Nothing about us without us:
Centering lived experience and revolutionary care in efforts to end and prevent homelessness in Canada

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Abstract

Following the efforts of Disability-Justice advocates who have fought for decades for the representation of people with disabilities in matters that impact them, this paper considers the importance of centering people with lived experience of homelessness and housing insecurity in efforts to end and prevent homelessness. This paper has three interrelated goals: situating the work being done by activists with lived experience of homelessness within broader homelessness prevention and housing rights advocacy in Canada; outlining the importance of centering voices of lived experience in research and advocacy contexts, focusing on both 'naming' power and privilege in advocacy work, and navigating embodied knowledge and epistemic authority; and highlighting the ethics of 'care' (as theorized by disability and feminist scholars) as fundamental to the process of doing radical and justice-oriented work. To accomplish this, this paper examines two oppositional faces of 'care'–*anonymous care*, structured by the demands of neoliberal capitalism, and a potential antidote, *revolutionary care*. The paper draws on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in 2017 in Whitehorse, Yukon Territory to contextualize lived experience self-advocacy. Additional examples are drawn from the new Canadian Lived Experience Leadership Network, as well as the author's lived experience of homelessness and activist work in the context of homelessness prevention. Ultimately, this paper offers a critique of efforts to include lived experts in the fight to end and prevent homelessness that, despite good intentions, often reproduces power imbalances–suggesting mutual, reciprocal, revolutionary care as one possible path forward. Power operates in subtle ways in advocacy contexts as an unintended driver of exclusion and discrimination. Recognizing and disrupting this dynamic is integral to the goals of ending and preventing homelessness and achieving housing justice in Canada.

Keywords
Homelessness, lived experience, Disability Justice, revolutionary care, Northern Canada

Introduction

'Nothing about us without us,' proclaims the now ubiquitous slogan popularized by the Disability-Justice movement in the 1990s (Charlton, 1998, p. 16). This phrase was successfully mobilized by early disability activists in social and political contexts to contest the influence of ableist and exploitative institutions, systems, and structures on the lives and voices of people with disabilities. It foregrounds instead the agentic and active capacity of people with disabilities to advocate for themselves. Primarily mobilized in the context of policymaking, the slogan extends to other advocacy efforts, including work within the non-profit sector, and even in academic research.

I begin this paper with this concept that unabashedly calls for the dismantling of pernicious notions of 'vulnerability' and 'feebleness' downloaded onto disability communities, because the slogan has since found footing in the advocacy efforts of communities with similar histories of facing systemic oppression, and groups with identities that intersect with disability–in particular, activists with lived experience of homelessness. Beyond embracing the slogan 'Nothing about us without us', communities of people with lived experience of homelessness have indirectly and directly taken up many of the principles of Disability-Justice in their experience-centered advocacy work: commitment to leadership by those most impacted, and an emphasis on mutual care, solidarity, and interdependence (Sins Invalid, 2015). The desires, motivations, and social, political, economic, historical, and lived contexts of homelessness and disability self-advocacy are different, and it is important to draw on the work of disability scholars without collapsing or erasing these distinctions. Though compounded by structural oppression, including ableism and sanism, the lived reality of disability also represents a site of embodied difference. Dismantling systemic and structural barriers will not change the embodied truth of my own and others' disabilities. My intention in placing these distinct movements for self-advocacy in dialogue is to lay bare the significant and informative ways in which the principles of Disability-Justice reverberate through homelessness lived experience movements, and can provide lessons for inclusive change as movements based in lived experience continue to grow. With increasing frequency, research, policy, and advocacy work across Canada is being done in collaboration with people with lived experience of homelessness. The lines between these domains are continuously blurred, as organizations and agencies conduct or produce their own studies, and as academics increasingly partake in community-engaged research. Though not new, robust collaboration represents an ethical best practice for work related to homelessness and housing insecurity. The work of ending and preventing homelessness requires the active involvement of people with lived experience of homelessness, but to ethically engage lived experts in this project necessitates deliberate thought and care.

I intend, with this paper, to provide researchers, policymakers, and activists with an ethical framework for engaging with colleagues and collaborators with lived experience of homelessness. I raise uncomfortable questions, and challenge people who have not experienced homelessness to reflect critically on the ways in which power and privilege can shape the dynamics of these interactions. I open this paper by briefly exploring experiences of and responses to homelessness in the Canadian context. Here I consider in broad strokes

the mechanisms and drivers that shape homelessness today, as this framework holds implications for approaches to ending and preventing homelessness. I then discuss the importance of centering voices of lived experience in research and advocacy contexts, focusing on both 'naming' power and privilege in advocacy work, and navigating embodied knowledge and epistemic authority. Here I consider the example of the Canadian Lived Experience Leadership Network (CLELN) to explore the ways in which lived expert groups have mobilized to address gaps in the policy and housing landscape. Power operates in subtle ways in advocacy contexts as an unintended driver of exclusion and discrimination. Recognizing and disrupting this dynamic is integral to the goals of achieving housing justice and confronting homelessness. Finally, I consider the ethics of 'care' as fundamental to the process of doing radical and justice-oriented work. To do this, I examine two oppositional faces of 'care'–*anonymous care*, structured by the demands of neoliberal capitalism, and its antidote, *revolutionary care.* Revolutionary care, in practice, demands an orientation towards 'naming' systemic oppression, and establishing trusting, respectful relationships with lived experts in collective efforts. It also involves movement beyond inclusion and consultation, towards more robust forms of collaboration. Work that prioritizes anti-hegemonic 'care' has always been important in the context of navigating relationships with people in the midst of homelessness, though it is often critically underrecognized and undervalued in neoliberal institutions. I conclude this section with a discussion of practices that organizations should consider while engaging with lived experts in collaborative spaces.

