SPECTRUM PUBLISHED: September 2024

What makes transitional housing in Manitoba unsafe for transgender people?

Matthew Paterson[1], Dr. Julie Chamberlain[2]

[1]Social Work, University of Regina
mbp633@uregina.ca

[2]Urban and Inner-City Studies, University of Winnipeg
j.chamberlain@uwinnipeg.ca

ABSTRACT

Transgender people across Canada face high rates of housing insecurity and homelessness compared to people whose gender identity matches the sex they were assigned at birth. Yet shelters and transitional housing meant to provide temporary places to stay do not always meet the needs of transgender people. This community-based study asked what can make transitional housing safer and more comfortable for transgender people, with a focus on the Westman region of Manitoba. In collaboration with YWCA Brandon, the first author interviewed nine service providers who work in housing organizations or in service provision for transgender people in Manitoba, to learn about good practices from their perspectives. In the process we learned about the factors that make transitional housing and shelters unsafe and unwelcoming for transgender people; these factors are the focus of this article. We highlight barriers to access to existing transitional housing, including the prevalence of faith-based shelters, gender segregation policies and practices, intake and referral procedures that create risks for transgender people, and insufficient training for organization leaders. These findings are relevant to shelter and transitional housing providers and to allies and advocates for the well-being of transgender people in Manitoba and beyond.

Background

As a result of discrimination, Two Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (2SLGBTQ+) people are more likely to experience homelessness than the general public in Canada. Though 2SLGBTQ+ community members only make up around 10% of the population, they are estimated to comprise 25 - 40% of homeless youth in Canada, for example (Abramovich, 2017). Transgender people also face much higher rates of homelessness than cisgender people, those whose gender identity matches the sex they were assigned at birth (Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Council, 2014)[1]. They are twice as likely to experience severe poverty and homelessness, five times more likely to experience mental health issues, and five times more likely to attempt suicide (CMHC, 2022). Relevant and accessible supports are therefore urgently needed to support trans people's well-being and survival, especially in a context where their existence and safety is under attack.

Despite the need for safe and supportive places, spaces, and services, transitional housing settings can be unsafe for transgender people. Transphobia is common and normalized throughout the housing sector (Abramovich, 2017). Transgender people are often harassed, discriminated against, or subjected to violence from clients and staff of transitional housing and emergency shelters on the basis of their gender identity (Shelton et al., 2018a). Supports that are organized according to a gender binary often exclude transgender people from forms, policies, and programming (Shelton et al., 2018b), and shelters are

Citation: Paterson, M. and Chamberlain, J. (2024) "What makes transitional housing in Manitoba unsafe for transgender people?" *Spectrum* Issue No. 13

doi: 10.29173/spectrum230

Received: October 2023
Accepted: April 2024
Published: September 2024

almost universally segregated by gender, which represents a structured barrier to the inclusion and safety of transgender people (Yu, 2010; Pyne, 2011). Many shelters in North American cities are also faith-based, which can mean they are hostile to transgender people on the basis of religious doctrine (Yu, 2010; Pyne, 2011). These safety issues often push transgender people into situations of heightened vulnerability like sleeping on the street, couch surfing, or staying with abusive family members or partners (Bardwell, 2015; Ecker, 2017; Sellers, 2018; Yu, 2010).

In 2021, YWCA Brandon, a non-profit organization that provides transitional housing to people who experience gender-based violence and marginalization, recognized an urgent need for welcoming and safe transitional housing for transgender people in the Westman region of Manitoba. YWCA Brandon is located in a mid-sized city of around 51,000 people, the second largest city in the province (Statistics Canada, 2022a; Statistics Canada, 2022b). Brandon is situated within the Westman region, which is characterized by rural and small-town landscapes. YWCA Brandon noticed that they had been receiving calls from transgender people who were asking about their transitional housing but did not seem to be accessing the shelter. Suspecting that there was a disconnect between what was offered and what transgender people needed from them, they asked Matthew Paterson, an honours thesis student in Geography at Brandon University, supervised by Dr. Julie Chamberlain, to conduct a literature review on the topic. This literature review focused on good practices in transitional housing for transgender people, shelters and housing organizations that offered trans-specific programming in the province, and learning about good practices taking place in Manitoba and beyond.

