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Sharing the Lived Experience of Public Housing: A Critical Discourse Analysis and Perspectives from Residents of Public Housing in London, Ontario

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Sharing the Lived Experience of Public Housing:

A Critical Discourse Analysis and Perspectives from Residents of Public housing
in London, Ontario

MPA Research Report

Submitted to

The Local Government Program
Department of Political Science
The University of Western Ontario

Tim Smuck
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Introduction

The underlying question that inspired this research project was, how are the people in public perceived in London, Ontario and would that differ from how they view themselves? I believe it is important for me to highlight both my biases and experience for this project as I resided in public housing for over 15 years. My experience growing up differed from how the media and government tended to talk about public housing and thus the tenants within it. By no means do I wish to glorify public housing, I simply wish to evaluate if others had similar experiences to mine of positive situations, exposure to diversity, and the witnessing of incredibly strong families doing so much, with so little. This project sought to evaluate if public housing within itself is not a causer of poverty but that the divestment and the particular negative way we talk about public housing is the true causer of poverty. Lastly, and most importantly, this project seeks to help influence public housing policy by listening to tenants and putting forth *their* policy recommendations in order for their voice to be heard. As public housing is their home, it is important for their opinions to be heard.

Before we delve into the history of public housing we must define our terms. The term public housing has often been used interchangeably and lumped in with the term social housing. Many scholars within the literature often forget the uniqueness and particularities of public housing as opposed to social housing. Both David Hulchanski and Michael Buzzelli define social housing as incorporating totally government owned, built, and operated housing areas such as public housing.[1] Buzzelli provides a strong and all-encompassing definition of social housing in the Canadian context:

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[1] Hulchanski, D. 2004. "What Factors Shape Canadian Housing Policy? The Intergovernmental Role in Canada's Housing System," in The State of the Federation 2004 − Municipal-Federal-Provincial Relations in Canada, R.

> Project- or dwelling-based subsidized housing that is either public or private (that is to say, third sector, as in the case of private non-profit and co- operative housing). This can be entirely rent-geared-to-income (RGI) housing, as in the early post-World War II public housing schemes, or in income-mixed projects of more recent decades.[2]

Albeit Buzzelli provides an excellent definition of the complex and multi-fascinated area that is social housing, I suggest that public housing within itself is unique and needs to be defined separately as it seeks to house some of the poorest members of society. What this paper seeks to focus on is the uniqueness of public housing which is entirely government owned and operated. Public housing as opposed to the partly subsidized or quasi private-public social housing has been deeply stigmatized amongst the Canadian context. With having sole government responsibility, public housing provides an insight into community that can be places of resistance against neoliberalism.

Another explicit definition that should be made here is that this study does not focus on housing policy. Although, the literature likes to pack public housing policy within the field of housing policy, this study does not. As Hulchanski articulates, it is inaccurate to see "housing policy" overseeing government owned and government subsidized housing projects.[3] Housing policy in Canada cannot have that nuanced scope as 95% of Canadians live in privately owned houses. Only 5% of Canadians live in social housing neighborhoods and fewer in public housing areas that are entirely owned and operated by government. Therefore, this project will focus on public housing policy, which will be defined as the tools and producers that government and ten-

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Young and C. Leuprecht, eds., Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, for the Queen's University Institute of Intergovernmental Relations,

[2] Buzzelli, M. 2009. *Is It Possible to Measure the Value of Social Housing?, Canada:* Canadian Policy Research Networks.

[3] Hulchanski, D. 2004. "What Factors Shape Canadian Housing Policy? The Intergovernmental Role in Canada's Housing System,"

ants use to govern them and the areas around them. Furthermore, this study provides insights, through the London case study how their communities are being governed.

Brief History of Public Housing in Canada

Canadian public housing has both a similar and different public housing history as the United States. For example, although heavily influenced by American values and academic literature, Canada began the construction of public housing after the (U.S).[4] Moreover, Canadian public housing does not compare nearly to the size of what was built in the U.S as Canada only has 5% of their citizens residing in public housing, making it one of the smallest social housing sectors in the Western world.[5] Similarly to the U.S, many government entities and business have opposed public housing in order to benefit the for-profit housing business.[6] The anti-public housing rhetoric dates back to 1946 when C.D Howe, one of the most influential Federal Ministers in his time was quoted in the House of Commons stating, "It is the policy of this government to ensure that as large a portion as possible of housing be built by the private sector."[7] To add to the rhetoric, then Prime Minister St. Laurent addressed the legislator in saying that, "no government of which I am apart of will ever pass legislation for subsidized housing."[8]

The anti-social housing stance then changed in 1949 when the National Housing Act (NHA) was passed. The NHA demonstrated the large federal spending needed in order to properly finance public housing as it required the feds to pay 75 percent of the costs and the province

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[4] Brushett, K. 2007. "Where will the People go: Toronto's Emergency Housing Program and the Limits of Canadian Social Housing Policy 1944-1957." *Journal of Urban History 33, 3*.

