

Behind The Stark Truth

Janine Harvey and Lisa Allikamik



A Bit About Us...

• **Janine Harvey**

- Janine Harvey is an Inuk leader from Ulukhaktok Northwest Territories.
- She is passionate about her culture and a strong believer in decolonizing the work she and other Inuit do today to better help their people.
- Janine is the Executive Director of the Tahiqutiit Women's Society, a non-profit organization with a vision to establish a shelter in their community for Inuit women and children who need access to safe housing; and alternative housing where Inuit can practice their cultural rights.
- Janine is also a seamstress and hunts and harvests off the land with her Husband, Children and Grand Children,

• **Lisa Allikamik**

- Lisa Allikamik is an Inuk artist and leader from Ulukhaktok Northwest Territories. Her art represents Inuit culture, and she teaches art classes in the Inuvialuit Settlement Region and across Nunavut.
- Lisa is also a mother of three wonderful children.
- Lisa participated in the Tahiuqtiit Women's Society and served as its President before she took on the role of Project Manager for Shelter Operations.
- Lisa is a has a strong connection to her land, culture and people.



Background

Over the last year, Janine Harvey and Lisa Alikamik, two Inuit right to housing advocates, travelled across the Northwest Territories to conduct culturally appropriate interviews with Indigenous community members, gathering their stories and first-hand experiences of what it's like trying to find affordable, safe, and secure housing in the North.





We were very interested in leading this project and doing these interviews because we see homelessness in our community (and surrounding communities) on a daily basis. Homelessness is a real issue.

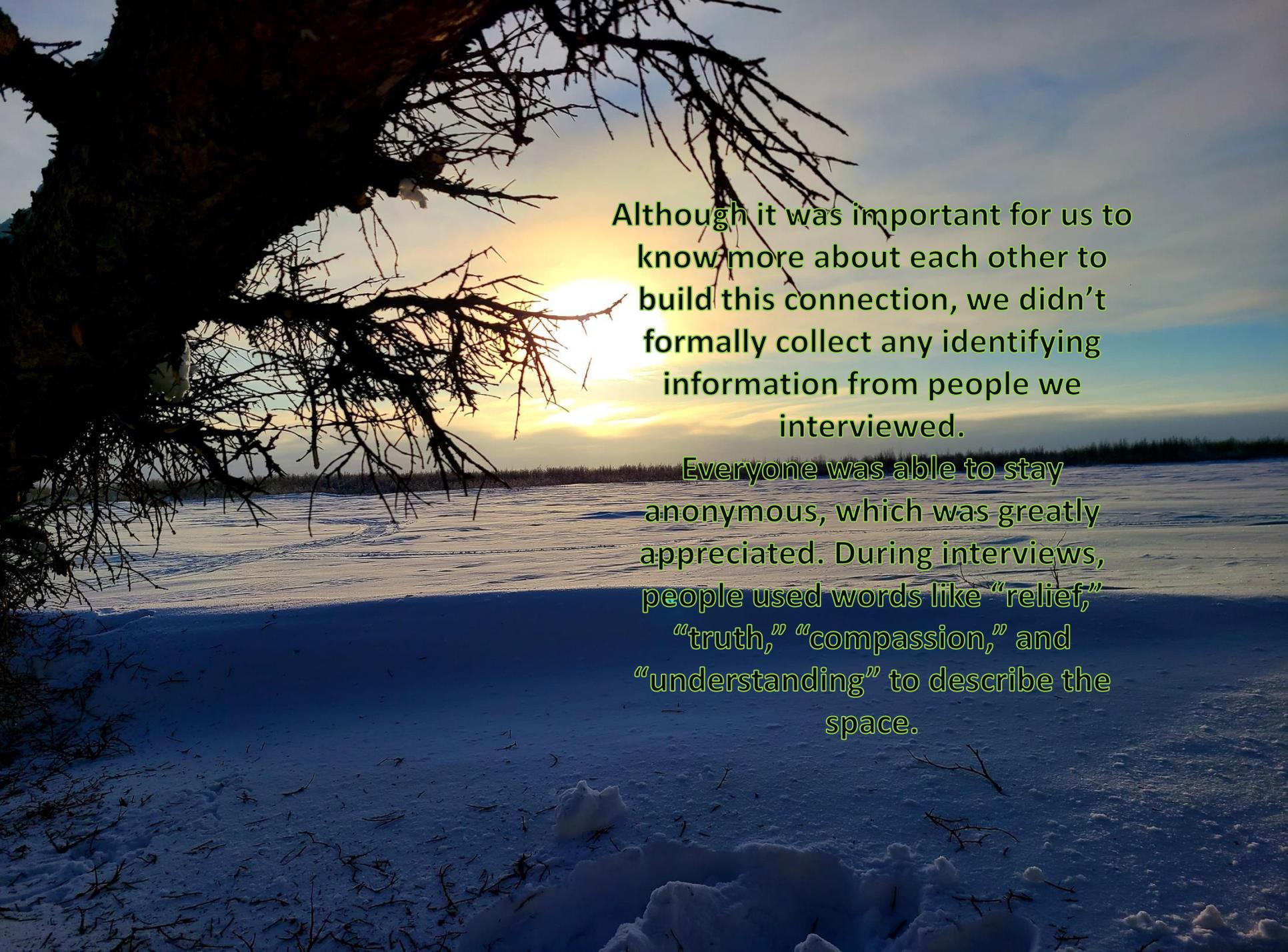
We conducted approximately 60 surveys and interviews about people's housing experiences in three communities across NWT: Yellowknife, Inuvik, and Ulukhaktok. The surveys were written in plain English text with the aim of providing respondents with a clear understanding of the questions they were being asked and why. People were given the option to complete surveys and interviews over the phone, over Facebook Messenger, or in-person.