The recommendations that emerged from the literature review and from interviews with housing and social service providers included things like hiring staff that are representative of the full diversity of the communities seeking housing; making training that is informed by the lived experience of transgender community members mandatory at all levels of housing organizations; using visual indications that a housing provider intends to be safe and welcoming for transgender people, if that is in fact the case (i.e. stickers, posters); and developing and funding transgender-specific housing options. The full breadth of recommendations have been published in more detail elsewhere (Hammond et al., 2021; Paterson, 2022).

In this article, we focus on the context that the service providers laid out to describe and explain the need for change in transitional housing across Manitoba. We share their thoughts about the ways in which transitional housing is frequently unwelcoming and unsafe for transgender people. This includes that organizations are often faith-based in Manitoba, linked to religious communities that have not been safe for transgender people or the broader 2SLGBTQ+ community. Structural and systemic issues, such as spaces divided along gender lines, and intake and referral processes that do not take the safety of transgender people into account, can be dangerous for trans people to navigate. Leadership of shelters are undertrained and under-educated on how to create safer and more accessible spaces for gender diverse people. These insights are useful to housing providers, researchers, and transgender rights advocates, but also for the broader public to understand the barriers to well-being that trans people experience in Manitoba. The danger and inaccessibility of potentially lifesaving emergency and transitional housing is especially concerning against a backdrop of significant anti-trans rhetoric and politicization (Hunter, 2023; Vadeboncoeur, 2023).

Methods

This study was community-based: it arose from community rather than academic knowledge needs, and was guided by the board of YWCA Brandon as well as by a faculty supervisor, Dr. Julie Chamberlain. The initial connection was made by Dr. Candice Waddell-Henowitch, who is a board member of YWCA and also a professor at the university. She guided the foundations of this research as a representative of the board, and we met with the board early in the research process before beginning data collection. The research questions were "What makes transgender people feel comfortable and safe in transitional housing settings?" and "What are the best practices in serving this group?" Because the project was initiated to inform YWCA Brandon as well as contribute to scholarly and public knowledge on the topic, and because of the limited scale of an undergraduate thesis, the focus was on the perspectives of service providers on these questions. Further research is needed into the perspectives of unhoused and underhoused transgender people themselves, as this was beyond the scope of this study.

This project was granted ethics approval from the Brandon University Research Ethics Committee. Participants were provided the opportunity to remain anonymous via a pseudonym of their choice. Only one of the researchers knows which participants chose which pseudonyms. We did not seek the permission of employers before interviewing participants, and participants were given the opportunity to review and edit the interview transcripts from which identifying information, such as workplaces, was removed. We did this to afford participants significant control over

doi: 10.29173/spectrum230

what they said and how, and to respect their words and thoughts while ensuring their anonymity in a context with a small population in which people can be easily identified if their workplace is named. Data related to interviews and participant information were stored on a locked computer.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted between July and September 2021. Interview guides were employed, and questions were added and removed depending on the context of each interview (See Supplementary Information). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic interviews were held over Zoom, which enabled interviews with people who were located beyond the region of Westman. Nine service providers were interviewed, including service providers who worked in senior positions at shelter organizations (e.g., executive director, shelter manager) and those who worked with transgender people in other settings like trans advocacy groups and 2SLGBTQ+ resource centres. Housing service providers were included in the sample because of their knowledge of policy, programming, and procedures at housing organizations. Trans service providers were included in the sample to gain insights from beyond the housing-specific sector that might be applicable to the sector. Throughout this paper we refer to HSPs and TSPs to indicate the organizational affiliation of participants without identifying their specific workplace and compromising their anonymity.

To recruit participants for this study the first author, Matthew Paterson, completed an in-depth environmental scan to identify organizations, programs, and projects that existed locally, provincially, and nationally. We reached out to over 30 organizations across Manitoba, with the assumption that organizations within the province could have insights that would be relevant for Westman. People from nine organizations responded and agreed to participate in this study. Participants shared what they thought would be relevant and interesting to people in Westman.

