CAPSTONE ACTION/LEARNING LOG

NAME: Samantha Wong

MY ESSENTIAL QUESTION: How has mental health contributed to the homelessness epidemic in Canada and what can be done about it?

LOG #: 2   DATE: Nov 11, 2023
MY PROCESS: Investigate and Report

HOURS SPENT WORKING ON YOUR PROJECT: 6
(MINIMUM OF 6 HOURS PER LOG REQUIRED)

QUESTIONS/GOALS THAT I WILL EXPLORE BELOW THAT WILL HELP ME START ANSWERING MY ESSENTIAL QUESTION (SEE YOUR FURTHER QUESTIONS/GOALS FROM THE PREVIOUS LEARNING LOG) T PS C	RESOURCES I HAVE USED TO ANSWER THE QUESTION(S) T PS C

Who is Homeless?
 	
How do (if they do) mental health disorders contribute to the homeless population?
 	
How Does One's Environment/Living Situation Affect Their Mental Health?
 	
Watch a video or interview that explores how homeless individuals manage to survive and the challenges they encounter.
	Must be properly cited. Sources could include: books, news articles, podcasts, artwork, people, songs/poetry, recorded conversations, films/documentaries, academic articles, stories, data. Use https://www.citefast.com/ or https://www.bibme.org/ for MLA, APA, or Chicago formats.
	
	Attitude. (2016, August 15). *Homeless with Mental Illness* [Video]. YouTube.
	
	    https://youtu.be/Dx6OiJiQSks?si=ZVhXRDSQv0ealtKe
	
	California Health Care Foundation. (2021, August 23). *In their own words: People with mental*
	
	    illness and addiction at risk for homelessness [Video]. YouTube.
	
	    https://youtu.be/vcBo4Od-zwY?si=smg7e5iKDzUMkVh-
	
	Copernicus Health Hub. (n.d.). *Mental health and well-being*.
	
	    https://health.hub.copernicus.eu/mental-health-and-well-
	
	    being#:~:text=Factors%20like%20noise%20pollution%2C%20air,effects%20on%20mental
	
	    %20well%2Dbeing
	
	Covenant House Vancouver. (n.d.). *Youth homelessness in Canada*.
	
	    https://www.covenanthousebc.org/youth-homelessness/the-issue-of-youth-
	
	    homelessness/
	
	Homeless Hub. (n.d.). *Who is homeless in Canada?*
	
	    https://homelesshub.ca/collection/homelessness-101/who-is-homeless-in-canada/

National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH). (n.d.). *Depression*.

https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/depression#:~:text=Symptoms%20associated%

20with%20depression%20interfere,for%20the%20person%20experiencing%20them

1)List individuals that have helped you since your last learning log and explain who they are and why you are consulting with them.

I have not contacted any individuals about my capstone project so far.

Reporting on my LEARNING:
1) *What have I learned so far? (REPORT ON THE QUESTIONS/GOALS FROM THE PAGE ABOVE)*
   Synthesize what you've learned from your sources/experiences to SHOW your learning. This is NOT a summary; you need to describe where you learned it from and what you think about it to show critical thinking (INCLUDE QUOTES & CITATIONS).

Examples of critical thinking: analyze data, make inferences, examine, compare and contrast, consider different perspectives, make connections, sketch, infer, modify, develop, and collaborate in this area…

After doing my capstone pitch, I changed my essential question from "How does mental health affect the homeless population in Canada?" to "How has mental health contributed to the homelessness epidemic in Canada and what can be done about it?", as it provides a more specific focus to allow me to answer my question better.

Who is Homeless - I wanted to get a better understanding of which groups of people were homeless because there are many different reasons that one may have experienced homelessness. After taking the B.C. First People's course last year, I knew that there was a high rate of Indigenous homelessness in Canada due to factors like historical trauma and systematic barriers. However, learning that 35% of homeless individuals in Canada identified as Indigenous, while they make up only 5% of the population in the country demonstrates the detrimental effects of historical injustices (Homeless Hub, n.d). Intergenerational trauma can take a toll on the mental health of the current and future generations, along with current ongoing discrimination it may complicate their abilities to maintain stable housing and employment. Moreover, I did not realize that veterans also experience high rates of homelessness, as many of them struggle with the transition back to civilian life and may lack the necessary support system (Homeless Hub, n.d.). Many veterans who have experienced war tend to struggle with mental health issues, like post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and anxiety, and with a potential lack of support systems they can experience instability; eventually some may experience homelessness. The most intriguing thing that I learned was that the homeless population is made up of 20% of young individuals between the ages of 13 and 24, with at least 6,000 young people experiencing homelessness every night (Covenant House Vancouver, n.d). As a person who could fit in this category, it is disheartening to know that people my age are experiencing a lack of stable housing. The severe consequences of youth experiencing homelessness include mental health conditions, disruption of education, and an increased possibility to be involved in criminal activity (Homeless Hub, n.d). Young individuals need a stable living environment because it provides them with safety and security, which are essential for healthy development.

