



THE UNIVERSITY OF WINNIPEG

MEDIA RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

IUS Report: Hidden Homelessness A Chronic Struggle for Urban Aboriginals

WINNIPEG—At the upcoming City Summit, 200 Winnipeggers will gather to table ideas and thoughts on the future of our city. They will no doubt come up with excellent options for making Winnipeg a better place to live. At the same time, thousands of others will remain inadequately housed in hotels, rooming houses, missions, or forced to rely on the kindness of friends and family to provide shelter. Finding a home to call their own will continue to present an insurmountable challenge in a city with a tight vacancy rate; especially for quality affordable housing.

"Some call this 'sofa surfing' but we call it hidden homelessness as many have no permanent housing options before them, despite their best efforts" said Jino Distasio, Director of The University of Winnipeg's Institute of Urban Studies (IUS).

In a report that examines hidden homelessness in prairie cities, researchers confirmed yet again that a chronic shortage of quality houses remains a concern in this community. "As a child, what did you dream of being when you grew up? Everyone dreams of a significant role in life. No one dreams of being homeless... including the homeless," said Siloam Mission's John Mohan.

The report, entitled "*Home is Where the Heart is and Right Now that is Nowhere...An Examination of Hidden Homelessness among Aboriginal Peoples in Prairie Cities*" examined the homeless situation among Aboriginal persons in urban centres.

"Winnipeg has the largest Aboriginal identity population of Canadian cities, with 8.4% of the city population (55,755 persons) identifying themselves as Aboriginal in 2001. It is estimated that Aboriginal people may make up 60 to 70 per cent of the homeless population in Winnipeg," stated Wayne Helgason of the Social Planning Council of Winnipeg (SPCW.)

Distasio noted that the Winnipeg housing market may be booming to those who own a home or can afford to buy one. "But for those simply looking for a decent affordable rental unit, double digit gains and rising house prices mean nothing but added heartache. For some it becomes a daily struggle to find a place to sleep and a warm meal," he said.

Neeginan Emergency Shelter's Ken Harper reported that Neeginan has provided over 45,000 safe beds to Winnipeg's homeless in 28 months.

Ed Tanner of Manitoba Urban Native Housing Association (MUNA) pointed out that hidden homelessness is a critical issue that faces the urban Aboriginal community in the Province of Manitoba. "Aboriginal families that do not have access to a safe, adequate, and healthy home inhibits

the growth and development of Aboriginal children,” he said. “Aboriginal people in Winnipeg and other Manitoban urban centres are at the highest risk for homelessness. The three levels of government need to target Aboriginal housing and homelessness in order to develop a comprehensive National Aboriginal Social housing and Homelessness Strategy.”

With the transition from rural to urban centers like Winnipeg, homelessness is rapidly increasing amongst Métis people, according to Ron Chartrand of the Winnipeg Métis Association Inc. “Housing not only becomes just a basic need but an absolute necessity for survival”

The cost of shelter and utilities will come out of the food that will go on the plates of low income families, warned Winnipeg Harvest’s David Northcott. “This is too big a price to pay. Housing and shelter touches all of us whether a new baby or an elder that struggles with a place to die. The measure of our society needs to be how we care for one another.”

Urban Aboriginals in the thousands face wait lists for adequate housing in Winnipeg. However, efforts by MUNA, the Eagle Urban Transition Centre, Siloam Mission, Neeginan, and Winnipeg Harvest help improve their daily lives and circumstances, noted Distasio.

“People are moving multiple times over short periods because they are living in poor quality housing, in bad neighbourhoods, and far from the services and supports they need. What we were told time and time again was give us a good quality home in a decent neighbourhood and access to employment and training opportunities. While this might seem a simple request, it is not being met,” he said.

In two IUS studies, over 1500 interviews were completed with urban Aboriginals. The results showed a system too overwhelmed to meet the basic shelter needs of many. While services and supports exist, Distasio said the need now is to focus on building new units and providing long term and sustained financial support.

Members of the media are invited to attend a press conference today and panel discussion at which the group’s recommendations will be released to the community:

Siloam Mission

300 Princess Street, Main Floor

Tuesday, May 2, 2006

10:00 a.m. Facility Tour of Siloam Mission (for those who wish to participate)

11:00 a.m. Report Release and Question & Answer Panel

Question and Answer Panel members includes:

Jino Distasio- The University of Winnipeg Institute of Urban Studies

John Mohan-Siloam Mission;

Wayne Helgason-Social Planning Council of Winnipeg

Ed Tanner-Manitoba Urban Native Housing Association

Ken Harper-Neeganin Emergency Shelter

Charles Cochrane-EAGLE Transition Urban Centre

Ron Chartrand-Winnipeg Métis Association Inc.

The report was prepared for the National Secretariat on Homelessness and received funding from the National Research Program of the National Homelessness Initiative and administered by the Institute of Urban Studies at The University of Winnipeg in Partnership of the Social Planning Council of Winnipeg.

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