Though it was not a criterion for participation, almost half of the participants identified as either transgender, gender non-binary, queer, or a member of the 2SLGBTQ+ community. We believe this reflects the relatively common practice of 2SLGBTQ+ organizations hiring 2SLGBTQ+ people, and that 2SLGBTQ+ housing providers might have been more inclined to find the research of interest. Participants were all Manitoba residents and were located throughout the province. Interviews were transcribed using an AI-based software and then cleaned by the interviewer. Interview transcripts were printed and coded thematically, manually looking for themes, outliers, and unexpected insights.

Table 1: Interview Participants

Housing Service Providers (n=5)	**Roles within organization:** Director (3), Supervisor (1), Frontline (1)
	How often they report encountering transgender service users: Never (2), sometimes (2), often (0), all the time (1)
	Self-rating of knowledge of issues facing transgender people: No knowledge (0), somewhat knowledgeable (1), knowledgeable (2), very knowledgeable (1)
	Do they have coworkers who identify as part of the 2SLGBTQ+ community: Yes (1), No (4)
	Organization provides specialized training on issues facing transgender people: Yes (2), Informally (2), No (1)
Trans Service Providers (n=4)	**Roles within organization:** Director (1), Program Manager (1), Educator (2)
	How often they report encountering transgender service users: Never (0), sometimes (0), often (0), all the time (4)
	Self-rating of knowledge of issues facing transgender people: No knowledge (0), somewhat knowledgeable (0), knowledgeable (0), very knowledgeable (4)
	Do they have coworkers who identify as part of the 2SLGBTQ+ community: Yes (4), No (0)
	Organization provides specialized training on issues facing transgender people: Yes (3), No (1)

doi: 10.29173/spectrum230

Results

While we set out to learn what service providers consider to be good practices in transitional housing for transgender people, we learned at the same time about some of the specific ways that transitional housing currently fails to meet the needs of transgender people in Manitoba. Participants reported that transgender people perceive transitional housing organizations and shelters as unsafe and uncomfortable for them to access. There are overarching challenges, such as a lack of gender-affirming services in general in Westman, which is an under-funded and largely rural context where transgender people expect to encounter discrimination. Providers of emergency and transitional housing tend to be faith-based organizations in Westman, tied to religious communities that have not historically been safe places for transgender people. There are also structural issues within transitional housing, including physical gender segregation and intake and referral procedures that can be dangerous for transgender people to navigate. Lastly, we heard that leadership of shelters are often under-trained and under-educated on how to create safer and more accessible spaces for gender diverse people.

Supports are scarce in a rural context

Study participants argued that access to safe and welcoming transitional housing for transgender people is limited by the overall context in Westman. There are not enough resources geared towards transgender and 2SLGBTQ+ people in rural Manitoba overall. While Brandon meets the provincial classification of a city with its population of over 50,000, it is what geographers have called a "city with rural character" (Coen et al., 2013, pg. 96). We heard that transgender people often look for support outside of rural Manitoba because they fear discrimination in communities with conservative religious populations, and because the few explicitly gender-affirming services are concentrated in Winnipeg, the province's urban centre. Charlie, a service provider who works in Winnipeg, meets people who make their way to the city as a result. Charlie said for example, "I hear a lot that like when you leave the city, there's just no supportive queer culture or queer visibility in general … when you leave Winnipeg and even going into smaller cities like Brandon … how much more difficult it is to find lifesaving supports" (Charlie, TSP, interview, 2021).

While rural and small-town organizations may want to create lifesaving supports, we heard that securing funding is a major challenge. Existing grants for housing and social programs have not grown with the cost of living for 15+ years, so that funds have to be "stretched thinner and thinner over time" (Ang, HSP, Interview, 2021). In effect, this shrinks resources for existing programs and limits the possibilities to create new programs that respond to the needs of gender diverse community members, as well as to other needs that might emerge.

Participants also shared that the often conservative views of surrounding communities mean that shelters in rural areas of the province are perceived as unfriendly or unsafe for transgender and 2SLGBTQ+ people. Some housing providers said in no uncertain terms that their rural context is "a scary place to come out," a place where the inclusive principles of their organizations are at odds with the community's more conservative values (Ang, HSP, interview, 2021). Ang works for a rural housing organization that is located in a part of the province that has a reputation for being religious and socially conservative (see Froese, 2023). Ang's organization relies very heavily on the support of the community where they are located because the public funds that come from the provincial government are limited. The organization sees itself as 2SLGBTQ+ inclusive and finds it challenging not to alienate the financial support of a socially conservative community. Ang said that transgender people in the area might assume that the organization is as conservative as the community and therefore not a safe place for them (Ang, HSP, interview, 2021).

