

The Canadian Model for Housing the Homeless: *Case Studies from Three Canadian Cities*

Wael W. Al-Azhari, PhD
Department of Architecture
Faculty of Engineering and Technology
The University of Jordan
Jordan

Abstract

The government of Canada, in cooperation with the provinces, the housing industry, and public interest groups, is focusing on the national and international plight of the homeless. Through the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), Canada is supporting many and diverse projects alleviating the most pressing shelter needs of the homeless in more than forty countries in the world (Statistics Canada, 1990). Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) and Canada's National Housing Agency, on the other hand, are supporting a wide range of initiatives to identify and research the best means of improving the living conditions of the homeless in Canada (McLaughlin, 1987). The analysis of homelessness in Canada indicates that while it is a pervasive phenomenon, particularly visible in the major metropolitan cities, it is subject public policy resolution and substantive improvement through public and private resources (Oberlander, 1987). The practical solutions for such a problem should focussing on the needs of the homeless that include shelter as well as social and economic support services. This will provide the basis for effective return and participation of individuals and families in the Canadian society who have been made homeless by economic, health, and social circumstances. This study is an analytical survey on the nature and the causes of homelessness in Canada, and on selected successful solutions and projects in three cities, which are: Vancouver, Ottawa, and Toronto. The examples that will be present are successful innovative solutions of a cooperation process and joint enterprise of public and private initiatives.

1.0 Introduction

The effects of the dual processes of population growth and rapid urbanization suggest the urgent need for fundamentally new concepts of managing settlements and providing affordable, quality shelter, and services within the context of an exponentially growing need of gainful employment and public financial constraint (Ward, 1989). During the seventies, shelter and human settlements programs have made positive contributions to national social and economic development. Appropriate shelter satisfies a basic human need, it represents a major contribution to health and social development and provides employment and vital economic activity (Wright, 1987). Accordingly, addressing homelessness, and the needs of the poor and disadvantaged, requires a structured response to a wide range of issues including guaranteed access to land, security of tenure in affordable and adequate housing, primary health care, as well as ready access to infrastructure, basic services, education, training and above all, employment (Oberlander, 1987).

Canada's economy is a mixed market economy within which settlement investments and expenditures usually are made by private enterprise with infrastructure support by local and provincial governments, often with substantive assistance from voluntary and charitable organizations (McLaughlin, 1987). The vitality and resilience of the contemporary Canadian settlement system are intimately linked to regional, provincial, and national economic development strategies, in which public policy responsibility for the growth and development of settlements rests with the provincial governments, while the mixed market economy creates the setting for a public/ private partnership (Ibid, 1987).

In this regard, a process of public consultation and dialogue between the appropriate levels of government, the private, and the voluntary sectors, had started to improve and increase the delivery of shelter to the homeless (Daly, 1996). The aim of this process was to coordinate actions toward creating an environment in which the non-governmental sector can operate while governments discharge their social and economic responsibilities (Ibid, 1996).

In 1985, a new social housing policy was established through which all available social housing funds are being directed to those most in need (Statistics Canada, 1990). Social housing involves program grants, loans, and subsidies designed to create appropriate housing at costs affordable to poor. These include many of the private and non-governmental. In 1985 alone, the government provided 1,781 new hostel beds and it spent 21\$ million to repair existing rooming houses (Oberlander, 1987). During 1987, the federal government and the provinces had funded the construction of 20,000 housing units for the poor. This resulted in a total of 425,000 social housing units in Canada, an indication of national commitment, and the willingness to address the needs of the poor and disadvantaged (Ibid, 1987).

2.0 Homeless Problem in Canada

Despite that the homeless problems in Canada are pervasive and complex, they can be solved through the implementation of a structured response involving a partnership of public and private resources.

2.1 Definitions of Homelessness

Every definition available to us in the literature on the homeless becomes in the end an attempt to classify. All such terms, like "hobo," "tramp," or "bum," are really designations for conditions in which a person may find himself/ herself at any time (Jencks, 1994).

"Home is where we start from" (Culhane and Horuburg, 1997, p.11). Thus, drawing the boundary between home and homelessness is further complicated when mobility, work, and tradition enter the picture (Hathorn, 1994). Resort to irregular forms of accommodations, what some may refer to as homeless ways of life, can describe the usual situation of whole communities (such as the Roman "gypsies", Irish "travelers", or nomadic hunters and gatherers), who would never think of telling a visiting anthropologist that they do not feel at home (Ibid, 1994). Therefore, definitions matter because they alert us to how things have changed. Even in the strict sense of the literally homeless, caution should be exercised in applying the notion of homelessness across time, place, or culture. Although homelessness probably occurs in most societies, not only do the forces of displacement vary greatly but so do the configuration and meaning of the ensuing transient state (Kraljic, 1992).

For Culhane and Horuburg (1997) homeless are:

those currently residing for at least one day but for less than fourteen with a friend or relative, not paying rent, and not sure that the length of stay will surpass fourteen days; those current[ly] residing in a shelter, whether overnight or transitional; those currently without normal, acceptable shelter arrangements and thus sleeping on the street, in doorways, in abandoned buildings, in cars, in subway or bus stations, in alleys, and so forth; those residing in a treatment center for the indigent who have lived at the facility for less than 90 days and who claim that they have no place to go, when released p.28.

In addition, the definitions tell us not only where to look for what we seek but also how to recognize it when we find it. A perennial problem, and one that continues to dog labels even after their users have been apprised of it, is that of reification: the tendency to transform into things certain phenomena that are better understood as relationships or processes (Glasser, 1994). Most relevant here are phenomena that not only get named and attached to an individual, but also come to dominate the person's social identity and to locate his or her effective world at the margins of the world.

Legislative efforts at definition can be fairly exhaustive. According to the Jencks (1994), a person is considered homeless who:

lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate night-time residence and; has a primary night time residency that is: (a) a supervised publicly or privately operated shelter designed to provide temporary living accommodation, (b) an institution that provides a temporary residence for individuals intended to be institutionalized, or (c) a public or private place not designed for, or ordinarily used as, a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings p. 42.

The Jencks definition of homelessness serves large, urban communities, where tens of thousands of people are literally homeless. However, it may prove problematic for those persons who are homeless in areas of the country, such as rural areas, where there are few shelters. People experiencing homelessness in these areas are less likely to live on the street or in a shelter, and more likely to live with relatives in overcrowded or substandard housing (Jencks, 1994).