Drawing on the work of theorists such as Sara Ahmed, Vikki Reynolds, Paulo Freire, Mariana Ortega, and Lisa Stevenson (among others), I consider the long history of thinking about knowledge(s) and truth(s) as phenomena rooted in bodily experience. Having experienced many years of homelessness myself, I stand in sometimes contradictory worlds. I am both an academic researcher–an anthropologist–and an activist engaged in both national and community-level lived experience advocacy movements to end homelessness. I draw examples from my own experiences as a lived expert engaged at the national level in homelessness prevention work, as well as from my 2017 Anthropology MA research in Whitehorse, Yukon studying gender, homelessness, and policymaking. Further, I consider perspectives from a variety of intellectual traditions, and intentionally privilege those who favour–albeit critically–embodied expertise. I primarily ground my reflections in feminist theory, Disability Studies and Disability-Justice, wherein people have been thinking through the relationships between voice, self-representation, and justice for decades. I seek to highlight the relevance of these intellectual and activist traditions as modes of inquiry for unpacking homelessness self-advocacy, and to glean best-practices for building care into research methodologies. As a person who is new to both the discursive space offered by Disability Studies and Disability-Justice, and new to understanding myself as a person with a disability, I have found this immense archive of literature, theory, art, and emotion to be overwhelmingly insightful in exploring the ways in which advocacy efforts can perform the work of justice-doing alongside people with lived expertise of homelessness.

'Ending homelessness' in Canada

There are many aspects of, and points of entry into homelessness prevention and housing justice: academics doing community-engaged research; community organizers and activists doing frontline and on-the-ground work; people engaging in policy-reformation from a critical, feminist, and anti-capitalist standpoint. All of this work offers the potential for change that justice-based movements pursue. Here I focus on the texture of homelessness prevention and housing justice work at the intersection of academic research and broader non-profit advocacy-work. In all facets of work to end homelessness, the importance of centring voices of lived experience remains a cornerstone of pursuing justice. In the landscape of Canadian homelessness-prevention discourse, 'lived expert', 'person with lived experience', or 'first voice' are mobilized as catch-all terms used to signify that a person has in some capacity survived homelessness, and therefore possesses a unique and important type of knowledge or insight on the topic.[1] Lived experts have historically been excluded from taking part in decision and policy-making processes; their expertise often goes unacknowledged and undervalued, which is compounded by the stigma surrounding homelessness.

A challenge presented by mobilizing lived experience in the context of advocacy is that homelessness is an inherently multi-faceted experience: there is no universal set of shared experiences that the term encompasses.[2] There exist myriad causes, consequences and realities of homelessness–some directly related to housing issues, and others not. According to a 2016 report produced jointly by Canada's two largest research and advocacy groups, the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness (COH), and the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness (CAEH), at least 235,000 people experience homelessness in Canada each year, and 35,000 people experience homelessness on any given night (Gaetz et al., 2016). Their joint report also suggests that the face of homelessness is changing. Once primarily characterized by white, single men, today greater numbers of women, youth, and families are increasingly becoming homeless.

The main model of confronting homelessness in Canada is a housing-oriented policy and practice framework, known as 'Housing First' (HF). HF is characterized by the rapid rehousing of people who become homeless, without first requiring additional qualifying criteria—including seeking various forms of 'treatment'—be met. HF—alongside *non-*

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[1] Unless otherwise specified, I use these terms as shorthand throughout this paper to refer to people with lived experience of all forms of homelessness, forced eviction, and housing insecurity. I use both 'homelessness' and 'housing insecurity' throughout this paper. While these are closely related terms, they refer to distinct (though often overlapping) realities. The term 'homelessness' refers to a wide array of experiences, and encapsulates their social, structural, and institutional causes and consequences. Housing insecurity refers more specifically to the continuum of precarious forms of accommodation that can characterize experiences of homelessness.

[2] The Canadian Definition of Homelessness describes homelessness as 'the situation of an individual or family without stable, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect, means and ability of acquiring it. It is the result of systemic or societal barriers, a lack of affordable and appropriate housing, the individual/household's financial, mental, cognitive, behavioural or physical challenges, and/or racism and discrimination. Most people do not choose to be homeless, and the experience is generally negative, unpleasant, stressful and distressing' (Mechan, 2018, p. 5).

compulsory access to supports, training, and resources—has become what many deem a 'best-practice' in Canada and the United States (Gaetz et al., 2013). Where previous policy frameworks meant to confront homelessness have fallen short of adequately tackling housing insecurity, evidence suggests most people who are rapidly rehoused through HF *remain* housed through the program (Gaetz et al., 2013, p. 12). While promising as a harm-reduction policy program, HF alone does not tackle the root, structural factors that undergird pathways to homelessness. For this reason Canadian experts, including former UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Housing Leilani Farha, Métis scholar and lived expert Jesse Thistle, and both the CAEH and COH call for multi-pronged approaches that take structural change as their 'backbone' (Gaetz et al, 2016, p. 21). Experiences of homelessness are compounded by structural and systemic factors such as colonialism, ableism, sanism, racism, and cis-heterosexism. HF is only one component of a comprehensive strategy to 'end homelessness'. The term 'ending homelessness' itself refers to a specific program of action against homelessness, which is characterized by particular agenda items: developing an action plan with measurable goals and a specific timeline; planning to reduce or eliminate chronic and veteran homelessness; increasing investment in infrastructure; and coordinating community efforts to support people who become homeless (Built for Zero Canada, 2020). Despite significant advances, existing research, practice and policymaking regarding homelessness is still often implicitly rooted in notions of individual pathology, or the flawed logic that people experiencing homelessness have just 'made bad choices' that need to be rehabilitated. The multiple, interconnected means of addressing homelessness do not exist in a vacuum: interventions and the philosophies they are based on come 'from somewhere'. Like homelessness itself, they exist in a political, social, historical and economic context. Research, advocacy, and the policymaking process more broadly, represent constantly negotiated sites of power, wherein ideas about homelessness are made and remade. In tandem with programs like HF that emphasize a robust reinvestment in housing, the change we need is structural.

