

Working Session with Indigenous Voices

Living Space Relocation Review – Part 3

Mon, Feb 26, 2024

9:30 am – 12:00 pm

SUMMARY OF FEEDBACK

The working session included 21 people, including staff from Mushkegowuk Fire Keepers (Nick Gunner, Shiloh Spencer, Stephen Hookimaw, Sabrina Sackancy), Wabun Tribal Council (Trina Regan, Social & Emergency Response Coordinator), Nishnawbe Aski Nation (Jessica Gasci, Senior Policy Analyst working with Deputy Grand Chief Anna Betty Achneepineskum participating remotely from Thunder Bay), Ontario Aboriginal Housing Services (Heather Murray, Resiliency Coach and Supervisor, along with an OAHs placement student), Timmins & Area Women in Crisis (Julie Nobert Demarchi), the City of Timmins (Meagan Baranyk, Community Programs Manager), the Cochrane District Social Services Advisory Board (Jean Carriere, Director Emergency Medical Services and Carole Duguay, Community Services Manager), Gervais Emergency Consulting (Michelle Gervais), along with Eagle Cree Consulting (Theresa Sutherland, Phillip Adeyemi), Olivia Sutherland, Kaidryn Sutherland, Pat Etherington Sr., Frances Whiskeychan, and Stephanie Stephens. Third Party Public (Nicole Swerhun) shared the draft outcomes of the Relocation Review and took notes.

As the meeting unfolded, we remembered the importance of honouring and continuing the leadership that the late Jean Sutherland from Eagle Cree Consulting showed during her work on the Living Space Relocation Review. It's also important to remember the contributions of the many others we have lost who were working to help.

The discussion focused on the following points:

- 1. Non-Indigenous people are trying to serve Indigenous people and that's why its not working. We know the path that will work.**
 - We can think of what's happening in Timmins today like a situation where we took a First Nations reserve and moved it into a city. People who are providing the services have no understanding of our people. That's why we can't move forward.
 - Many Indigenous people are not from the city. Many don't know what it is to live in a town or city. Many Indigenous people are survivors of residential schools. Authoritarian figures are a very big trigger for us. This is one example of why we need sensitivity training for staff. Indigenous people are not statistics. What we're discussing are human needs.
 - The people participating in the meeting here today have been coming to meetings regularly during the Living Space Relocation Review. There is interest in continuing to work together going forward to help implement what has been discussed today and is included in the rest of this summary.
 - NAN would like to be added to the Steering Committee and involved in Action Committees or any other activities going forward. NAN is also interested in helping connect with different DSSABs.
 - We need allies to look at the resources we're all connected to, and to follow the model that works using the lessons learned through the emergency evacuations. The clients are the first and most important

voice, followed by the Indigenous-provided supports, and then the western/non-Indigenous supports – in that order.

- There also needs to be more representation of Indigenous people on the front lines, in management, and at the CDSSAB. There are no Indigenous in management at the shelter. There aren't enough Indigenous people on staff at the shelter. We don't see Indigenous people at the CDSSAB.
- Service providers have to show up better. Our partners need to be more understanding.
- When people are ready for help and ask for help, services need to be provided right away. There is a very short window of time to get people help. Services needs to be available immediately in response. Right now, there are longer timelines and waitlists, and in that period, a lot people change there minds. There needs to be a circle of are provided to support people.
- The Fire Keepers are doing good work with the street patrol. We should think about how Fire Keepers can integrate and work together with people working in the shelter to better understand and support Indigenous clients. Consider expanding Fire Keepers role and elevating them to do other activities too.
- The Living Space Board needs to be fixed. Three people put forward their names, including two Indigenous people, interested in being on the Board but there was no uptake. It should either be run by the Living Space non-profit Board of Directors or it should be run by the CDSSAB.
- We need Action Committees not Advisory Committees. There are too many cooks and not enough soup. Also Indigenous leaders are busy, so it's important to consider opportunities to delegate participation to others on their behalf (could be someone from the health team).
- There needs to be more leadership from First Nations Chiefs. A model like what they have in Kenora with the Kenora Chiefs Advisory should be something that we investigate and see how we can make something like that work here.

2. In terms of how to better support clients at Living Space with safer spaces in the immediate-term, there are examples in Timmins, including spaces and procedures provided at TAWC and with the emergency evacuation effective hosting model.