Opinions varied, however, about whether the city of Winnipeg is really less of a site of discomfort and discrimination than rural Manitoba, or if it is just perceived as such. Levi, an HSP working for a self-described inclusive organization, argued that the differences lie in how explicit or veiled anti-trans discrimination might be in rural versus urban areas. Discrimination can make things hard in the city as well.

> In Brandon, discrimination was so much more visible and accepted. In Winnipeg, there's this façade, that discrimination isn't tolerated, but if you're an Indigenous trans person … you already have several strikes against you when you're accessing a service, when you're trying to find a house but because people are not honest or forthcoming about their discrimination it's much more challenging to trans persons (Levi, TSP, Interview, 2021)

While underscoring that transgender people are experiencing discrimination in urban centres as well as small town and rural settings, Levi also highlighted that the intersecting identities of transgender people differ, and so do their experiences, especially for those who are Indigenous in the settler colonial context of Manitoba and Canada more broadly.

doi: 10.29173/spectrum230

Faith-based organizations can be inaccessible

Overlapping with the perceptions and realities of conservatism in rural and small-town Manitoba is the fact that many shelters in the province have religious foundations and are tied to faith-based organizations, which is consistent with the situation in many other places as well (Yu, 2010). Transgender people may feel excluded on the basis of religion affiliation as a result. Speaking of a Christian organization in Winnipeg's downtown, for example, Charlie said "I get asked all the time … like 'I'm not a Christian person, can I go to Siloam Mission?'"

Shelters and transitional housing run by faith-based organizations can also be perceived as hostile to transgender and 2SLGBTQ+ people. We heard particularly from the participants who are themselves transgender, or who work in 2SLGBTQ+ community organizations, that transgender people have often had past, negative experiences with Christianity that influence how they perceive faith-based housing overall. They have also felt judged or dehumanized by people working in faith-based shelters. This in turn means that transgender people have reservations about staying at shelters that are explicitly religious, even if the organization is making an effort to be more inclusive than in the past or in comparison to other organizations. The environmental scan Matthew Paterson conducted prior to interviewing revealed for example that a faith-based shelter in Winnipeg had recently tried to open a section devoted to housing members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community. One interview participant brought this development up to illustrate how faith-based shelters had failed the transgender community to date: the organization had not consulted the community ahead of time and did not build trusting relationships that would make the shelter accessible. Instead, there were major barriers, and the idea "fluttered out," in one participant's words (Hank, HSP, Interview, 2021).

Faith-based organizations need to account for "the impact of the historical harm they've done," according to Housing provider Hank, who identified as a transgender person who works with unhoused individuals (interview, 2021).

> Just because [the organization mentioned above] were trying to do things differently, they didn't really comprehend why people weren't trusting them immediately. Because, they've done bad things to people for decades and so just doing something for one day in a better way doesn't actually mean that people are going to be like super comfortable identifying themselves as queer to you. (Hank, HSP, Interview, 2021)

From Hank's perspective, meaningful consultation with 2SLGBTQ+ community members and organizations would have informed the faith-based shelter that they had work to do ahead of time.

Intake procedures are often risky

We also heard from participants that common intake procedures dissuade transgender people from accessing shelters and transitional housing. The forms and processes that are used to gather personal information when people arrive at housing organizations were characterized as flawed, unnecessary, and sometimes dangerous. They include prodding questions about gender and sexual orientation and can "out" a person as transgender. Prodding processes include requiring proof of identity, which can include gender information or names that do not align with how a person identifies or expresses themselves. But without identification, people can be denied access to the housing they need.

