this type of mutual aid, offered on a case-by-case basis, cannot be sustained in the face of the demands of higher numbers of homeless people.

Building on Christian philosophical origins of Simcoe County, the traditional mutual aid approach forms the bedrock of the volunteer boards of the 259 non-profit social service agencies listed on the community information website and registered with the United Way of Greater Simcoe County (2008). These organizations exemplify key social and cultural features of the region, and are the cornerstone of a distinctive network that enables communities in Simcoe to respond to the needs of its citizens. Representation of clergy and faith groups on the Alliance steering committee and a strong presence in the local chapters of SCATEH suggests that religious communities within the County are also concerned about the issues of poverty and homelessness, and are searching for new shelter solutions. One simple example of innovation is the issuing of vouchers for food and motel rooms, a practice of social agencies in Simcoe County, including police services, when no other emergency services are available. According to the Social Services Division reports for 2007, 1,362 homeless people living on the street received motel vouchers, which seem to be a most practical and appropriate shelter solution in cottage country particularly when motel vacancy rates are low in the off-season (Simcoe County Corporation, 2007). Another practical innovation

is called the Flex Fund, introduced in 1999, that pooled federal, provincial, and county funds to address rental arrears, utility arrears or need for start-up funding with rent or utilities and Is still administered by the Simcoe County Alliance to End Homelessness (Personal interview with Mandy Hillyard, Alliance Coordinator, 2007).

Political Features

The County of Simcoe has traditionally elected representatives that are aligned with conservative political forces, including Leslie M. Frost (premier from 1949–1961), who personified the values of small-town Ontario and presided over the unprecedented economic boom of the 1950s (Orillia Hall of Fame, 2007). In 1993, Ed Harper, the only Reform Party representative elected east of Alberta was from Simcoe County. His philosophy was described by the chair of the Alliance to End Homelessness as a "brutal mental attitude totally lacking in compassion towards those less fortunate" (Personal interview with Rick Jones, Chair, Simcoe County Alliance to End Homelessness, 2007). Currently, the federal and provincial members of parliament for Simcoe County are Conservatives.

The political structure in place for Simcoe County surrounds the two independent cities of Barrie and Orillia. The government of the County of Simcoe has a clearly defined mandate with regard to the social welfare system and deals directly with the province on these matters. This has been interpreted by elected city officials in Barrie and Orillia as a reason not to participate in matters related to homelessness, which they maintain are outside their jurisdiction. Legally and technically, this is a correct interpretation as the constitutional responsibility for provision of housing is assigned by

the federal government to the Province Of Ontario. However, there is the argument put forward emphatically, by the Alliance, that finding shelter for every citizen is a moral responsibility of the community.

One policy document published by the Mayor's Task Force on Affordable Housing (2002) states that in Barrie and throughout Simcoe County the numbers of homeless or those at risk of becoming homeless are reaching crisis proportions and Council and staff were asked to incite a "social housing movement" to create long-term solutions and at the same time improve many other areas of support need in the City. The paper goes on to say that this will not be easy work and it will require a great deal of compromise and creativity but the results will put this City and County on the map for citizenship and resourcefulness (Mayor's Task Force on Affordable Housing, 2002, p.4). Unfortunately, shifting political leadership adds an extra layer of complication to the advocacy efforts of the Simcoe County Alliance to End Homelessness (SCATEH) and many times the Steering Committee had to redouble their efforts to provide statistical updates and strong arguments for increasing political support for the Flex Fund as each year the increasing needs created a greater shortfall of funds. Several changes in elected officials and Councils meant that recommendations accepted in 2002 were not accepted or implemented by the next Council. According to the chair of the Alliance, his main role is to bridge the gap between the reality of homelessness and the political denial that exists locally, especially in rural areas, which requires constant ingenuity, innovation, and persistent communication strategies (Personal interview with Rick Jones, Chair, Simcoe County Alliance to End Homelessness, 2007).

Unique Economic Features and Labor Force Characteristics

The Canadian Armed Forces training base at Camp Borden is the County's largest employer with 10,000 military staff; Honda is the second largest employer with over 4,300 employees at the manufacturing plant in Alliston (Personal interview with staff from Simcoe County, Social Services Division, May 9, 2007).The provincial headquarters for the Ontario Provincial Police, large institutions such as Central North Correctional Centre, a new Super Jail, the Mental Health Centre in Penetanguishene (which includes Oakridge, the only maximum security facility in Ontario for the criminally insane), Huronia Regional Centre in Orillia (which provides residential services for people with developmental disabilities[2]), and strong manufacturing and agricultural industries are the major government, public sector, and private sector employers.

The university and college satellite campuses that have been set up in the last two decades and continue to expand rapidly in Barrie, Midland, Orillia, and Collingwood are also attracting a new wave of educators and others to public and private sector jobs. The impact of this migration for employment is expected to be reflected more in the Community Plans for North Simcoe and Orillia rather than the southern area surrounding Bradford. This broad influx of higher-income workers and their families to Simcoe County means that their search for housing is transforming the smaller communities and lakeside cottages into gentrified middle-class spaces mirroring the findings in the U.K. study by Cloke et al. (2000c).

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[2] In keeping with the provincial policy to close large residential institutions, after 20 years of downsizing, on April1, 2009 Huronia was closed and the Penetang Mental Health Centre was divested to a non-profit community-based Board of Directors signaling the end of an era of provincial government employment positions.

A distinctive economic feature of the southern part of the county is the agricultural food production center of Holland Marsh, which is on one of the first trade routes already in place when the first Irish settlers arrived in 1819. The Grand Truck Railway station, built in 1857, opened up the agricultural food production sector, which remains a key economic feature of the area today.

Economic development priorities for Bradford are focused on land availability and access via major Highways 400 and 9, and its location on the bus and commuter train routes (Town of Bradford West Gwillimbury, 2008).

A relatively hidden phenomenon within these vast and diverse geopolitical boundaries is that people arrive searching for work and end up living in their cars on deserted country side roads until they are successful in finding work. For this group, the readily accessible jobs are in the low-income end of the service sector, thereby limiting housing possibilities (Jeffrey, 2003). These interconnections between affordable housing, employment opportunities, income support, and social services are confounded by the layers of overlapping government responsibilities and programs, which present a real barrier to finding shelter solutions.

Simcoe County with a 19.2%% growth rate and 422,204 people in 2006 also contains well-educated and higher income level residents (median income $72,516 compared to $66,525 for Ontario) well above the provincial average. These characteristics of Simcoe County are leading rather than lagging variables in revitalizing the dynamism of the rural setting, according to the New Rural Economy framework (Reimer, 2002). It also should be noted that because Simcoe County is adjacent to

Toronto many residents are within a relatively easy commuting distance. These commuters live in a rural setting while continuing to work outside of it. Their relatively high incomes means that they can afford more expensive housing and this leads to increased housing prices.

Shrinking Housing Stock

The attraction of Simcoe County as a scenic area has led to strong competition for its housing stock; in-moving affluent groups building new "cottage estates" on the waterfronts has led to an escalation of local property prices (Personal interview with David Jeffrey, Executive Director, United Way of Greater Simcoe County, 2004). In addition, the rapid growth in population has forced lower-income groups out of the smaller communities because of low vacancy rates and consequentially the higher costs of rents – a significant proportion of this is tied to employment in government positions or connected with the local tourism sector.

These factors, coupled with decreasing levels of social housing through closures of substandard boarding and group homes, retirement facilities, and nursing homes, and the downsizing and closures of major institutions, have resulted in a shrinking housing stock available to those at the lower end of the socio-economic scale (Personal interview with David Jeffrey, Executive Director, United Way of Greater Simcoe County, 2004).

Thus, Simcoe County, although rich in natural and economic resources, has a higher level of households experiencing economic disadvantage. As a result, homelessness appeared to be on the rise in the rural communities, and had surfaced in

the small towns as people look for assistance with housing. Net population growth and in-migration of newcomers (including retirees) has highlighted the declining stock in the housing market and placed increasing pressure on local community support services.

Social Forces:
The Formation of the Simcoe County Alliance to
End Homelessness (SCATEH)

This chapter addresses the first two objectives of this study which are to document and understand the nature of rural homelessness. In order to do this I follow the SCPI funding model and outcomes achieved in Simcoe County by examining how the formal partnership and agreement with the federal government was established.

It appears that the struggle of social activists affiliated with the United Way of Greater Simcoe County against strong traditional and conservative political forces, coupled with limited social service infrastructure and rapid economic growth prompted the formation of the Simcoe County Alliance to End Homelessness (SCATEH) in 1998.

Other possible influences, reflected in Ontario, were the formation of similar municipal government-initiated committees to address homelessness in Toronto, Ottawa, Hamilton and the regional governments in the GTA of Peel, Halton, York and Durham, all established to strengthen the political lobby for Ontario, prior to the federal decision to approve the National Homelessness Initiative.

Transcripts of interviews in Simcoe County describe an "incredible transformation from the United Way's role as fundraiser and allocator to a community builder and collaborator". There had been "significant discord over failures in Simcoe County to

raise the anticipated and publicly announced funding goals" so the timing seemed right to forge a new direction for the United Way in Simcoe County (Personal interviews with Steering Committee members: Rick Jones, Gail Saulnier, Mandy Hillyard, David Jeffrey, and Doriano Calvano, 2007).

According to Jeffery (2003), this deliberate shift in social discourse, which created a renewed sense of the common good and a common purpose, was an attempt to build stronger horizontal connections. A change in leadership focus towards community capacity building across Simcoe County at the turn of the new century speaks to the capturing of a shared vision and mission to declare an intention to eliminate homelessness. The terms of reference used to create SCATEH were fleshed out with the partners and stakeholders, after many hours of discussion, to produce a sound committee structure and clear decision-making guidelines 2 years prior to the announcement of the NHI. This advance preparation proved to be one of the determining factors in the federal government's decision to fund the Alliance (Personal interview with Gail Saulnier, first coordinator of SCATEH, 2007).

No one can say with any certainty if this is the case, but this unique combination of socio-economic and political factors was cited repeatedly by several of the community leaders interviewed as an important signal for social change. Recognizing the value of the tremendous potential of local human resources and the resilience of the traditions of Simcoe County provided the leaders with optimism about the future (Personal interview with Gail Saulnier, first coordinator of SCATEH, 2007).

When the 7 common domains of community capacity (Smith, 2003) are considered: participation, knowledge, skills and resources, shared vision, sense of community, communication, leadership and problem-solving and ongoing learning, all were mentioned to various degrees in the interviews and focus groups. However, the two domains most commonly identified were shared vision and sense of community and are reflected in the formation of Simcoe County Alliance To End Homelessness.

The creation of the new community entity (SCATEH) was also seen by community members as a response to fears about the growing prevalence of people discharged from the large institutions in the County. Because many of these people were also without viable shelter options, they added to the absolute numbers of the homeless in Simcoe. The mandate to find housing solutions and to end homelessness was embraced by this informal group of champions, brought together as volunteers by the United Way from all sectors, public and private, in Simcoe County through an open and transparent process to form the Steering Committee. No elected officials signed on to the Alliance making its direct relationship to the federal granting agency unique in Ontario. This factor, in itself, makes a declaration that the invisible homeless of Simcoe County will be exposed by SCATEH despite the denials by local politicians thereby exemplifying the concept of intentionality as it is used in this research.

The SCPI Agreement

Part A: Terms and Conditions

As a first step in the reviewing process, the terms and conditions of the agreement with the federal government were examined. The United Way of Greater Simcoe County was designated as the organization accountable for the SCPI project. The United Way, a non-profit with a charitable status, would administer the flow of funds, and complete all of the accountability and reporting requirements on behalf of the Alliance. The components of the original SCPI agreement (see Table 2 in Chapter Four) were reviewed and deemed to be complete. This investigation takes an in-depth look at five components of the agreement: process, assets and gaps, priorities, sustainability and communication strategies, with particular emphasis on the latter.

Although a request for proposal (RFP), or managed competition approach, was required by the agreement, the stakeholders, through discussion, had already determined which service providers would apply for local funding to target established priorities. Because they were part of a pre-existing network, rather than putting energy into a competitive bidding process, they agreed that all the agencies already serving the homeless should work in conjunction with the Alliance (Personal interview with the Executive Director, United Way of Greater Simcoe County, 2004). The anticipation of the federal announcement allowed the group to use the RFP process to their advantage, short-circuiting, simplifying, and streamlining the decision-making process through the creation of this new collaborative network reflected in the Steering Committee structure. This collaboration exemplifies a linkage to SCATEH's goal number five which speaks to the coordination of a network of supports for those in housing

crisis, as well as a support network for those working together with people who are homeless. The fact that these service agencies were already working as a network illustrates that they acknowledge the realities of partnering in a rural setting as advantageous allowing nimble response times to proposal calls and improvements in coordination. Building on existing capacity is evidence that SCATEH used a strategic approach from day one.

This delivery model allowed SCATEH to be an independent body of volunteers in spite of the fact that the United Way handled the tasks of administration and the substantial amount of paperwork required by the SCPI agreement. The Senate Committee on Rural Poverty has recommended that federal funds be made available to assist groups such, as the United Way, in developing and submitting proposals for community-related activates in rural Canada and introduce tax measures to reward volunteer time and effort (Senate Report, 2008, p. xx). Both recommendations would fit with building community capacity as it is defined in Simcoe County.

Formed in 1998 with about 70 stakeholders as partners, the Alliance hired the first coordinator from St. Louis, Missouri to support the steering committee. She had never been to Ontario, let alone Simcoe County, before, but had a strong appreciation for the grassroots approach to homelessness (Personal interview with Gail Saulnier, first coordinator of SCATEH, 2007). Originally funded through a provincial program, the Alliance was successful in obtaining approval for federal SCPI funding in 1999, HRDC funding in 2002, and a second round of SCPI funding extended to the completion date in 2006.

As stated earlier, there were no elected officials on the steering committee. Barrie and Bradford politicians refused to participate in the discussions about homelessness, as they declared that it was *not* their responsibility, moral or otherwise.. Their decision to not participate opened the door for the federal funds to flow directly to SCATEH instead of through a predominantly municipal governance structure in the rest of Ontario. Elected officials in North Simcoe and Orillia did join in the Alliance events sponsored in their communities, an indication of higher levels of engagement and awareness of this issue's importance and reflecting a " moral consciousness".

Part B: Community Action Planning

The Alliance continues to hold general membership planning sessions twice a year, hosts educational workshops, and has an open and participatory capacity building philosophy. Over the last decade, regular town hall meetings and special events have been held throughout the year to gain community input, which is considered to be a key component of the Alliance's planning and communication strategy. At every annual meeting a media relations update is recorded with an ongoing commitment to invite cable tv, radio and newspaper reporters to all events (personal interview with Nancy Smith, Alliance Coordinator, June, 2007). As noted, the presence of an HRDC federal government office in Barrie had a significant impact on the continuity of visible activity for federal officials to make NHI/SCPI funding announcements and to create photo opportunities as a welcomed chance to showcase the community partnerships and local projects. The ongoing assistance of government staff in priority setting and the successful submission of proposals played a strong role in capacity building for Simcoe County. But in 2006, during the time of bureaucratic changes under the new

Conservative government in Ottawa, the office was moved out of Simcoe County and a invaluable resources were lost to the Alliance.

Over the years, many non-profits, faith groups, and private sector businesses have contributed time and expertise on a voluntary basis to uncover homelessness. The funding of paid staff was unstable; during the period under study there were four different Alliance staff coordinators. The intermittent nature of the funding did not support ongoing operational costs for staff. According to one steering committee member, the coordinators "have all been highly skilled and committed to the homeless, overqualified, and underpaid, without enough funds to carry on a sustainable budget" (Personal interview with Rick Jones, Chair, Simcoe County Alliance to End Homelessness, 2007).

All Alliance coordinators were interviewed by this researcher and it was discovered that each brought very different skill sets and experience to the position: social work, nursing, finance, communications and marketing which all had a very positive impact and cumulative effect as this issue demands an interdisciplinary perspective. In order to build capacity, these human resources can be seen as definite assets that gave SCATEH a tremendous advantage in carrying out their work in the community. However, despite budgetary disruptions and constant instability, all of the Alliance staff were dedicated to the process of awareness raising and the importance of inclusive consultations required to create a Community Action Plan. Mediating between landlords and private developers in the housing sector and providers in the social service/ mental health sector, the SCATEH coordinators contributed significantly to the success of complex and time-consuming planning processes within a dynamic set of

partnerships (Personal interviews with Alliance coordinators, Gail Saulnier and Mandy Hillyard, 2006, 2007). They all expressed confidence in navigating the income support, housing and community health areas of service provision to find solutions for the homeless population in the county, although admitting that resources were scarce.

Rural researchers in the U.S. and in the U.K. have found that the numbers of homeless people are underestimated because of the "hidden" nature of homelessness in the rural context and because of people's reluctance to be "identified" as homeless (Cloke, 2001, p. 17). In Simcoe County, this reluctance was confirmed by two of the Alliance coordinators, who described themselves as often distraught, when after building a trusting relationship; they would receive calls but be unable to assist because of limited resources. Being homeless is not information that people share easily, particularly in rural areas where the philosophy is one of fiercely defended independence. Pride, shame and life experience of disruption and moving frequently also contribute to the denial of referring to oneself as homeless. Camping for 6 months of the year is not questioned in Simcoe County, as it could be a life style choice, but the Alliance Coordinators encountered many families in this situation because they could not secure housing (Hillyard, 2002, p.2). One coordinator stated that rural homelessness is "different," explaining it this way:

> When someone cannot pay their hydro bill which in the countryside means
> then they have no heat and no water or when their car breaks down and
> they have no funds for repairs people are stranded without food, no way to
> buy groceries and this isolation is often not recognized as homelessness
> or on the verge of homelessness per se. But the "stigma" of obtaining help

prevents people from revealing their struggles with poverty. And this type

of scenario is often uncovered, as the starting point in a series of

escalating serious financial difficulties leading to loss of housing.