Generally, the opposite of homelessness is not shelter but home, and, socially understood, home must entail some claim to solidarity (Hathorn, 1994). The question underlying homelessness policy, then, is not, what does charity demand? but rather, what does solidarity require?



Figure 1: Homeless Shelter.
Source: (Daly, 1996)

2.2 Who is Experiencing Homelessness

The homeless in Canada present heterogeneous populations (O'Reilly, 1993). The traditional stereotype of the indigent vagrant who has opted out of society and into a bottle is a misleading caricature that can no longer be accepted. People from all walks of life, of all ages, and with vastly different experiences are losing their capacity to exercise choice and control over their environment.

Often homelessness is characterized in terms of presumed causes or precipitating problems: *accidental* (resulting from natural disasters or exogenous events); *structural* (relating to poverty or health problems, for example); *economic* (unemployment as a result of deindustrialization); *political* (refugees from areas of political or ethnic conflicts); or *social* (single mothers and others who are marginalized or discriminated against) (Daly, 1996).

Within the class as a whole, certain sub-populations may be identified in Canada, whose relative proportions vary from region to region (Oberlander, 1987), these sub-population are:

1. Single-parent households, many of which were receiving public assistance when they became homeless, who have been evicted for failure to pay rent, removed on vacate orders, or turned out by friends or family with whom they had been doubling up.
2. Single men, either indigenous or on the road, who are out of work, are increasingly of ethnic minority status, and often have rudimentary or obsolete job skills, the younger men tending to have job histories concentrated in the peripheral labor market. From (Table 1) we can see that this category had the highest percentage of the people who lived in the emergency shelters.
3. Single women of all ages, who have lost husbands or mates, who have been turned out by friends or family, or simply cannot keep up with rising rents.
4. Individuals with serious disabilities, severe and persisting mental illness, or long-standing substance abuse problems in particular, some of them having been hospitalized, others not, and all having lost whatever precarious accommodations they once had and being now at a severe disadvantage in competing for the affordable housing that remains (Wright, 1987). From (Table 1), this group of people has the lowest percentage in the emergency shelters.

5. Ex-offenders released from jail or prison to fall back on their own meager resources, who face discrimination in securing jobs.
6. Homeless youths, who are especially vulnerable to the depredations of the street, some having been ejected from households unwilling or unable to support them any longer, and some having been victims of abuse or graduates of foster care.
7. A host of smaller groups, including the displaced elderly, victims of domestic violence, and legal and undocumented immigrants.



Figure 2: Homeless in the Streets.
Source: (Daly, 1996)

<i>Situation</i>	<i>% of sample</i>
Unemployed	54.7
Receiving social assistance	51.5
Alcohol abuser	33.3
Current or ex-psychiatric patient	20.1
Drug abuser	15.0
Evicted	9.4
Physically handicapped	3.1

Table 1: Characteristics of emergency shelter residents in Canada
Source: (Daly, 1996, p.159)

While there are several critical factors contributing to homelessness, affordability of shelter is the main factor in all of the causes. The gap between shelter costs and ability to pay widens as income decreases; the lower the individual or family income the higher its proportion devoted to housing (Friedrichs, 1988). The young, often under- or unemployed, and the old on fixed income are especially at risk of having to devote a disproportionate amount of their income to shelter or indeed become homeless (Ibid, 1988).

2.3 Causes of Homelessness

Homelessness in Canada is a pervasive and prevailing condition, the result of a complex of problems that are affecting an increasingly broad spectrum of the community. It appears to be a predominantly urban centered, socio-economic, and physical shelter problem deeply rooted in economic disparities across the country (Ward, 1989). Although it is a phenomenon difficult to define and measure accurately, it is evident that homelessness involves more than simply the presence of shelter. There are many factors for the causes of homelessness in Canada. No single causal factor can be used to define homelessness successfully. In certain regions of the country the problem is chronic, while in others it is episodic, but evidence indicates that homelessness in Canada is responsive to public policy, of which a shelter component is a vital, but by no means exclusive part (McLaughlin, 1987). Indeed, it is not exclusively a matter of government (McLaughlin, 1987). The viability of systematic and cost-effective strategies to alleviate problems of urban poverty and homelessness rests with the willingness and ability of the public and private sectors to coordinate their efforts and to work together (Fallis and Murray, 1990).

Conceptually, homelessness in Canada results from the confluence of social, economic, political, and physical factors (O'Reilly, 1993). Since it is linked to the combined effects of poverty, inadequate income, unaffordable housing, lack of meaningful employment opportunities, inadequate social benefits, urban change, and the differential standards which society seems to be willing to tolerate for some of its members, explanation of the causes, and by implication, the selection of practical solutions, requires comprehensive, multi-dimensional analyses which go beyond single factor causal explanations (Ibid, 1993). Recent evidence suggests that the causes of homelessness in Canada are varied, changing over time and from city to city. Nevertheless, there are some common elements, which are:

First, rates of personal disability among the homeless are extremely high (McLaughlin, 1987). About a third are mentally disabled; about a tenth are physically disabled; about half are substance abusive (Statistics Canada, 1990). Probably two-thirds to three-quarters of the total suffer from one or more of these conditions (Ibid, 1990). Despite the disproportionate number of severely mentally ill people among the homeless population, increases in homelessness are not attributable to the release of severely mentally ill people from institutions. Most patients were released from mental hospitals in the 1950s and 1960s, yet vast increases in homelessness did not occur until the 1980s, when incomes and housing options for those living on the margins began to diminish rapidly (O'Reilly, 1993). Only 5-7% of homeless persons with mental illness needs to be institutionalized; most can live in the community with the appropriate supportive housing options (Ibid, 1993). However, many mentally ill homeless people are unable to obtain access to supportive housing and other treatment services. The housing problem posed by the existence of large numbers of mentally ill homeless people is that the current supply of supported, transitional, and extended-care housing for the mentally disturbed is insufficient or, in many places, simply nonexistent (Friedrichs, 1988). The absence of an adequate supply of such housing is exactly why so many mentally ill people are homeless in the first place (Ibid, 1988).

Second, alcohol and drug abuse are commonly cited causes of homelessness (McLaughlin, 1987). As with psychiatric disturbance, rates of alcoholism and drug dependence among the homeless are admittedly quite high, on the order of 50 or 60 percent (Wright, 1987). But 40 or 50 percent are not substance abusers, and their homelessness must, therefore, result from other factors (Ibid, 1987). Thus, the homelessness of the alcoholic and drug dependent, like that of the mentally ill, is may considered a housing problem (Friedrichs, 1988). If homeless alcoholics or addicts are no longer going to live in skid row, out of the sight and mind of society at large, then they will have to live among the ordinary people in the Canadian society, and this in turn requires reintegration into the norms and behaviors of normal middle-class society. Therefore, to understand the exact nature of the housing problem of chemically dependent homeless people requires an understanding of the alcohol and drug treatment programs that are normally available to those of limited means (Culhane and Horuburg, 1997).