> Being called your legal name can be dangerous or outing … Like, "do I put my actual name that I want to be called [on the form], so that people are 'surprised' at the face that they meet later? Or do I put my legal name so that I'm more likely to access services, because it's closer to whatever is going to be [on] my I.D.? (Charlie, TSP, Interview, 2021)

Transgender people may or may not want to be out in a shelter or transitional housing setting, or to talk about the gender they were assigned at birth, but people are not usually given a choice of whether and how to share information about themselves. As intake is the first contact a person may have with an organization, experiences that do not affirm and respect their gender identity and expression – and that are then immediately negative experiences – can lead transgender people to avoid shelters and transitional housing altogether.

Participants who worked in 2SLGBTQ+ serving organizations underscored that "having to come out at every single step of the way, several times a day, is a horrifying experience" (Levi, TSP, interview, 2021). Transgender people are often forced to explain themselves and their identities to family, friends, and even strangers in their day-to-day lives. This is draining and frustrating, but also fraught and dangerous given the current reality of widespread transphobia. We heard that when organizations require, in effect, that people either attempt to "pass" as cisgender or come out as transgender in order to access housing, it exposes transgender people to a threat of discrimination, harassment, and violence from staff and others accessing shelter.

doi: 10.29173/spectrum230

Critically, participants characterized intrusive and outing intake procedures and forms as fundamentally unnecessary and changeable. Charlie gave examples of questions that could gather information that housing organizations need in a respectful and affirming way. Some of these questions included: "How do you want to be addressed when I'm talking about you? How do you want me to describe your gender, if it's necessary for me to do so? Where is the best place for you to be housed?" (Charlie, TSP, interview, 2021). Asking questions like these would afford transgender people some agency and control, and also would ensure that staff know people's wishes when they are referred to in the third person, for example when there is an exchange of information or referral to a third party such as a medical provider. The times and processes in which personal information is gathered and transferred can create risk of harm to transgender people.

Leaders need training to create safe and welcoming places

One of the reasons that procedures in shelters and transitional housing can be so challenging for transgender people is that the leadership is undertrained on pertinent issues. Participants noted that shelter staff *in general* are undertrained, but that any available training on 2SLGBTQ+ issues also tend to be directed to front-facing staff and not to the leadership. Yet participants argued that leaders in positions of management and power set the tone for the organization and need to be well-informed because they can influence all aspects of housing organizations. Being informed means learning about the barriers that transgender people face, about policy and practice solutions to address those barriers, and about creating physical spaces that are safer for transgender people.[2]

Some participants reported that transphobic and anti-trans practices were clearly rooted at the top of their organizations. Notably, one organization was a nominally 2SLGBTQ+ positive organization, but even those organizations marketed as "trans-friendly" can be sites of discrimination against transgender people. One participant who preferred to be anonymous shared the following, for example:

> Our executive director is actively transphobic and has made transphobic comments to me in particular. The executive director would make comments, messed up my pronouns the entire time, and made a comment that because of my appearance and my name, it just was hard for her to get used to my pronouns, which is like obviously harmful. It's like, okay, that's not an acceptable excuse for messing up somebody's pronouns and then not apologizing for it. It is things like that where even the places where you think that you will be the most safe to work and interact still often have people who are not safe to work and interact with (Anonymous Participant).

This participant underscores the significance of whether and how organizational leaders demonstrate basic respect for transgender people, whether they are housing-seekers or staff members. As another participant, Charlie, told us, cisgender people sometimes mistake using correct gender pronouns for a small issue, when in fact pronouns are a significant way in which people can demonstrate that they value and care for transgender and non-binary people. Conversely, a lack of effort on gendering and naming people according to their wishes communicates to transgender people that they are not welcome, cared for, or safe. Participants argued that shelter leadership need to model good practices as the people who have the most individual power, ability to effect positive change, and ability to direct programming. To do that they need to be well-informed and trained.

Participants stressed that it is the responsibility of leaders and workers to create and maintain safe spaces for transgender people. It is not the primary responsibility of other people who need shelter and transitional housing. However, blame for transphobia is often laid at the feet of cisgender housing service users, which participants argued is neither accurate nor fair. Hank, a housing service provider who is transgender, said "when I came out and started transitioning and stuff, people would often think that street-involved folks would be like less open minded. I would hear that from non-street involved folks. But I find that the street community folks actually are more likely to know a trans person than someone who lives in the suburbs" (Hank, HSP, interview, 2021). People held the misconception that unhoused people would be closed-minded about gender identity, when this participant found that because transgender people are at a higher risk of becoming homeless, other unhoused people are more likely to have met and interacted with transgender people than people who have led more privileged lives. Charlie also argued that while everyone in housing organizations needs to be educated on safety and access for transgender people, leaders especially need to walk the talk.