(Personal interview with Mandy Hillyard, Alliance Coordinator, 2007)

These comments are completely consistent with the *Senate Report on Rural Poverty*, which states that for most rural Canadians "getting around" means owning or having access to at least one vehicle -- an expensive proposition at the best of times but even more so in rural areas because travel costs (for fuel and repairs) tend to be higher than in urban areas (Senate Report, 2008, p. xv). This issue of transportation and distances to travel was acknowledged by the SCATEH Coordinators as one of the major challenges faced in Simcoe County with regard to both service delivery and planning.

To address homelessness, the SCATEH Alliance applied a framework for the community planning consultations with four priorities: shelter across continuum; network of support services; income and core funding; and public awareness and education. Of the four priorities, public awareness and education are the most important and pertinent for this study, and are discussed in detail in the content analysis section of the review of the three rural community plans and summarized in Table 5.

Part C: Role of Government

The importance of the partnerships for SCATEH with both the federal and county government cannot be underestimated. Staff from the Human Resource Development Canada office were instrumental in facilitating the proposal development phase and accessing funds available, and acted as champions of two significant research projects:

the SHARP job creation project in 2001–2002 and the two NHI case studies outlined in Table 4 (Simcoe County Community Plan, 2006). As members of the Steering Committee they also provided administrative expertise and ongoing support.

One finding that is unusual in a rural and small town setting is the strong interest in research partnerships with the federal government. It suggests that there is such a deficit in rural infrastructure and resource limitations that communities are left with no other choice but to cross jurisdictional boundaries to secure funding and reach out to the institutes of higher education for assistance with research projects. It also highlights the absence of local and provincial government partnerships which proves to be a key missing element in this case study of Simcoe County and one factor that speaks to the failure of SCPI to strengthen and sustain local capacity over the longer term.

A summary of four federally funded projects, from 2001to 2006, focusing on rural homelessness in Simcoe County associated with SCPI is presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Federally Funded Research Projects Related to Homelessness in Simcoe County (2001-2006)

	SHARP: Simcoe County Homeless Action Research Project Job Creation (2001-2002)	**Project Case Studies: 1. SCATEH 2. Busby Centre, Barrie (2002-2003)***	**Holding on to Housing in Simcoe County: Looking into Homelessness Among Older People in Rural Ontario (2006)**
Purpose	Pilot project designed to hire people experiencing homelessness; in practice, very few people actually met the employment criteria set by the federal program	To evaluate the process and programs as implemented.	Designed as a community research partnership
Staffing	Two volunteer project coordinators	Conducted by independent research consultants Alderson-Gill Associates Consulting Inc.	Research co-directors**, one volunteer and one paid one day per month. Trained senior volunteers conducted focus groups and interviews.
Funder	Human Resources Development Canada	National Secretariat on Homelessness National Homelessness Initiative	New Horizons For Seniors, Social Development Canada

	SHARP: Simcoe County Homeless Action Research Project Job Creation (2001-2002)	Project Case Studies: 1. SCATEH 2. Busby Centre, Barrie (2002-2003)*	Holding on to Housing in Simcoe County: Looking into Homelessness Among Older People in Rural Ontario (2006)
Ongoing project support	The Simcoe County Alliance to End Homelessness (SCATEH)	The Simcoe County Alliance to End Homelessness (SCATEH)	Canadian Pensioners Concerned, Inc., Ontario Division
			Older Women's Network
	Ontario Mental Health Centre, Penetanguishene	Georgian College	United Senior Citizens of Ontario
	University of Toronto		Ontario Community Support Association

Note. * Barrie was one of 20 case study sites chosen from the 61 NHI projects in Canada.
** I was one of the research co-directors, along with Dr. Don Bellamy, professor emeritus from the Faculty of Social Work, University of Toronto. In the course of this project an intervention was instigated on behalf of older homeless people to inform the four major provincial partners about the urgency of escalating lobby efforts with all three levels of government to change social housing policies that were found to discriminate against senior citizens in the homeless population.

It is interesting to note the presence of community-based research linkages with the University of Toronto and Georgian College and partnerships with provincial non-profit advocacy organizations. The reports resulting from these projects were released publicly and widely distributed. They all capture some of the aspects of being homeless and sometimes hidden in Simcoe County and make a unique contribution as distinct rural features are described in all four reports. The original SHARP report (2002) had as one of its authors the first Alliance Coordinator and was a federally funded experiment to create an employment program for clients who had been formerly homeless. The two project case studies looked at the start-up phase of SCATEH and the drop-in centre called Busby Centre. The final report was focused on older people and is one of the

only such studies to date in Canada. All reports received broad-based media coverage in print and also on local radio and television stations and serve to inform this thesis as strong indicators of a local commitment to raising awareness and demonstrating the principles of community-based research. As has been mentioned, endorsement of the efforts of the SCATEH Alliance has been conveyed repeatedly through many channels to the elected officials of Simcoe County. This is a significant finding in that the role of colleges and universities in assisting with community-based research is not always consistently found in other areas in the GTA but was apparent in Simcoe County. The University of Toronto played a key role in the SHARP project and Georgian college students are recruited by SCATEH to organize the Annual Night in the Cold offering students the experience of what it is like to sleep for one night on the street in Orillia (Tom Cowan, *Orillia Packet & Times*, 2009).

In addition to the significant role played by the federal government staff, local staff from the government of Simcoe County participated as members of the steering committee and acted as a liaison with the provincial government to secure ongoing funds for the homelessness projects. They continue to be instrumental in collecting statistics, collating information about assets and gaps, and making the case with local decision-makers to expand services for those who are disadvantaged within the social welfare system. SCATEH received valuable assistance from government staff in securing reliable information and broad-based community consensus about priorities.

Although there are no data available on the actual number of homeless persons living in Simcoe County, in 2007, there were 3,035 rent-geared-to-income housing units; 413 households assisted with funds from the rent bank and energy assistance

programs, (including the Flex Fund as described earlier in this chapter) approximately 1,200 persons using the emergency shelters, and 170 persons living in assisted boarding home settings (SCATEH, 2005). These data are aggregated across Simcoe County and include all 18 municipalities, rural and urban. The 2007 report of the Consolidated Homelessness Prevention Program, a provincially funded initiative, reported that 8,180 people were served for all of Simcoe County. Doriano Calvano, Program Supervisor, County of Simcoe, Social Services Division, estimates that the actual number served was 10,927, including those at imminent risk of homelessness that remained housed, those receiving personal support services, and those obtaining temporary and permanent housing (Personal interview with Doriano Calvano, Program Supervisor, County of Simcoe, Social Services Division, 2008). The SCATEH Alliance Community Plan stated: "Homelessness is reaching epidemic proportions that we have never seen before in Simcoe County" (Simcoe County Community Plan, 2006, p. 20).

When they numbers are analyzed it is clear that SCPI funding did not have an impact on the reduction of numbers of homeless persons, but, in fact, the opposite effect of enabling the Alliance to confirm the escalation of the statistics collected on those deemed to be homeless in Simcoe County.

Review of the SCPI Community Action Plans

Processes

As participant observer, I attended SCATEH meetings and public forums and took notes, and collected additional examples of the various communication strategies implemented by the steering committee over a 4-year period. Instructions and tools for completing the community plans were posted on the Alliance's website. Invitations to community members to get involved in the planning process were distributed by the Alliance through email, letters to politicians, and newspaper articles.

Approximately 70 people in total, including local politicians, service providers, government employees, volunteers, faith groups, and community members with personal experience with homelessness participated in the planning sessions. This consultation process provided the background for the content analysis of the community actions plans. The background is augmented by data from the focus groups held in Midland, Orillia, and Bradford between October 2005 and February 2006 (see Appendix B for a list of study participants).

Table 5 depicts some of the key descriptive features and components of the community plans grouped into the categories of environmental scan descriptors, community engagement, communications and housing and supports. The section that follows conveys some of the detailed perspectives of those SCATEH members interviewed and selected comments from focus group participants.

Table 5

Summary of Simcoe County Community Plans I, II, and III

	Plan I North Simcoe	Plan II Orillia	Plan III Bradford
ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN DESCRIPTORS			
Rural Setting	waterfront cottages, recreational ski/golf, agricultural		
Large provincial institutions	2	2	0
Demographics	9,748	20,031	23,830
Median age	44	42.7	36.7
	oldest group	new retirees	youngest group
Distinctive features	historic sites	adult lifestyle	commuters
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT			
Active membership in SCATEH	Yes A few dedicated volunteers but active chapter	Yes, very active chapter Lots of volunteers (many retired)	Not many volunteers, less active chapter
Number attending focus groups	9	12	8
Participation by local politicians	Yes	Yes	No
COMMUNICATIONS			
SCATEH website	Yes, lists phone numbers for volunteer contacts	Yes, lists phone numbers for volunteer contacts	Yes, lists phone numbers for volunteer contacts

	Plan I North Simcoe	Plan II Orillia	Plan III Bradford
Print media	Reporter for townships covers stories	Reporter for townships covers stories	No regular coverage
Cable television	Yes, limited coverage	Yes, regular coverage	No regular coverage
Educational Workshops	Yes for landlords	Yes for volunteers	Not available needed for landlords
Annual general meetings	Active attendance	Active attendance	Active attendance

	Plan I North Simcoe	Plan II Orillia	Plan III Bradford
HOUSING AND SUPPORT SERVICES			
Housing registry	No	Yes	No
Motel vouchers	No vouchers but temporary stays in motels possible	Yes	No send to Barrie/ Newmarket (York Region)
Salvation Army	No	Yes, two shelters	No
Lighthouse Christian Ministries	No	14 emergency shelter beds for men and Green Haven Shelter for women and children	No
St. Vincent de Paul	Yes	Yes	Yes, limited access
New units of housing designated for the homeless	No	Yes, 3 new projects underway: 4 units for single mothers & children called Jubilee House now open (2006) **3** apartments in Places for People, and **30** units in Hillcrest (conversion of closed nursing home, opened 2008) total new units **37**	No
Habitat for Humanity, Huronia	No	Yes, 1 house built in Washago	No

	Plan I North Simcoe	Plan II Orillia	Plan III Bradford
Strategies for outreach to those who are hidden	Yes Limited transportation, bus access Police presence a factor in reducing visibility for those who are street-involved	Yes Several outreach strategies in place: Emergency Mobile unit once per week, regular access to bus transportation	No Minimal recognition of homeless: refer out with bus tickets, access to commuter Go Train route, cross border links

Content Analysis of Plans

A brief summary of highlights of the three selected community plans is presented in the following pages to address the first two research objectives, which are designed to describe the nature of rural homelessness and identify new synergies created by Simcoe County Alliance to End Homelessness. In addition responsiveness is measured by the inclusion of strategies for outreach that describes local responses to the hidden aspects of homelessness in each of the 3 plans.

North Simcoe Community Plan.

This community in the heart of cottage country includes the towns of Midland and Penetanguishene, and an additional rural population of 9,748 in Coldwater, Elmvale, Tiny and Tay Townships, and Christian Island. Consistent with the demographic profile of all Ontarians, there are more women than men living in North Simcoe; however, with a median age of 44 it is older than the province's median age of 39. North Simcoe is also the oldest of the 3 communities studied, as Orillia and Bradford have median ages of 42.7 and 36.7 respectively.

Although only 6% of all Canadians are cottage owners, this relatively small area located between Georgian Bay and Lake Simcoe contains a disproportionately high number of recreational properties. The apparent contradiction of communities providing a second home to the privileged while also trying to support those with no home is one of the challenges faced by social service agencies serving rural areas. When considering the level of sense of responsibility, locally, one factor that may explain limited participation of cottage owners is that they are "on vacation" and may represent an untapped resource, particularly, for summer consultations. None of the focus groups for this study took place during the summer months.

One of the assets identified in the North Simcoe Community Plan is the proximity and access to the resources of the large provincial institution, the Penetang Mental Health Centre in Penetanguishene and its affiliated community programs, such as Wendat and Community Link Housing Registry located in Midland. These resources are not as readily available to the rural communities surrounding Orillia and Bradford and may have resulted in highlighting more of the mental health aspects of homelessness in the projects described below.

The concept of homelessness is regarded as notoriously difficult to pin down. After much deliberation the following definition was included in the North Simcoe Community Plan (2006):

> Homelessness … is the absence of a continuing or permanent home over which individuals or family groups have personal control and which provides the essential needs of shelter, privacy and security at an affordable cost, together with ready access to social and economic public services. (p. 9)

Other examples of key resources in this area are: St. Vincent de Paul, which provides a food bank and motel vouchers; the Salvation Army, which provides bus fare, last resort emergency shelter beds, and year-round soup kitchens taking place three to four days per week at the Royal Canadian Legion and Knox Church; and the North Simcoe Out of the Cold program offered five to six days per week in winter.

Legal clinics are available twice a month, and it was stated by members of the North Simcoe focus group (2005) that there is a higher observable police presence here because of the location of the super jail and the mental health center. According to the service providers interviewed, the presence of the super jail may have had the adverse effect of making homeless individuals even more likely to remain hidden, in order to avoid encounters with the police and correctional systems (North Simcoe Community Plan, 2006, p. 13). Members of this chapter of SCATEH, although few in number, were characterized by a member of the clergy from the North Simcoe focus group (2005) "as a passionate and collaborative group of activists fortunate to have the support of members of the Midland council".

The final North Simcoe plan incorporated five projects:

1. to develop a non-profit group to write a proposal for a range of housing options and seek funding;

2. to make support services available 24 hours per day;

3. to develop services that wrap around the client;

4. to increase advocacy and set up an educational workshop to help landlords understand how the rent supplement program operates in order to increase uptake; and

5. to demand core funding for high demand service activities.

There were 29 potential partners and funders listed in the public plan, and ongoing communication with those identified was highlighted as key to moving forward. (North Simcoe Plan, 2006).

North Simcoe focus group.

The focus group discussion was held in Midland at the Wendat agency site with one clergy member and seven service providers in attendance. The participants acknowledged how hidden homeless people were even though many were well-known as clients. One of the themes of this group discussion related to the phenomenon of people being aware of individuals walking long distances and refusing assistance. This type of " surveillance by community members" is unique to smaller communities where people know each other and recognize and respect an individual's privacy but raised concerns about how to assist those in need. It was mentioned that the visible police presence in the Midland area can be viewed as both a positive and a negative factor for those who are vulnerable. Sometimes, when the police check in on a homeless person services are accepted and referrals to shelters and meal programs are successfully made.

Transcripts reveal that "paying rent" is something many people experiencing life on the edge would prefer to avoid while other shelter options, such as sharing a roof

with others, living in a shed or bunkhouse on an abandoned farm, or sleeping on a

friend's couch, allow for more discretionary income to be available for items such as

food (North Simcoe Focus Group, 2005). This is one example of the concept of

intentionality where an individual makes personal choices about how they spend limited

resources and where they sleep. One agency member reported occasionally arranging

temporary stays in motels. Police had vouchers for emergency hotel stays in Alliston,

Collingwood, and Wasaga Beach, but participants in the focus group indicated that

these vouchers were not honored in Midland-Penetanguishene.

In addition, local retirement homes with reasonable rent and "good landlords"

were fully occupied and many private homes only accepted non-smoking residents with

higher incomes; therefore, these homes were not an option for the homeless. This

speaks to item 4 on the community plan (listed above) which aims to provide workshops

for landlords to increase acceptance of more vulnerable tenants. For example, all

attempts to secure other arrangements for a man known to be living in a horse trailer

behind a barn had failed as no landlord could be found to assist. It was also reported

that in Midland, no supportive housing had been built over the last 20 years, and pre-

existing non-profit groups pursuing this option had given up in frustration. There are also

no emergency shelter beds available, and the following quotation illustrates what

happens when there are no shelters in a rural community: this is problematic for

homeless people:

> To quote one situation, a well-known 'harmless' man, who had been
> evicted for setting fires, [and when found had been beaten] was put in jail
> by the police because there was no other place for him to go. They picked
> him up as a last resort when the "system" failed. It was noted that this
> man's needs were minimal: poor eyesight, a condition requiring drugs that

he couldn't afford and fear of dying alone. A supportive setting would have been much cheaper that taking up a nursing home/hospital bed or jail cell. (North Simcoe Focus Group, 2005, p. 27)

One point raised in this focus group was the effects of the influx of residents and family members of patients and inmates of the major provincial institutions in Penetanguishene on the housing shortage. The concern raised was that families with difficult social problems were crowding an already tight housing market surrounding the super jail (North Simcoe Focus Group, 2005). Having these concerns documented in the Community Action Plan allowed the participants to use their plan as a tool in their lobby efforts with local government on behalf of the homeless. In this focus group, there was a general sense of optimism about the effectiveness of the action plan; it was felt that it had the potential to force significant shifts in attitudes about homelessness in the community to secure more resources. However, limited progress was noted over the last decade on the first priority project to develop a proposal for non-profit housing and only project number 4 related to educational workshops had been achieved so far. Therefore, the group agreed that communicative action is required to convince local partners to assist with implementing a worthwhile plan for North Simcoe.

Orillia Community Plan.