Considering the implications of lived expertise in research and advocacy

The inclusion of 'people with lived experience' in academic and social justice advocacy work has become a benchmark of conducting ethical research–in part due to the tireless work of activists from a wide array of justice-based and anti-oppression movements compelling shifts in political and social awareness. What is also clear, however, is that in well-intended efforts to conduct 'good' work, researchers can find themselves unintentionally perpetuating and reinforcing hegemonic systems of power and oppression. To be a researcher–and even, to some extent, an advocate–is to wield some degree of power over the narrative produced and the rewards that come with it. The question of engaging with lived experience, ultimately, is a question of voice and epistemic authority. People who experience homelessness are conditioned–both by pervasive public attitudes, and by the organizations and institutions that we interact with–to internalize sole blame and responsibility for our lived realities. Beyond gaining a supportive community of friends and role models, working with other lived experts has helped me reorient the feelings of shame and guilt I had internalized around my own experiences of homelessness, towards political

action. It is through lived experts that I have come to recognize the importance of lived experience representation at all levels of decision-making, research, and advocacy about homelessness and housing justice–including within my own doctoral research project. I have a responsibility to open space in academic and advocacy contexts for more lived experts, and to work collectively to reduce barriers to participation in these spaces. The importance of accessing collective knowledge of navigating institutions is fundamental to the thriving of lived experience networks. The efforts of lived experience groups operating across Canada are part of a much larger conversation concerning the nature of representation in advocacy movements. Their work offers an important jumping-off point from which to interrogate and reframe power, authority, voice, and privilege in the pursuit of justice.

CLELN, a newly formed national coalition of lived experts, represents one of the many networks of activists with lived experience of homelessness operating in Canada.[3] CLELN launched in 2020 as an allied network of the CAEH, to oversee and advise their activities through the lens of lived experience. The demand for a national lived experience network is high. Within the first month of CLELN's launch, membership jumped to over 200 lived experts and continues to grow. Lived experience of housing insecurity is an absolutely vital perspective in confronting homelessness, but concerns over the power imbalances that often frame 'inclusion' and 'consultation' pose very real challenges in ensuring this collaborative work takes place in an ethical manner.

In 2016, a group of lived experts that would later go on to form CLELN published a call to action entitled, 'Nothing About Us Without Us: Seven principles for leadership & inclusion of people with lived experience of homelessness'.[4] In this document, CLELN calls for not only the *inclusion* of lived experts in decisions that impact them, but for necessary shifts to take place in the way such inclusion occurs. In their words:

> The belief that people who are homeless do not have the competence to participate as equals in organizations is layered on top of the other stereotypes directed at us because of racism, sexism, ableism, poor-bashing, and other oppressions. Many organizations are learning to value lived expertise, but overcoming outdated, paternalistic beliefs and practices doesn't happen overnight. Service providers, researchers and policy-makers need to work alongside people with lived experience to create new structures in which we come together as equals (LEAC, 2016, p. 1).

The genesis of CLELN occurred during a protest outside of the Sheraton Wall Centre Hotel in downtown Vancouver, which was hosting the 2014 CAEH National Conference (Jarrett, 2016). CAEH is a network of organizations, governments, researchers, frontline workers,

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[3] CLELN is unique in its role as a pan-Canadian lived experience body, though several cities across Canada also have lived experience organizations that operate at a local level. This includes: 'Ottawa's *Alliance to End Homelessness*; Waterloo's *STEP Home Participant Advisory Group*; Winnipeg's *Lived Experience Circle*; the *Regina Anti-Poverty Ministry*; Vancouver's *Carnegie Community Action Project* and the *Committee to End Homelessness* in Victoria' (Jarrett, 2016, n.p.), as well as Calgary's *Client Action Committee*, and Toronto's *Lived Experience Advisory Group*.
[4] Prior to the launch of CLELN in 2020, this group was formerly known as the Lived Experience Advisory Council (LEAC). The 'Seven Principles' document was published prior to the shift from LEAC to CLELN.

activists, and lived experts working together to shape and coordinate political and organizational responses to homelessness. In recent years, CAEH has undertaken delivering information, resources, and training to individuals, organizations, and governments that want to implement innovative, evidence-based approaches to ending homelessness. Each year, CAEH increases the number of lived expert attendees at their national conference, with a portion of the cost of each registration going to provide scholarships for people with lived experience of homelessness. The protest during the 2014 conference was largely organized by and comprised of residents of Vancouver's Downtown East Side–people experiencing homelessness and their housed allies. This protest was a demonstration calling out Vancouver's support of a conference that protesters saw as being for 'elite managers', rather than focusing on 'building homes' (Social Housing Alliance B.C., 2014). The protestors' message drew the attention and support of the conference's lived expert attendees and their allies, who had themselves grappled with the conference's sometimes jarring class disparities. Years afterward, one of these attendees would tell me that the 2014 conference felt like being in a 'fishbowl' with her lived experience on display—all for, she felt, the benefit of more privileged conference-goers. Together, both the protestors and attendees marched, united in solidarity through the recognition of shared struggle. As one activist-researcher I know described:

> I came to find myself […] locked outside the conference hotel in the rain. It was a surreal scene: outside in the courtyard, dozens of homeless people and allies, waving red banners and chanting; inside the glass causeway above, hundreds of conference delegates, enjoying wine and salmon skewers. And between us, a line of police and hotel security, barricading the lobby. Two groups of people working to end homelessness, one being "protected" by armed police from the other (Paradis, 2014, n.p.).