How do mental health disorders contribute to the homeless population - Mental health disorders alone don't directly cause people to become homeless but it plays a significant role. Individuals who have poor mental health are more susceptible to homelessness, as mental health conditions may make it more difficult to perform day to day tasks like employment. It is important to note that not everyone who has a mental disorder will become homeless. For instance, depression can hinder an individual's ability to maintain steady employment, which is important for financial stability and housing stability. It can be challenging for one to execute their job duties consistently due to the symptoms associated with depression, like fatigue, lack of motivation, and difficulties with concentration (National Institute of Mental Health, n.d). While researching about how different mental health conditions contribute to the homeless population, I gained an understanding of how important having strong relationships and social networks is because they are a resource that individuals turn to when faced with problems, like housing instability or financial difficulties.

How Does One's Environment/Living Situation Affect Their Mental Health - The environment plays a surprisingly large role in shaping our mental well-being. A clean and tidy room or the soothing presence of nature invokes a sense of peace and calmness. Whereas cluttered spaces can create feelings of overwhelm and anxiety. Environmental stressors like noise and air pollution, overcrowding and lack of privacy can further exacerbate mental health issues, by increasing feelings of stress and irritation (Copernicus Health Hub, n.d). Regarding the environment for homeless individuals, it is clear that the environment affects their mental health as they experience more stress and anxiety.

Without their own personal space, some need to constantly be on guard which creates a heightened sense of stress. It is difficult for people to feel peace or at ease when they have a lack of privacy and security.

Videos - I watched a video, "Homeless with Mental Health", which explored the homelessness and mental illness in Skid Road, Los Angeles. Shanon Cameron, a former homeless woman who struggled with addiction and mental health issues, said that "[she] would just grab anything to make what [she] was feeling go away" (Attitude, 2016, 11:35). This made me understand why many homeless people tend to use substances, as they would rely on them to cope with their mental health struggles and the challenges associated with being homeless. Another thing that Shanon said that really stood out to me was: "I can't live, I can't die, so I existed" (Attitude, 2016, 13:17). Cameron implied that she felt trapped in a state of limbo, unable to find the meaning of life so she was simply existing rather than truly living. I believe that homeless individuals tend to have less access to resources and opportunities, so it can seem like there is no meaning to life as they may feel stuck in a state of perpetual crisis.

I watched another video, "In Their Own Words: People with Mental Illness and Addiction at Risk for Homelessness" by the California Health Care Foundation. This video opened up my perspective on how providing homeless individuals, who have mental health conditions and addictions, need a stable living environment before they can start working toward changing their lives for the better. Marcus Cannon, a Behavioural Health Service Administrator at Riverside U Health System explained how the old model told people who were homeless that they needed to be sober first, or have a certain amount of therapist visits before they could receive housing assistance (California Health Care Foundation, 2021, 3:53). However, Cannon stated that "wellness begins with a home" since it is hard for individuals who live outdoors to attend appointments on time without worrying about losing their belongings (California Health Care Foundation, 2021, 4:09). A place to call home provides a safe and secure environment where individuals can focus on their well-being, attend appointments, and work towards their recovery. The statement: "the problem that I see is that when you really need it, you're probably least willing to be able to work with those guidelines or rules" from Ralph Manning, who lived on the streets for nearly two years and has issues with substance use disorder and severe depression, highlighted the challenges face by individuals in crisis (California Health Care Foundation, 2021, 3:19). By listening to Manning's perspective, I now understand that those who are struggling with homelessness and mental health issues may find it difficult to adhere to strict regulations and expectations of programs, due to the overwhelming nature of their circumstances which make it hard to prioritize a long term goal. It is more beneficial to provide immediate support, like stable housing and access to essential services first to address their needs and then work towards recovery.

YOUR ESSENTIAL QUESTION:

In a paragraph, use your findings from above and from past learning logs to answer your Essential Question.