This area includes the small city of Orillia and a rural population of 20,031 in the surrounding Oro-Medonte and Severn Townships. Population figures confirm more women than men living in this area and a median age of 42.7 also older than the provincial age of 39.The assets and projects identified in this plan are quite substantial compared to the other two rural community plans and this group was deemed to be extremely action-oriented (Orillia Community Plan, 2006). There is a higher population

density in the area surrounding Orillia and 30,259 people within the city limits; therefore, volunteers can be drawn from a larger pool which includes a higher proportion of retired people. The plan focuses attention on improving volunteer training and coordination as its top priority (Personal interview with the President of the Board of Directors, Jubilee House, 2006). This related directly to the research interview questions about champions, training and participation.

The educational programs described in the plan are designed to destigmatize the issues and let the volunteers "know the face of our homeless, which can be anyone in the general community" (Orillia Focus Group, 2005). There was an energized level of discourse observed when participants elaborated on the steps involved in opening two new supportive housing projects in 2006: Places for People, a house purchased for renovation with 3 apartments, and Jubilee House, a transitional house in leased space for four single-parent women and their children. Both projects were created without any government funding, are financed by volunteer donations and rent from the tenants and did not require any capital funding for new buildings. These innovative shelter solutions include setting aside a portion of the rent each month allowing tenants to gradually build personal capital to improve their units and their lives (Source: personal interview with reporter Shirley Paterson-Dmytruk, S. (2005).

In addition, Hillcrest Lodge, a former nursing home, has been converted into a 30-unit rent-geared-to-income project for seniors by local leaders of St. Paul's United Church with the endorsement of the Orillia council, which was described as " proactive and aware" (Orillia Focus Group, 2005). One of the champions of this innovative shelter solution is Ken McMullen, a member of SCATEH, who proceeded to negotiate with the

church to secure this site, raise private funds and donations and renovate the building which opened in June, 2008, after several years of planning and development (personal interview with Ken McMullen, President of Hillcrest Lodge non-profit corporation, June 2005). This project was not a direct result of SCPI planning but did benefit from the public awareness campaign organized by the Alliance.

Mutual aid has the advantage of being relatively non-intrusive, culturally relevant, inexpensive, non-stigmatizing, and relatively anonymous. It is the simplest approach to helping others and seems to work most effectively when the people helping and those being helped hold similar values, come from a similar culture, or have a similar lifestyle (Johnson & Schwartz, 1994). These examples of spontaneous mutual aid started with volunteer community leaders and private sector partners (owners and landlords) and occurred outside of the formal SCPI partnership and planning activities (Orillia Community Plan, 2006). They could be interpreted as evidence of community mobilization and innovations, partly in response to some public criticism of SCATEH and SCPI activities as a "waste of taxpayer's money" which added no real value to the Orillia housing situation (Personal interview with President of Jubilee House, 2005). There is bound to be disagreement, contradictions, and conflict in community planning, and this was accepted by the Alliance steering committee as a healthy sign of community engagement with local citizens and service providers. It should be noted that the three small housing projects opened in Orillia, as well as the local activities of Habitat for Humanity, all have strong origins within Christian organizations in Orillia. This observation may seem contradictory since there is a generally acknowledged decline in memberships in these faith groups. However, it appears to be a sign of a

higher level of community capacity existing in Orillia than found to be present in Midland or Bradford.

One of the other potential partners identified in the Orillia Community Plan was Casino Rama, a joint venture between First Nations, commercial operators Penn National Gaming, and the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corporation, and arguably a stimulus to homelessness in the Orillia region as residents suffering from gambling addictions are identified. Casino Rama, possibly to improve its public image, has expressed interest in sponsoring community outreach projects such as supportive housing and other follow-up actions are planned to be pursued in the future by the Alliance.

A housing registry in Orillia is quite active with: a contact list for referrals to five affordable housing buildings; several private landlords willing to accept those experiencing homelessness; Green Haven, a shelter for abused women and children; and Lighthouse Christian Ministries' 14 bed emergency shelter for men. In Orillia, over a one month period, 375 people applied to link up with landlords through the local housing registry; but only about 10 persons succeeded in finding permanent housing that way. Rents in this busy housing market are regarded as higher than average for a rural county. Comments from the focus group held in Orillia refer to rents that seemed particularly "out of whack," although all rents had been rising in the area. Those with tenuous housing (referred to as "the shakily housed") often occupied rooms at "huge" rents (Personal interview with Mandy Hillyard, Alliance Coordinator, 2008). In Orillia, a room with a bathroom and a toaster oven or microwave could rent for $650 to $700 a month, which is out of reach for those with lower incomes whether they receive Ontario

Works (welfare), Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP), or Old Age Security (Orillia Focus Group , 2005). This theme of awareness of the lower edge of poverty was prevalent in the focus group discussion as an issue preventing access to some housing options.

It was widely acknowledged that the Simcoe County Alliance to End Homelessness (SCATEH) had a special place in the Orillia Chapter. To quote a feature reporter for the *Orillia Packet and Times* newspaper "for over a decade the Alliance has been very active and effective in leading local change, the success can be seen in the three new rental projects, Places for People, Jubilee House and Hillcrest Lodge and the public acceptance of Habitat for Humanity as a key player now in the community, as well as the ongoing contributions of the Good Food Box and the Mobile Unit" (Personal interview with Shirley Patterson Dymtruk, 2005).

The Mobile Unit, for example, involving a 4-year partnership between the Salvation Army and the Orillia Hospital, made trips into the community one evening a week to assist a caseload of about 100 people. The program supplied food, housing, clothing, and blankets, in addition to legal assistance and medical supplies. The Salvation Army, St. Vincent de Paul Society, and a food hamper distribution organization, called Sharing Place, have been cooperating to distribute food baskets to low income people with the assistance of volunteers from church women's groups and the Women's Institute. This provides further evidence of a supportive community presence and capacity and is further confirmed by strong participation of women as volunteers travelling in the mobile unit to the small towns and rural areas surrounding Orillia.

However, the Orillia focus group agreed that more coordinated efforts were badly needed even though the partnership between the Salvation Army and the Orillia hospital had been working well the Mobile Unit project took 3 years to gain the trust of the recipients and to become accepted as a community venture. Volunteers continue to be "shocked" when they discover people living "in the bush" who come to the side of the road to pick up supplies from the Mobile Unit. These people prefer otherwise to remain hidden in shelters either that are tents or makeshift shacks (Personal interview with Gail Saulnier, Alliance Coordinator, 2007).

One extreme perspective on homelessness, expressed by a practitioner and former manager at Huronia Regional Centre, is that all the large provincial institutions serving the homeless should be abolished. He argued that people living in the bush had "a far better quality of life and chance to experience freedom" than the oppressive conditions on the back wards of the provincial institution. Once again the theme of intentionality and free choice emerges through this argument, albeit, an extreme position. The current flaw in the system is in sustaining supports for the extremely vulnerable such as assisting those with a dual diagnosis such as mental illness and developmental delays; or mental illness & addictions (Personal interview with Bob Gregory, former manager at Huronia Regional Centre, Orillia, 2006). This is one example of a hidden aspect of homelessness that makes it so difficult to respond to. SCATEH's goal number 3 addresses hidden homelessness in creating ongoing intervention and prevention strategies in conjunction with service agencies in Simcoe County.

This debate within the Orillia focus group about how to best address the needs of street people in part flows from deinstitutionalization policies adopted in Ontario. Many community supports that are needed have not been implemented, and in particular, supportive housing is needed. Other focus group members felt that building more institutions is preferable to having people living in the streets, and more people can be accommodated at lower cost and protected from the harshness of the elements, particularly in winter. Chapter 6 will return to this lively policy debate since this is the crux of ongoing policy discussions. As communities engage in the policy development process, they go through many stages of debate, and when social pressures exceed the forces of inertia, policy reforms can result as can be seen in Orillia when the Town Council waived development fees in 2006 for these supportive housing projects: Places for People, Jubilee House, Habitat for Humanity and Hillcrest Lodge.

While the opinion of focus group participants was that volunteers and members of church groups are "wonderful, giving and well-intentioned people," it was acknowledged that, in general, they, like most people, have difficulty understanding the lifestyles of the "hard core homeless". But there were mixed views expressed about this as some church clergy felt that the homeless in their congregations were hidden from them because of the stigma that families may experience in small communities. Some church outreach programs are directed at those who were considered more transient people and external to their neighborhoods. To quote one Minister "People appear and you are unaware of their homelessness. We have seen those who have literally walked from Toronto up Yonge Street and stop along the highway, in places like Stroud, looking for assistance. Probably, one of the most distressing things experienced is encountering

these same individuals in the emergency rooms at the hospital in Barrie. They have no where else to go" (Bradford Focus Group, 2005). This is another thematic reference to the presence of "surveillance" when community members observe people walking long distances, out of place in rural settings where distances mean that vehicles are a required part of life and those without them are noticeable and recognized as part of the " hidden " homeless.

Community workers who were interviewed stated that homeless people were moving to Simcoe County from the Greater Toronto Area to escape the unsafe and unhealthy conditions in the big city, to avoid staying in emergency shelters that were considered dangerous and because they believed it was easier to get services in Simcoe. The reality is that the services are not always accessible. There is a 14-bed men's shelter which limits stays of the homeless to 30 days in a calendar year, and there are no shelter beds available for women.

As noted in Table 5, Orillia's plan shows a more active implementation of projects with a total of 37 new supportive housing units and more services than the other two plans. Part of the reason for superior resources in Orillia is the significant commitment of time and resources of primarily retired volunteers and also students from Georgian College, as well as the University Partnership Centre that includes 5 university partners at the College campus sites located in both Barrie and Orillia. This active participation is evident in the engaged community through its ongoing consultation and planning processes and reflects a higher level of community capacity (Orillia Community Plan, 2006, p. 13).

Bradford Community Plan.

This area includes Bradford West Gwillimbury and an additional rural population of 23,830. As the youngest of the 3 sites studied with a median age of 36.7, it is made up of more young commuters travelling out of the community for employment in the GTA, thus leaving little time available for sustained day time volunteer activities. This community prides itself on being a beautiful and prosperous farming community with approximately 10% economic growth over the last decade. There are no government institutions or campus sites of higher education, no waterfront cottages and very few service agencies with office space available located in Bradford.

Marketing of new housing subdivisions has been successful for developers in partnership with the Town Council and they have a proven ability to attract new homeowners, resulting in a rapid housing expansion located "5 minutes north of Newmarket, York Region and 25 minutes north of Toronto" (Town of Bradford West Gwillimbury, 2008, p. 1). Described as a multicultural residential environment, cultural groups identified include immigrants from Portugal, Italy, Holland, Germany, the U.K., and the Ukraine, drawn by the opportunities afforded by agricultural land. It is interesting to note that there is only one social service agency listed on the community website under "volunteer opportunities".

A unique feature of the Bradford community plan is that there is little recognition of homelessness as a real issue and little evidence of the systematic steps taken towards awareness raising that are apparent in the other two plans. While promotional materials describe this area as a friendly community with a small town feeling, this sensibility is not reflected in the social service infrastructure at all.

Proximity to major urban areas has both advantages and disadvantages for those who are facing homelessness. There are no services located in this area and referrals send vulnerable people elsewhere to access shelters and other supports. This arrangement removes people from their familiar surroundings and social networks. Most of the mainstream agencies are located in Barrie, Alliston to the west, and York Region to the south. To quote a member of the focus group expressing frustration at the lack of infrastructure; "we need to stop being the forgotten people of Simcoe County and insist that county-wide services reach the south and east edges of the county" (Bradford Focus Group, 2005).

The assets listed in the Bradford plan are one housing support worker once per week, services of the Canadian Mental Health Association of York Region out of the Newmarket office, emergency hotel vouchers, and a community meal provided once per week. Although emergency services are available, they must be accessed through the main offices in Barrie, over 30 kilometres away. Interviews with former provincial managers revealed that attempts to form non-profit social service agencies in the past had not met with success, as attempts to recruit local volunteers to sit on boards have failed (Corporation of the County of Simcoe, 2007). This suggests that this area has a low level of community capacity. The SCATEH Alliance coordinators have struggled to convince members of the Bradford chapter to stay with it, but unfortunately the last decade of effort has not shown strong results. There are few resources and little energy to keep the plan active or create new synergies or partnerships to deal with homelessness. Even the SCATEH website has been underutilized here, compared to the other two sites. The characteristics of a bedroom community are prevalent; the

commuters living in new subdivisions have limited time for community engagement; and external resources such as York Region's transition house located outside Simcoe County are used as stopgap measures to fulfill local service needs.

Summary and Conclusions

This chapter has examined local policy and planning documents, demographic features emerging from the environmental scan and the socio-cultural, political, and economic context of the formation of the Simcoe County Alliance to End Homelessness (SCATEH). The community plans have been reviewed and offer an illustration of how rural communities differ in their responses to homelessness and show respect for this rural diversity within a county-wide Alliance framework and community action plan. Unlike other SCPI models seen to be operating outside of existing longer-term community development efforts, a major finding of this study is that SCATEH operated inside its mission using a traditional community development philosophy.

As stated in Chapter Four, the SCATEH goals most pertinent to this investigation are to increase public awareness of the impact of homelessness on the community and to increase understanding of the changing and hidden nature and causes of rural homelessness. This primary goal and the significant investment of time by both government staff and volunteers continue to drive the success of this organization and distinguish Simcoe County from other communities. This Chapter has documented evidence of varying levels of community capacity that helps to explain why this particular county responded to the call for SCPI funding.

In summary, of the three community plans and sites studied, Orillia emerged as the community that exhibited the most capacity to respond to homelessness with a strong contingent of older woman volunteers and retirees, a higher level of education among its residents, a sensitivity to the lost role that large institutions had played in providing shelter and employment in the area, an orientation to action as 4 new housing projects were implemented, a responsiveness to outreach through the mobile unit and also a strong connection to the local media and Georgian College students. This capacity indicates a long-standing foundational value base that recognizes mutual aid as important to community life and which can be tapped to mobilize resources to respond to whatever the most pressing issues are.

There were three main themes arising from the focus groups and interviews that related to 1) use of technology; 2) educational workshops; and 3) transportation issues. A surprising county-wide finding was how extensively the SCATEH website and information technology including emails had been used for the consultation process and information provision for the general public through its six local chapters. Being open to this type of online innovation demonstrates the will to overcome the distances that are a barrier to integrating planning efforts in smaller communities. This augments traditional grassroots processes and was directly stimulated by the NHI/SCPI funding and the involvement of government staff. The demand for more educational workshops was apparent across all 3 sites and ranged from sessions specifically designed for landlords, to volunteer training and advocacy training to improve efforts to lobby politicians.

Another county-wide finding was the consistent concerns raised about transportation issues listed in all 3 of the plans under review, and the observation that

especially in more rural areas, this phenomenon of " surveillance" related to persons seen walking long distances presented an ongoing challenge on what to do to assist in this situation. Practices and protocols established as intervention and preventative measures need to be reviewed and shared widely among all of the stakeholders which is goal number 3 of SCAETH's community action plan.

The struggle for sustained funding imposed severe limitations on what the Alliance could accomplish in its outreach and community development in Simcoe County. Without stable funding for staffing and organizational development, services for the homeless are unlikely to meet increasing demands. To quote one of the Alliance Coordinators "SCPI funding is unstable and arduous. For example, delays in receiving funds, in the summer of 2003, meant that we had to close the Alliance office for over two months, making us wonder whether the administrative reports and requirements were worth the trouble as we scramble to file reports and then wait for several months for the dollars to flow after announcements are confirmed" (Personal interview with Kimberly Dawson, Alliance Coordinator, 2005).

The general consensus across the county was that over the past few years, non-profits, faith groups and volunteer organizations have been asked by various levels of governments to do more and more with the same or less funding. This is breaking the capacity of service providers and the Alliance, which is manifested in staff burnout, employee turnover, volunteer apathy, and fatigue. Without secure ongoing funding the SCPI initiative was not sustainable in Simcoe County.

It is also important to state the finding that several major needs were mentioned in some of the plans but not in others. For instance, Barrie, as the urban centre of Simcoe County and the central focus of the Community Plan to end and Prevent Homelessness, identified the need for better health care for the homeless population and better access to basic services. Those from Bradford said they wanted to stop "being the lost and forgotten people of Simcoe County" (Bradford focus group, 2005). Many organizations do not go as far south as Bradford to deliver their programs and therefore the homeless person is either referred to emergency services in Barrie or York Region, usually by being issued a bus ticket as the distance and transportation challenges are a huge barrier to service access.

North Simcoe and Orillia felt that a better coordination of services and more volunteer training was needed in their communities. The planning process in these two areas was seen as a positive experience and the overriding response was that SCATEH was very successful in achieving the goals of increasing public awareness and understanding of the changing nature of homelessness. Participants made comments such as: "this was beneficial -- we want to be part of the solution;" "planning generates renewed interest in the issues;" "we must do more lobbying;" "website has been invaluable in answering questions, connecting resources;" and "we need to get to social justice issue, more justice, less charity" (North Simcoe and Orillia focus groups, 2005).

However, the conclusion voiced strongly by Mandy Hillyard, Alliance Coordinator, was that the Community Action Plans cannot move forward to the action stage without strong lobbying and political intervention to push for policy reform (Personal interview

with Mandy Hillyard, Alliance Coordinator, 2008). Therefore very little ***ACTION*** can

occur in rural communities that have no more resources to draw upon. SCPI plans are

not sustainable for Simcoe County even though Simcoe County Alliance To End

Homelessness will continue to pursue its goals. Now turning to the policy development

component of this research the strengths and weaknesses of SCPI will be considered

as reflected in the experience of SCATEH.

Table 6 lists some major features of the SCPI implementation process as

adopted by the Alliance, including the formation of the new community entity sponsored

by the United Way and its chosen Pure Community Model governance structure.

Strengths such as the shared vision and commitment to a grassroots community

consultation process coupled with the existence of advance planning allowed for

openness and transparency. The early creation of a communications plan which

included the implementation of a new website for the six chapters of SCATEH guided

the work of the Steering Committee.