We also held in-person community meetings and town halls in all three communities, which included culturally appropriate elements like sewing spaces. Including activities that are a significant part of the community's everyday life and cultural practice made the spaces more comforting. These activities created an environment that felt less like an "official space" and more like a familiar community setting where people could gather, connect, and share. This informal and safe environment eased tensions and encouraged community members to open up and engage in deeper, more meaningful conversations



Years of trust, relationship-building, shared understanding, and connection were at the foundation of what made community members receptive to our efforts and made the work meaningful. It was also important to approach these housing conversations with sensitivity, confidentiality, patience, sincerity, and respect



A winter landscape with a snow-covered field, a sunset sky, and bare tree branches in the foreground. The sun is low on the horizon, casting a warm glow over the scene. The sky transitions from a pale blue to a soft orange near the horizon. The snow is bright white, and the tree branches are dark and silhouetted against the sky.

Although it was important for us to know more about each other to build this connection, we didn't formally collect any identifying information from people we interviewed.

Everyone was able to stay anonymous, which was greatly appreciated. During interviews, people used words like "relief," "truth," "compassion," and "understanding" to describe the space.

CHALLENGES

If we did this project again in the future, we would plan our budget to account for inflation. The cost of travel, fuel, and food rose significantly since preparing our project budget, which is an even bigger problem in northern communities where the cost of living is so much higher. There was also much greater interest in participating in the research than we had budgeted for initially.

Local organizations were able to share funding to provide further gift cards, and door prizes at community meetings and town hall sessions. This showed us how much of an impact our work was able to have on the community.