Third, homeless people show high levels of family and social estrangement (McLaughlin, 1987). Few have ever been married; most who have been married were subsequently separated or divorced (Ibid, 1987). Contact with the family of origin is minimal to nonexistent in most cases (Ibid, 1987). Indeed, many become homeless when their families can no longer support them. Lacking the safety net of familial and other social ties, they have nothing to catch them when they stumble, so they fall into the shelters and streets (Stoner, 1995). The housing implication of this fact is that they are rarely able to draw on networks of kin and friends to sustain them through periods of social, economic, or psychological crisis (Oberlander, 1987). Most people, if they found themselves about to be homeless or newly homeless, would have someone to whom they could turn as they weathered the storm and got back on their feet (Ibid, 1987). In general, the homeless are those who do not have such a support system.

Finally, the homeless are characterized by extreme poverty (Daly, 1996). In Canada most poor people are not starving, nor are they forced to live on the streets. But increasing numbers, including many children and single mothers, as it is obvious in (Table 2), rely on food banks and emergency shelters to meet their needs.



*Figure 3: Homeless Everywhere.
Source: (Daly, 1996)*

Children of single mothers	63.8
Single mothers with children under age 18	56.2
Natives	54.2
Single women over age 65	53.8
Unattached youths under age 25	50.1
Single adult women	44.5
Unattached individuals	37.5
Children of single fathers	23.1
Children under age 16 (all families)	16.9
Children of couples	10.6

Table 2: Poverty rates in Canada, 1990 (%)

Source: (Statistics Canada, 1990, p.39)

According to Statistics Canada (1990), about 14 percent of Canadians, 4.3 million people, including over 1 million children, are poor. Between 1979 and 1994, while median household income increased by 5 percent, the number of poor households grew by 11 percent, indicating that increases in income were not equitably distributed. Moreover, poverty among unattached individuals rose by 29 percent between 1981 and 1991. At the same time, the proportion of poor elderly people dropped from 34.9 percent to 27.6 percent, reflecting the salutary effect of social policy being carried out through redistribution of income. In recent years poverty has become more pronounced in urban areas, among young families, lone-parent households, and in households where one or more people are working (O'Reilly, 1993). According to Statistics Canada (1990), 87 percent of single welfare recipients spent more than half of their incomes on housing. An average single employable person on welfare, living in a rent-controlled bachelor or studio unit, had only 47\$ left per month after paying for housing. As a result, many individuals are locked into the hostel system because they are not able to pay the first and last month's rent usually required by landlords (Statistics Canada, 1990).

There is, of course, a fifth commonality to emphasize. Because of their extreme poverty, personal disabilities, and social estrangement, all homeless people are unable to secure or retain adequate housing. Therefore, housing affordability is one of the most frequently named culprits in the rise of homelessness. The assumption is that as housing has become less affordable, homelessness has resulted (Oberlander, 1987). This assumption is quite reasonable, but unfortunately for both policy-makers and researchers, "housing affordability" is a slippery term (Ibid, 1987).

Housing can become more affordable because people earn more but housing costs remain stable, or because people's earnings stay the same but housing costs decrease. It can become less affordable because people earn less although housing costs remain constant, or because people's incomes are constant but housing costs increase. People's incomes may change for many reasons, including unemployment; shifts in the pattern of employment between well- and poorer-paid jobs or between full- and part-time work; changes in eligibility for benefits or in the inflation-adjusted dollar value of benefits; and the availability for employment of more or fewer workers per household (Culhance and Horuburg, 1997).

Housing costs may change for equally diverse reasons: because a shortage of housing inflates the price, because building codes require more expensive construction, because national fiscal policy keeps interest rates high, or because localized economic downturns cause a glut of available housing (Erickson and Wilhelm, 1986). Each of these potential causes of a change in housing affordability implies a need for a different policy approach.

3.0 Shelter and Housing Needs

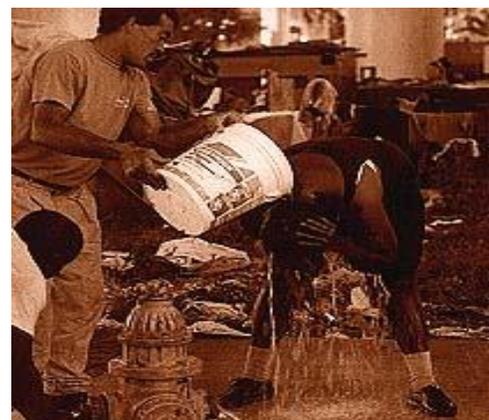
Within the Canadian society, housing is a vital element in both economic and social policy (Statistics Canada, 1990). However, since many people remain unable to afford decent shelter, the debate as to whether housing assistance by governments is sufficiently focussed on those most in need remains unresolved. Canadians still have unmet housing needs, and many people remain at risk of homelessness (Culhance and Horuburg, 1997). Some quarters such as: abandoned buildings, public spaces, residential health care facilities, emergency shelters, and hostels are considered a permanent shelter for many homeless (Oberlander, 1987). None of these options constitutes an adequate response to a person's need for a "home".

These options do little to address the conflict inherent in the structure of the economy which pits the needs of the poor or unemployed against the marketplace within a very diverse and fragmented public support system which differs from province to province.

Measuring the extent of homelessness is difficult because the number of homeless changes constantly in response to such factors as national and regional economic policies, unemployment rates, availability and use of community social services, availability of low-rent housing, season of the year, climate, day of the month, incidence of poverty and hunger, and the enumeration methods employed (O'Reilly, 1993). The number of homeless in any city in Canada depends on the definition chosen, and on the descriptive boundaries of selected social, economic, and environmental factors. In addition, the homeless themselves are difficult to enumerate, they have no fixed address and by definition move throughout the urban areas or between them (Ibid, 1993). The main problem for homeless is the people who are at risk of losing or unable to sustain an affordable home.

In this regard, a federal policy had been adapted. The policy encourages the development of social housing by other levels of government and by the voluntary sector. This policy is effective when provincial and municipal governments are motivated to mount an aggressive housing program (Oberlander, 1987). Without this local commitment, the policy goals cannot be realized. Also, CMHC's decision to devolve authority to the provinces resulted in an increase in the production of social housing by municipal non-profit housing corporations and private non-profit groups (Teasdale, 1993).