> Often the organizations will scapegoat clients or the front-line workers. I mean, I've just literally sat down at the executive table at [a local organization] and have them all like, look me in the eye and be like, "you're the first tran I've ever met" with tears streaming down their faces about how hard my life is. But like, I haven't seen them make any

doi: 10.29173/spectrum230

> changes in their organization (Charlie, TSP, Interview, 2021)

Charlie points to the gap between leaders stating an interest in the lives of transgender people and actually doing something about it. In the absence of substantial, trans-friendly changes, housing organizations remain uncomfortable and unsafe for transgender workers and service users. The changes needed lie not only in speech and interpersonal practice, but also in how transitional housing and shelters are organized and structured.

Gender segregation creates discomfort and danger

Currently, shelters in Manitoba (as in many other locations) are almost universally segregated by gender: there are shared shelters which are divided into 'male' and 'female' sections, or there are shelters with gender-specific mandates (e.g., women's shelters and gender-based violence shelters). We heard from participants that this creates a fundamental barrier to safety for transgender people, which is also reflected in literature from other contexts (Dénommé-Welch et al., n.d; Pyne, 2011). Gender segregation is generally justified on the basis of safety for cisgender women. Transgender and non-binary people are not included in this model of 'safety,' and can in fact be perceived as threats as a result. Neither transgender women nor transgender men may be welcomed into shared living spaces with cisgender women, for example. While participants emphasized that *everyone* deserves to feel safe, they emphasized that binary gender segregation is not an inclusive approach. We heard from Bre, a non-binary Trans Service Provider, for example that:

> If you're worried about people being sexually assaulted in the shelter bedrooms, then that's not a trans person issue. That's like just a basic safety issue, because if there isn't safety in the first place, a trans person isn't going to make it any less safe. So, it really becomes this idea of safety versus inclusivity, because of course, there are people who have that history of violence with masculine folks, and [the presence of people perceived as masculine] is potentially triggering. That sense of safety is so important, but [so is] acknowledging people's identities and respecting that (Bre, TSP, Interview, 2021)

In this context, transgender people are not often given the opportunity to decide for themselves where they would be most comfortable in a gender segregated space, which echoes reports from other contexts as well (Ecker, 2017; Sharpe, 2019). Participants suggested that allowing transgender people to stay where they feel safest can dramatically raise their sense of comfort and safety. Instead, shelter and transitional housing staff typically decide where they think people 'should' be housed. Charlie spoke about the problem this presents both from their position as an 2SLGBTQ+ advocate and as a transgender person themselves.

> You can't just look at my face and decide where I'm going to be safe in a shelter. I honestly don't even know where the fuck I would be safe in a shelter. I think that people who are women would not want to sleep in a bed next to me in a shelter because I look like a guy, and I don't want to sleep in a shelter full of men because I'm not a guy and I have trauma (Charlie, TSP, Interview, 2021).

One of the conclusions that participants came to is that transgender-specific housing options are urgently needed in Manitoba. As Bre put it, "if there were queer specific shelters where trans and non-binary folks felt safe to access … absolutely that that would function a lot better. But society hasn't really reached the point in which they're prioritizing queer folks" (interview, TSP, 2021). In the meantime, we heard that transgender people should have as much control and choice as possible in where they sleep and how they are treated.

Discussion and Conclusion

As this research emerged from a partnership with a community organization that already suspected their transitional housing was not safe and comfortable for transgender people, we did not set out to specifically ask what the current problems are, but rather what housing providers and providers of transgender-specific programs and services perceived as better practice. It came through clearly in interviews, however, just how shelters and transitional housing in Manitoba, and specifically in Westman, are currently failing to meet the needs of transgender people. We have outlined here how a rural context and the predominance of faith-based shelters impacts perception and accessibility of housing, and how intake processes and forms discourage transgender people from accessing transitional housing. Near universal gender segregation in existing transitional housing structures spaces in an unwelcoming and unsafe way, while leaders of housing organizations need education and training to lead the way on making change.