Table 6

SCPI and the Alliance: Governance Structure

1. FORMED COMMUNITY ENTITY
Pure Community Governance Model

United Way sponsorship and administrative function:

1. New Community entity -- advance planning
2. Steering Committee volunteers selected
3. Open & transparent process for decisions
4. Ongoing grassroots community development approach
5. Communications plan
6. RFP and consultation process

7. Commitment to community engagement

Under section 2, SCPI Agreement described in Table 7, there are three parts considered and that each relates to the research questions contained in the interview questions in Appendix F. Part A addresses the terms and conditions of the SCPI agreement, which includes the administrative component and resources available to SCAETH. Part B outlines the community planning process and Part C alludes to the role of government. The right side of the table indicates the elements considered here to be weaknesses, as related to local political support and project sustainability leading up to the termination of the experiment by the Conservative government when elected in 2006. The community action plans and government roles were seen as strengths that enhanced the local capacity building.

Table 7

SCPI and the Alliance: Review of the Agreement

2. SCPI AGREEMENT

Strengths	Weaknesses
Part A Terms & Conditions	Federal guidelines did not stipulate that other levels of government become partners
1. United Way accountable/paperwork 2. Knowledge & skills tapped 3. RFP process implemented quickly	
	No elected officials included on Steering Committee to act as champions of the shared vision at Council meetings overall political support weak
Part B Community Action Planning	
1. Barrie Plan and 6 Chapter Plans 2. Community participation 3. Assets/gaps/priorities set 4. Sensitive to rural diversities	General approach not targeted to specific subpopulations
5. Flex Fund established to pool all government $ into one account to be distributed by SCATEH	Difficulty engaging private housing developers/ attracting matching capital for project funding
6. Goals 1-3 achieved 7. Consistent membership for 10 years	No affordable housing funds available
	Goals 4 & 5 related to advocacy and support networks not achieved
Part C Role of Government	Limits to problem-solving crossing jurisdictional boundaries, Retirement of key government staff, loss of corporate memory
1. Data collection/statistics/housing needs study 2. Effective as new $ local introduced in 2007, post SCPI termination, by county government	With SCPI termination, no funds to implement plans, NHI leadership failed to address sustainability, change of government
	Federal office moved out of Simcoe County in 2006

Weaknesses such as exclusion of elected officials as members of the Steering Committee are highlighted. The expectation of sustainability contained in the federal guidelines for SCPI was not realistic for rural communities, as the economies and local capacity just did not exist and therefore this represented another major weakness. The limitations are also related to the political elements of connecting with local Councils and private housing developers. Within the context of Simcoe County Alliance to End

Homelessness, the goals included strategies to address "hiddenness," and were consistently followed throughout a decade of communications planning and consultations. The time-limited aspect of SCPI does not work well in a rural setting as resources for staff to carry on after the project winds down are not available, particularly in small towns and rural areas. It is not realistic for the federal government to require project sustainability when there is no hope of securing local resources so failure is built in from the outset. This case study of the Alliance in Simcoe County shows that a community entity governance model can be organized and proceed to implement projects rapidly if there is a shared vision and consistent volunteer leadership. What worked can be described as an ongoing dialogue between all of the partners to clarify the directions taken by the steering committee and to create innovative solutions.

Adopting the distribution of motel vouchers and the creation of the Flex Fund were two examples of discrete and creative solutions that are not adding to the stigma of declaring need and address SCATEH's goal number three related to interventions and prevention strategies. By pooling all the funds from federal, provincial, and local government funds into one streamlined approach for one-time assistance of last resort the Flex Fund allows front-line workers to flow funds directly. This circumvented some of the red tape. People in severe crisis with nowhere to turn were provided with one-time assistance up to $500 to deal with rent arrears, utility arrears (preventing eviction) and/or start-up funds for rent or utilities in a secured housing unit (Hillyard, 2002). This is consistent with the comment made by Cathy Crowe (2007) that access to SCPI funds from front-line workers has definitely saved lives and this has proven to be the case in Simcoe County as well.

Another creative approach adopted by the Alliance to deal with the request for proposal process which presented a potential area of discord among service providers was to host discussions and negotiate agreements about how submissions for service enhancements were to be orchestrated across the county in order to avoid the competitive nature of the conventional RFP. This demonstrates flexibility available to a focused community entity such as SCATEH.

Goal 1 to increase public awareness and Goal 2 to increase understanding of the changing nature and causes of homelessness were made explicit by the Alliance and contained in the communication plan that was regularly updated by issuing media releases; sending reminders of events and activities on the web site and through email; hosting educational workshops, town hall meetings and special events; and obtaining, extensive media coverage over the entire 10-year period since its inception.

Looking at SCPI at the macro level, there were difficulties engaging elected officials, private landlords, developers, and some municipalities across the country in a strong commitment to the vision of eliminating homelessness. With regard to the massive NHI efforts to build capacity, there were 2,972 national projects funded and the Simcoe County Alliance to End Homelessness (SCATEH) was one of 583 local SCPI projects approved.

In addition, there were challenges to maintaining the web site since resources were not dedicated to local information technical support although there were significant resources available for website maintenance at the national level. Many rural areas do not have consistent access to and service levels available on the internet, and this limits

organizations' ability to disseminate local planning information and knowledge transfer about the successes of the Community Action Plan consultations and implementation.

It is also difficult to sustain high profile stories on homelessness with 61 communities and thousands of capacity building projects, or 6.8% of the SCPI expenditures nation-wide. This point speaks to the heterogeneous nature of defining this abstract phenomenon of homelessness. Too much coverage leads to a saturation point with the general public becoming desensitized to the media coverage which covers the complete range of 18 sub-populations as defined by the NHI (see Appendix H). However, in Simcoe County, the personal stories and special events hosted in familiar surroundings do still have an impact on levels of public awareness. According to Mandy Hillyard, SCATEH Coordinator, "when you work on Flex Fund applications daily, the human stories and the desperation experienced by so many people throughout the county cannot help but affect you in a personal way" (Hillyard, 2002, p. 1).

Included in the capacity building category of SCPI were 222 projects focused solely on public awareness activities as a sub-set of capacity building which accounted for 7.5 % of SCPI expenditures nation-wide (see Appendix I). The power of the media must be harnessed and cannot be underestimated as a key component to effective communications plans, as was discovered in the case study of Simcoe County. One way to deal with invisible issues on a local level is to expose them in newspaper articles, radio, and cable television and on the internet. The speed that this can occur in the 21st century, even in rural settings, is truly astounding.

With regard to addressing hiddenness, strategies to provide mobile outreach services to "deliver" goods to isolated areas and to secure leases with private landlords have met with some success. The first Flex Fund application was received by the new Alliance Coordinator on September 13, 1999. At that time, Gail Saunter visited applicants in their homes or at coffee shops or other safe places adopting a "case management style" and accepting 31 applications in the first 3 months of the program from September to December, 1999 (Hillyard, 2002, p. 1). This approach to uncovering the "hiddenness of homelessness" proved so successful that by the third year the numbers had increased to 547 and agency staff had to take over this function as it was unmanageable for one Alliance Coordinator to handle the volume (Hillyard, 2002, p. 1). However, this could not be replicated across the county due to resource limitations. The difficulty in rural areas, quite often, is that other supports are not available over the long term. Fragile rental arrangements break down when other services are not in place to prevent evictions. SCPI is not a quick fix and developing ongoing supports is a long-term commitment that is not sustainable once the initiative was terminated.

When looking at governance and the SCPI agreement itself, Parts A, B, and C (see Table 7) were well established in terms of accountability, governance and clearly stated action plan requirements. This allowed for easy implementation by the Alliance. The St. John's federal community governance model confirmed that successful relationships and a strong community plan, developed and prioritized by the community, are the key ingredients to building capacity. In this case the stakeholders were able to achieve their collective goals (Personal interview with Bruce Pearce, St. John's, Newfoundland, SCPI Project, June, 2004).

However, the parts of the agreement that did not work as effectively in Simcoe County related to lack of clarity around targeting outcomes and measures along with unclear jurisdictional responsibilities and lack of stable funding. For example, only 5.4% of outcomes related to increased awareness contained in 4,376 NHI outcome reports showed that this broad qualitative measure was vaguely linked to results (see Appendix J). Although there was strong support by federal government staff, initially, this was not sustained over time as the HRDC office relocated out of Simcoe County, and there was a loss of continuity from a policy point of view as the Harper government modified the SCPI program in 2006 and renamed it the Homelessness Partnering Initiative and diminished its prominence on the national political agenda. This marked the end of the SCPI experiment which failed to bring about change through community action planning in the absence of sustainability. A general sense of pessimism was evident among Steering Committee members when advocacy efforts were deemed to have failed on the national level once SCPI was terminated.

Addressing the Goal to Raise Awareness

As we continue to explore the word "homeless" and understand the complexities of its meanings, it is essential to look at linkages to emerging themes portrayed by the media. This is a critical step to understanding the discussion of communicative action as it applies to this policy review, the case study, and the reflexive accounts of the observations that follow in this chapter. Journalists are active partners in policy development, as their accounts are enriching, empowering, and expand understanding of the lived experiences of those without shelter (see Appendix K). Of particular note are reporters with the *Orillia Packet & Times* newspaper which has a feature column called

People Coordinator and showcases local issues. Two journalists writing about homelessness are a student from Georgian College and a senior, past-president of United Senior Citizens of Ontario. The student reported on his experience of sleeping on the street as part of an annual Night in the Cold event organized by the College students to reach out to street-involved youth. At the other end of the spectrum a senior reporter covers stories affecting older people, particularly the plight of older women and says "people are in dire straits and we are facing tough times especially for those on fixed incomes, my utility costs have tripled and I am worried about future increases that may affect my ability to stay in my home…. I think that Simcoe County Alliance to End Homelessness has been very effective in following this topic for over a decade and that the original founders are still working on the Steering Committee…it takes a long time to make people really aware but look at the successes of Jubilee House and Habitat for Humanity houses…opportunities have presented themselves over the years" (Personal interview with Shirley Paterson-Dmytruk, November 2, 2005).

Communities appear to have a higher tolerance for problem-solving to deal with a singular, known situation than they do for establishing broader public policies that would apply to all situations, higher volume of demands/needs and many sub-populations. The concept of intentionality is explored through media articles particularly when it comes to describing the 18 sub-populations including in NHI (see Appendix H).

The possibilities in describing homelessness as a phenomenon are as endless as the imagination. I have called this the journalistic view of homelessness because I believe the media has contributed to understandings and explanations of homelessness not previously possible before the advent of electronic and instant reporting.

It has limitations as a research method as this summary represents a random collection of articles, as they occurred over the period of this research. It is not a comprehensive review but a select sample of articles and reports filed from 1999 – 2008 by different journalists from at least eight different newspapers serving the Canadian public. In Simcoe County alone, in the 3 selected research sites there are 4 weekly newspapers (2 in Orillia) that offer some local commentary on community events and human interest stories although the reporting is much more limited today than in the past because of the corporate ownership and consolidation into one basic newspaper for large rural areas by Metroland (Personal interview with Shirley Paterson-Dmytruk, member of SCATEH and reporter with the *Orillia Packet & Times*, November 2, 2005).

There was also a great deal of media coverage in Toronto from 2005 to 2007 as arrangements were negotiated with the squatters in Tent City and living under the Bathurst Street bridge, and as Street to Homes, a new program, was introduced by the City of Toronto and marketed as a "made-in-Toronto program to end street homelessness" (City of Toronto, 2007, p. 1). As the largest municipality in Canada, adjacent to Simcoe County these continuing media reports from Toronto have an unknown influence on the rural stories and/or on the provincial and national scenes.

Challenges and Limitations

Clearly, it was not possible to achieve all that may have been wished for in this single case study. For practical reasons only one county, located near the Greater Toronto Area, was chosen as the research site. Therefore, the findings of this study are not generalizable to other rural areas in Ontario or elsewhere. Similarly, while efforts

were made to include a broad cross-section of persons informed about homelessness in the targeted community, no claim is made that all relevant experiences or opinions are represented. However, despite these limitations, the study was conducted carefully and conscientiously so that the observations of the interviewees are considered carefully. It has been confirmed through the interviews and focus groups that homelessness in the countryside is less visible than in urban areas, and that finding homeless people in rural areas is difficult because they may be hidden on side roads or in wood lots, sleeping in vehicles, living on isolated farms or family properties, or camping out in the many of provincial parks and conservation areas throughout the county. Other research (Cloke, Milbourne & Widdowfield, 2000c; Fitchen, 1991) has referred to this point, but the documentation in this study is possibly the first systematic effort to address this hiddenness in rural Canada.

HIddenness and Intentionality

This study illustrates that hiddenness has features which are universal, whether found in urban areas or anywhere else; however, the physical spaces occupied can vary. In rural settings, these could be abandoned farmhouses and barns, the bush, cottages that are not winterized, vehicles in remote areas not under general surveillance by authorities or neighbors. At any given time, several township parks, conservation areas, and trailer parks throughout Simcoe County were occupied by small groups of squatters, "living rough" in tents. All were under police pressure to move on because of their visibility. There was open conflict between those using these areas for the recreational purpose intended and those deciding to take up permanent residence in these parks, thereby contravening local bylaws. Thus there is safety in being hidden if

one wishes to avoid authorities, but often homelessness is so invisible that it may not be recognizable by family, friends or neighbors because of high levels of denial.

As for the definition of *intentionality* there are many perspectives reflected in this study from the individual example of "camping" as a housing choice to group examples such as publically declaring the goal to eradicate homelessness in Simcoe County. Many retired people who have moved to Lake Country in Simcoe County are now anxious about losing their homes because of market value assessment (MVA), increases in property taxes and increasing costs of utilities. In two townships, between 2000 and 2005, MVA property values increased 44%, taxes 28% and utilities by about 35%. As a result many property owners question whether they'll be able to keep their houses over the long term and fear that they are at risk of becoming homeless.

There are contradictory and fiercely held intentions to stay housed, particularly by retirees and those who are camping in the parks that have been recorded in this study. In addition, service providers have observed a differentiation in approach related to intentionality. Some people are more vulnerable to homelessness and not as concerned about staying or keeping units because their situation is sometimes indicative of poor competence in everyday affairs due to disability, substance abuse and/or mental illness.

Housing options for the homeless and those at risk of homelessness are in extremely short supply in Simcoe County. In 2008, the 60 subsidized units in the southern part of the county had waiting lists of 1 year, and there was up to a 5-year wait in the growing city of Barrie. In addition to the obvious need for more affordable social housing, there is a strong need for better transportation and more accessible health and

social services. In these respects, the rural dwellers appear to be worse off than their counterparts living in more urban areas of Simcoe County.

The difficulties of delivering social, health, recreational, and other human services in a large geographic area such as Simcoe County, with a highly dispersed population, occupied much attention in the focus groups. The major outcome of this study is the documentation of a dramatic increase in the number of those who are homeless over the 7-year period. This was not the original intent of SCATEH. Another surprise was the strong presence of educational resources through colleges and universities and the research interests evident across these diverse small town and rural communities. However, organizations such as the Alliance to End Homelessness have made an impact, and the fact that it is still in existence 2 years after the SCPI funding was terminated is a testament to its role.

This chapter has presented evidence related to research objectives one and two that makes it possible to document and further our understanding of the nature of rural homelessness and showcase the new synergies that have been created. Each community is unique with many layers of networks and practices that bind the "social system" together as it has been constructed locally. The case study has demonstrated that even small groups of volunteers can gain capacity building skills, engage in communicative action and be effective in the pursuit of their goals. According to one of the Alliance Coordinators, local policies have definitely been impacted by SCATEH and learnings have occurred although SCPI was only viewed by most stakeholders as just another source of funding not a mechanism for community development in itself.

New Local Policies Developed

There are two examples of local policies created in partnership with the Simcoe County government which were influenced directly by SCATEH:

1. creation of the Flex Fund in 1999 which focused on prevention of evictions, and

2. creation of the Simcoe County Community Homelessness Project (SCCHP) in 2006.

The implications of these results will be discussed in Chapter Six. Looking at SCPI at the macro level, there were difficulties engaging elected officials, private landlords, developers, and some municipalities across the country in a strong commitment to the vision of eliminating homelessness. With regard to the massive NHI efforts to build capacity, there were 2,972 national projects funded and the Simcoe County Alliance to End Homelessness (SCATEH) was one of 583 local SCPI projects approved.

In addition, there were challenges to the communication planning since resources were not dedicated to local information technical support although there were significant resources available for website maintenance at the national level. Many rural areas do not have consistent access to and service levels available on the internet, and this limits organizations' ability to disseminate local planning information and knowledge transfer about the successes of the Community Action Plan consultations and implementation.

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Without national government leadership and partnerships at all political levels, no policy solution is possible. Therefore, as much as the outcomes of federal initiative were limited, the local membership sees the community action plans and local policy changes as true achievements for the Simcoe County Alliance to End Homelessness although

the impact of SCPI on day-to-day service provision was negligible (Personal interview with Mandy Hillyard, Alliance Coordinator, 2008).

Expectations were not high at the outset of the SCPI experiment, so its failure to facilitate leveraging of private sector resources was not a surprise to the Alliance Steering Committee but there was a general disappointment expressed by members that after 10 years of focusing on ending and preventing homelessness no capital resources or new investment partners had emerged. With the rapid economic expansion in Simcoe County, particularly with massive construction of new subdivisions there was the intention to leverage some private sector partners that did not materialize.

The strengths of the community governance model and community policy development process exemplified in the Simcoe County Alliance to End Homelessness will be discussed in the next chapter as key to the development of local policies.