These mixed-income projects function reasonably well and represent a major improvement over monolithic public housing projects of earlier decades. By sponsoring or funding non-profit or social housing (CMHC) and provincial governments have fostered the development of some projects which are planned, designed, and managed by users (Ibid, 1993). Post-occupancy evaluations reveal that these developments achieved most of their objectives and are functioning reasonably well.



*Figure 4: Homeless in the Streets.
Source: (Jencks, 1994)*

But, the attention given to social housing and homelessness in Canada varies profoundly from one region to another. Some Provinces have taken little action. Only one, British Columbia, has adopted legislation, the 1994 Homeless and At-Risk Program (Daly, 1996). Other provinces, like Ontario, demonstrated that a great deal could be accomplished when all three levels of government (the federal, the provincial, and the municipal) cooperate (Fallis and Murray, 1990). Starting in the mid-1980s Ontario introduced several new measures. It passed the Rental Housing Protection Act to control demolition and conversion of rental housing when the supply of affordable units is threatened (Ibid, 1990). It conducted an inquiry into the housing situation of roomers, boarders and lodgers which resulted in the inclusion of rooming houses under the Landlord and Tenant Act (Ibid, 1990). A housing policy statement was devised, requiring all municipalities to allocate at least 25 percent of new development and redevelopment for affordable housing (Daly, 1996).

In Nova Scotia, the Province concentrates on programs that help welfare recipients to become homeowners (Teasdale, 1993). Social assistance payments were considered as income in order to meet qualification criteria for eventual purchase of dwellings. Mortgage funds are committed which, along with a second mortgage program, provide for 100 percent financing of new or existing units (Ibid, 1993).

In Quebec, a 15.5\$ million federal/ provincial program had developed permanent housing for homeless people (Daly, 1996). The result was a production of 260 homes with 1,300 dwelling units by non-profit housing organizations (Ibid, 1996). A 2\$ million provincially funded program supplies equipment (principally in kitchens) for existing housing to assist disadvantaged groups (Teasdale, 1993). In addition, arrangements are made so that homeless people without a fixed address can receive welfare payments.

4.0 Searching for Solutions

The homeless are not hopeless, and the problems associated with homelessness can be resolved in Canada. Shelter issues cannot be separated from the broader human settlements development issues, and neither set of issues can be separated from those of poverty and economic development (Hathorn, 1994). A comprehensive shelter strategy must encompass related economic, political, socio-cultural, and design solutions. The responses must be based on a cooperative commitment by all levels of government, coordinated with the initiatives developed by non-governmental organizations and the homeless themselves, and designed to enable individuals and families to begin or to return to participate fully in Canada's prevailing society (Oberlander, 1987).

To be effective, solutions must involve a structured response by all three levels of government in cooperation with the combined efforts of the private sector and voluntary organizations, and with continuing participation by the poor and homeless (Ibid, 1987). Representative examples from three of the largest urban centers in Canada, in which the problems of homelessness are clearly manifest, illustrate the type of projects designed to demonstrate the variety of solutions that were tested in Canada.

4.1 Vancouver Model "The Veteran's Memorial Housing Project"

In Vancouver, lots of homelessness' problems are concentrated in the downtown and eastside neighborhoods. The majority of the homeless in these neighborhoods are elderly on welfare and World War II veterans who have chronic illnesses (Oberlander, 1987). Approximately 80% of the residents of the area receive fixed income assistance or have incomes which are not enough for living (Ibid, 1987). Also, the people in the area are felling a strong sense of community, and the residents consider the local streets to be an extension of their houses (Ibid, 1987).

The project was opened in 1986 (Oberlander, 1987). It demonstrates many ingenious and user sensitive architectural and urban design features, which imaginatively overcome or compensate for many of the difficulties which prevail (Figure 5).



Figure 5: Project's Street Elevation.
Source: (Oberlander, 1987)

The project is a five-story building with 134 units (Ibid, 1987). The building had been designed in harmony with existing structures (Figure 6). The obvious efforts to have new project enhance the sense of community reflects the long term commitments and personal ideals of those who work with the poor and disadvantaged in this area.

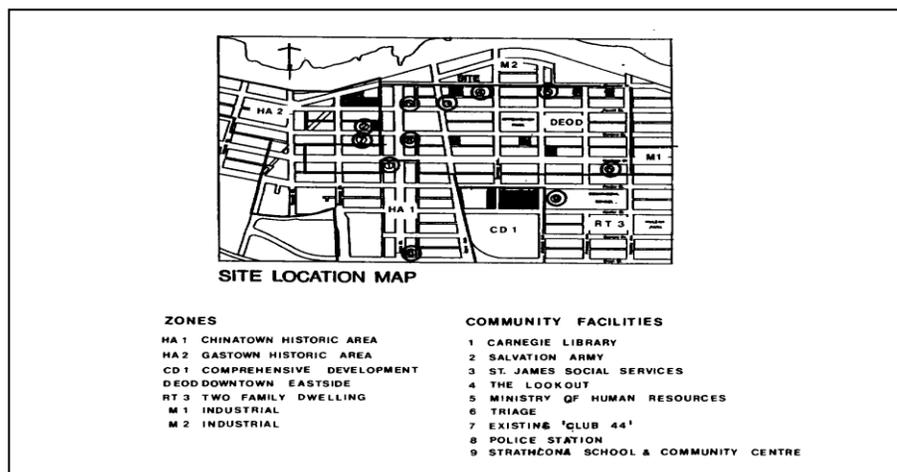


Figure 6: The Site Plan.
Source: (Oberlander, 1987)

The design concept of the project was to humanize the life-space of marginalized people, the homeless, through a process of progressive adaptation, by combining physical shelter with aided social self-help and ready access to a range of essential support services (Ibid, 1987). The five floors provide a reasonable upward progression of help and care from full dependence on staff to complete independence with private bathroom and kitchen for those who have learned to regain self-management and health (Teasdale, 1993).

A significant aspect of the building's management is the conviction of the staff that the residents require ready access to a variety of social and personal services all under one roof (Teasdale, 1993). Indeed, the aim was not to enforce rehabilitation, but to facilitate, encourage and support whatever developments or improvements in lifestyle of the residents. The attempt was "to put the paths where the people walk" (Teasdale, 1993, p.125), by providing a safe and supportive environment that engenders self-respect.

