Analysis of the Documentary Film
*The Will To Live*
and Development of a
Facilitator’s Guide

by Frankie Misner

June 12, 2013
Introduction

• In August, 1990 Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa visited the First Nation community of Mishkeegogamang (Onasburgh) in northwestern Ontario. He described the housing circumstances as forcing the people to live, “... as if they were dirt ...” (York, 1990).

• Tutu’s words provide an insightful message that parallels that of George Stephen, a Cree man from Kashechewan, who is the subject of the documentary film The Will To Live.

• His story gives a face to the realities of housing issues on the James Bay and in Sudbury and explores the impact of homelessness.
Organization of the Literature Review

- Educational Impact of Creative Endeavours
- Cree Identity
- Connections to Current Housing Realities
- Historical Factors
Statement of the Problem

There is a widespread lack of knowledge and misunderstanding of homelessness in First Nations communities.
Focus of the Advanced Practicum

• Examine circumstances and housing realities for Cree peoples through one man’s shared experiences of homelessness.

• Create a Facilitator’s Guide to accompany the video *The Will To Live*
Figure 7: A Cree Medicine Wheel
Context for the Practicum Project

• Took place within the project: Poverty, Homelessness and Migration (PHM) in the Centre for Research in Social Justice and Policy at Laurentian University.

• PHM created the video *The Will To Live*. 
Role Within the Practicum Project

• Learn about the realities of homelessness through the eyes of one Cree man, George Stephen.
• Gain further knowledge of homelessness.
• Explore relevant current events and resources.
• Use an arts-based approach to create visual materials that illustrate key themes.
• Create a facilitator’s guide.
• Conduct a summative evaluation of the guide.
• Raise awareness and increase understanding of homelessness.
Approaches Utilized

Phenomenological and narrative approaches facilitated the study of individual experiences and their context (Creswell, 2009).
Theoretical Applications

• Empowerment theory promotes the voice of George Stephen.
• Aboriginal theory offers a culturally sensitive lens that places George Stephen’s experiences of homelessness within the parameters of Cree identity.
Ethical Considerations

• Aboriginal Code of Ethics:
  The Seven Grandfather Teachings
• Professional association as a registered social worker.
• Ethical approval to PHM for digital storytelling by Laurentian University’s Research Ethics Board.
Approach to Analysis and Coding Process

• Phenomenological and narrative analyses share an interactive process that emphasizes a reflective approach.
  – Bracketing
  – Garnering significant statements
  – Creation of categories
  – Textural and structural description
Viewing Process

• Creating visual materials (arts-based process).
• Snapshot viewing.
• Six sessions.
Results

Four themes emerged:

• Colonization
• Barriers
• Resilience
• Meanings of family
Presentation of Themes

- The Identity of Family
- Colonization in the East
- Barriers
- Resilience
The Creation of a Facilitator’s Guide

• 10 sections based on a Cree Medicine Wheel
  – The East: introduction, literature review
  – The South: visual representations
  – The West: active learning – included individual questions based on the four themes;
  – Also designed for group participation
  – The North: summative evaluation – overview of the first three quadrants occurs in a Closing Circle with specific evaluative questions
    • e.g. Is there a benefit to having a Closing Circle?
Sections of the Facilitator’s Guide and Sample Discussion Questions

• Theme I: The East
  – Colonization
    • Role of churches
    • Residential schools
    • Loss of spirituality and social structures.
  – Sample discussion question.

Journey Back
The East: Sample Discussion Question

What are your thoughts on the information contained in the documentary? Identify two points that stand out for you.
Sections (continued)

• Theme II: The South
  – Barriers
    • Denial of help and services
    • Racism, prejudice
    • Separation from family, suicide attempts
    • Poverty, inadequate housing
    • Addictions, lack of housing
  – Sample discussion question

The Hollow Tree
The South: Sample Discussion

Question

Identify the barriers George Stephen encountered in Sudbury in relation to racism, social/health services and 24/7 survival.
Sections (continued)

• Theme III: The West
  – Resilience
    • Survival, 24/7 on the streets
    • Sense of humour
    • “will to live”
    • Ability to learn, view self differently
  – Sample discussion question
The West: Sample Discussion Question

Do you see connections between the documentary and what is happening in communities such as Attawapiskat?
Sections (continued)

• Theme IV: The North
  – Meaning of Family
    • Pre-contact—caring, communal lifestyle
    • Family identity
    • Street people as family
    • Everyone needs a helping hand
  – Sample discussion question
What was the meaning of “family” for Cree people in pre-contact time? How does it compare to George Stephen's definition of family in *Will to Live*?
Conclusions

– The guide offers an opportunity to increase understanding and respect for Indigenous perspectives and experiences.

– Screenings of the video using the facilitator’s guide are important given media attention on housing issues in James Bay communities.

– Indigenous social work and non-Indigenous social work share concern for society’s vulnerable members.

– Provides a point of intersection that creates further understanding and awareness within the practice of social work.
Thank you, miigwetch

• Acknowledgements:
  – George Stephen
  – Carol Kauppi
  – Emily Faries
  – Herb Nabigon
  – Wayne Neegan