Chapter Six:

The Implications of the Results for Policy Development

This chapter will address the third research objective which is to identify

opportunities to generate policies and legislative proposals that respond to

homelessness beyond the National Homelessness Initiative and the SCPI experiment. It

discusses how social housing policy and rurality intersect in the context of a critical and

broad view of the policy frameworks in Canada. The basic phases of the community-

based policy development process are applied to the issue of homelessness along with

an examination of how the term "homeless" has been shaped. Thinking back to the

definition of the word homelessness as an abstract concept (Hulchanski, 2009) we see

that journalists play upon the reader's imagination through human interest stories, for

example, and therefore are well-positioned to assist in changing the minds of politicians

and policy-makers. Relationships with the media have been presented as key to the

achievement of SCATEH's goals and an integral component of policy development on

the local level which, in turn, allow for the transmission of this knowledge through

provincial, national and even international channels.

Finally, the last section presents a modified community-based policy

development framework grounded in critical theory and linked to this study's findings

regarding intentionality and communicative action. As for the definition of *intentionality,*

there are many perspectives reflected in this thesis, from the British model of enacting

legislation that excludes from eligibility those who have made themselves homeless

through their own choices, behaviors and actions; to the various anecdotes found in

Simcoe County about individuals who adopt "camping" and/or "living in the bush or abandoned cottages or farmhouses" as examples of alternate housing and life style choices. Intentionality is also applied to group decisions such as that made by SCATEH to publicly declare the goal of eradicating homelessness in Simcoe County. In addition, there is evidence of intentionality indicated by practitioners and the SCPI sponsor, the United Way. These advocates have published four separate studies that report on the outcomes of interventions implemented in an effort to influence policy-makers at all four levels of government: federal, provincial, county and local (see Table 4). These interpretations are all linked to the concept of intentionality in its many forms.

Observations about the multi-dimensional approach used in this study as well as the complexities encountered in community partnership arrangements have been taken from my journal, best practices such as mobile outreach services and the restrictive access to service monitoring and collaborative approach to interventions, and my reflections on this research experience. Discussion of the implications of social housing policy within the rural context related to the Alliance acting in the role of change agent and with regard to the consequences of housing displacement is also conveyed. Then Chapter Seven offers conclusions and considers the next steps needed: further research on how to better expose and respond to homelessness in the rural setting; and a sharing of the knowledge transfer techniques that have assisted smaller communities in making compelling arguments for social housing and effecting public policy change.

Social Housing Policy and Rurality

According to the Senate Committee report (released in June, 2008), *Beyond*

Freefall: Halting Rural Poverty:

> With every new census, rural Canada's place in the national fabric seems
> to unravel a little more … for the first time rural population has fallen below
> 20% … reflecting a vision of a country made up of a few densely
> populated urban centres against a rural landscape denuded of its people.
> (Senate Committee, 2008, p. ix)

It goes on to say that, on the surface, there is no rural housing problem. The rate

of home ownership in rural parts of Canada is considerably higher than in urban areas

and it is rare to see a homeless person in rural and small town Canada. But serious

housing problems, such as poorly-maintained homes, abandoned farmhouses and

hidden homelessness were found. Witnesses told the Senate committee that the federal

policy response has been inadequate.

The National Homelessness Initiative (NHI) and the Affordable Housing Initiative

(AHI) were overwhelmingly urban focused and totally lacking in sensitivity to the needs

of rural areas (Senate Committee, 2008, p. xvii). With continued out-migration to urban

centers, pressures are added to the already overburdened urban housing and social

service support systems. Given this negative assessment of current social housing

policy in Canada, which has already been outlined in Chapter Two of this dissertation, it

is not surprising to find rural areas struggling to cope with a backlog of housing need.

Data collection over 7 years yielded hundreds of public documents, photographs,

and media articles demanding action to address the problem of homelessness, but very

few dealt with rural issues. As mentioned, credit must be given to federal decision-

makers for directing some funds to rural communities and for the flexibility to allow

different community entity governance models to exist (Personal interview with

Claudette Bradshaw, former Minister responsible for the Homelessness Initiative, 2008).

The Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative (SCPI), one component of the

National Housing Initiative, was introduced to alleviate homelessness. Its clearly stated

objective was "to strengthen the capacity of communities by bringing local service

providers together to develop plans that address individual needs in a seamless and

coordinated fashion" (NHI, 2006, p. 54). The five major areas of activity emphasized

were sheltering facilities, support facilities, provision of support services, capacity

building, and public awareness (see Appendix I for details about the number and

percentage of projects addressing each area). This study only considers the last two

activity areas of the SCPI initiative, namely, capacity building and public awareness.

Although there were only 11 SCPI projects in rural settings across Canada, this

investment in a comprehensive planning process was at least a start and had the

potential to contribute directly to capacity building in rural communities. Figure 5

presents early estimates of the incremental impact of SCPI funding on local investment

indicating that over a short period of time from 1998 to 2003, provincial and municipal

investments had almost tripled from about $7 million to just under $15 million. Certainly

in the case of Simcoe County, the governance model and community planning

processes led by the Alliance were effective and resulted in focused political attention

by elected officials on the County Council. In fact, in spite of extremely limited

resources, by year six of SCPI funding, the local government of Simcoe County was

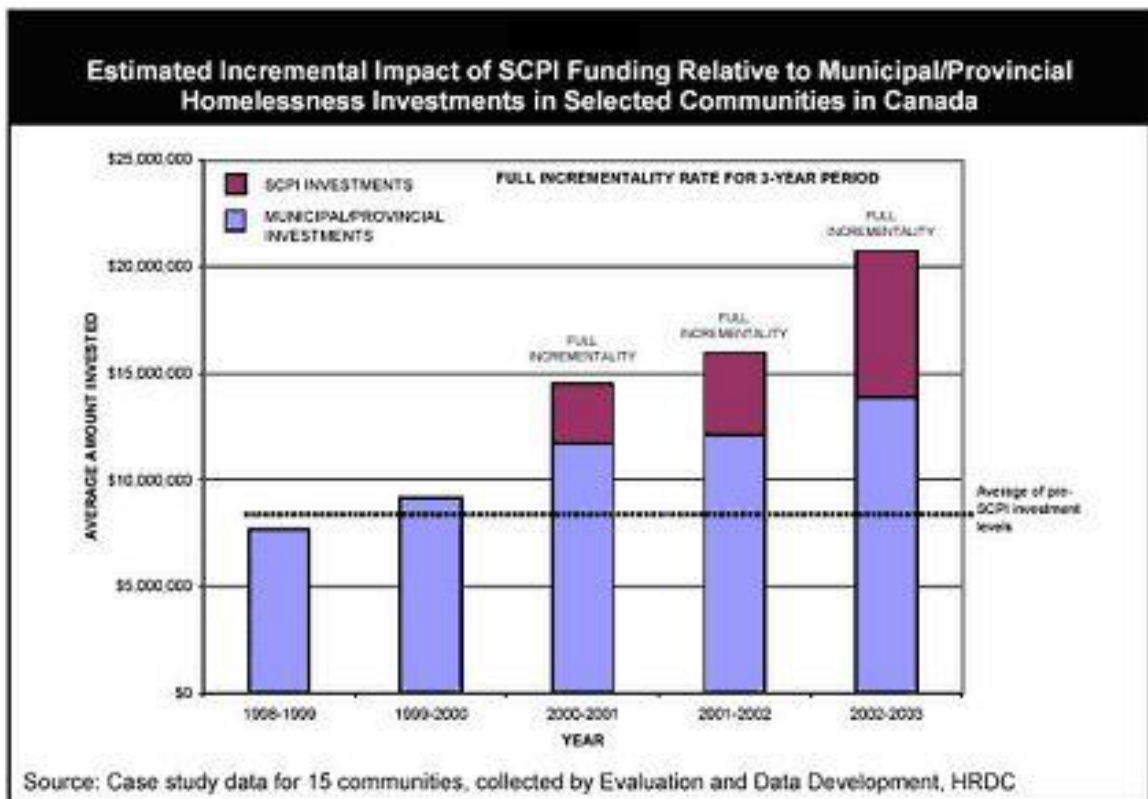ready to invest in a new program to prevent people from becoming homeless.

Figure 5. **SCPI funding.**
Note. Source: NHI (2007).

Local funding of $125,000, annualized, which was successfully introduced from the tax-base of the County of Simcoe in 2007, is interpreted here as a direct response to strong lobby efforts on behalf of the Alliance. It was suggested by one government staff member that the "prevalence of homelessness increasing at such an alarming rate combined with the termination of the SCPI funding in 2006 may have forced the elected officials to approve a new program called "Simcoe County Community Homelessness Project" (SCCHP). The total funding for community-based programs and services, including the Flex Fund, related to homelessness and/or the prevention of

homelessness was estimated to be $2,619,934 in 2006 (Simcoe County, Social Services, 2008).

Recognizing this new funding as a significant leveraged outcome, how did the Alliance convince the elected officials, the policy-makers in this instance, to make this investment? The next section will consider this question.

Community Policy Development Process

When adopting a community-based research approach, there are many collaborators and partners that influence outcomes and have the collective power to change policies. Springate-Baginski and Soussan (2006) have developed a working paper, within an international context, that outlines key steps in approaching policy process analysis and tools used to create a dynamic and public policy process. This figure depicts the flow of various elements such as the role of agents of change; factors in community that drive for social change and the interaction with awareness raising that builds momentum towards outcomes for success (see Figure 6).
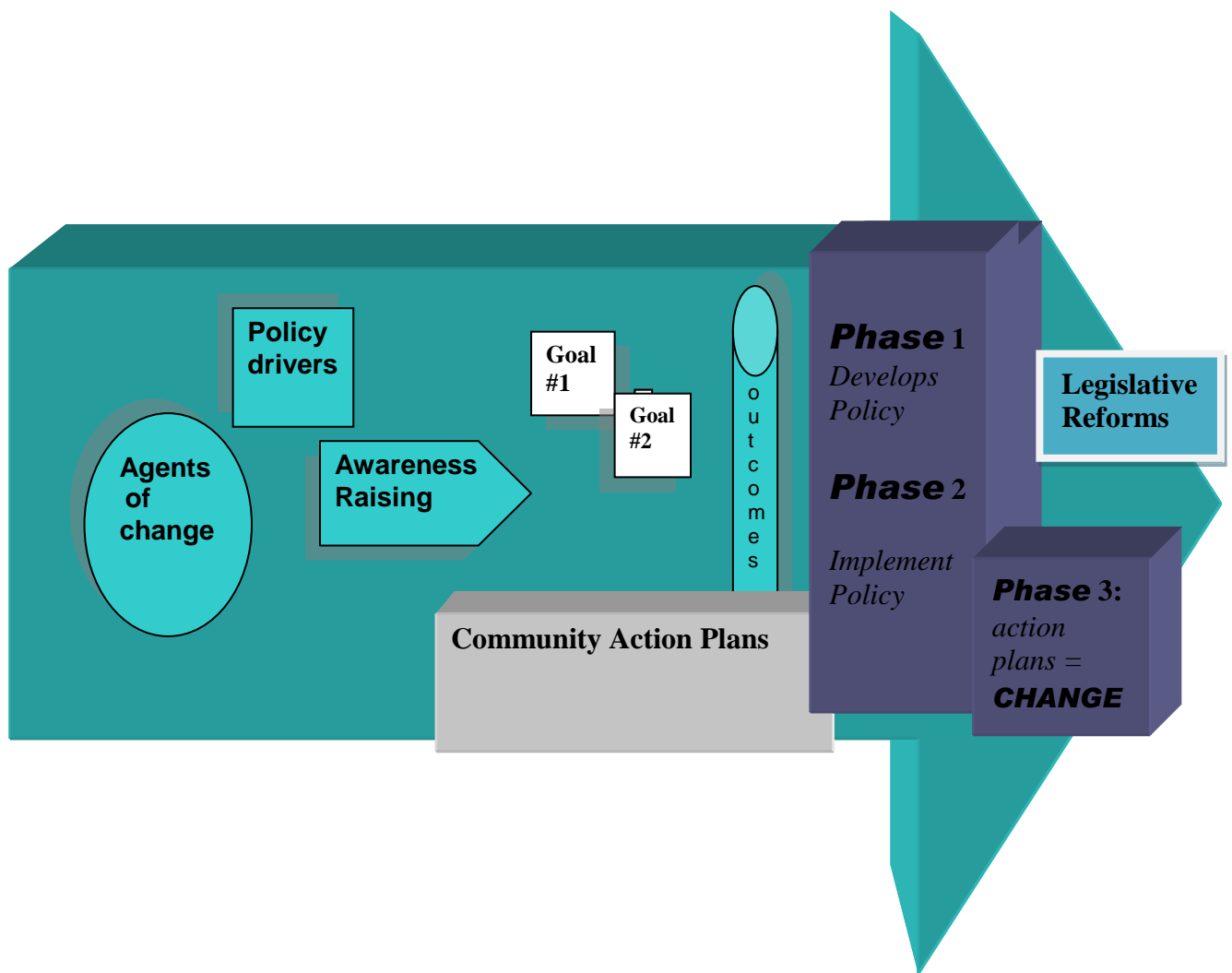
Figure 6. **Modified community policy development model.**

When the process presented in Figure 6 is applied to SCATEH, the Alliance leaders are the agents of change, the policy driver is the increasing incidence of homelessness, goal #1 relates to awareness raising, and goal #2 to increasing understanding of the issues. These factors are all integrated into the development of the Community Action Plan. The outcomes are then reflected in the components of the plan which identifies specific areas for public policy change.

This conceptual framework provides a practical methodology for understanding how local communities contribute to the public policy process when new policies are introduced by government, at the macro or national level and then implemented at the micro or local level. The process has many layers and moves forward in several phases. It is not completely linear because there are setbacks and local circumstances that disrupt a smooth flow of implementation in one direction and groups have to loop back to revise strategies on an ongoing basis that takes in a more circular motion. This refers to the plan-act-observe-reflect cycle, mentioned as part of this research design and keeping in mind that this policy change process in the SCATEH case took place over a 10 year period. For example, the introduction of NHI at the federal level had a direct impact on Simcoe County. The outcomes led to a broader understanding of the policy process for all of the partners, particularly with the emphasis on more rural and small town settings. Components of the framework include key milestones such as the formation of a new community entity, political and governance contexts, policy issues, and development processes (which include communications strategies and planning outcomes) all accounted for in this case study example.

In this analysis, one of the outcomes takes the form of the Community Action Plan which I have added as a modification to the proposed model. It provides local evidence of intentionality delivered by the collaborative work of the six chapters of the Alliance, which brought together many stakeholders and community partners. Two of these community partners co-authored the SHARP report (see Table 4) that documented the process and outcomes of the Simcoe County federally funded employment project that targeted hiring those who were homeless (Saulnier & Storey,

2002). In addition, one of the Executive Directors of the United Way participating in the work of the Alliance was the author of an unpublished University of Toronto Master's thesis on civil society (Jeffery, 2003). These documents indicate the level of commitment to collecting data and sharing information about homelessness and clearly provide further measures of what capacity building looks like in this community.

Viewed as a dynamic and iterative process this community development conceptual framework is easily applied and provides a simple and realistic tool to assess the future prospects of mounting local responses to homelessness in general. Working towards a systematic understanding of how the policy process functions in practice, with membership in the Simcoe County Alliance to End Homelessness (SCATEH), a direct attempt has been made to openly declare intentionality, a critical ingredient to change, because as discussed by Freire (1992, p. 83): "without intention there is no hope". The freedom to make choices, according to the principles of critical theory, allows community leaders to influence policy on a practical level related to homelessness as a lived experience in small towns and rural areas. This effort to collaborate horizontally with many community partners has been adopted in some urban centers as well. But the strength of smaller communities is that the community planning processes draw on smaller pools of volunteers, usually well known to each other and with more frequent encounters in the community which act as constant reinforcements and reminders of the shared visions and missions in place (Senate Committee, 2008).

In this simple policy model, the Alliance leaders are the agents of change, quickly securing SCPI funds when they became available and working diligently for over a decade to raise awareness in a very large and diverse county in order to achieve stated

goals. Other rural areas missed out on this opportunity because they did not have access to the resources necessary to complete what were considered by service providers as "onerous" SCPI application forms. SCATEH was fortunate to have administrative assistance provided by the United Way. In any push towards social change there are obstacles to overcome. It is informative to examine the strengths and weaknesses of SCPI as a learning opportunity.

Without national government leadership and partnerships with communities, at all political levels, no effective policy solution is possible. When the Community Action Plans in the 4 GTA regions were reviewed there was no mention or attempt to explore the existence of homelessness in the more rural parts of these regions on the suburban fringe of Toronto. As the largest municipality in Canada, Toronto has been, and continues to be, a major driving force questioning policies related to the elimination of homelessness. Drawing from this advantageous urban perspective on what is possible, this thesis now explores which aspects of community-based policy development are most applicable in rural settings.

Discussion

This section will examine two elements of public policy that touch on the research questions in an effort to examine intentionality as it relates to agents of change, and legislative reforms related to housing displacement. These are referred to in this thesis as social housing policies I and II meant to illustrate how communicative action can be captured within a community-based policy development model.

Social Housing Policy I:
Without Intention There Is No Hope: Agents of Change

There are many ways to view the meanings of declaring intention in group behaviors such as those exhibited by the Alliance (SCATEH) members, who first joined together to raise their own awareness about the facts surrounding homelessness. To quote one Steering Committee member "If you can't see it, it doesn't exist" (Personal interview with Gail Saulnier, 2007).