There were varieties of units' area, which were designed according to the physical conditions of the residents (Figure 7). The 40 units on the first and part of the second floors were designed for residents who require some degree of physical or health assistance (Oberlander, 1987). Each unit, (Figure 8), had a net area of 18-meter-square, and a sink, a bed and basic furniture (Ibid, 1987). The remaining units were designed with larger space and more facilities for those who are able to function with less supervision (Ibid, 1987). These units range from those with a toilet and sink only, to a bath and kitchenette, and ultimately to fully self-contained facilities. Also, The building design includes a subsidized low cost public cafeteria for residents and the surrounding community, reflecting the desire to maintain and strengthen long established community ties (Teasdale, 1993).

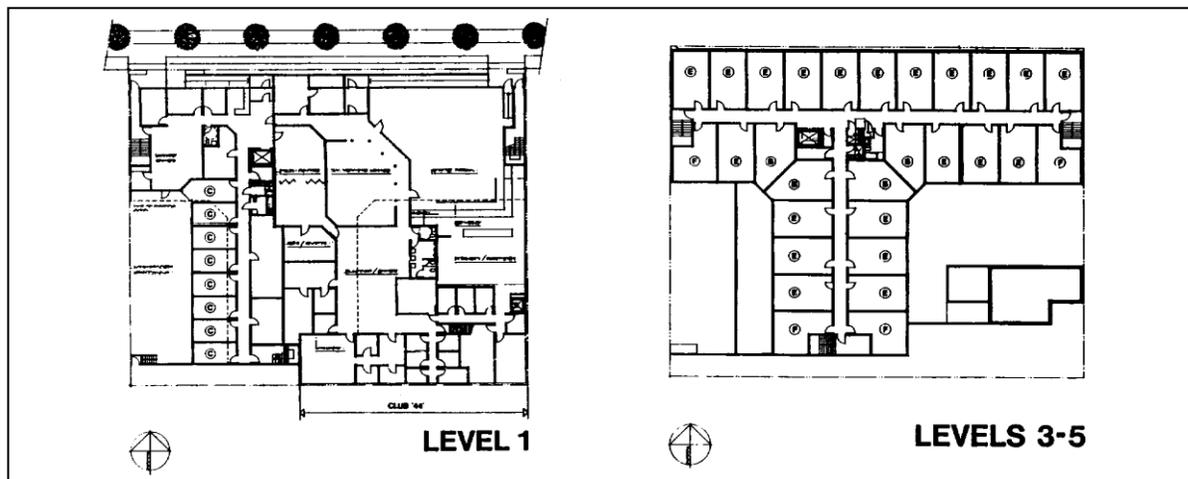


Figure 7: Project's Plans.
Source: (Oberlander, 1987)

The project had cost 4.5\$ million (Teasdale, 1993) and its funding came from three sources, which are (Oberlander, 1987): a) Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) provides assistance under the Non-Profit Rental Housing Program, approximately 324,000\$ per annum. b) Veterans' Affairs Canada had committed 50,000\$ annually for five years to cover additional service staffing costs. c) The City of Vancouver provided a write-down on the land lease to 75% of market value, thereby retaining public ownership and protecting against land speculation.

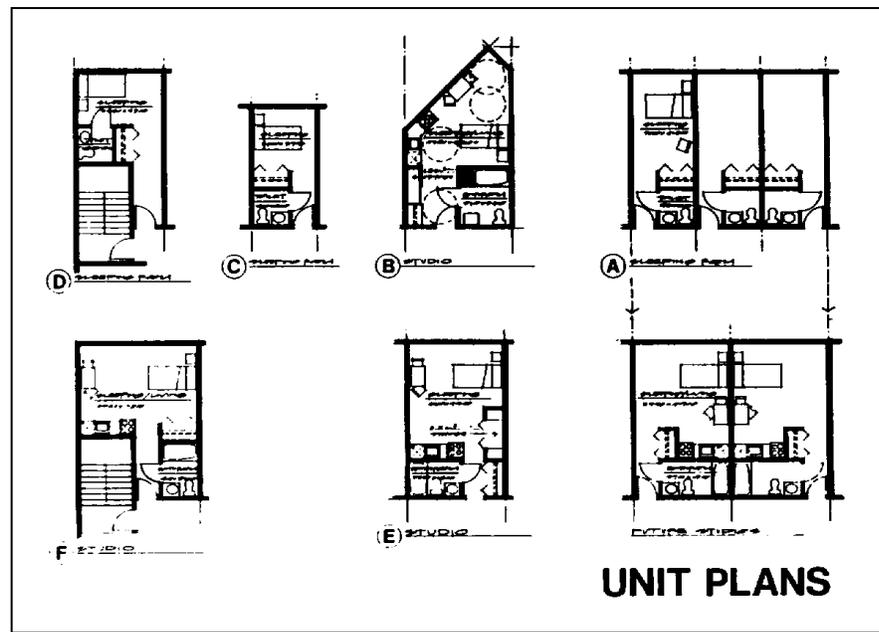


Figure 8: Units Plans.
Source: (Oberlander, 1987)

The Veteran's Memorial Housing project literally takes people off the street and provides them with the opportunity to put their lives back together in a supportive, sensitive environment (Teasdale, 1993). It is intended that when veterans no longer require the units provided, they will become available to non-veteran homeless, this approach can be replicated for other homeless and in other regions of Canada (Ibid, 1993).

The project is an example of cooperation process whereby experienced public and private organizations can work with the homeless where they choose to congregate. In addition, the project reflects the importance of having a committed partnership between, in this case, the Federal and Municipal governments coordinating efforts with the private sector and voluntary groups.

4.2 Ottawa Model "The Bronson Avenue Rooming House"

In Ontario, the percentage of low-income single persons and childless couples are high, approximately 75%, and it is increasing (McLaughlin, 1987). Also, there are more young women and men trapped in a revolving door of poverty and insecure, in affordable shelter alternatives (Ibid, 1987). In response, the city of Ottawa Non-Profit Housing Corporation (City Living), had begun to create a designed rooming house stock (Teasdale, 1993). City Living had grown from a Municipal Housing Company which managed just over 1,500 units for families and seniors to one of the largest non-profit housing corporations in Canada (Ibid, 1993). The varied federal and provincial government programs which City Living had utilized over the years, as well as the City of Ottawa's independent housing initiatives, have resulted in the provision of a wide range of building types, sizes of units and rental levels to accommodate the needs of low and moderate income households, although the local demand for affordable rental housing remains high (Oberlander, 1987).