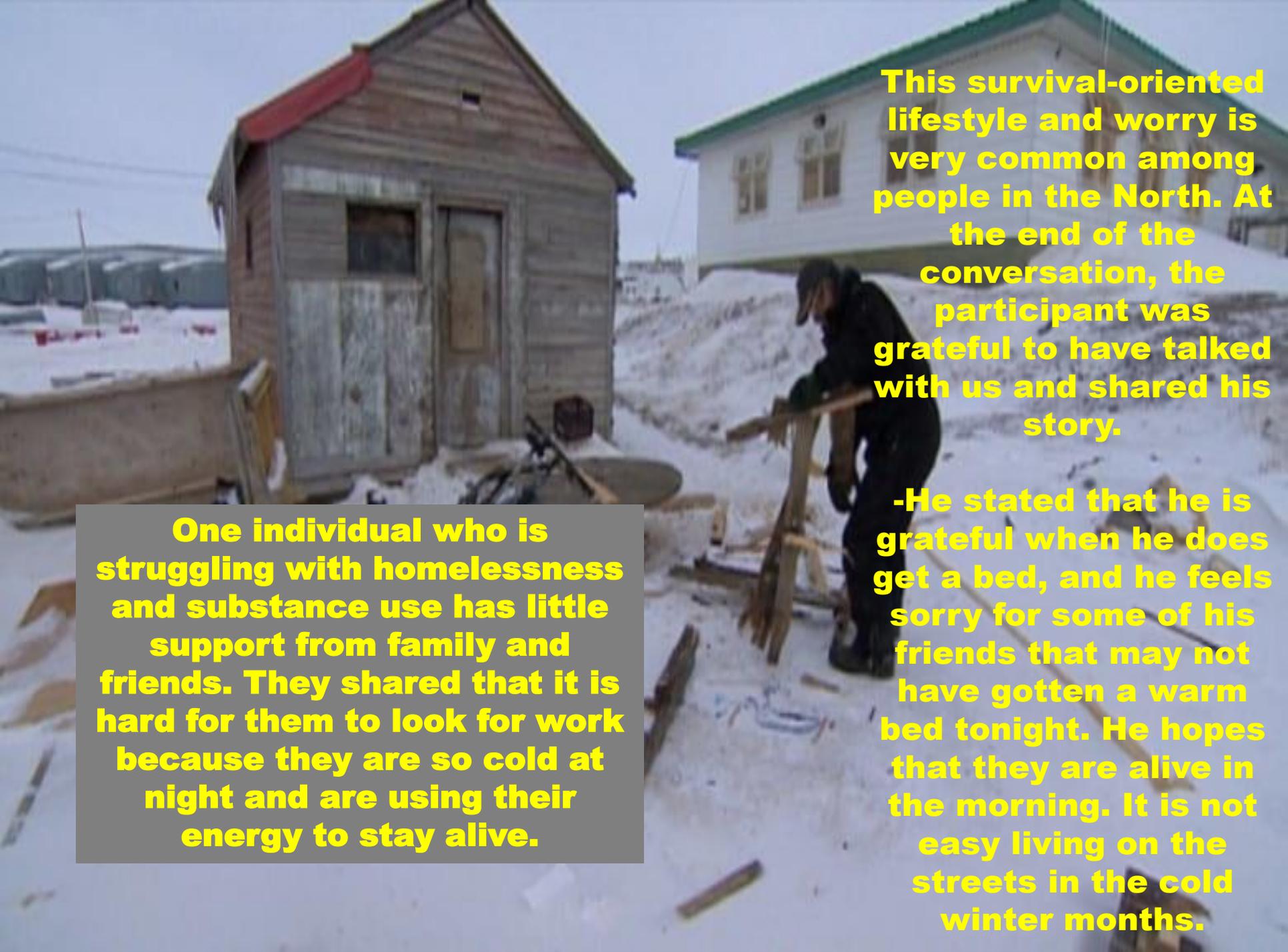


We see firsthand that our people and neighbouring friends in surrounding communities experience dire predicaments due to having no safe place to call home



We also know that addressing homelessness is supposed to be an urgent priority under international human rights law—and the federal government's own National Housing Strategy Act. But we see no action.





This survival-oriented lifestyle and worry is very common among people in the North. At the end of the conversation, the participant was grateful to have talked with us and shared his story.

-He stated that he is grateful when he does get a bed, and he feels sorry for some of his friends that may not have gotten a warm bed tonight. He hopes that they are alive in the morning. It is not easy living on the streets in the cold winter months.

One individual who is struggling with homelessness and substance use has little support from family and friends. They shared that it is hard for them to look for work because they are so cold at night and are using their energy to stay alive.

A lot of people expressed having no help or support, or no more options for housing.

Homelessness...

They believe that overcrowding in shelters contributed to their losses of life because we don't have places to live.



When residing in shelters, lack of sleep is inevitable, and this sleep deprivation and anxiety can lead to depression. People question how they will make it through another day. This worry often leads people to cope with their homelessness through substance use.