Based on the research that I have gathered so far, mental health conditions can contribute to the homelessness epidemic in Canada. Many individuals facing homelessness struggle with untreated mental health issues, which often arise from past traumas or a challenging upbringing. These conditions can severely impair a person's ability to manage daily responsibilities, such as maintaining employment or handling bills. It is important for individuals with mental health conditions to have a support system that they can rely on for assistance and guidance. Moreover, mental health conditions can also develop after someone becomes homeless, as the stress and instability of living without a permanent home can lead to heightened anxiety, depression, and feelings of hopelessness. Living in an unsafe environment, like the streets, increases an individual's vulnerability to violence, theft, and harassment. The constant state of fear and insecurity can exacerbate existing mental health conditions and create new ones, which make it even more challenging to find stable housing, maintain employment and preserve relationships. Many tend to use substances to help them cope with their mental health issues and the challenges associated with being homeless. To effectively address homelessness among individuals with mental health issues, it is essential to provide stable living environments that promotes recovery and personal growth, which empowers them to rebuild their lives and regain independence.

WHAT HAVE I LEARNED SO FAR? T PS C	**WHAT HAVE I LEARNED SO FAR?** T PS C
Reflect on the Capstone <u>PROCESS</u> that you have chosen (refer to the processes document). Think about HOW you have tried to answer the question. Describe *what's working and what isn't working.* (If unsure, copy & paste the bullets you've been working on from the processes document here, and reflect on each one)	**Reflecting on <u>SELF</u> *What am I learning about myself?*** *How can I use this information about myself moving forward? (learning style, personality, skills, feelings, work ethic…)*

Outline the steps you took to complete the second part of your project.

I began the first part of my project by answering the guiding questions that I made in the last learning log which will help me to answer my essential question. I researched my questions by reading articles related to my guiding questions. Lastly, I made it a point in the last learning log that I wanted to watch at least one video surrounding my essential question to provide myself with a better sense of the concepts of my project, and also gain a different perspective or point of view about my project.

What's the biggest challenge you've faced so far? What concrete steps will/did you take to overcome this challenge?

I realized that I could not just listen to one person's story and testimony about being homeless because the situation in homelessness varies vastly. That being said, I watched another video which had a different main idea from the first video, and I got to see the perspective of the individuals in that video. I would like to listen to more individuals before I finish this project because I think that it is important to listen to as many views as I can before making decisions on how to answer my essential question. I will continue to watch more videos on Youtube regarding my project and possibly incorporate some podcasts and documentaries. I will also reach out to organizations that help homeless individuals and see if they are willing to share their experiences and perspectives surrounding homelessness.

How would you describe your work habits while working on your Capstone project (time management and effort)?
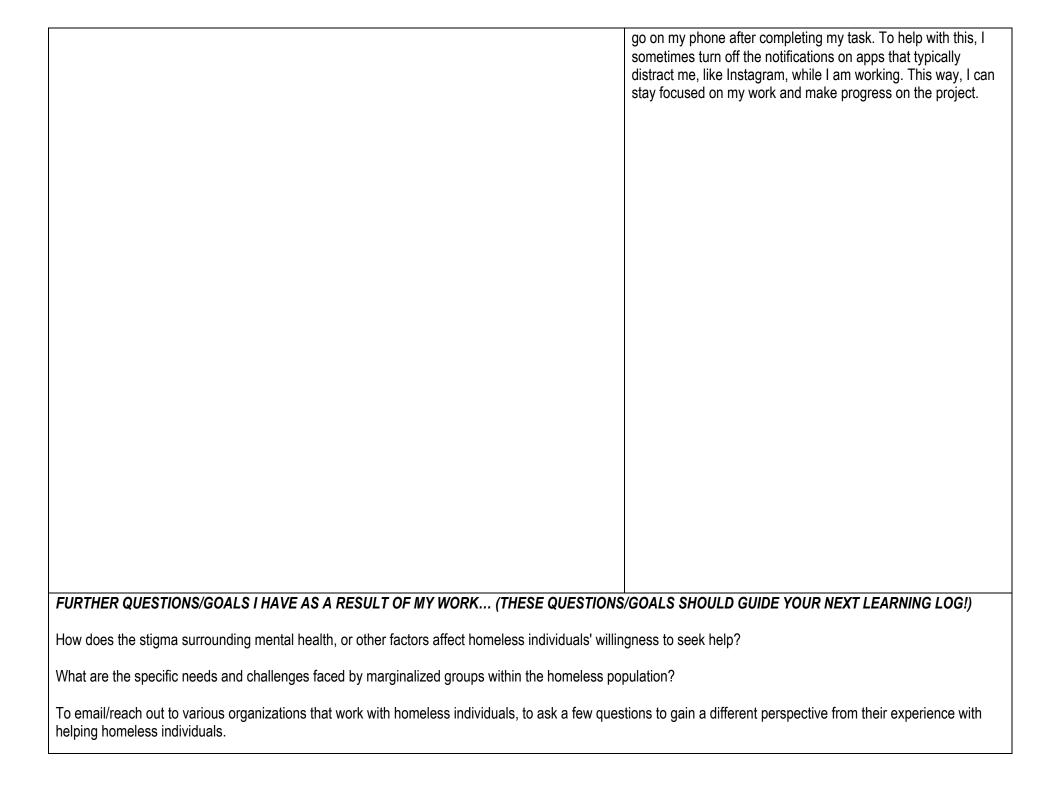
When I am working on my Capstone project, I focus on time management and put in my effort into the project to ensure that I am able to complete this project well while enjoying it. I set deadlines for different parts of the projects, like when I should finish researching a certain guiding question. I do this instead of trying to research all my guiding questions and achieving my goals at once, which helps me to avoid feeling overwhelmed along with other school work. This approach allows me to view the project as something enjoyable rather than a burden, making me genuinely interested in it.