The Bronson Avenue Rooming House (Maison de Chambres) is the first rooming house constructed by City Living in 1985 (Teasdale, 1993). It is located in a poor neighborhood called Oalhousesie Ward and support services within walking distance or a short bus ride (Figure 9). The target groups to be housed are: low-income singles, under 50 years of age, including transient men and women, marginally employed, students are considered low priority (Ibid, 1993). The residents must be self-sufficient and capable of taking care of themselves.

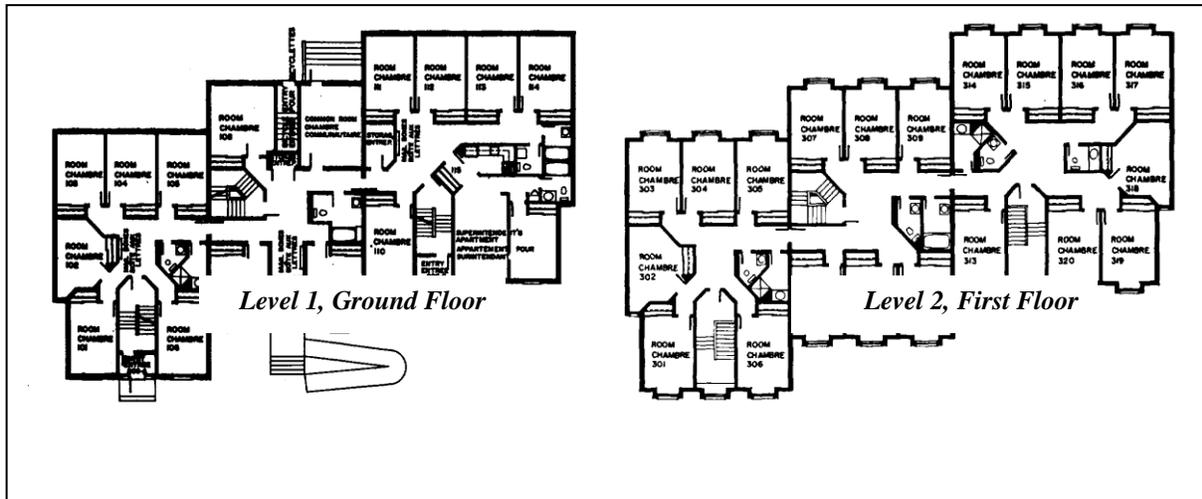


Figure 9: Project's Plans.
Source: (Oberlander, 1987)

The rooming house contains 55 rooms with a one-bedroom unit for a resident superintendent (Oberlander, 1987). Each unit is furnished and equipped with kitchenette facilities (Figure 10). There is a common room, laundry facility, common bathrooms and storage areas for the residents (Ibid, 1987).

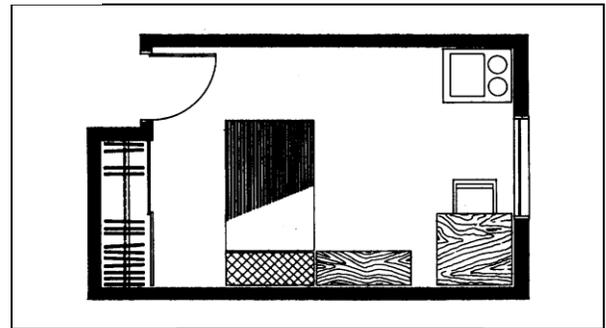


Figure 10: Unit Plan.
Source: (Oberlander, 1987)

A recreational program had been established in response to tenant requests and with the assistance of the Canadian Mental Health Association (Teasdale, 1993). This program is a pioneer program. It supports the residents with social skills that are important to help them to integrate with the society. Also, the program gives the staff the educational knowledge of care taking (Teasdale, 1993). So, the program is an interrelated process from which the residents and the staff could work together.

The main source of project's funding was from Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC). It provided funding under the Canada Rental Supply Program with a grant for a 15-year interest free loan of 391,020\$ for the construction of the project (Oberlander, 1987). The total cost of the project at completion is approximately 1,200,000\$. The project was planned to operate on a roughly break, even basis with rents averaging 205\$ per month (Ibid, 1987).

The policy guidelines for the operation of City Living rooming houses are based on the following objectives (Oberlander, 1987), which are:

- to maintain a healthy and secure living environment;
- to maintain a supply of affordable housing for low income single persons in the city;
- to maintain a relationship with the neighborhood and community support services for purposes of consultation and referral.

The Maison de Chambres demonstrates the success of providing affordable, quality accommodation at a human scale, (Figure 11), in an appropriate location, through local government initiative.



Figure 11: Project's Street Elevation.
Source: (Oberlander, 1987)

4.3 Toronto Model " The Strachan House Project"

Strachan House is a pioneer housing prototype that was opened in December 1996. The purpose of the project is to provide short and long term shelter to chronically homeless people. Sixty-three men and woman live in the renovated three story, brick and timber 19th century warehouse (Goodman, 1997).

The project was designed as a second-generation model of Street-City.¹ This first project was built approximately ten years ago in an abandoned postal warehouse (Figure 12). The main theme of this project grew from an idea generated by a group of homeless men squatting in the area and hostel workers. It was an opportunity for this group to try to put into practice ideas they had been developing about alternative, appropriate, housing for the homeless.

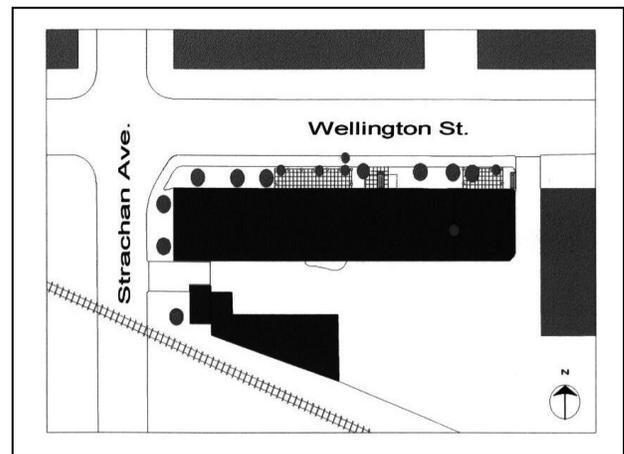


Figure 12: The Site Plan.
Source: (Goodman, 1997)

Strachan House is an example of interrelated process between the designer and the residents (Freedman, 1997). Therefore, respect and consideration for the proposed residents meant developing architecture solutions with the meaning and experiences of their lives (Goodman, 1997). A process of consultation predated the design work. It helped define the social and political framework within which a group of men and women, living solitary lives literally and figuratively on the outside of society, could imagine how to come inside and live together (Ibid, 1997). In this regard, during the design process, the architects have many discussions with the individuals about such issues as: what qualities would make Strachan House feel like a home; what would help people feel safe in doors and as part of a community; what were the qualities of living on the street that people liked, and would want translated and incorporated into a home. The architects found that the methods of designing with various kinds of models, (Figure 13), were one that worked well in discussions with residential. Unlike plans, large-scale models that create shadows and can be looked through, enable people who are unaccustomed to reading plans, to get a sense of the space (Freedman, 1997).