Transitional Housing...

In transitional housing, it was indicated by residents that they are not allowed to have family visit them. Landlords have the power to decide who is allowed to visit the tenants.

Tenants also felt forced to do programming to obtain their accommodation. A lot of people appreciated the security in their building, but some said they felt scrutinized.

They wait for warmer temperatures to pitch a tent outdoors so that they can enjoy their privacy and freedom for those short months.

Despite this, it was said that people felt controlled.



Discrimination



When it came to signing documents and lease agreements, there was no legal or advocacy support, or clarification of what tenants were signing.

It was also mentioned that housing providers in NWT exerted control over the lifestyles that tenants chose to live.

A participant stated that when he entered the office of a housing provider to submit his application for housing, he was questioned about his completion of an addictions program. He was directed to show proof that he had completed the treatment program and attach it with his application or it would not be considered. This is both an inappropriate violation rooted in discrimination and is a breach of confidentiality for applicants.



We know that some community members cannot pay rent because of reasons directly tied to Canada's long and ongoing history of colonialism. A lot of housing and programs provided are also not culturally appropriate—they do not support the lifestyle of our Inuit and Arctic communities, which greatly differ from other communities across Canada.

ARREARS, EVICTIONS, & LANDLORDS

A high number of participants stated that it is very stressful to have rent payment amounts overdue or outstanding (i.e., arrears).

It was identified that people feel fear on a day-to-day basis. This frame of mind often led to a pervasive fear of being evicted with short notice. This worry also led to the fear of their children being apprehended by social services because of not being able to obtain a secure home.



Our people in the Arctic are left with little to no support when it comes to funding opportunities to help alleviate arrears, even through external rental programs offered by housing providers in NWT.

Today, there are people still being evicted because they had not paid their power bill on time. This is an example of the lack of support to prevent eviction.

Safety

People do not want to talk about housing in the North, but they do want to feel safe. They want merely to feel treated fairly, and to feel comfortable in the place they call home.

One individual says “safe housing” to her means not feeling watched. It means being able to feel comfortable in your own home, where your kids can play in the yard and not having to see drug dealers or bootleggers.

One individual stated that she was abused for years by her common-law partner, and her home was damaged due to the abuse she endured. When she called RCMP, her partner was arrested and charged—but her kids were taken away by the authorities, and she was also evicted from her unit.

BASIC INFRASTRUCTURE, SERVICES, & FACILITIES

In small communities with no road access, living is very complex. We live in a very cold climate. Some communities do not have trees for firewood and live in cabins at -45 degrees Celsius with no other housing options. Often, people resort to living in cabins that are built with plywood. If you don't have firewood, you must use heating fuel which is very costly.

People have no access to basic necessities like laundry. They have no electricity. Often there are health effects to these conditions, like breathing in stove fumes. Many people have no standard oven to cook and no washer and dryer for clean clothes. This makes life very challenging and leaves people with little or no hope for the future.