The results we present echo findings in other geographical contexts, providing some local evidence and voices to inform local practice. For example, there is evidence from other locations that form filling and intake, and the religious affiliation of an organization can present such barriers that transgender people avoid even trying to access social service and housing organizations (Shelton, 2018b; Yu, 2010). Like-

doi: 10.29173/spectrum230

wise, there is literature from other contexts demonstrating that housing organizations are undertrained and also under-serving transgender people (Ecker et al., 2019).

Our findings illustrate that perception is an important key to accessibility and comfort. According to the service providers we interviewed, transgender people need to perceive *and* to experience that they are welcome and will be cared for to find safety in transitional housing. This is an important insight for community organizations that want to improve their relevance and accessibility for transgender people. Organizations should expect that they need to transform their structures and practices and effectively demonstrate and communicate about the transformation.

The theme of choice and lack thereof also stands out in our findings as a key aspect of safe and comfortable transitional housing for transgender people. In structures organized along a gender binary, and in intake and referral processes that can exacerbate vulnerability and create risk, service providers flagged that self-determination and control over the questions and answers currently present a major problem for transgender people. They also emphasized that there are simple ways of correcting these patterns, by asking transgender people what they want, need, and prefer.

More research is needed into the experiences of transgender people with transitional housing and shelters to further support positive change in accessibility and safety. As an undergraduate study that set out to meet the knowledge needs of YWCA Brandon, this study did not directly seek out to fill that gap in research, but rather to foreground the knowledge and expertise of local professionals. Expanding safe housing options for transgender people requires that existing organizations understand why transgender people might feel unsafe accessing their organizations today, and what can be done to improve the situation. The latter is the focus of another publication from this study (Paterson, 2022). This paper contributes to knowledge in Westman, Manitoba and beyond to inform critical thinking and planning to improve the safety and well-being of transgender people at a time when demonstrations of respect and care are urgently needed.

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to our collaborators on this project: Dr. Candice Waddell-Henowitch at Brandon University and the board of YWCA Brandon. This project received financial support from the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada through the Manitoba Research Alliance Grant, Community-Driven Solutions to Poverty: Challenges and Possibilities.

doi: 10.29173/spectrum230

Notes

[1]Transgender is an umbrella term used to refer to people whose gender identity differs from the sex that they were assigned at birth. Identities that fall under this umbrella include those who identify as transgender, transexual, queer, non-binary, transitioned, Two-Spirit, gender non-conforming, agender, and others (Rainbow Resource Centre, 2021).

[2]For recommendations for organization leaders, see Paterson, 2022.

doi: 10.29173/spectrum230

References

Abramovich, A. (2017). Understanding How Policy and Culture Create Oppressive Conditions for LGBTQ2S Youth in the Shelter System. *Journal of Homosexuality*, *64*(11), 1484–1501. https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2016.1244449

Bardwell, G. (2015). *LGBT Needs Assessment for Emergency Shelters in London, Ontario*. Unity Project for Relief of Homelessness in London. https://missionservices.ca/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/15-05-LGBT-Emergency-Shelter-Needs-Assessment-2015-Final-Version.pdf

CMHC. (2022, June 15). 2SLGBTQIA+ Housing Needs and Challenges. The Housing Observer. https://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/en/blog/2022/2slgbtqia-housing-needs-challenges

Coen, S., Oliffe, J., Johnson, J., & Kelly, M. (2013). Looking for Mr. PG: Masculinities and men's depression in a northern resource-based Canadian community. *Health & Place*, *21C*, 94–101. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.healthplace.2013.01.011

Dénommé-Welch, S., Pyne, J., & Scanlon, K. (n.d.). *Invisible Men: FTMs and Homelessness in Toronto* (p. 94). Wellesley Institute. https://www.wellesleyinstitute.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/invisible-men.pdf

Ecker, J. (2017). *LGBTQ2S Adult Housing Needs Assessment: Final Report* (pp. 1–60). https://homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/LGBTQ2S%20Adult%20Housing%20Needs%20Assessment_Final%20Report_23Nov2017%20(1).pdf