¹ The Street-City project is a rooming house for low-income singles (Goodman, 1997).

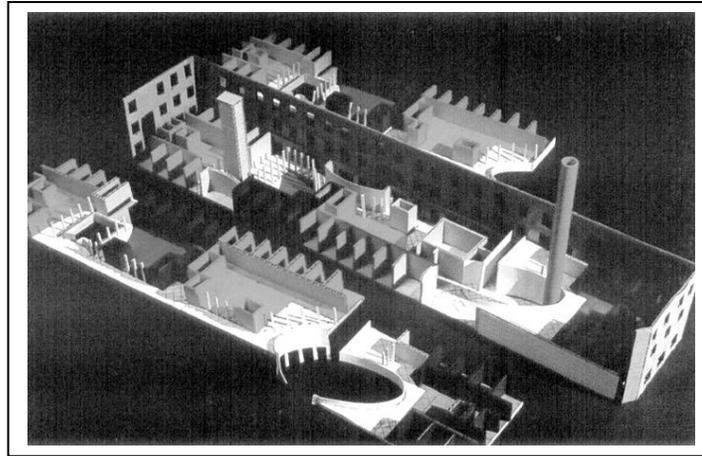


Figure 13: Building Concept Study Model.
Source: (Goodman, 1997)

The concept of the house and the community has infused the architectural design. The building was organized as a number of "houses", (Figure 14), linked horizontally by a public corridor (Goodman, 1997). Each house contains five to seven bedrooms, each house shared two washrooms, a washing area, a kitchen, and a living room (Ibid, 1997). There are layers of interior porches that mark the programmatic transitions from public to semi-public to the main space. Adjacent to and shared by each pair of houses is a semi-public lounge off the main street. All four houses on a floor share laundry and an additional multi-purpose room.

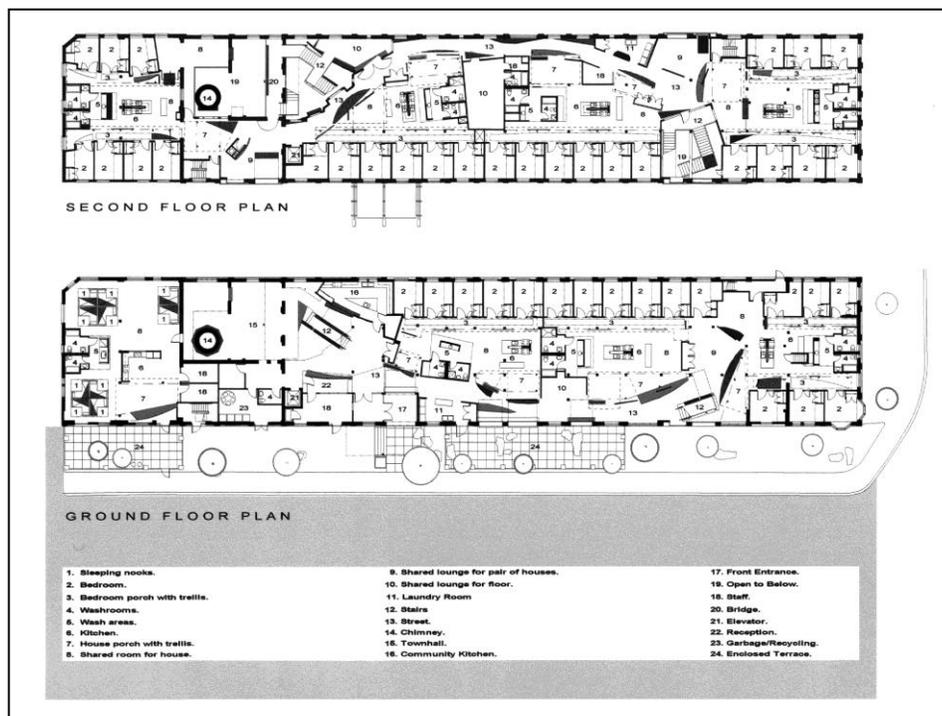


Figure 14: Project's Plans.
Source: (Goodman, 1997)

Vertical connections between each floor, (Figure 15), are established by two, three story spaces containing the stairs (Freedman, 1997). These two staircases anchor the ends of the building and provide the ability to move continuously through the various public rooms sited along the way (Ibid, 1997). The organizing principle was a hierarchy of spaces ranging from the most private, (Figure 16), the bedroom for each resident, to the Town Hall, a space large enough to accommodate the entire community. The largest area of Strachan House is given over to public uses in contrast to conventional apartment living in which private space is privileged over shared common space.

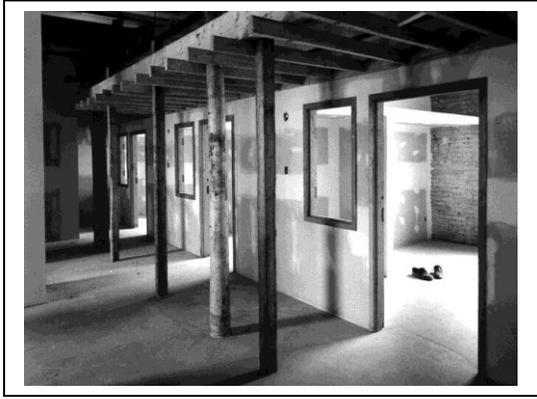


Figure 16: A View of the residents' Bedrooms.
Source: (Goodman, 1997)