[5] Hulchanski, D. 2003. "What Factors Shape Canadain Housing Policy? The Intergovernmental Role in Canadian Housing System." Paper presented at the Conference on Municipal-Provincial Relations in Canada, School of Policy Studies, Queen's University May 9-10

[6] Silver, J. 2011. *Good Places to Live: Poverty and Public Housing in Canada*. Halifax, N.S: Fernwood Pub.

[7] Silver, J. 2011. *Good Places to Live: Poverty and Public Housing in Canada*

[8] Ibid

with the remaining 25 percent.[9] As Sliver argues, having the feds pay for the majority of public housing capital costs it highlighted public housing as a national issue that the government thought, at the time needed to be addressed. Having Afterwards, the 1964 revision of the act furthered the involvement of federal government as it increased its costs on the construction side to pay 90 percent of capital costs but would then transfer the ownership of public housing to the provinces while also sharing operating costs equally with the province.[10] Now with the federal government paying the majority of capital costs, Canada saw the amount of public housing unit's increase from 10,000 in 1964 to 115,000 in 1974 as part of the federal slum clearance program that saw to remove the poor from slums into public housing.[11]

The slum clearances in both Canada and the US are now widely criticized in retrospect for being disruptive as they displaced residents and sustained the foundation for segregated communities. Funding was more generous then, and that had the benefit of more affordable housing construction, but the poor were often treated like powerless objects as much as they are today. This is a very similar argument as Martin August makes today with the construction of new public housing revitalization projects occurring in Ontario. The ideological foundation for the critique of old and new public housing policy at the federal level and the provincial level in Ontario is the rise of Neoliberalism and the culture of poverty theory which states that the poor are to blame for being poor.

The late 70's and 80's was also a significant time the broader social housing sector as Ontario and municipalities were providing partial rent assistance, even some to private landlords

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[9] Ibid
[10] Ibid
[11] Ibid

and also grant money to lower operating costs over 10-15 years.[12] 1978 was also the beginning of the first full federal social housing program were they took the lead in funding and adminis-trating social housing in Ontario.[13] This federal program created 52, 189 housing units created. However, that Federal program ended in 1985 when the recession took over and increased inter-est's rates close to 20% and in turn made it expensive fund lower mortgage costs. [14] The follow-ing year in 1986 the Ontario government then took over the housing program and created its own social housing units to the amount of 30,998 over a span of 6 years (1986-1992). [15] Furthermore, the Federal government's role began to roll back even more-so under the Federal/Provincial So-cial Housing Program that transferred more costs the province and Canadian Mortgage Housing Corporation (CMHC).

The late 80's and 90's set the foundation for the divestment in public housing by the fed-eral government, particularity in the 90's. Beginning in 1993 the Federal government officially announced that it would stop the funding towards any new social housing projects, including public housing communities. Social housing took an even harder hit in Ontario as the newly elected Provincial government disabled many provincial housing programs that started in 1986 and only provided limit funding towards supportive housing.[16] To make the case even worse for social housing in Ontario, from 1996 to 2000 there was the first multi-year period in the span of over 50 years where no government funding was made available for new social housing projects in Ontario.[17]   Fast forward to the late Mike Harris years within Ontario of 2001 and social and

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[12] Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association (ONPHA). 2015. Timeline: A History of Social Housing in Ontario. Re-trieved from www.onpha.on.ca/.../CMDownload.aspx?ContentKey...ContentItemKey
[13] Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association (ONPHA). 2015. Timeline
[14] Ibid
[15] Ibid
[16] Ibid
[17] Ibid

public housing responsibilities was transferred to the local level in 1999.[18] This transfer established one of the most complex intra-jurisdictional transfers in Ontario history as such a large and costly service was downloaded to the smallest and least funded municipal governments. The Province decentralized existing social housing to 47 varies Municipal Service Managers while also only pledging only $2000 per social housing unit with the Federal Governments Affordable housing Program. This change left the responsibility for the remaining $23,000 per unit of matching funds to municipalities, charities, and non-profits.[19] As the table below shows the amount of Federal dollars committed to costly housing programs has been steadily decreasing.[20]