What can you do to make the most of your time? How can you use your time most effectively?

I make most of my time by making goals that I want to achieve by each learning log. Then before filling out the learning log, I make deadlines for when I want questions or tasks to be completed by. I find it easier to manage my time by spreading my tasks out, especially when I have other school work to do.

What are some of your biggest distractions while working on this project and what can you do to address them?

My biggest distraction while working on this project would most likely be my phone. I typically tell myself that I would be able to

go on my phone after completing my task. To help with this, I sometimes turn off the notifications on apps that typically distract me, like Instagram, while I am working. This way, I can stay focused on my work and make progress on the project.

FURTHER QUESTIONS/GOALS I HAVE AS A RESULT OF MY WORK... (THESE QUESTIONS/GOALS SHOULD GUIDE YOUR NEXT LEARNING LOG!)

How does the stigma surrounding mental health, or other factors affect homeless individuals' willingness to seek help?

What are the specific needs and challenges faced by marginalized groups within the homeless population?

To email/reach out to various organizations that work with homeless individuals, to ask a few questions to gain a different perspective from their experience with helping homeless individuals.

NEXT STEPS:	ON WHAT DATE WILL I COMPLETE THIS WORK:
Email organizations my questions.	November 30
Research all the guiding questions above through reading articles and watching videos.	By December 6
Hand in Learning Log #3.	December 13, after school.

Research Notes:

How has mental health contributed to the homelessness epidemic in Canada and what can be done about it?

Who is Homeless?

- a big disproportionate rate of indigenous people
  - make up 5% of the population in canada
  - during the 2020-2022 national Point-in-Time count, 35% of homeless individuals identified as Indigenous
  - more likely to experience hidden and unsheltered homelessness, so the actual rate of Indigenous homelessness is likely higher

- The Black community also have a disproportionate impact by homelessness
  - 4.3% of Canadians identify as Black (2021 census)
  - 15.4 % of youth experiencing homelessness are Black, according to the Without a Home survey

- 20% of young people make up the homeless population
  - between the ages of 13 and 24
  - at least 6000 experience homelessness every night
  - 40% experience their first experience of homelessness before the age of 16
  - **Causes -** family breakdown, mental health and substance abuse, poverty and economical disadvantages

- causes severe and long lasting consequences, like physical and mental health problems, disruption of education, criminal involvements
- 24% of homeless youth identified as 2SLGBTQ, yet they only make up 5-10% of all youth

- immigrants make up a smaller portion of the overall population
  - 14.3% of homeless individuals identified as immigrants (7.9%), refugee (2.5%), or refugee claimant (3.9%) (Point-inTime survey)
  - challenges include language barriers, cultural adjustments, lack of social support networks, and difficulties with accessing services

- veterans experience high rates of homelessness
  - majority of veterans are adult men
  - many struggle with mental health conditions, like PTSD, depression, and anxiety, which can lead to instability
  - many have difficulty transitioning back to civilian life and may lack social support to support them

https://www.covenanthousebc.org/youth-homelessness/the-issue-of-youth-homelessness/