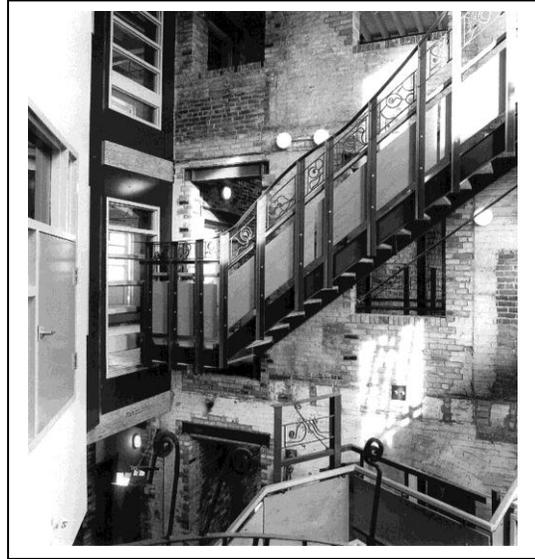


Figure 15: The Main Staircase.
Source: (Goodman, 1997)

The main staircase connects all the levels of public space, weaving its way up alongside of, through and around an existing three-story masonry wall. As Strachan House is "self governing" community, the architects used the analogy of the Greek *Agora*² when designing the public space that contains the staircase, the Town Hall (Goodman, 1997). Over time, Strachan House residents have formed an elaborate community structure including bi-weekly meetings of residents, known as the Town Council (Freedman, 1997). This is to promote a community that is largely self-governing. They elect a Mayor who hold election campaigns and have limited terms in "office". From this council, the residents managed to solve their own problems, and to communicate easily with the administration (Ibid, 1997).

The Strachan House model has received international attention for its success in developing a new housing prototype for chronically homeless adults (Figure 17). The prototype is a highly sensitive one, capable of responding to both the peculiarities and idiosyncrasies of the client group and the physical context (Goodman, 1997).

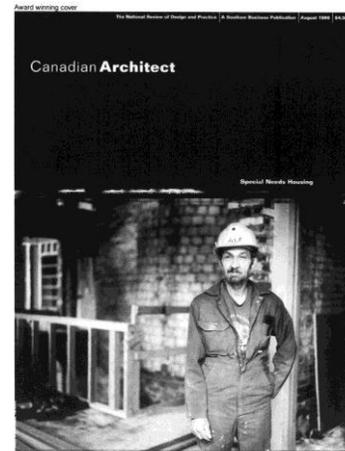


Figure 17: Canadian Architect Cover Page, August 1996.
Source: (Goodman, 1997)

5.0 Conclusion

The problem of homelessness is universal. No society is without its share of those who have no home or whose home is inadequate. Homelessness will only be removed by restoring the individual or the family affected to an active and full participation in the mainstream of Canada's society (Fallis and Murray, 1990). Self respect coupled with marketable skills and urgent crisis support based on selected continuing assistance including health and education, ought to return individuals and families to Canada's society to participate fully in the market economy (Stoner, 1995).

² The *Agora*, is a place for public meeting or market place in an ancient Greek polis or city (Turner, 1996, p.210).

The previous examples have shown that most individuals and families considered homeless or at risk of becoming homeless, can look after themselves and their needs, and once again become self-reliant and effective members of the Canadian society, given a chance to orient their life, learn new skills and attitudes, and being helped over an economic or social crisis. Understanding the relative nature of homelessness in Canada therefore, requires a detailed analysis of the particular roles played by all levels of government, and the private and voluntary sectors, both in terms of identifying the causes of the problems and in searching for effective solutions based on the necessary resources.

Therefore, any solution to homelessness requires a committed partnership combining the resources of the federal/provincial/ municipal governments with the private market investment, held together by the continued enthusiasm of volunteer and charitable institutions committed to improving local and regional living and housing conditions (Daly, 1996).

To sum up, resolving homelessness in Canada requires the concerted partnership of six groups (Oberlander, 1987), which are:

1. The homeless themselves, to identify needs, expectations, and aspirations.
2. The volunteer and local charitable organizations with extensive pioneer experience in providing shelter and temporary health and food services for the poor.
3. Private industry providing investment, contracting and building services.
4. The municipalities and local governments who influence location and availability of land and buildings for housing projects, while being responsible for establishing norms and regulations through local by-laws and ordinances.
5. The provinces and their agencies who have the Canadian constitutional jurisdiction for housing and social services. The provinces represent a major source of policy initiatives and the critical opportunity for coordinating the delivery of health and social services to the homeless in relation to shelter provision and appropriate accommodation.
6. The federal government through its taxation power is able to raise and allocate appropriate resources to housing and social service programs including social housing on a national basis.

References

- Culhane, D. and Horuburg, S. (1997) *Understanding Homelessness: New Policy and research Perspectives*, Washington, DC: Fannie Mae Foundation.
- Daly, G. (1996) *Homeless: Policies, Strategies, and Lives on the Street*, London: Routledge.
- Erickson, J. and Wilhelm, C. (1986) *Housing the Homeless*, New Jersey: the Center for Urban Policy Research.
- Fallis, G. and Murray, A. (1990) *Housing the Homeless and Poor: a New Partnership among the Private, Public, and Third Sectors*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Freedman, A. (1997) "A Roof of their Own" *Toronto Life*, 18, 6: 88-92.
- Friedrichs, J. (1988) *Affordable Housing and the Homeless*, New York: Aldine de Gruyter.
- Glasser, I. (1994) *Homelessness in Global Perspective*, New York: G.K. Hall.
- Goodman, L. (1997) *Strachan House*, Toronto: Levitt Goodman Architects Ltd.
- Hathorn, E. (1994) *Why Home*, London: Anderson.
- Jencks, C. (1994) *The Homeless*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Kraljic, M. (1992) *The homeless Problem*, New York: H. W. Wilson.
- McLaughlin, M. (1987) *Homelessness in Canada: the Report of the National Inquiry*, Ottawa: Canadian Council on Social Development.
- Oberlander, P. (1987) *Shelter or Homes: a Contribution to the Search for Solutions to Homelessness in Canada*, Vancouver: Center for Human Settlements.
- O'Reilly, T. (1993) *Down and Out in Canada: Homeless Canadian*, Toronto: Canadian Scholar's Press.
- Statistics Canada. (1990) *Canadian Social Trends*, No. 17, Ottawa: Statistics Canada.
- Stoner, M. (1995) *The Civil Rights of Homeless People: Law, Social Policy, and Social Work Practice*, New York: Aldine de Gruyter.
- Teasdale, P. (1993) *House Design Guide for Low-Income Singles*, Ottawa: CMHC Press.
- Turner, J. (1996) *The Dictionary of Art*, London: Macmillan Publishers Limited.
- Ward, J. (1989) *Organizing for the Homeless*, Ottawa: Canadian Council on Social Development.
- Wright, J. (1987) *Homelessness and Health*, Washington, DC: McGraw-Hill's Healthcare Information Center.