Ecker, J., Aubry, T., & Sylvestre, J. (2019). A Review of the Literature on LGBTQ Adults Who Experience Homelessness. *Journal of Homosexuality*, *66*(3), 297–323. https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2017.1413277

Froese, I. (2023, March 23). The 'real Steinbach' isn't as Mennonite as it once was. How the city is surprising people. *CBC.* https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/steinbach-growth-diversity-1.6784679

Hammond, R., Rempel, C., & Paterson, M. (2021). *YWCA Brandon: A demographic overview of housing, reintegration, and domestic violence service recommendations for ongoing and future strategic operations.* Centre for Critical Studies of Rural Mental Health, Brandon University. https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5d8100cdfadd7b051fbb8d6b/t/615c9f81d463710165eed7df/1633460101837/YWCA_Final_Report_2021.pdf

Hunter, A. (2023, October 20). Sask. Government passes Parents' Bill of Rights. *CBC News.* https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/saskatchewan/sask-parental-rights-law-1.7002088

O'Brien, D., Travers, R., Scanlon, K., Ridgley, A., & Carolo, H. (n.d.). *"What Do You Find in the City": HIV Vulnerability Among Two-Spirit Youth*. Youth Migration Project. Retrieved April 19, 2021, from http://www.2spirits.com/PDFolder/youthmigration.pdf

Paterson, M. (2022). *"It's a scary place to come out": Exploring how shelters in Westman can be safer and more welcoming for transgender people*. Manitoba Research Alliance. https://mra-mb.ca/publication/its-a-scary-place-to-come-out-exploring-how-shelters-in-westman-can-be-safer-and-more-welcoming-for-transgender-people/

Pyne, J. (2011). Unsuitable Bodies: Trans People and Cisnormativity in Shelter Services. *Canadian Social Work Review / Revue Canadienne de Service Social*, *28*(1), 129–137.

Rainbow Resource Centre. (2021). *2SLGBTQ+ Awareness, Inclusion, and Affirmation Workbook*.

Sellers, M. D. (2018). Absent Inclusion Polices: Problems Facing Homeless Transgender Youth. *Public Integrity*, *20*(6), 625–639. https://doi.org/10.1080/10999922.2018.1446629

Sharpe, B. (2019, December 9). Why So Many LGBTQ Teens Are Homeless, And Why We Should Be Worried. *HuffPost Canada*. https://www.huffpost.com/archive/ca/entry/teens-homeless-lgbtq_ca_5dee6054e4b00563b854fd49

Shelton, J., DeChants, J., Bender, K., Hsu, H.-T., Maria, D. S., Petering, R., Ferguson, K., Narendorf, S., & Barman-Adhikari, A. (2018a). Homelessness and Housing Experiences among LGBTQ Young Adults in Seven U.S. Cities. *Cityscape*, *20*(3), 9–34.

Shelton, J., Poirier, J. M., Wheeler, C., & Abramovich, A. (2018b). Reversing Erasure of Youth and Young Adults Who are LGBTQ and Access Homelessness Services: Asking about Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, and Pronouns. Child Welfare, 96(2), 1–28.

doi: 10.29173/spectrum230

Statistics Canada. (2022a, February 9). *Profile table, Census Profile, 2021 Census of Population—Brandon, City, Manitoba*. https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E

Statistics Canada. (2022b, February 9). *Profile table, Census Profile, 2021 Census of Population—Winnipeg, City, Manitoba*. https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E

Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Council. (2014). *Forgotten Voices*. https://www.tassc.ca/uploads/1/2/1/5/121537952/_forgotten_voices-booklet-final.pdf

Vadeboncoeur, D. (2023, September 24). "Everyone deserves to be who they are": Rally for Trans Youth in Winnipeg responds to anti-LGBTQ2S+ protests. *CTV News Winnipeg.* https://winnipeg.ctvnews.ca/everyone-deserves-to-be-who-they-are-rally-for-trans-youth-in-winnipeg-responds-to-anti-lgbtq2s-protests-1.6575736

Yu, V. (2010). Shelter and Transitional Housing for Transgender Youth. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Mental Health*, *14*(4), 340–345. https://doi.org/10.1080/19359705.2010.504476

doi: 10.29173/spectrum230