Upon debriefing about the protest, several of the conference attendees–who I would later come to know through attending the 2017 CAEH conference–recognized the clear need for a coalition of individuals with previous or ongoing experience of homelessness who could advocate alongside other people currently experiencing homelessness (Jarrett, 2016). Their protest represents an important moment of solidarity and refusal: solidarity with other lived experts of housing insecurity, and refusal to accept the terms of participating in a conference where lived experts were tokenized *inside* the conference hall, and criminalized *outside* of it. This protest ignited important conversations, both within CAEH, and at the national conference. In the years since, lived experts have become key constituents and decision-makers within the organization, and CAEH is making concerted efforts to address concerns about the nature of inclusion and diversity—particularly with regard to people with lived experience, 2SLGBTQ+ communities, as well as First Nations, Métis, and Inuit representation or self-determination. CAEH has undertaken an ambitious project in spearheading efforts to end homelessness; as the alliance expands, its coordination of cross-community homelessness prevention efforts, dialogue about power, privilege, and tokenism continues to unfold and evolve. The nature of overcoming structural oppression is rarely straightforward or linear, though the ever-growing number of lived experts invited to

participate in and plan the annual conference—as well as CLELN's partnership with CAEH as an allied network—are evidence of change in an unquestionably positive direction.

During my MA research in 2017 with key players engaged in the process of homelessness-reduction policymaking in Whitehorse, Yukon Territory, I began considering more directly what engaging with lived experience in the realm of policymaking might entail. Whitehorse is a city in Northern Canada—the region north of the 60th parallel. Though Whitehorse is a relatively small population centre—sitting at 33,000 residents in 2020—it is also the largest city in Northern Canada (Yukon Bureau of Statistics 2020). Whitehorse serves as a resource and service hub for the surrounding area, and in 2018, reported 195 residents experiencing homelessness (Mechan & Pratt, 2020, p. 7). Yukon is home to 14 first nations—11 of which are self-governing—and approximately ¼ of the population of Yukon identifies as First Nations, Métis, or Inuit (Yukon Bureau of Statistics, 2020). Whitehorse itself is situated on the traditional territories of Kwanlin Dün First Nation and Ta'an Kwäch'än Council and under the jurisdiction both of these governments, as well as municipal, territorial, and federal governments. Whitehorse boasts a robust bureaucratic and non-profit landscape, which both complicates and creates interesting opportunities for collaborative, culturally-salient, and community-based planning.

Lived experts in Whitehorse are actively involved in policy- and decision-making initiatives. An example that came up repeatedly during my research was *Safe at home: A community-based action plan to end and prevent homelessness in Whitehorse, Yukon*, where lived experts were actively engaged in its production alongside elected officials, NGO workers, and members of the municipal, territorial, and First Nations governments. The plan, now officially adopted by Kwanlin Dün, Ta'an Kwäch'än, the City of Whitehorse, the Government of Yukon, and supported by the extensive grassroots NGO network in Whitehorse, is the result of a group of 20 diverse Whitehorse advocates working alongside one another for over a year and a half (Mechan & Pratt, 2020, p. 4).[5] The network of lived experts and their allies is both tightly knit and highly effective in Whitehorse. In particular, I was left overwhelmed by the fact that virtually all the events, roundtables, and projects I observed taking place in Whitehorse included meaningful lived expert involvement or leadership. This ecosystem of caring, reciprocal relationships is ripe with possibilities for considering lived experience engagement more broadly.

I first attended the CAEH national conference in the middle of my fieldwork in 2017, together with over 1,000 policymakers, researchers, frontline workers, and lived experts who had traveled to Winnipeg, Manitoba from across Canada. The conference is held in a different Canadian city each year. I had not originally intended to go, but almost all of the Whitehorse advocates, lived experts, and policymakers I wanted to interview were leaving for the conference. The Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition (YAPC), a dynamic and engaged NGO with many members who have lived experience, invited me to fly with them as a lived experience guest. On panels and in audiences throughout the week, lived experts expressed frustration at their negative experiences in collaborative environments. One woman, in a

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[5] Impetus for *Safe at home* came from two 2015 community forums, held by the City of Whitehorse and Kwanlin Dün (Mechan & Pratt, 2020, p. 4).

packed session on the topic of lived experience inclusion in policymaking, explained that she is regularly made to feel infantilized and tokenized during the process of consultation: 'once we leave, [the policymakers] have the "adult" conversation'. Another woman described a similar feeling: '[the policymakers] are sitting at the table, but their backs are turned'. Both comments were met by a volley of nods in agreement from the audience.