- over 60% of homeless people are males
  - single adult men compose the largest population group experiencing homelessness, between the ages of 25 and 55

- women make up 27% of the homeless population
  - this number is likely to be undercounted
  - more likely to experience hidden homelessness by staying with friends or family, or couch surfing
  - tend to avoid shelters and the streets, even if that means staying in dangerous situations like domestic violence (which is a major cause of homelessness for women)
  - homeless women are at higher risks of violence and assault, sexual exploitation and abuse

https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/homelessness-in-canada

https://homelesshub.ca/collection/homelessness-101/who-is-homeless-in-canada/

How do mental health disorders contribute to the homeless population?

- Mental health disorders alone do not directly contribute to/cause people becoming homeless, but it plays a significant role

- They may make it more difficult to perform day to day tasks, like maintain housing and employment
- individuals with poor mental health are more susceptible to homelessness
- without a home, it is harder to get consistent food or to access showers and have clean clothing, making it difficult to get a job

Not everyone with a mental disorder will become homeless.

Bipolar Disorder - formerly called manic depression, mental health condition that causes extreme mood swings from extreme highs (mania or "manic" episodes) to lows (depression or "depressive" episodes); one may experience changes in energy, thinking, behavior, and sleep

https://www.samhsa.gov/mental-health/bipolar#:~:text=Bipolar%20disorder%20is%20a%20serious,thinking%2C%20behavior%2C%20and%20sleep.

- difficulty with maintaining employment and financial stability

Mania:

- may engage in impulsive behaviors, make poor decisions like spending excessive money or making risky investments, and take on more responsibilities than they can handle, and can lead to strain relationships with coworkers or job loss
- individuals may experience impulsive spending during manic episodes

Depression:

- cause severe fatigue, difficulty concentrating, and loss of motivation, which makes it hard to maintain employment

- lack of access to treatment
  - some may not have access to the necessary mental health services, due to financial constraints, stigma, or lack of support
  - without treatment, managing the disorder may become harder and lead to more frequent and severe episodes, making it harder to manage daily tasks

Depression -

- interferes with an individual's ability to maintain steady employment, an aspect that is important for financial stability and housing security
    - symptoms associated with depression like fatigue, lack of motivation, and difficulty concentration make it challenging to perform job duties consistently
    - may result in frequent absences or reduced productivity, leading to loss of job
    - can hinder efforts to look for employment for those who are unemployed

- can cause social isolation and relationship strains
    - depression can make it difficult to maintain relationships with family, friends, or other social networks
    - harder to interact with others and build relationships
    - result in fewer resources and people to turn to when faced with housing instability or financial crisis

- increases vulnerability to substance abuse
    - many individuals with depression turn to alcohol or drugs as a form of self-medication to cope with their emotional pain
    - this worsens depression and other mental illnesses
    - may cause financial instability
    - may lead to more erratic behavior, making it harder to keep relationships with family members, friends, or colleagues

- interferes with one's ability to perform daily tasks
    - like paying the rent on time, going grocery shopping, going to work

https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/depression#:~:text=Symptoms%20associated%20with%20depression%20interfere,for%20the%20person%20experiencing%20them.

https://www.addictioncenter.com/addiction/homelessness/

https://www.fredvictor.org/2020/01/17/just-get-a-job-why-its-not-that-easy-homelessness-and-mental-health/

PTSD - can develop after experiencing or witnessing a traumatic event, like natural disaster, war, sexual assault, or a life threatening event.

https://pathwaystohousingpa.org/news/how-does-ptsd-affect-housing-instability

- many experience hyperarousal, a state of heightened awareness and anxiety, causing a difficulty to focus, concentrate and maintain a regular sleep schedule
    - difficulty with controlling emotions can lead to outbursts and strained personal and professional relationships
    - may cause one to have difficulty maintaining their job or doing day to day activities

https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/conditionsandtreatments/post-traumatic-stress-disorder-ptsd#

- those with PTSD may have avoidance and social isolation
    - avoid situations, places, or people that are reminders of the traumatic event
    - leads to isolation and difficulty maintaining relationships

https://www.ptsd.va.gov/family/effect_relationships.asp#:~:text=Yet%20the%205%25%20to%2010,from%20others%20and%20feel%20numb

- job loss and financial instability
    - may avoid work environment, as there is a fear if triggers or traumatic reminders
    - leads to financial instability and job loss

Schizophrenia - severe mental disorder that is characterized by thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that seem out of touch with reality; results in hallucinations, delusions, and disorganized thinking and behavior

https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/schizophrenia/symptoms-causes/syc-20354443#:~:text=Overview,aren't%20observed%20by%20others.