By creating a Community Action Plan, they made the hidden issue visible. The Alliance, as a recognized group of volunteers, makes a courageous political statement and continues to provide local leadership to uncover the invisible nature of homelessness and shatter the myth of the rural idyll. They do this consciously through their voluntary roles on the steering committee regardless of potential economic and social costs and despite high turnover rates among social service agency and government staff. They are attempting to end the silence, by engaging in dialogue for social change, alongside those with lived experience of homelessness and other key partners, such as non-profit organizations, service providers, government, private business leaders, and the media, to transform the situation. Building local decision-making and resilience takes time and experience and leaders must combat the frustrations of working in constrained political environments by staying connected and working together to promote mutual aid in the face of adversity.

Paulo Friere (1992) talks about the use of words such as intentionality to declare people as conscious beings and highlighting their humanness and their freedom to make choices. This is the basis of creating responsive public policies related to social

housing; this allows citizens to become agents on behalf of their organization and influence change. Efforts from groups of citizens such as the Simcoe County Alliance to End Homelessness (SCATEH) provide hope by virtue of their intentional declaration and exposure of the uncomfortable evidence about homelessness for all to see. Increased research attention on the homeless may not always have a direct or immediate influence on public policy, but in the case of Simcoe County, it did invoke a shared sense of collective responsibility, the determination to provide voluntary leadership and generated interest in the various rural settings. Simply making the experience of homelessness more visible through public discussion and debate validates and highlights the significance of the issue as stated in the community plan (Veazie, Teufel-Shone, Silverman, Connelly, Warne, & King, 2001).

Evidence of the Alliance as an active agent of change is reflected in the documentation of the astonishing increase in numbers of people in rural areas of Simcoe County assessed as eligible for the Flex Fund (from 31 to 547 in under 3 years). This prompted the local government to recognize the growing numbers and introduce its own homelessness prevention program the SCCHP (Simcoe County, Social Services, 2008).

Political action is required to take the public policy process to the next level as action plans are not enough, particularly within the context of parallel struggles going on across the country to end homelessness. This is what is meant by the term communicative action drawn from critical theory as espoused by Habermas (1983). Both the community plans and the support of these initiatives through extensive media coverage reflect solid communicative action strategies. Policy-makers at the provincial

and federal levels have ignored the warnings generated by the NHI and, unfortunately, rurality as a factor has not been seriously considered. Recognized as one of the Canada's leading agents of change, Cathy Crowe (2004) states "I want to inspire and engage Canadians from all walks of life, to empathize and respond to the injustice of homelessness in their community and motivate them to become involved in call for the solution – a national housing program". This requires groups to become politically active in advocating for and pushing forward their community action plans in order to force changes in social housing policy.

Resilience, determination, and persistence have been demonstrated for over a decade by The Simcoe County Alliance to End Homelessness as an agent of change and as an inspiration to other advocacy groups, rural and urban.

Social Housing Policy II:
Without Intention: Legislative Reforms and Housing Displacement

Policies meant to improve quality of life have actually played a part in creating the homelessness crisis. One such policy in place for the last few decades in Ontario is referred to as deinstitutionalization and has been defined in a number of ways. Sealy and Whitehead (2004) use the "rapid closure of beds in psychiatric hospitals" as their operational definition in looking at the timing and intensity of deinstitutionalization which varied widely across Canada. This term was broadened in the community support sector to include any type of congregate facility and was the focus of attention brought about by activists and family members advocating for fair treatment of vulnerable persons living primarily in large institutions (Lord, 2007). Based on the premise that everyone has a right to safe, secure, and decent housing, the role of government was to

bring about legislative reforms to accompany deinstitutionalization policies to ensure that alternate residential living arrangements were put in place in communities and to monitor the impact of these system changes over the long term.

In more recent efforts to upgrade housing standards, congregate facilities that once housed vulnerable populations were closed in Simcoe County and across the province of Ontario in light of the laudable goal to establish smaller scale, independent, and much improved supported living arrangements in the community. The corresponding number of spaces closed in institutions were not replicated in the community residences. Decades after these closures an unexpected outcome has been increasing evidence of housing displacement, which has directly contributed to the increasing prevalence of homelessness. Total operating funding from institutions was never transferred to the community as many of the empty facilities are still being maintained to this day (Lord, 2007). This may seem obvious, but the net loss of housing spaces has not been widely recognized by those responsible for monitoring the social service system or those living in affected communities.

In the focus groups of this study the debate about reusing empty institutions was resurrected as local memory has captured and retained the knowledge, first-hand, about difficulties of the closures; placement hardships experienced by clients and their families; and the loss of employment related to deinstitutionalization in Simcoe County. The question asked is whether no shelter options at all is better than an institutional shelter solution where large buildings sit empty in small towns such as Orillia and could be reopened for the homeless? This is a legitimate policy question directed to the

Provincial government as the owners of these buildings and an example of taking communicative action steps to the next level.

Places of last resort for the vulnerable are usually government-subsidized and have included hospitals, nursing homes, jails, and psychiatric institutions. Simcoe County is identified as a place where a disproportionate number of these large institutions were built, historically, as a provincial economic development and employment strategy to create jobs and distribute resources outside Metropolitan Toronto. The reduction of alternate accommodation options through residential closures over the last 20 years has exacerbated the increasing local demand for supportive housing. Therefore, vulnerable people discharged from hospitals, Huronia Regional Centre for the developmentally disabled, the super jail, and Penetang Mental Health Centre have no place to live.

Drastic changes in national housing policy have filtered down with dramatic effects on small communities across Canada. It is not realistic to expect local groups like the Alliance to change national policy within the context of tough political constraints but it is not completely outside the realm of possibility that sometimes, by virtue of adding many more voices from unexpected sources, these voices may be heard in surprising ways. Drawing attention to housing displacement is in itself a powerful action towards prompting legislative reforms. That rural areas are disappearing can no longer be denied. Gentrification of real estate in Simcoe County has prompted the value of farms, small towns, lakeside cottages, and properties to escalate, unintentionally forcing out and displacing long-time residents with lower incomes and those who are retired and aging in place (Simcoe County Corporation, Social Services, 2007).

Changes in provincial laws such as from the Ontario Tenant Protection Act, 1997 to The Residential Tenancies Act (RTA), 2007 have altered procedures in dispute resolution and there is a perception held by service providers and practitioners that these changes have permitted an escalation of evictions by private sector landlords. Even seemingly unrelated local bylaws, such as the recently proclaimed anti-smoking bylaw, have also forced tenants to leave premises rather than give up smoking, which is another unplanned cause of homelessness for those vulnerable groups across Ontario and found to be a prevalent predictor of possible evictions reported by service providers in Simcoe County.

Closures of substandard rooming houses, boarding houses, retirement homes, nursing homes, group homes, and various institutions were not intended to create homelessness, but this has been an undesired and undeniable outcome. Original provincial laws and protections for providing room and board for those who are "indigent," primarily through government institutions, have been downplayed by those advocating for supportive housing in community living settings. Homelessness has been caused by the closure of these facilities and the inability of smaller communities to keep pace with volume demands and growth in population. Very few affordable or alternate housing options have been included in rapid expansion plans for the GTA areas surrounding the largest urban center in Canada. Without intention, there have been many changes that have resulted in the displacement of people. Economic growth has had an overall positive impact in this period of history to the detriment of those living on the fringes.

The role of government partners, particularly at the provincial and national levels is to ensure that legislative reform takes into account these economic and social factors in communities in order to protect the vulnerable and minimize housing displacement. Responsibility for legislation, initiating action and ensuring that appropriate administrative support and financial resources are available is a critical role for government in capacity building. In other words, looking at the integration of various policies across the broader legislative spectrum – housing, community services, income support, and employment – would prevent a change in one policy from causing disjointed and negative outcomes in other areas. This is a very complex task, but it is an essential responsibility of government to support those who are most vulnerable by monitoring outcomes and listening to community feedback on an ongoing basis when proposing changes to refine legislation, standards, and guidelines.

Reflection on Good Intentions

People end up losing housing because of circumstances in life; very few become "intentionally" homeless. As mentioned in Chapter Two, in the United Kingdom, laws such as the Housing Act (Homeless Persons) passed in 1977 exclude anyone determined to be "intentionally" homeless from local support services. It takes national leadership, such as that modeled by the SCPI experiment, to demonstrate that a federal political decision can assist in building capacity locally and has the power to override provincial and municipal jurisdictions. However, a backlash is created in communities trying to address issues in the absence of a national vision to ensure that everyone have access to safe, affordable housing in Canada. After half a century of social housing policy efforts we are not further ahead; homelessness is a growing

phenomenon in rural settings and while national policy initiatives reflected good intentions they have not provided long-term funding nor really supported a comprehensive agenda to eliminate homelessness (Hulchanski, 2009).

The expected private and public sector voluntary partnerships to create new housing units did not materialize confirming that this approach is not working. During this period of economic downturn and the decline of the welfare state in Canada a reluctance to risk investments in the social housing sector dominated the political scene.

Grassroots efforts are not enough and top-down initiatives cannot work in the absence of collaboration with other levels of government, in this instance, the provincial government was a major player missing from the NHI planning table for Ontario as the relations with the Conservative government in Ottawa were extremely strained during the period under study from 2000–2007. As a result, negotiations on federal-provincial agreements related to housing starts were protracted and cooperation on federal initiatives such as SCPI were delayed.

According to one of the Alliance coordinators, Steering Committee members have dedicated over 10 years of volunteer time and energy to the complex process of exposing homelessness. Dealing with the complications of political, social, legal, economic, and cultural perspectives on homelessness, particularly, in the rural areas has proved to be very draining for service providers and practitioners. Mandy Hillyard, a SCATEH member, says "enough is enough, it is now time to act" and her motto is "when all else fails, get mad" and take strong communicative action steps. The Alliance would even take up the extreme position of proposing legislation to protect the

homeless and guarantee everyone's right to housing, as other countries have done, if there was a remote chance of success (Personal interview with Mandy Hillyard, Alliance Coordinator, 2007). For instance, Simcoe County Alliance would support efforts to protect the extremely vulnerable through proposing that new federal legislation be enacted.

Drafting such a law would force all jurisdictions to agree on an appropriate level of responsibility and resource allocation to address the homelessness issue on a permanent basis. Groups such as SCAETH would need to join together with other major advocacy groups across Canada to push this idea forward and determine the feasibility of such an approach. However, the downside of such a step has been publicly exposed in the U.K. by reports that even those registered as homeless under the legislation and on a priority wait list for housing still doesn't provide access to housing where none exists (Crane, 1999).

The community-based policy development process reaches phase three when all other avenues have been exhausted and voluntary measures are not enough to force a change, then one of the few remaining choices is to propose a law that would protect at-risk citizens from homelessness.

Policy development in this model has three phases as outlined here but with no end. The socio-economic context of implementation and political factors which influence reforms shift constantly, affecting the realization of planned outcomes or actions. One finding of this research is that dedicated, well-organized, activist groups like the Alliance in Simcoe County are not likely to give up on their mission which has been a well

documented characteristic of vibrant communities by Canadian policy analyst Torjman (2006). An open and public process reinforces the priorities formalized in community action plans. This assists in formulating next steps for community leaders to convince politicians to push for necessary legislative reforms when barriers to implementation of proposed polices are documented.

Summary of Policy Discussion

In 21st century rural Ontario, the policy development processes remain the same across jurisdictions—groups organize to make change with a new emphasis on forming broad and inclusive partnerships. Supporting Community Partnerships Initiative (SCPI) was an experiment to effect policy change. Its outcomes have revealed a degree of success related to raising awareness about homelessness and what it means to individuals living in rural areas of Ontario. Whether or not this is apparent in the 10 other SCPI rural sites across Canada is beyond the scope of this research. However, in this case, it demonstrated the value of community ownership and engagement in uncovering a hidden phenomenon and finding ways to address it.

The SCPI initiative has served to reinforce the need for national leadership. I have suggested two areas of social housing policy: searching for ways to strengthen the role of change agent and acknowledging that housing displacement requires legislative reform in order to fix this fundamental housing supply issue. Supportive housing is the most viable shelter solution available for vulnerable populations living in rural settings as it has been proven effective through the creation, on a smaller scale, of more intimate congregate residences that include built-in support services. Providing services in rural

places where the homeless are found mitigates against some of the challenges such as providing service access to those without any means of transportation.

It has been my unique experience and privilege to work in the supportive housing field for the last 30 years, at all three levels of government: regional, provincial and federal and to observe the impact of this National Homelessness Initiative. Overall, this recent political decision by the federal government has failed to marshal any new resources in the rural setting. This is not surprising as, historically, resources in rural communities have always been thin. Therefore, the chances of sustaining SCPI's success gave grounds for pessimism even when my expectations were low at the outset; this research confirms that it is not possible to continue such initiatives without government funding and the ongoing support required for government staff to assume the role of community partner.

Introducing such measures as managed competition through an RFP process has been disastrous as it contradicts the cooperation required for voluntary and nonprofit agencies to function together with very scarce resources (Phillips et al., 2003). Clearly, the policy to manage competition through RFPs is an example of a business concept that is not compatible with the community development philosophy which is the cornerstone of working with the complexities present in the nonprofit sector.

Community partnerships are constantly shifting as the players involved in capacity building continue to change. By declaring communication strategies and producing written plans, tangible outcomes are created that persist and survive. A key element of the policy development process is marketing with educational information

tools such as pamphlets, flyers, articles, reports and websites to serve as reminders that document the significant voluntary efforts in capacity building and community development history.

This level of effort is not totally lost in an environment where the unstable nature of funding and human resources means that organizations such as the United Way of Greater Simcoe County must constantly transform to lead in the pursuit of policy change. Community capacity relies on volunteers, and in this case, primarily well-educated women and those recently retired to promote the communicative action messages. Directions for future social housing policy and legislative reform must hold every municipality in Canada accountable for providing services to the homeless, although the responsibility in our federal system is shared across complicated jurisdictional boundaries.

When a community-based policy development model is shared and acknowledged as an asset and a practical tool for channeling knowledge, energy and resources it moves social action efforts to the next level despite significant challenges.

Chapter Seven:

Conclusions and Future Directions

The policy issues around rural homelessness are very significant in a vast land such as Canada where traditional moral values hold home ownership in high esteem as a basic human right and reasonable shelter, it is assumed, is within everyone's reach. Inspired, perhaps, by a pioneer tradition, people in rural Ontario take pride in maintaining a home in a country setting. This research has been directed towards three overall objectives and conclusions will be presented for each as follows:

Research Objective 1: The Nature of Rural Homelessness

When documenting and defining the nature of rural homelessness, the hidden aspects of people living without shelter present the biggest challenge. This is an important endeavour because Canada faces the reality of a bleak future where homelessness becomes a routine and normal part of our social and political landscape unless this issue is addressed as a public priority (Hulchanski, 2009).

A combination of research methods was used to confirm the existence of the phenomenon with data collection taking place in the field over a 7-year period to describe and define the characteristics of rural homelessness. The complexities of such a research design underscores the first important conclusion, that for an independent researcher, searching for evidence of homelessness in rural areas takes up an inordinate amount of time and requires a personal commitment to seek out what is hidden. There are barriers to overcome such as long distances between geographical

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sites and the stigma of using the label of homelessness to uncover what was once simply called living in poverty.

Distances to Travel

Although it may seem obvious, recognition of the extra burden experienced by all stakeholders in travelling long distances whether for conducting Steering Committee meetings, public consultations and forums, data gathering, service provision and for those living with homelessness should not be underestimated as a major trial encountered while exploring the nature of rural homelessness. Transportation issues continue to be a feature of country life and a barrier to service provision and longitudinal research in rural areas.

Stigma Associated with Labeling and Statistics

There is a stigma associated with the task of documentation and a resistance that was noted in this study that prompts more reliance on anecdotal information provided by service providers and other members of the community when the "hiddenness" of homelessness is described through narratives. An interesting finding describes surveillance by community members observing the presence of individuals walking along the highways and country roads. Exhibiting a determination to arrive at a destination with intentionality these homeless people often wave, in greeting only, as recounted by service providers. Unique to smaller communities, where people know each other, an individual's privacy is recognized and respected and this surveillance feature is not limited to police but includes community members of the rural areas. Although, people are watching out in non-invasive ways for signs of distress, there is an

element of restraint and non-interference that is contrary to the expected role of service providers but is condoned in reaction to the fierce independence depicted in anecdotes told about strong-willed persons without shelter encountered in the rural areas. This is the dilemma embedded in the concept of mutual aid observed in smaller communities which is deemed to be as non-intrusive as possible while at the same time trying to reach out to the vulnerable.

The definition of rural in this study included the surrounding areas of small towns and villages with populations less than 1,000. There is no reliable statistical source of data to actually count the number of homeless people in rural areas of Simcoe County and no desire to conduct a "count" in smaller communities because of the stigma of "knowing" those who are not willing to use the term homeless to describe their situation as it carries such a label of negativity. Since there are no emergency shelters located in the rural areas of Simcoe County, once again, there is no statistical evidence to establish a quantitative base number of potential users. It is however, confirmed, that emergency shelters are an urban solution not readily applicable or economically feasible because of the sparse population dispersed across vast distances in the rural settings.

Secondary sources from actual health and social services provided have been the most useful in trying to estimate the prevalence of homelessness which is calculated to be over 10,000 persons, a figure which aggregates both rural and urban at a rate about 25% of the total population (County of Simcoe, Social Services Division, 2008). In addition, the literature reveals an "underestimation" of homeless persons because of the hidden nature of sharing a shelter with friends and family on a temporary basis and

there was no reliable way available in Simcoe County to capture this information. Once again evidence provided by the Alliance only confirms the existence of this underestimation through narrative accounts, however, the conclusion that homelessness does exist is undeniable.