These dismissive attitudes are far from unique. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Freire describes a phenomenon reminiscent of that experienced by these conference-goers. In exploring the process of bringing about revolution, Freire articulates precisely the need to include 'the people' in matters that impact them: 'It is absolutely essential that the oppressed participate in the revolutionary process with an increasingly critical awareness of their role as Subjects of the transformation' (Freire, 2017, p. 100). Freire also considers the problem posed by inclusion that pays lip service to the revolutionary desires of 'the people', only to thwart any real attempt at criticality, systems-change or revolt (Freire, 2017, p. 120). If the voices of those who offer their expertise go unacknowledged, and lead to no discernible structural or systemic reworking, the motivation to include them *must* be examined. In the '7 Principles' document, CLELN states: 'Too often we are given lip service to placate us, and not enough say when the rubber hits the road' (LEAC, 2016, p. 4). The same mechanisms of power outlined by Freire decades earlier are still highly relevant in contemporary conversations about lived experience, and benign 'inclusion'.

From anonymous care to revolutionary care: lessons from Whitehorse

> Within disability circles, it's common knowledge that we survive best when we are nourished by activist and self-advocacy networks that allow us to live and thrive through mutual support and care (Belser, 2015, p. 25).

While ethical issues surrounding the inclusion of lived experts in research projects and policymaking persist, these ethical obstacles fall short of the malpractice of *not* including lived experts in conversations that concern their lived realities and their communities. The impact of homelessness is not abstract for lived experts: the stakes are incredibly high for us, and for the people we love. For this reason, it is vitally important to honestly and critically interrogate the way power operates in collaborative research or advocacy contexts. In order to ethically engage lived experts in policy, research, or advocacy efforts, mutual care, solidarity, and a recognition of interconnectedness must first be established. Taking the time to build relationships is vital to combatting oppressive structures that both frame and reinforce power in research or advocacy contexts.

In the case of Whitehorse, I was surprised by how many lived experts, elected officials, and NGO workers who had participated in developing *Safe at Home* pointed to the plan as a model for what was possible. In the context of crafting policy responses to homelessness, this level of community buy-in and cross-sector camaraderie—not to mention excitement—are uncommon. The necessity of maintaining relationships is highlighted in the plan's key action items, which include: 'Agreeing on and establishing a coordinating body or roundtable bringing governments, people with lived experience and community partners together and

building on the equal and respectful relationships developed through the process of creating this plan' (Safe at Home Working Group, 2017, p. 6). Building on Freire, I argue that the process of engaging lived experts in advocacy or research work must be done with *revolutionary care*—care that is integral to the revolutionary process, in that it aims to mobilize the transformational potential of lived experts, while helping to dismantle systems of oppression. This type of intentional, reciprocal, and honest 'love' has the capacity to become transformative, as it simultaneously *acknowledges* power and privilege, and *unsettles it* through the act of extending–and accepting–care and compassion to (and from) an Other.

The concept of 'care' appears, on its surface, to be a simple word attached to clear-cut implications, values, and experiences. Over time and space, however, 'care' is imbued with multiple, sometimes contradictory, layers of meaning. Revolutionary care can exist within similar or overlapping contexts to hegemonic and often oppressive forms of 'care'—and the process of disentangling one from the other is not always clear. In *Life Beside Itself: Imagining Care in the Canadian Arctic,* anthropologist Lisa Stevenson mobilizes a concept she terms 'anonymous care' (Stevenson, 2014, p. 5). Stevenson describes anonymous care in the context of the Canadian Government in its relationship with Inuit communities in the Northwest Territories. In describing both the tuberculosis epidemic that devastated Inuit communities between the 1940s-1960s, and the contemporary suicide epidemic, Stevenson argues these crises are inextricably linked to patterns of colonial displacement and dispossession. In the narrowly defined colonial pursuit of 'preserving life', bodily agency and autonomy is reduced to a matter of bureaucratic practice. The only thing that matters about an individual is that they stay alive. While preserving life is an ostensibly 'good' goal, the ways in which it has been applied towards Indigenous Peoples in Northern Canada uproots culturally salient expressions of care, and entrenches an incongruous set of colonial policies as the dominant alternative. Stevenson posits that 'it is more a matter of revitalizing subaltern (and never innocent) forms of care than of choosing between care and its absence' (Stevenson, 2014, p. 177).

I will outline briefly the dynamics of anonymous care in the context of homelessness, where the neoliberal capitalist demands placed on academics, service workers, and other waged and salaried people in the housing and homelessness sector produce a tainted form of care that is both 'abstract' and 'anonymous'. In a neoliberal institution, as Malenfant et al. articulate, care becomes an output (2019). The internalization of the demand for increasingly rapid and efficient outputs places immense strain on relationships, sometimes precluding their formation altogether. In a framework of anonymous care, it does not matter *who* the person cared for *is*, only that they receive care that is predetermined. Embedded within this system is the ability to *withdraw care*–to determine both one's deservingness of care, and the conditions under which care will be provided. Barriers to accessing care reinforce this logic of biopolitical control and bodily self-regulation: there exists an implicit threat that care can be withdrawn at any time in order to enforce control and elicit desirable behaviour. Asking for this care already transforms living, breathing, feeling human beings into burdens. The conditions and regulations of anonymous care exclude the desires and agentic capacity of the *cared-for*. In this framework, the 'need to change' is always inherently etched into the bodies

and minds of those seeking care–those who are criminalized, exploited, racialized, and colonized—rather than on the systems that necessitate this caring situation in the first place. Anonymous care disguises dynamics of patriarchy, capitalism, and colonialism. In the 7 Principles document, CLELN brings attention to the construction of people with lived experience of homelessness as perpetual recipients of anonymous care, which denies them the possibility to be seen as highly qualified agents of political and social change (LEAC, 2016). All efforts to end and prevent homelessness and housing insecurity *must* uplift and centre lived experts, who mobilize individual and collective agency, identities, and relationships in order to reimagine the terrain of 'care'. Anonymous care is so pervasive and effective in its design, because it relies on the very real emotions of those who are in caring positions to perpetuate itself, often at the expense of the person cared for. Systems of oppression co-opt such emotions to *reproduce the mechanisms for that oppression* and shut down the possibility for dialogue.