Figure 3. Federal funds for Transferred Programs from 2006/07 to 2011/12 (millions of dollars)
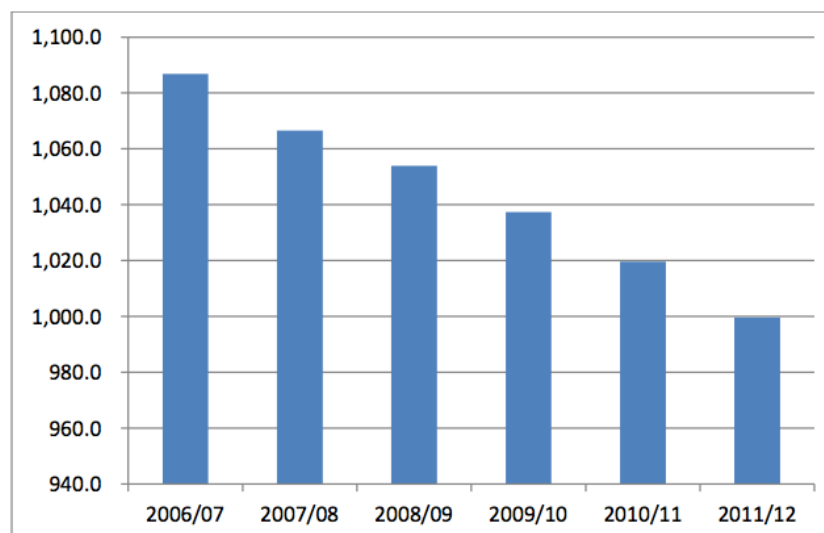
Source: Canadian Housing Statistics, Table 50

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[18] Ibid

[19] Ibid.

[20] Housing Services Corporation (HSC). 2014. Canada's Social and Affordable Housing Landscape: A Province to Province Overview. Retrieved from http://www.hscorp.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Canada-Social-Housing-Landscape_FINAL.pdf.

Many municipalities were unsure how to deal with social housing and are still learning from their mistakes.[21] In 2010 the Province began to state housing as a key priority at the local level through the creation of Ontario's Long Term Affordable Housing Strategy that confirms the devolution of social housing to the local level and emphasized community-based local planning of housing and homelessness services.[22] Although this legislation believes in community-based decisions and control, both the Province and Federal Government do not provide enough funding to have municipalities take on such a large task.

However, this is when many municipalities started acting as landlords towards public and social housing areas. This distinction is vital to understanding the local bureaucrats' current view of public housing which then turns into policy and affects the lives of the residents. Public housing was part of "welfare state solution" to housing for the poor.[23] But once the communities were built, public housing was often not well maintained if at all and the people within them were not supported and seen as influential citizens.[24] Therefore, since the 1980s, public housing has fallen out of policy mainstream altogether, replaced either by various social housing policies, or by wholesale neglect of the needs of poorer people.

Narrative Stacked with Stigmatization

Public housing has been under attack in the mainstream media since the 1980s with the fall of the welfare state and the rise of neoconservativism that give the dismantlers a stronger voice then the poor who lived in public housing. Furthermore, historically public housing has been somewhat under attack since its existence within both Canada and the United States

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[21] Ibid
[22] Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association (ONPHA). 2015. Timeline
[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid.

(U.S.).[25] In terms of the U.S, the dismantling of public housing has been carried out in the U.S through the HOPE VI project, which involves the destruction of large public housing estates, the displacement of low-income residents, and the injection of market units to produce mixed-income neighborhoods.[26] Furthermore, housing policies that look to rid of public housing are occurring in many western countries such as Australia, the U.K, and France.[27] With many countries committing billions of dollars to dismantle public housing, but officially stating and having the intention to typically improve the conditions, I believe it is vital to explore why this phenomenon is occurring and to de-construct the "discourse gap" that has consumed governments from being able to see public housing communities as a place to be cherished and loved.[28] The intention is typically to "improve conditions for the poor", the unintended consequences of effect of current public housing policy is often to dismantle with no net benefit for the poor, which testifies to the power of the "discourse gap" between the governments narratives and the narrative occurring within public housing through tenants.