- the symptoms can impact a person's ability to maintain employment, manage finances and perform daily tasks

- social isolation is common
    - loss of social networks, making it harder to access financial and housing assistance

- lack of resources and access to treatment

- from stigma, financial barriers, or limited availability of service
- prevents many individuals from receiving necessary support

https://www.mentalhealth.com/library/schizophrenia-and-homelessness#:~:text=A%20lack%20of%20resources%2C%20coupled,that%20is%20common%20with%20schizophrenia.

Continuation

- the stressful conditions associated with homelessness can trigger mental illnesses or aggravate existing conditions
  - can cause trauma and emotional distress, which worsens one's mental state
  - homeless individuals often have limited access to mental health care, leading to untreated or poorly managed conditions
  - many use substances as a coping mechanism, which can worsen mental health symptoms

- make it difficult to leave homelessness
  - make it challenging to access and navigate social services and housing programs
  - affects judgment and decision making abilities, making it harder to take steps towards stable housing
  - stigma surrounding mental health can lead to discrimination in housing and employment opportunities

https://homelesshub.ca/collection/homelessness-101/mental-health/#:~:text=Homeless%20in%20Canada%3F-,People%20with%20poor%20mental%20health%20are%20more%20susceptible%20to%20the,employment%2C%20they%20have%20little%20income.

How Does One's Environment/Living Situation Affect Their Mental Health?

Physical and social environment factors can contribute to mental illnesses

Aesthetics
- cluttered spaces can create feelings of overwhelm and anxiety
- tidy spaces invoke a sense of calm

Social Environment
- strong social connections can buffer against stress and improve resilience

- lack of supportive relationships can lead to feelings of helplessness during challenging times, like a divorce
- toxic relationships at home or work can lead to chronic stress and emotional turmoil

https://www.alliant.edu/blog/how-environmental-factors-impact-mental-health

Environment Stressors
- air and noise pollution can lead to increased stress levels and psychological distress

https://health.hub.copernicus.eu/mental-health-and-well-being#:~:text=Factors%20like%20noise%20pollution%2C%20air,effects%20on%20mental%20well%2Dbeing.

Homeless
- guard is always up because individuals are not in a safe environment, they have no permanent place to call home
- lack of privacy and security causes increased stress levels

Homeless with Mental Illness - Attitude

- explores the homelessness and mental illness in Skid Row, Los Angeles
- shelters are overcrowded and full
- those who seemed shelters had a time limit, but many workers would bend the rules because they had nowhere to move the individuals
- mental institutions and hospitals would drop off vulnerable patients on the streets

- Shanon Cameron, a former homeless women (20 or 30 years on and off) who struggled with addiction and mental health issues
- "I would just grab anything to just make what I was feeling go away" - using substances to cope with her emotional mental health struggles and struggles associated with being homeless

- Curtis: "When you're laying here, what are you thinking? Is this the worst thing in the world or what?"
  Shanon: "Actually, I didn't have a thought, I just stared at the sky and you see, I was not only homeless I was gone mentally... It's an indescribable feeling"

- "I can't live, I can't die, so I existed" - felt trapped in a state of limbo, unable to find the meaning of life; felt as she was mearly existing rather than truly living

In Their Own Words: People with Mental Illness and Addiction at Risk for Homelessness

- Ralph Manning, lived on the streets for nearly two years (issues with substance use disorder and severe depression): "There are a lot of resources out there, but you have to be willing to work within whatever the parameters those resources set. The problem that I see is that when you really need it, you're probably least willing to be able to work with those guidelines or rules."

- Marcus Cannon, LMFT, Behavioural Health Services Administrator, Riverside U health System: "There was an older model that said to people who are homeless you need to get well first and then we'll help you connect to housing. 'You need to be sober first' or 'You need to have made it a certain number of therapist visits in a row without missing one before we'll help you with housing.'"
- "Wellness begins with a home. For someone who lives outdoors it's extremely difficult to make appointments on time without losing your belongings. There's a whole host of physical health problems that exacerbate mental illness. To take good care of our health in any domain, we need a stable foundation, a place to sleep at night, a door that we can lock, a sense of security."