Despite the prevalence of anonymous care in organizations and institutions with which people experiencing homelessness interact, grassroots efforts to revitalize 'subaltern […] forms of care', are finding ways to flourish (Stevenson, 2014, p. 177). For example, it is a decidedly different type of care thriving within Disability-Justice circles, a 'subaltern' form of care that is mutual, reciprocal, and revolutionary. It is distinctive in its capacity to establish and foster deeper community ties, and to thrive in spite of oppression (Freire, 2017, p. 62). Mutual care stems from a fundamental recognition that no person exists in isolation or independence from others. We all depend on others for our survival, and to *name* this dynamic is, in itself, an act of resistance. Interdependence is named as one of the 10 Principles of Disability-Justice–it pushes back against a dichotomous system that views disabled people as entirely and deviantly 'dependent' in contrast to able- bodied and minded people as the 'independent' ideal (Sins Invalid, 2015). Mutual care is further rooted in understandings and relationships built between people who have done the challenging yet vital work of trust-building. This work is also an implicitly gendered aspect of advocacy. As Malenfant et al. report, emotional or 'care' work is most often performed by women or gender non-binary workers, and routinely undervalued or even dismissed within institutions, departments, or organizations struggling under the demands of neoliberal capitalism (2019, p. 45). Activist/therapist Vikki Reynolds, in *Justice-Doing at the Intersections of Power* describes this kind of unseen yet vital work as 'A knowing-in-the-bones that our work matters' (Reynolds, 2019, p. 19). Reciprocal care requires solidarity and allyship between people who may face complex, interwoven, and uneven privileges and oppressions. Feminist disability scholar Susan Wendell expands on this in the context of mutual care in disability circles:

> Relationships of reciprocity are not necessarily equal […], in that one person may give more care, or have more responsibility for providing care, than another. Nevertheless, they involve moral obligations on both sides; they are ethical challenges and ethical achievements (Wendell, 1996, p. 150).

Reynolds outlines a hopeful vision for a care-centric future in her work. She explicitly ties together 'connective practices' with 'resisting oppression' (Reynolds, 2019, p. 9). Where

anonymous care shirks personal accountability and obscures power dynamics, revolutionary care openly names these dynamics, refusing to let them hide and be reproduced anew.

Revolutionary care combats the underexamined dynamics that make 'inclusion' so often problematic and tokenistic. Inclusion *without* structural change can serve to reinforce power imbalances in relationships that are, on the surface, collaborative. The desire for 'inclusion' is performed not only by individual actors with complex and varied motivations (sometimes including their own lived experience of oppression), but the structures and institutions that undergird the interaction *also* seek to coopt progressive initiatives for gain, spurred by the inescapable engines of neoliberal capitalism–a companion of colonialism and patriarchy. In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion,* while describing the concept of 'national shame' in Australia, feminist writer, Sara Ahmed, considers the testimony of Indigenous survivors of colonial violence. Ahmed surmises that those who bear shame without situating it within broader contexts are allowed to not act further beyond the experience of feeling ashamed in the first place (2015). Likewise, there is a deep desire on the part of middle-class, progressive allies to demonstrate both the *love* they feel for people experiencing homelessness, and the *shame* they feel that homelessness exists in the first place. Homelessness itself is intimately tied to pernicious legacies of racism, colonization, and deeply entrenched forms of exploitation. Ahmed continues, explaining that the structure of shame is rooted in a profound desire to *move quickly past* the (ideally temporary) discomfort, and into a more inclusive and progressive reality—without working to dismantle the structures that contribute to the inequality in the first place.

In terms of the relationship between lived experts and those who seek to consult with them, a similar desire can lead to, in the words of feminist philosopher Mariana Ortega, '[the perceiver] making up a reality that reinforces his or her worldview' (2006, p. 61). Ortega suggests, as a measure for white women to more responsibly engage with women of colour, the coupled processes of '*looking and listening*,' and '*checking and questioning*' to combat otherwise '*arrogant perception*' (2006). In particular, Ortega challenges white women to examine their own misinformed perception, privileges, and biases that can appear, at first, as 'loving', 'kind' and 'good' manifestations of allyship. Inclusion that claims to be 'loving' can similarly serve as a weapon to oppress and further marginalize if deployed if it is not first built into a framework of critical, self-reflexive, and revolutionary care (2006, p. 60). Both Ahmed and Ortega offer valuable insight on the related question of engaging lived experts in the process of ending homelessness. They ask that those who occupy 'ally' subject positions (particularly white women), critically and continuously examine their own motivations, intentions, and the power they have but may not acknowledge they wield. Simply 'caring about' or 'including' people experiencing homelessness without building in these critical elements can reinforce paternalistic, 'top-down' power dynamics. In contrast, revolutionary care is consensual, formed through working alongside lived experts to build reciprocal relationships in which power and knowledge flow *both ways*. This was certainly a dynamic beginning to emerge during the process of formulating *Safe at Home*: 'Unique to Safe at Home is that no one government, agency, or person is responsible for ending homelessness but rather every single government, agency and person is collectively responsible' (Mechan & Pratt, 2020, p. 2).