- TAWC is a 15-bed shelter that has 8 "safe" rooms that are used to provide clients with their own safe space safe. If someone comes in under the influence, we make a safety plan, including an agreement on whether the client would like a staff member to check in on them regularly. They stay in that room until they're ready to join the shared spaces, including spaces with women and children. And if an individual says that they want help, we work so that they can stay in the safe room until we can connect them to the service they need.
- For the Emergency Evacuations, a similar process is used. There are safe rooms used for people who need them, with staff assigned to support the person in the room and outside the room – they have a peacekeeping role. Both Julie and Michelle are happy to talk further with the CDSSAB and Living Space to share these lessons and experiences in more detail. Olivia Sutherland and Shiloh Spencer are also interested in conversations about how a circle of care can be better provided.
- The Living Space shelter wasn't supposed to be like this. When the shelter started, there was more training for staff and the pay used to be higher. Then there was a change in leadership and when higher paid staff left (making about \$24/hr) they were replaced with people making \$18/hr and less training was provided.

3. There are issues related to the justice system and Indigenous people living on the street.

- An Indigenous male who was part of the emergency evacuation had to stay behind to attend court. He was very scared and didn't know how to navigate the justice system. I helped him go through the system. I saw that the court in Timmins had lists of names of people who are Indigenous and living on the streets. That is not the place for people who are homeless.
- There are people who commit crimes in order to spend time in Monteith. That way they know they'll be warm, sheltered, and receive meals. There is data from Timmins Police Services that demonstrates this. This is not how the system should work.
- NAN Legal can support Indigenous people in the justice system, if people are aware of this service and know that they need to apply. This also relies on adequate funding to NAN Legal to provide this service. NAN Legal has supported more than 3000 members in the last few years.
- The justice system is supposed to pay for plane tickets to get people home, but that doesn't always happen. There are people homeless in Timmins because they can't get back to their communities. I met with someone who had been homeless for 6 months because they couldn't get a plane ticket home. When people do get a plane ticket to go home, sometimes the flights are rescheduled because of weather issues. Sometimes people have to wait 3 days until the flight gets out and there are no supports provided to them at the airport.
- There's a lack of warm "hand-offs" of people from one part of the system to another. They don't know that services are available so they can't connect to those services. There are bailbeds that are intended to help address this, but they are limited in number.
- Police need cross-cultural training on how to handle our people.

4. Instead of overpopulating Living Space, we need options.

- We need transitional housing and supportive housing. There could be stages for people, starting with detox, then transitional housing, and then a place of their own. Living Space was not intended to be a long-term place for people to stay, like it is now. It needs to be a low barrier shelter.
- A land-based program option should be explored.
 - This could be an option provided to people exiting Monteith. I've taken the Matheson bus with a woman who was leaving Monteith and looking for an apartment. She was looking good. Then a few months later I saw her on the street and she didn't look good. If she had another option, maybe things would have gone differently.
 - There could be a land-based option with fires, smudging, teepee, sweat lodges, hunting, and trapping. There were times in Timmins when we had a teepee as part of services, we served Bannock and smoked fish, and people said that made them feel a connection to the community and the city of Timmins.
 - There are also existing programs that people from Timmins could attend. For example, OAHS bought 15 spots in a treatment facility that can serve 15 people. Examples of facilities include: GwekwaadziwinMiikan Mental Health and Addictions on Manitoulin Island, and Sagashtawao

Healing Lodge in Moosonee (though there can be some reluctance to go there because people may run into other people they know that they prefer not to be around). There are also others.

- An Indigenous-run and Indigenous-led shelter option is needed.
- Fort Albany First Nation has received government money for a facility in Timmins to support victims of violence against women and 2SLGBTQ+ communities. The CDSSAB is familiar with this. This may be an experience to learn from when considering additional facilities needed.

5. It doesn't make sense when we talk about a lack of funding.

- There are so many resources extracted from here – through mining, forestry, water – yet we are left to chase small amounts of money that people say isn't available. Resources are available. People are choosing not to direct them here.
- Money received by Wabun Tribal Council can only be used for people on reserves. It cannot be used for supporting urban Indigenous people.

6. Other points raised:

- Fentanyl is a major issue.
- Addictions impact many people that are not homeless. And just because someone is homeless, doesn't mean they have addictions.
- Timmins Native Friendship Centre used to be a place that our people were supposed to go, but now it's locked up.

Next steps:

The Relocation Review report will be delivered by Third Party Public to the Relocation Review Steering Committee and also distributed to all participants in the process and posted online at www.livingspacereview.ca.

This summary was written by Nicole Swerhun from Third Party Public. As facilitators that are not advocating for any particular outcome of the Relocation Review, the intent is to capture the perspectives shared during the discussion, not to assess the merit or accuracy of any of these perspectives. Note that points are numbered in this summary for ease of reference only and are not intended to imply that some points are more important than others.