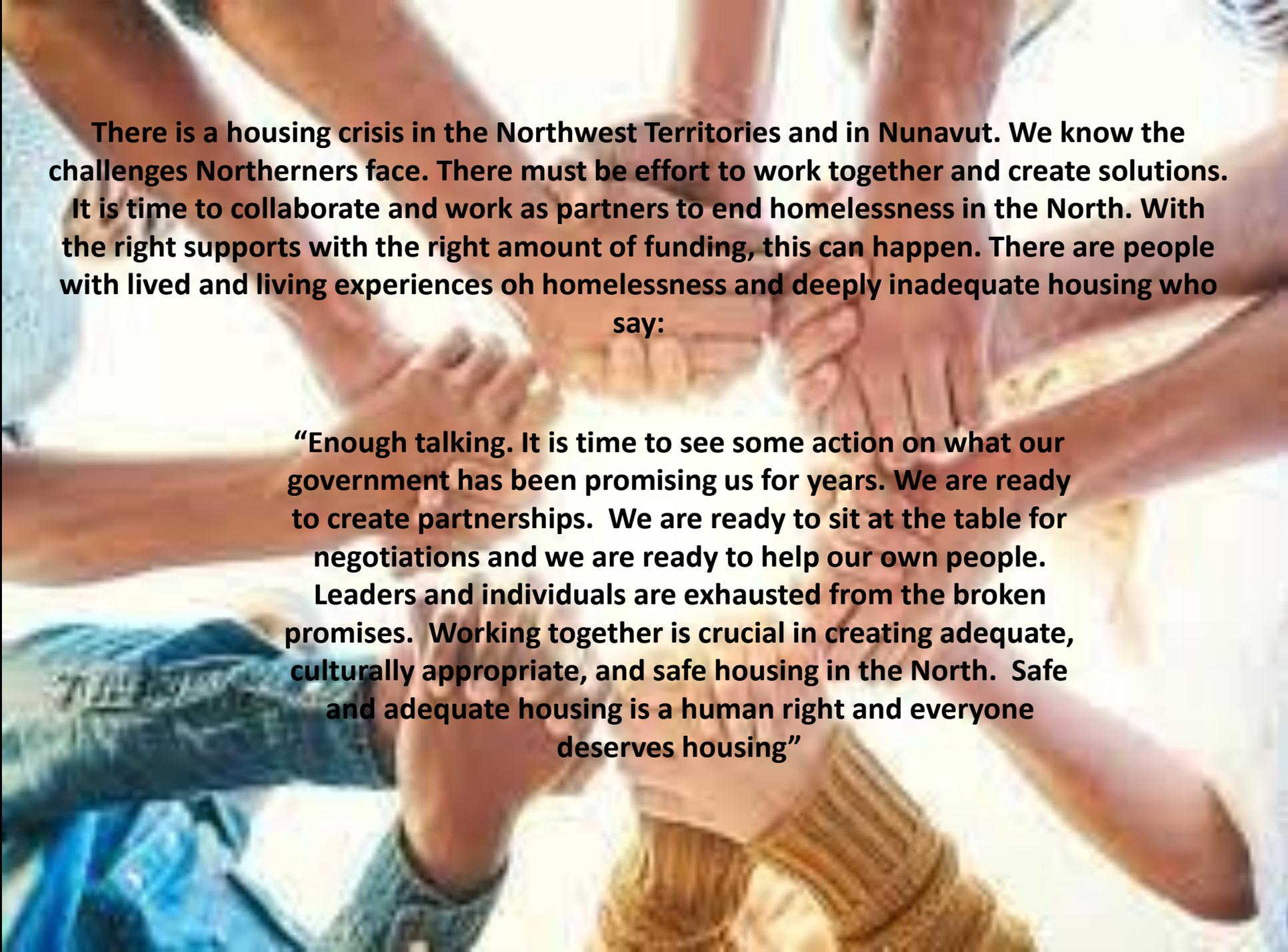
HEALTH & HABITABILITY

People and their health are also affected by living in poor housing conditions. It is not rare to hear about or see mould, broken windows and doors, and holes in walls. These kinds of living conditions can be dangerous. Exposed electrical wires, sharp areas exposed, and mould negatively affects people's health.

Under international human rights law, dignity, equality, non-discrimination, and access to justice are at the core of the right to adequate housing—as well as seven components including:

- 1. Legal security of tenure (i.e., legal protection from tenant evictions)**
- 2. Availability of services, materials, facilities, and infrastructure**
- 3. Affordability**
- 4. Habitability**
- 5. Accessibility**
- 6. Location**
- 7. Cultural Adequacy**





There is a housing crisis in the Northwest Territories and in Nunavut. We know the challenges Northerners face. There must be effort to work together and create solutions. It is time to collaborate and work as partners to end homelessness in the North. With the right supports with the right amount of funding, this can happen. There are people with lived and living experiences oh homelessness and deeply inadequate housing who say:

“Enough talking. It is time to see some action on what our government has been promising us for years. We are ready to create partnerships. We are ready to sit at the table for negotiations and we are ready to help our own people. Leaders and individuals are exhausted from the broken promises. Working together is crucial in creating adequate, culturally appropriate, and safe housing in the North. Safe and adequate housing is a human right and everyone deserves housing”

Thank you