Beyond Whitehorse, Canada's 2019 National Housing Strategy included lived experience consultation—a move lobbied for since 2016 by lived experts affiliated with CLELN (Jarrett, 2016). To practice revolutionary care is to engage in an evolving process—its design is always emergent, and contingent on the needs, desires, and social locations of those involved.

Revolutionary care in practice

How does one centre revolutionary care as a research methodology, or as a practice? There are numerous factors that must be considered in the process of openly and actively engaging lived experts in justice-oriented care work. In this section, I outline a select number of emerging ideas and promising practices that organizations and individuals are mobilizing to better engage lived experts at all stages of the research, policymaking, or advocacy process. Many of the practices here are still under development, as the process of dismantling deeply entrenched power imbalances is always in-progress, and often non-linear. I have drawn these cues from engaged advocates in Whitehorse and CLELN, my own experiences as a lived expert advisor, and from the scholars and activists cited throughout the pages of this paper.

Prior to entering a collaborative space, the terms of collaboration should be built together with lived experts. During experiences of homelessness, brushing up against violent structures can constrain individual agency and it is vital that collaborative spaces not reproduce this dynamic. Research contexts should involve collaboration from the very start of a project, including the development of research or policy proposals, and even applying for research grants. Once the structure of a project is set, it feels challenging to make meaningful changes. Lived experts should be involved in shaping and defining the project's goals and parameters.

In order to facilitate the open and active involvement of lived experts in research and advocacy, barriers to participation must be reduced as much as possible. As addressed throughout this paper, this means that people without lived experience who enter into collaboration with lived experts must be prepared to examine their own internalized biases through 'looking and listening', and 'checking and questioning' (Ortega, 2006). Removing barriers to participation also involves building trust, and taking the time to get to know the people with whom you will be working (LEAC, 2016, p. 3). Akemi Nishida points out in *Neoliberal Academia and a Critique from Disability Studies,* the importance of building time into plans that are disability-centred. She refers here to the concept of 'Crip Time', which recognizes the need to push back against normative and ableist temporal demands (Nishida, 2015, p. 154). This need is echoed by CLELN as a fundamental aspect of dismantling barriers to full participation of lived experts (2016, p. 3). Regarding *Safe at Home*, those I interviewed described it as a lengthy, but ultimately highly rewarding process. Those that participated in the over 18-month development process recognized the challenges and points of friction the working group faced, however participants expressed pride that they were able to *see themselves reflected in the plan*. This ideal that does not always manifest in collaborative projects, and often, the experience of participating in such major policy projects is alienating for lived experts. For many reasons, flexibility should be a central tenet of work with lived experts. Sometimes

people will need to take a step back from collaborative efforts, and this possibility should be built into work plans. In my own networks of lived experience, 'flexibility' involves being comfortable with changing plans when needed. It is important to acknowledge that the labour of being 'adaptive and 'nimble' in social innovation is often invisibilized yet also fundamental to the success of a movement, project, or organization (Malenfant et al., 2019, p. 41).

Steps to reduce barriers can take a variety of forms. For example, opening up lines of communication across multiple platforms allows for greater ease of participation. Email and Facebook are common methods of communication, but these, too, come with barriers. Any costs that lived experience collaborators may incur, including transportation, should be covered in advance, or reimbursed as quickly as possible (Becu & Allan, 2017). In most organizations, submitting reimbursement forms takes significant time and make assumptions that people can wait to be reimbursed. Additionally, as when collaborating with experts in other domains and disciplines, it is important to compensate lived experts for their time (LEAC, 2016, p. 3). Honoraria should be provided in recognition for time and expertise contributed to a project, rather than in exchange for lived experts' 'stories'. Providing cash is considered a good ethical practice, as it is both immediately useable, and does not place limitations on its utility (as is the case with gift cards). Gift cards and other forms of non-cash honoraria are embedded in paternalistic assumptions about how people experiencing homelessness will (or should) use their money.[6]

Transparency over research dynamics–including expenses–is also important. In 'Activist Academic Whore', academic, activist, and lived expert of sex work Chris Bruckert argues that it is entirely understandable that marginalized and over-researched communities remain wary of academics as they have long been exploited and used to further academics' professional goals (2014, p. 311). Recognizing this warranted mistrust, Vikki Reynolds (2019) articulates the importance of honestly and openly naming power and privilege as an often-overlooked aspect of working alongside people who face oppression (2019). The collaborative ecosystem I observed in Whitehorse is both promising and instructive for other contexts within the homelessness sector. This does not mean, however, that challenges and barriers do not exist. Despite the progressive nature of Whitehorse's relationship to lived experience advocacy, tensions and biases still prevailed within policy and practice. Prioritizing honesty and transparency suggests that failure, discomfort, and the making of mistakes will be an inherent part of the revolutionary process towards structural transformation. During an interview, a Yukon Housing Corporation policy worker expressed to me that they felt guilty working alongside lived experts, because their ability to actualize the changes lived experts desired was often limited within the structure of bureaucratic decision-making. Consultation still took place, but with the implicit recognition that this was limited to change that had institutional buy-in. This is certainly not unique to Whitehorse. One seasoned policy analyst who had only recently moved to the city referred to her frustration working in an intensely hierarchical context in Southern Canada. By the time

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[6] The question of compensating lived experts warrants greater discussion than is possible within the scope of this article: for more robust examples and discussions, see Becu & Allan 2017.

policies were passed up through what she referred to as the 'shiny, bureaucratic abyss', they were sometimes unrecognizable to her. Be clear and upfront about both personal and institutional boundaries, dynamics, and limitations, but also recognize when imposed limitations are arbitrary—or when they need to be abolished altogether. Vagueness, or shrinking away from difficult conversations is an immense privilege, as is deciding what lived experts should and should not know. Everyone involved in collaborative projects should also have a clear understanding about who stands to benefit from the work—and how. Equal participation means that lived experts should have equal access to the information that is relevant to the projects they are involved in.