Financial Concerns

The strong link between income supports and homelessness, well-established in the literature (Pomeroy, Steele, Hoy, & Stapleton, 2008) has once again been reinforced in this study. Although it is well known that rents and other expenses such as increasing utility rates often exceed social assistance levels, there is a serious gap in understanding that these stringent income policies are a direct cause of housing loss. Many of the characteristics defining homelessness as described in this study were predominantly financial in that neglect of simple budget items such as not being able to pay the hydro bill or make car repairs mean that people are stranded in the countryside without food, heat and/or water and transportation which are indicators of struggles with poverty that often lead to homelessness. One of the first signs of these financial difficulties documented by the Alliance was accessing the assistance available from the Flex Fund. The conclusion is that responses to homelessness in the rural setting must be tailored to individual circumstances with as much sensitivity and flexibility as possible and funds as made available through SCPI and offered to staff at the front lines were invaluable in allowing such a response to occur. Exactly the same finding attributed to the flexible nature of SCPI funding was made in urban areas such as the City of Toronto (Cathy Crowe, 2004).

The Simcoe County Flex Fund is an example of a local social housing policy created to assist in a non-threatening way through an outreach approach that means staff go out to public places to find the families and individuals in need. These funds protect anonymity and help to preserve the basic human right to housing by permitting people to hold onto their existing homes in times of financial crisis.

The culmination of this research effort is to piece together the threads of themes and observations and reflections required when analyzing the qualitative aspects of this type of field study. The challenge and stigma associated with counting and serving those who are homeless provides one explanation for the fact that very little academic attention has been given to this topic to date. This is due, in part, to limited human and financial resources available for this type of research. Excepting studies from outside Canada, no other research has tackled uncovering the hidden aspects of rural homelessness in this way. It concludes that providing permanent supportive housing—subsidized housing in combination with mental health, employment and other support services—for homeless people is less costly than leaving them to a fragmented and expensive system while they're without a home, particularly, when they must leave their rural communities to seek help elsewhere.

Uncovering the Hidden Aspects of Homelessness

For 7 years, this researcher has acted as a participant-observer at public events and interviewed policy-makers at all levels of government, conducted focus groups with community members and service providers, and monitored the literature and media reports on the issue of rural homelessness from a social policy perspective. The

purpose of this effort was to discover the nature of rural homelessness and share what was learned about its hiddenness. Local findings in Simcoe County, Ontario, exhibit some similarities to a case study conducted in Cotswold and Forest of Dean in the United Kingdom that describes the "very invisibility of rural homelessness as constituting the principal barrier to effective policy responses" (Cloke, 2000b, p. 111). According to members of the Alliance, there is no question that the phenomenon of rural homelessness exists in Simcoe County and continuing efforts to make the issue more visible and verify the scope of the problem are ongoing.

Research Objective 2: New Synergies Created

The focus on Simcoe County has been a fascinating case study because of the rapid socio-economic growth and change experienced in this distinct and diverse geography spanning 4,842 square kilometers. Over the period 2000-2007, at the beginning of a new century, much optimism existed in spite of the challenges of rural life. There is no doubt that this is a complex and multifaceted area of research that must take into account the historical, socio-economic, political, and cultural factors present in communities. The issue is not simply the diminishing supply of housing or increasing evidence of poverty; it will not be solved by an ideology based on charity or philanthropy, but calls for a philosophy that embraces everyone's humanity and views housing as part of that humanity. The very nature of this discourse then is political, and it has seen a dramatic shift to a dominant neo-liberal ideology.

To capture the processes that established the Simcoe County Alliance to End Homelessness in 1998 and took place over the following decade was an exciting

venture, as no other organization exists in Canada that compares with its emphasis on

behalf of the rural homeless. In addressing the question: who represents community? it

is clear that this voluntary group, SCATEH, exemplifies the enthusiasm, passion and

high-energy required and has earned the designation to represent the citizens of

Simcoe County through their sponsorship by the United Way and the endorsement of

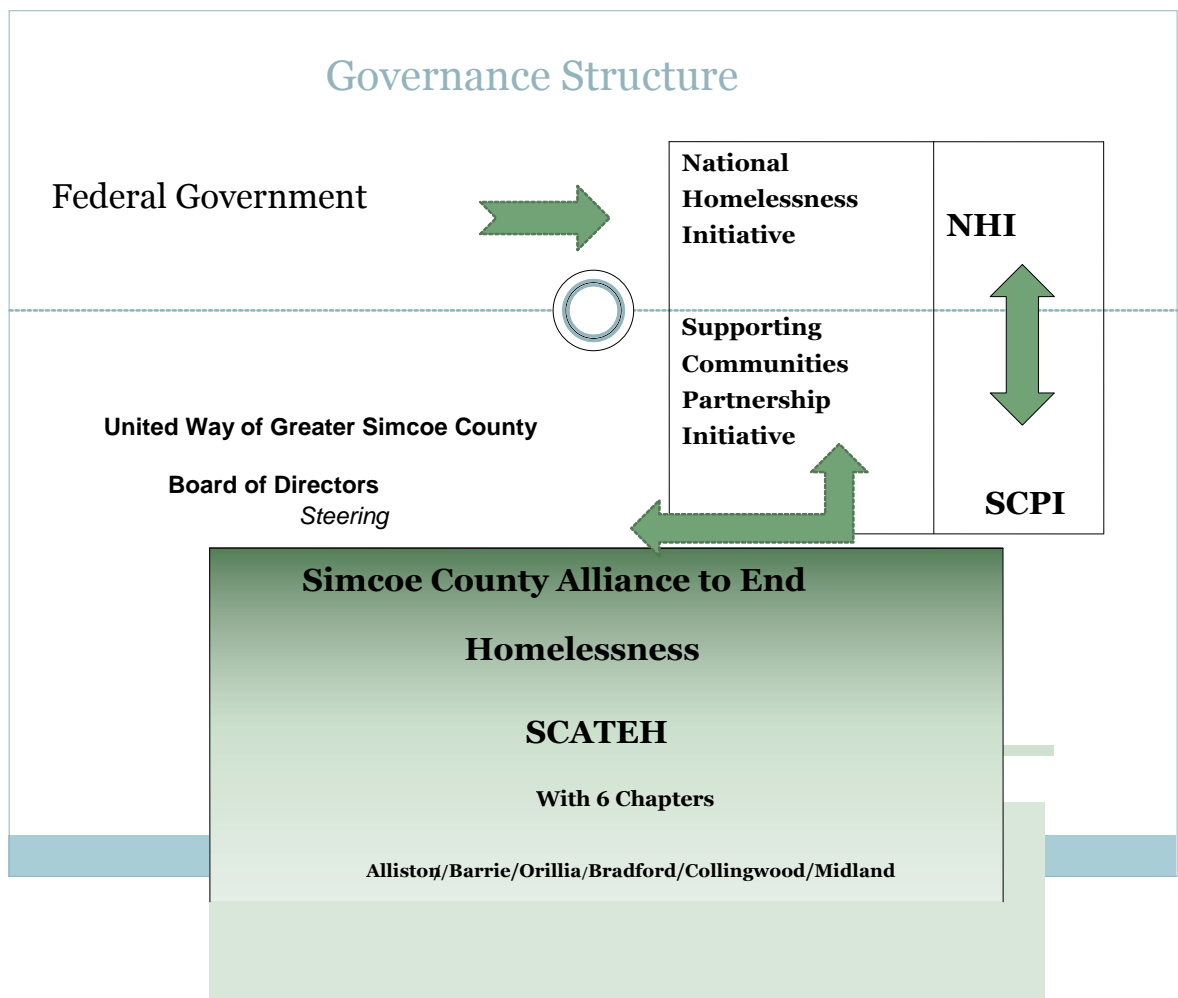over 75 participating stakeholders and partners.

Figure 7. **Governance structure: Creating new synergies.**

This partnering with NHI and the SCPI agreement itself disrupts the usual way of seeing and doing things and allows for the creation of new synergies which have been confirmed in this research and led by the Steering Committee of SCATEH. Examples of new ways to communicate through the development of a website and the use of information technology to conduct community consultations and planning processes were not available across Simcoe County prior to this initiative. Regional disparities and service gaps were documented in the Community Action Plans for the first time. It is also noted that 37 additional supportive housing units had been developed during the SCPI initiative with multi-faith groups and volunteers playing a prominent role as vital community stakeholders. Four ways to access housing stock alternatives were adopted: leasing and/ or purchasing existing buildings that were then renovated; conversion of an old nursing home and new construction of one house.

The conclusion is that new synergies and capacity building with regard to human resources and housing stock did occur as a result of SCPI; overcoming the barrier of scarce human and financial resources; and allowing the grass-roots and top-down approaches to community development the space to intersect successfully.

This participant-observer role of the researcher enabled the observation of capacity building through of innovative practices and policy influence at the local level. However, it is also a disheartening task to document well-designed and sustained advocacy efforts that are locked in a period of political history that has not responded to social justice issues in general.

Political will in rural Ontario is often directed towards protecting the rural idyll. Therefore changing local political mindsets is the foundation to eliciting any policy response in the 21st century. While it is true that governments both Liberal and Conservative have failed in recent decades to meet housing needs, the SCPI experiment opened the way for small groups of volunteers in rural areas to declare their intention to eliminate homelessness. What made one rural community in Ontario respond to this issue when others did not?

This research found no single reason. A series of socio-economic and political factors contributed to the formation of the Simcoe County to End Homelessness, such as: total dedication of time and energy to planning tasks by volunteers and an indirect influence of American policy possibly precipitating the hiring of the first staff coordinator with expertise gained from working in the United States. Another factor was the technical knowledge and application of the information available on the NHI and other Canadian websites, as well as knowledge about the National Alliance on Homelessness in the U.S. and about similar Canadian advocacy organizations. There was a preponderance of well-educated government and non-profit staff employed in local offices and institutional settings who advocate on behalf of clients seeking social housing and supports. In addition, efforts by multi-faith groups helped to create the only new social housing units that were acquired in this community during the study period.

My conclusion is that in Simcoe County the strategy to access SCPI funds proved to be very effective in creating new synergies and influencing capacity building at the local level. Unfortunately the federal program was terminated and therefore additional opportunities to make policy-changes at other levels of government were lost.

Research Objective 3: Policies and Legislation

The timing of the Senate Report on Rural Poverty (2008) coincided with the exploration of my third goal to identify policies, practices and review legislative options to address rural homelessness. Concerns on behalf of declining rural communities have been heard from across the country and demands for attention will require the political will to advance social change through a federal response. By adopting the community-based policy development model, as an educational tool described previously, in Figure 6, groups can be assisted in this practical work. In this case, one option to explore is taking the process to the end stage by calling for Legislative reforms to eliminate homelessness. One possibility, although difficult to achieve because it cuts across both government departments and jurisdictional lines, is to introduce provincial legislation tied to the existing social service system that would mandate every municipality in Canada to be responsible for those who are homeless in their communities. Whether or not this is feasible is beyond the scope of this research and would require a thorough assessment of the political appetite to pursue such a policy goal.

The role of public servants in Simcoe County, as community partners in policy change, was found to be critical as they have the inside track on how to work with politicians in driving a more integrated approach to collaborative policy development on difficult files such as homelessness and poverty. The federal funding of 4 local projects and the 2 Simcoe County government initiatives provides evidence that the internal support of public servants was aligned with the political will to approve funds for this area. Recommendations that flow from these conclusions, then, are contained in a

policy approach that builds on what worked in this case study and calls for social policy reforms to address the underlying causes of homelessness.

Policy Response to Rural Homelessness

1. Implement policies and best practices known locally to tackle the issue directly in rural settings and share these learnings widely.

2. Explore the feasibility of reforming policies that cause homelessness in the first place at all levels of government.

Although giving voice to the marginalized is not for everyone, to those who understand it, it is a powerful motivator that keeps people coming back to the challenge year after year. Examples of best practices such as the flex fund, issuance of motel and food vouchers, mobile units for outreach to the homeless living in the countryside, information available on web sites, etc., are all examples of what can work in rural areas and should be shared widely, not kept secret. Members of the SCATEH steering committee reflect deeply held convictions that wherever they live they have a responsibility to engage in communicative action. To quote the chair of the Alliance: "It is difficult to legislate compassion, but some elected officials have 'no heart' nor will they address this kind of fringe-of-society issue unless they are forced to by law" (Personal interview with Rick Jones, Chair of SCAETH, May 6, 2008).

Advocates and practitioners know how policies and best practices can be strengthened and that by directly influencing policy on a local level they share their

contributions in a tangible way through these community plans and the introduction of prevention policies.

It is well known that legislation governing income support and access to housing needs attention in the form of revision to address prevention issues pertaining to the most vulnerable clients in the system (Pomeroy, Steele, Hoy, & Stapleton, 2008). It is with reluctance that advocates promote legislative reforms, seen as the last resort when voluntary incentives and progressive ideas fail. Amendments can be introduced to mitigate against the conditions that surround evictions, even smoking bylaws can be examined for possible exemptions for at risk of losing their housing, all it takes is the political will and then resources to be made available to effect the directions. The challenge is convincing policy-makers that investment in these issues is a worthwhile endeavour otherwise it is unlikely that action will be forthcoming.

In accordance with the findings of Imagine Canada (formerly the Canadian Centre for Philanthropy, 2004) this study confirms that rural organizations such as SCATEH lack the financial resources to invest in ongoing training, fundraising, and information technology, and therefore volunteerism alone may not be sufficient to afford the communities the capacity required to sustain their response to complex issues such as homelessness.

In his Conference keynote address to the Growing Home: Housing and Homelessness in Canada national meeting, held in Calgary, Hulchanski (February, 2009) concludes that action must be take place at three levels: the level of individuals and families; the community level, with initiatives at local and municipal level; and the

macro (federal and provincial) level, where the resources—for the most part, our tax dollars—are located (Hulchanski, 2009, p. 5).

As mentioned already there are reforms needed at both the provincial and local level to prevent homelessness in the first place and reinforcing this important role for government is paramount to solving homelessness.

If the policy development process itself is to be enhanced, two phases must be recognized: the developmental phase, which may take years of effort to create the strategies, and the action phase, which requires political intervention and goes well beyond the faulty quick-fix approach of the SCPI experiment. History teaches that prosperity and well-being, like peace, must be shared if they are to be maintained, according to the authors of "Sustainable Development in a Dynamic World". In that World Bank document, they argue that a mere two generations—50 years—is enough to eliminate all poverty and move to a more sustainable development path that guarantees housing for the most vulnerable in society around the globe. Canada, a relatively new country, is experiencing a rapid increase in homelessness within just one generation; therefore, this situation should be reversible in relatively short order if the will to protect the extremely vulnerable and prevent homelessness for all Canadians is present.

Social Housing Policy and Rurality Revisited

The current challenge is to prevent homelessness at the same time as preserving and renovating existing housing stock or else we will end up losing more shelter options and move further on our way to recreating the slums of the past. It

comes as no surprise that affordable social housing stock is shrinking in rural areas. According to the Senate report on rural poverty (Senate Committee, 2008), rural Canada plays a vital role in the nation's ecological sustainability. It is the place that filters and disposes of urban pollution and garbage, manages watersheds and provides space where urban dwellers can escape the confines, congestion, and crime of the city. Perhaps, most importantly, rural Canada provides another way of living, a slower paced, friendlier, and more community-oriented life in harmony with the natural environment. An increasing number of urban Canadians are recognizing these advantages; they are buying second homes in the country as places of retreat or to enjoy vacations outside the GTA and then frequently relocating to the rural setting on a permanent basis. Some of the rural population decline is being offset by an influx of young families and retirees looking to take advantage of what rural areas have to offer.

The community capacity building potential of rural areas must not be overlooked by policy-makers. The Senate committee recommended a greater federal presence in rural Canada and this sentiment is reflected in comments made by the former Liberal minister Claudette Bradshaw about SCPI: "It worked and allowed smaller towns and rural communities to grapple with the homelessness issue" (Personal interview, September 9, 2008). In order to move from an experiment to a solid national housing policy the resources and bureaucratic structure must be reinstated under the federal government's mandate.

True partnerships take time, energy, goodwill and the involvement of all stakeholders, as demonstrated in this dissertation. Social housing policy would thus be carefully integrated into the ongoing overall municipal planning. The thinking behind a

national policy framework is well-established, but a prevailing reluctance to interfere with the free market in housing persists even today in Canada, and the political will related to housing continues to waver (Hulchanski, 2004; Shapcott, 2004. Quality housing contributes so fundamentally to well-being that investments may yield savings in other areas of social policy – for example, health, education, immigration, and income security (Carter & Polevychok, 2004).

The purpose of this thesis has been to examine homelessness in the rural context as an important but hidden social issue of the 21st century in Canada. Exploring the meaning and complexities of the term "homeless" has provided a clearer understanding of how preserving a community-based policy development process allows volunteers and practitioners to play an important part in holding up the social safety net for those with no fixed address.

Limitations and Future Research

Examining rural responses to homelessness in Ontario using a multi-method research design to collect both quantitative and qualitative data has its limitations. There are three components to the research design: first, a policy review, a broad look at the policy agenda framework in Canada; then, a case study to illustrate implementation issues related to the National Homelessness Initiative; and, finally, a reflection on current practice in order to realize a holistic and multi-dimensional approach to the critique of public policy. Capturing the complexities of this approach is a research challenge because of the interactions of many layers of variables in the socio-political and economic realms under consideration.

One of the first obstacles was deciding on a definition of homelessness that reflected the reality of the rural setting and clarified the contextual meaning of the word. More exploratory work is needed in this area to make the conceptual definition include everyone rather than using an exclusive definition that by default misses many homeless people that are hidden. One example, is exploring in future, the fine line between homelessness and the concept of *intentionality* as it relates to personal choice, alternate life style and survival traditions and historical origins of living life on the land and close to nature. Anecdotal evidence of intentionality was found in the Aboriginal community in Simcoe County where many families fled to the bush or to the surrounding islands of Georgian Bay to escape the view of those purporting the residential school policies of the federal government in the 20th century (North Simcoe Focus Group, 2005). However, very little is documented about how the concept of intentionality has evolved or how it is regarded today and further exploration would be extremely beneficial as a contribution to the research on homelessness and capacity building.

In conducting such a research project, as an independent researcher, it was not practical to entertain a wide scope of geographical areas so a case study of only one county, located near the Greater Toronto Area, was chosen as the research site. This limits the generalizability of the results as does the selection of only one community group, The Simcoe County Alliance to End Homelessness. Future research needs to select more sites from across the country to seek other examples of diverse communities developing their own unique policies and shelter solutions.

Alternative examples of providing support on an intimate scale, such as the Bed and Breakfast (B & B) idea in the U.K. which is comparable to the boarding home with

meals concept in Ontario need to be revisited (Cloke et al., 2001). It may mean that new shelter options to replace the original low-income lodging homes in rural Ontario settings could be called Bed & Breakfasts and marketed to various sub-groupings of those who find themselves without a home allowing for needed flexibility for those who continue to move frequently. This B & B concept may also be developed to support families struggling to assist homeless family members and requires more investigation.

The reason this study of Simcoe County makes an important contribution is that it raises awareness about the vital role various partners across communities can play in shaping policies such as introducing a Flex Fund to prevent evictions and issuing motel vouchers instead of using emergency shelters which are not seen as desirable by those who are both vulnerable and homeless. These types of prevention policies in rural settings are then available as a demonstration to share and ultimately influence other jurisdictional levels and other regions. This is a powerful tool for capacity building and learning about unique smaller-scale shelter solutions and one of the outcomes of this dissertation is to share these best practices and lessons learned.

Similarly, while efforts were made to include a broad cross-section of persons informed about homelessness in the targeted community, no claim is made that all relevant experiences or opinions are represented. It is essential to include the voices of homeless people, themselves, and I relied on secondary sources to supply this component. Current best practice includes incentives for participation such as honorariums to attend interviews and focus groups and funds for this reimbursement will be key to expanding participant numbers and increasing sample sizes. No such funds were available for this study. Ways to be more inclusive of persons with lived

experience in the planning and design as well as implementation of community studies would be the ideal for consideration in future research projects. However, despite these limitations, the study confirmed that homelessness exists in the countryside and that building capacity to respond to this issue is indeed possible as long as housing, income and support services are integrated into the overall policy response.

There is no time to lose in conducting more experiments or documenting what we already know, it is now time to act with intentionality to help people improve the quality of their lives and preserve the well-being of a given community in rural settings across Canada.

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OISE UT Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of
the University of Toronto

Chair,

Steering Committee, Simcoe County Alliance to End Homelessness

Dear Chair _____ :

Re: Request to Attend Steering Committee

I am a doctoral student at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto. Under the supervision of Dr. Jack Quarter, I am conducting a research project about rural responses to homelessness in Ontario from 2000 to 2007. I am writing to request permission to attend the next Steering Committee to make a presentation on my study and to seek your approval to interview members as key stakeholders about their roles in creating the Community Action Plan and to conduct focus groups in the SCAETH chapter locations with a view to exploring the implementation and outcomes of the SCPI project. This should take up no more than 30 minutes on your agenda and I will follow-up with participants who are interested after the meeting.

The role of Simcoe County Alliance to End Homelessness, its governance model and processes followed under the SCPI agreement is unique in Ontario. You and your organization's viewpoint, and therefore, your involvement in this study, is essential in providing a more detailed and balanced account of how SCPI has influenced national social housing policy development and what the actual experiences of stakeholder groups has been locally.

The benefits of your participation will guarantee the inclusion of your views in a larger study of rural responses to homelessness and add to the body of knowledge on this subject. The risks of taking part in this study are minimal, in that you have an absolute right to confidentiality. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you can withdraw at any time.

I would appreciate being able to tape all interviews and focus groups to ensure the accuracy of the information and I will take detailed notes. At the end of this project all tapes and notes and transcripts will be erased.

Upon completion, I will send you a copy of the report of the study so that you can assess the results. You can contact me directly at the number below if you have any questions or call Dr. Jack Quarter, my supervisor at 416-923-6641.

Thank you for your assistance, I sincerely hope that you will agree to my attendance at the next Steering Committee meeting and I look forward to speaking with you.

Yours truly

Brenda M. Elias, Doctoral candidate, 905-584-2525

Cc. Dr. Jack Quarter

Appendix B
List of Study Participants

Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of
the University of Toronto

List of those to be Interviewed and/or included in a Focus Group from the

Simcoe County Alliance to End Homelessness

Steering Committee and representatives of the 3 Chapters

- The Chairperson
- A business partner
- A senior official from the mental health sector
- A senior official from the social service sector
- A senior official from the housing sector
- A leader in the faith community

Staff Support to the Alliance

- Alliance Coordinator (s)
- Executive Director (s) of the United Way of Greater Simcoe County

Government

- A senior public servant with the National Homelessness Initiative
- A senior public servant with the Province of Ontario
- A senior public servant with Simcoe County
- The Cabinet Minister responsible for the National Homelessness Initiative

Request to Participate in a Focus Group Interview

 Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of
the University of Toronto

Dear Focus Group Participant:

Re: Request to Participate in a Focus Group Interview

I am a doctoral student in the Department of Adult Education and Counselling Psychology at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto. Under the supervision of Dr. Jack Quarter, I am conducting a research project about rural responses to homelessness in Ontario covering the time period from 2000 to 2007.

You and your organization's viewpoint, and therefore, your involvement in this study, is essential in providing a more detailed and balanced account of how social housing policy is developed, and what the actual experiences of stakeholder groups has been in the National Homelessness Initiative.

The benefits of your participation will guarantee the inclusion of your views in a larger study of rural responses to homelessness and add to the body of knowledge on this subject. The risks of taking part in this study are minimal, in that you have an absolute right to confidentiality. You will be provided with a copy of the signed consent form. Any identifying information can be altered for the purposes of this study, and pseudonyms can also be used. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary, without compensation and you can withdraw at any time. The interview will take about 30 minutes and will be conducted at a location most convenient to you in Simcoe County and/or by teleconference, if that is more suitable to your schedule.

I would appreciate being able to tape our interview to ensure the accuracy of the information and I will take detailed notes. Only myself and my supervisor, Dr. Jack Quarter will have access to the data collected and I will keep it in a locked cabinet in my office. At the end of this project, by January 2010 all tapes and notes and transcripts will be erased.

Upon completion, I will send you a copy of the report of the study so that you can assess the results. In addition, presentations and scholarly articles may be generated from this thesis and will be made available to you, upon request. You can contact me directly at the number below if you have any questions or call Dr. Jack Quarter, my supervisor at 416-923-6641.

Thank you for your assistance, I sincerely hope that you will agree to participate and I look forward to speaking with you.

Yours truly

Brenda M. Elias, Doctoral candidate, 905-584-2525

Cc. Dr. Jack Quarter

Appendix D

Consent Form

OISE UT   Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of
the University of Toronto

Consent to Participate

      I agree to participate in the study of Rural Responses to Homelessness conducted by Brenda Elias who is a doctoral candidate at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto. I understand that information I provide will be taped and will be kept in strictest confidence. The information will be used to identify the unique features of social housing policy development and the impact of partnerships supported by the National Housing Initiative in rural areas. I have read the accompanying information sheet, Appendix A.

      I also understand that I may choose not to respond to questions and may withdraw from this interview at any time. All materials from this interview will be destroyed once the study is completed.

_____   _____
Signature   Date

_____
Brenda M. Elias, Witness

OISE UT   Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of
the University of Toronto

Brenda Elias, a student researcher, is looking for volunteers from the Steering Committee to participate in a focus group discussion about how the local Community Action Plan was developed and adopted by the Simcoe County Alliance to End Homelessness.

The purpose of this research project is to explore how rural responses to homelessness were developed and implemented under the SCPI initiative in Ontario from 2000 to 2007.

You and your organization's viewpoint, and therefore, your involvement in this study, is essential in providing a more detailed and balanced account of how social housing policy is developed, whether federal programs such as NHI and SCPI are effective and what the actual experiences of local stakeholder groups has been.

If you are interested in hearing more about the focus group. Brenda Elias will be attending our regular monthly meeting on _____, 2007 and will be available to answer any questions about the study.

Participation in the study is strictly voluntary. If you have any questions, please feel free to call Brenda at (905-584-2525)

Appendix F

Proposed Interview Questions

A.   Review of the SCPI Agreement/ Terms and Conditions.

1) How was the Governance Model chosen for the Simcoe County Alliance to End Homelessness?

2) What was the process followed in making funding decisions?

B.   Review of the Community Action Plan

1) Who were the champions that promoted the plan?

2) Were prevention strategies adopted at an early stage?

3) Were the support services enhanced with additional staff, resources, and improvements in coordination?

4) Were training programs implemented? Who participated?

5) Was the capacity building measurable? Best practices adopted?

6) Evidence of any new directions/innovations present in the communities? How was the hidden aspect of reaching out to homeless persons addressed?

7) How was public awareness of the issues addressed?

C.   Role of Governments

1) What was the level of commitment and participation?

Appendix G

Simcoe County Alliance to End Homelessness Goals

Simcoe County Alliance to End Homelessness (SCATEH) is a coalition of over 70 community stakeholders who are committed to developing and implementing strategies that will eliminate homelessness.

Established in December 1998, membership in the Alliance is open to individuals or organizations in Simcoe County who share this vision. The Alliance is governed by a Steering Committee of approximately 20 organizational representatives. The Alliance holds general membership planning sessions twice each year. Co-ordination of SCATEH is a project of the Simcoe County Alliance to End Homelessness. It is administered by the United Way of Greater Simcoe County.

GOALS:

1. To increase public awareness of the impact of homelessness on the community and our determination to end it.

2. To increase understanding of the changing nature and causes of homelessness.

3. To create intervention and prevention strategies to end homelessness.

4. To advocate for the creation of safe, affordable housing.

5. To help coordinate a network of supports for those in housing crisis, as well as a support network for those working with people who are homeless.

Appendix H

Sub-Population Groups Served by

National Homelessness Initiative Funded Projects

Appendix H

Sub-population Groups Served by
National Homelessness Initiative Funded Projects

Data has been collected on the sub-populations served in sheltering facilities, support facilities and by support services. These sub-populations range from youth at-risk to immigrants and refugees. The following table provides a breakdown of the sub-populations served by NHI-funded sheltering facilities, support facilities and support services from December 1999 to March 2004.

Table 6: Sub-population Groups Served by NHI Funded Projects

Sub-population Group	Percentage of NHI-funded Projects Identifying this Sub-population Group as a Major Client (of projects that reported on sub-population)
All Potential Sub-population Groups*	31.5%
Aboriginal Persons	12.8%
Ethno-Specific Group(s)	0.6%
Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual Persons	1.1%
Immigrants/Refugees	1.2%
Offenders/Ex-Offenders	3.5%
Persons in the Sex Trade	2.1%
Persons w. Developmental Disabilities	1.5%
Persons w. Dual/Multiple Diagnoses	2.2%
Persons w. HIV/AIDS	1.6%
Persons w. Mental Health Problems	6.2%
Persons w. Physical Disabilities	1.8%
Substance Abusers	6.9%
Veterans**	0.2%
Victims of Domestic Violence	4.3%
Visible Minorities	1.7%
Youth at-risk	16.5%
Other	4.2%
Total	**100 %**

*Community organizations whose project served more than three sub-populations were asked to select All Potential Sub-population Groups.
** Only sheltering facilities were asked to report on the veteran sub-population.

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National Projects by Activity Area

National Homelessness Initiative funding is provided in support of five major activity areas: sheltering facilities, support facilities, provision of support services, community capacity building, and public awareness.

Some projects addressed multiple activities - for example, one project may fund both a shelter and the support services provided within that shelter. In this case, the project is counted under both sheltering facilities and provision of support services.

Table 5: NHI Project Activity Areas

Activity Area	Number of Projects Addressing this Area	Percentage of Projects Addressing this Area	Description
Sheltering Facilities	772	26%	Funding was provided in support of the development and/or renovation of emergency shelters, transitional housing, supportive housing, and other sheltering facilities.
Support Facilities	417	14%	Funding was provided in support of the development and/or renovation of facilities including food depots/banks, clothing and furniture depots/banks, drop-in centres, soup kitchens, etc.
Provision of Support Services	978	32.9%	Funding was provided in support of the development and/or enhancement of new or existing support services for homeless and at-risk persons, including housing, material, transportation, info/referral/follow-up, psycho-social services, health, education and life skills, training/employment, legal/financial services, assistance with ID documents, etc.
Capacity Building	583	19.6%	Funding was provided in support of local research/studies, community plan development, development of training materials/activities, direct delivery of training, support for development and/or management of projects, enhanced coordination of services within/among organization(s), etc.
Public Awareness	222	7.5%	Funding was provided in support of activities directly focused at enhancing public awareness of homelessness and homelessness-related issues. These activities include production of tools/documents for public awareness, public awareness activities, etc.
Total	2972	100%	

Capacity Building Activities

Figure 10: Capacity Building Activities

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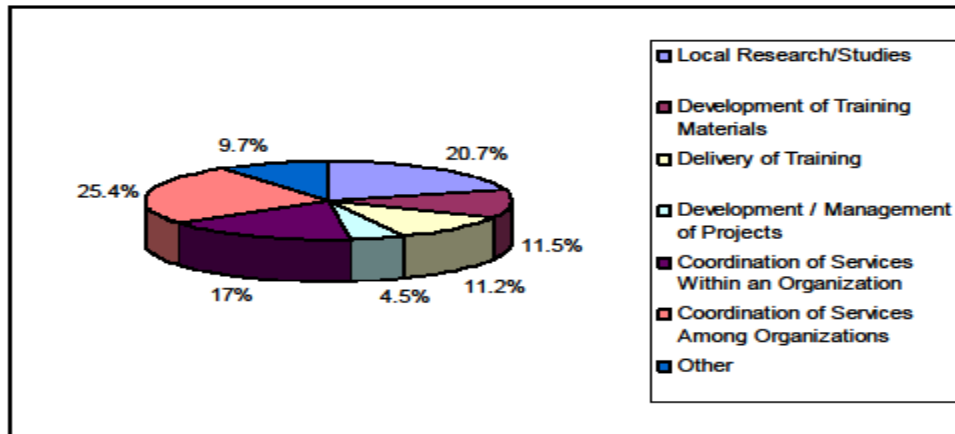
Appendix K

Journalistic View of Homelessness

Table K1 presents an analysis of 125 articles collected during this research project that include stories of the homeless by 32 Canadian feature reporters. These stories are about human interest themes, survival, court cases related to murders and assaults on homeless persons, and obituaries of the most vulnerable. This list is not exhaustive, but rather a selection of articles that appeared during the period of study.

The concept of intentionality is explored through media articles. To illustrate one category called youth at-risk, stories are told about youth who are experimenting with life on the street after having fled their homes and family life and then often coming into conflict with the law as a result of anti-vagrancy and panhandling bylaws.

Unusual situations such as stories about individuals and their pets living in airports and other public places, travelers without permanent homes, and other examples of transient lifestyle activities make up interesting story lines. Some of the more extreme attempts to establish living spaces are even supported by neighborhood residents in response to the often tragic circumstances of one homeless person. Communities appear to have a higher tolerance for problem solving to deal with a singular, known situation than they do for establishing broader public policies that would apply to all situations.

Also articles were collected on innovative models of inexpensive shelter solutions such as recycled rail cars, boxes, recreational and mobile units, small temporary emergency units used in natural disasters such as hurricanes, various forms of camping, small suites, cottages, and even tree houses. The possibilities are as endless as the imagination. I have called this the journalistic view of homelessness because I believe the media has contributed to understandings and explanations of homelessness not previously possible before the advent of electronic and instant reporting. This has assisted groups in registering their intentions and seeking action through strong communication strategies. Of particular note are articles in the People Coordinator section of *The Orillia Packet & Times* written by student reporters from Georgian College and by the past-president of United Senior Citizens of Ontario who writes a regular column (source: personal interview with Shirley Paterson-Dmytruk , November 2, 2005).

Table K1

Journalistic View of Homelessness (1999 -2008)

Type of article	Theme	Number collected
Feature reporters*	Human interest stories	71
		(plus 44 photos and 2 cartoons**)
Letters to editors		19
Social justice / Advocacy		9
Special reports		26
	Total	125

Note. * **Source: Local reporters with *The Barrie-Examiner*, *The Orillia Packet & Times*, *Orillia Today*, *Midland Mirror*, *Bradford Times* and Canadian Press reporters with *The Toronto Star*, *The Globe and Mail*, *Toronto Sun*, *National Post*, , *The Province (BC)*, *Calgary Herald*, and *Edmonton Journal*.**
** **Homelessness is usually treated sensitively, with photos occasionally used as a reminder of the reality of street life. Homeless is not regarded as a laughing matter, therefore cartoons are not generally in evidence.**

Table K1 attempts to quantify the forms of coverage. It has limitations as a research method because this summary represents a random collection of articles that occurred over the period of this research. It is not a comprehensive review but a select sample of articles and reports filed by different journalists. Four types of articles are arranged into themes, which were identified and defined as features, letters to editors and editorials, social justice and advocacy topics, and special reports. Also the articles reveal stories about compassionate acts, artwork and information graphics, tragic circumstances, assaults, obituaries, murders, survival struggles: man-made vs. natural disasters and intentionality.