In order to ensure that lived experts can be represented at every level of decision making across the homelessness sector, the very *structure* of organizations, management, and leadership must also shift to confront the inequality and privilege that currently rests there. There exists a tacit assumption that lived experience belongs in some domains, and not others. This is why *Safe at Home* is so remarkable: lived experts had full access to all stages of preparing what has now been adopted as formal policy and strategy at all levels of government in Yukon. Similarly, as an allied network of CAEH, CLELN acts in an advisory capacity to the broader efforts of the organization, holding significant decision- and policy-making power. During a dialogue between colleagues of mine (researchers with lived experience of homelessness), and senior researchers (researchers who, though they are established as 'experts' within the homelessness sector in both professional and academic contexts, do not have *lived* expertise), I posed a question: 'do you include people with lived experience of homelessness in your organization's leadership structure, and do you look for lived experience leadership in the other organizations you partner with?' One researcher informed my colleagues and I that, actually, people with lived experience are not interested in sitting on boards, because board meeting would be 'too boring' for them. This researcher elaborated on their claim by saying that lived experts are best-suited to community-level roundtable conversations. Though I do not doubt this researcher's good intentions, their implicit suggestions are not innocent. On the one hand, the levers of power are clearly operated by a particular kind of person, with a particular set of experiences; and on the other, this oversight and control over the homelessness sector (including research, advocacy, and even policy work) by systemically privileged people is inevitable, even natural, and beyond calling into question. This researcher is a 'good' person, and has dedicated their life to ending and preventing homelessness. However, the prejudices their response reflects are both damaging and incredibly pervasive. Often, people in positions of relative power are tasked with making new knowledge–a task which finds itself coupled with making essentializing assumptions about the 'subjects' of their research. These assumptions most often align with, rather than challenge, dominant hegemonic norms and values. If stigma and misconceptions riddle academic and advocacy work, where people are absolutely committed to ending homelessness, how could the same not be true for organizational, institutional, and political leadership? It is here, once again, that I say: 'Nothing about us, without us'.

Conclusion

> The words of [the oppressive] class come to be the 'true' words, which [they impose] or attempt to impose on the others: the oppressed, whose words have been stolen from them. Those who steal the words of others develop a deep doubt in the abilities of the others and consider them incompetent […] under these circumstances, dialogue is impossible (Freire, 2017, p. 107).

How do we come to know what we know about homelessness? Whose lives are at stake? And who, if anyone, benefits from the way things exist currently? Research is the means through which researchers–producers of a certain type of highly privileged knowledge, in both academic and applied settings–seek truth. What is less often interrogated critically, however, is the type of truth researchers construct unintentionally through their research processes, and that policymakers craft into the frameworks within which we are all entangled. The recognition that the construction of knowledge is inherently political is the necessary precondition for research and policy work that is both community-engaged and revolutionary. The often-unacknowledged violence of dismissing or overlooking the profoundly transformational knowledge of oppressed and exploited people ensures that the mechanisms that shape these realities in the first place stay intact. In the equation of justice-doing and ethical research practices, identity, biography, and social location–lived experiences of all kinds–become vital. It comes to matter a great deal *who someone is*, and mutually caring, trusting, and rigorous work must take place to situate individuals' whole selves. Ultimately, in the context of research, there is a hard limit to decentring traditionally privileged forms of knowledge and epistemic authority imposed by the demands of neoliberal institutions (Nishida, 2015). It is for this reason that I find the work being done in in Whitehorse to be both insightful and instructive. The robust, challenging process of drafting the *Safe at Home* plan is not yet common-practice—it was a novel approach in Whitehorse itself—and it left a unquestionably significant impression on those involved. In addition, *Safe at Home* left advocates with a desire to continue changing discourses of accountability and responsibility. Ending homelessness has become a goal that involves the labour and passion of the entire community (Mechan & Pratt, 2020). The work of engaged advocates, in Whitehorse, and through CLELN, suggests that promising change is on the horizon.

Moving towards ending homelessness in Canada requires significant collective labour, and our goals cannot be achieved without the perspectives and expertise of people who have survived homelessness and housing insecurity. Nor can we end homelessness when work is conducted in silos, in isolation from people we stand to learn a great deal from. Revolutionary care is one possible antidote to begin pushing back against these structures, amongst people who come together in the pursuit of anti-hierarchical, trust-based justice work. The present moment is ripe for uplifting the voices and knowledges of people who have long been speaking the language of 'care', community, and interconnectedness: disability activists. We must look to communities who are experts in doing the work of justice, and stand in solidarity against the systems that operate to oppress our peers and revolutionary allies. As feminist and disability scholars observe, 'care' alone is not enough: activist-oriented

academics and housing justice advocates must also engage in naming, challenging, and eventually overhauling oppressive frameworks–and the hierarchies embedded within them. At its core, all justice-based work (whether about our own lives, or those of others) stems from bodies that navigate and survive the systems and structures within which we all, as human beings, find ourselves entangled.

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