In order to analyze the discourse being created by government and media I will perform a literature review of the dominant writings and thoughts that will showcase how the reality around public housing communities has been constructed to enforce negative stigmatization. Critical discourse analysis is the examination of how language is used and how it effects social policy change.[29] Furthermore, how policy decisions are framed and constructed through the narratives the state uses can showcase who is intended to benefit and who will be devalued.[30] I, along with

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[25] Goetz, EG. 2013. The audacity of HOPE VI. pp. 342
[26] Goetz, EG. 2013. The audacity of HOPE VI. pp 345
[27] Jacobs, K., and K. Flanagan. 2013. Public housing and the politics of stigma. *Australian Journal of Social Issues* 48, (3). pp. 332
[28] In early revisions my supervisor, Dr, Martin Horak suggested to use the term, "discourse gap." I thought this term was brilliant and wanted to use it my project but do not wish to take credit.
[29] Goetz, EG. 2013. The audacity of HOPE VI: Discourse and the dismantling of public housing. pp 343
[30] Ibid

Goetz, Jacobs, and Flanagan argue that public housing has been constantly scrutinized by the state, media, and neoliberal academics. As noted above, with many western countries looking to demolish entire public housing communities during times of fiscal restraint, it is clear those governments do not see value within those communities and therefore, have devalued every man, women, and child located throughout them.

A plethora of academic literature on stigma has been informed by the work of Erving Goffmans's 1963 essay, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity.*[31] Goffman saw stigma as a method to describe the social processes that involved individuals and groups who are saturated with negative traits that go against social norms.[32] The judgment then reinforces poor self-esteem and begins to explain why so many public housing tenants feel guilty for merely living in public housing.[33] The notion of stigma as Goffman illustrates is a powerful framework for how people within public housing communities have become labelled. Darcy and August uses Goffman's work and apply it to public housing residents in order to demonstrate how harmful the negative labelling of, public housing communities have become. Furthermore, it has established a reality that many policy makers and scholars believe must be, "fixed".

As Goetz argues, a "discourse of disaster" has been constructed around public housing. The discourse of disaster is understood within the U.S in particular as, "the discourse utilized by policy elites which represents public housing communities as deviant, dysfunctional, and obsolete."[34] The two key central themes I wish to focus on are deviant and dysfunctional. Pfeiffer uses a pathologic discourse that emphasizes behavioral deficiencies of public housing residents. Pfeiffer's study found that tenants of public housing were either pictured as lazy, promiscuous,

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[31] Jacobs, K., and K. Flanagan. 2013. Public housing and the politics of stigma.
[32] Goffman, E. 1963. Stigma: notes on the management of spoiled identity. Englewood Cliffs, N.J., Prentice Hall.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Goetz, EG. 2013. The audacity of HOPE VI. pp 347

dangerous, or debilitated by the environment of public housing.[35] Here, Pfeiffer paints the mainstream discourse that has sadly taken over how the state views tenants of public housing communities. Generalizing entire communities as deviant and dysfunctional has had ramifications to the point where individuals within that community feel as though they are the outcast of society. As Wilson puts it, tenants of public housing are in need of role models with good social behavior.[36] This enables a narrative where all members of public housing are inherently misbehaved and those with capital have the right values and social practices.

Pfieffer also conducted a random sample of characterizations of Chicago's public housing between 1999 and 2004. The characterizations that were most prevalent within his study included such negative terms as, "isolated, dangerous, oppressive, overwhelmed, and prison like."[37] With terms such as these being handed down by large influential entities, such as the media, it allows policy makers to produce a legitimate action to displace hundreds of thousands of residents from North American public housing communities.[38] The forced displacement allowed by the constructed negative discourse of public housing communities showcases how powerful both discourse and the state are in North America.[39]

A similar study was conducted in Canada that showcased how low-income residents, some residing in public housing in Toronto and Edmonton illustrated how they believed society saw them as lesser then those had more capital.[40] Throughout the study of over 100 individual

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[35] Pfeiffer, D 2006. Displacement through discourse: Implementing and contesting public housing redevelopment in Cabrini Green. *Urban Anthropology,* 35(1). pp. 45

[36] Wilson, W. J. 1987. The Truly Disadvantaged: The inner city, the underclass and public policy. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

[37] Pfeiffer, D 2006. Displacement through discourse. pp. 47

[38] Goetz, EG. 2013. The audacity of HOPE VI. pp. 348

[39] Ibid

[40] Reutter, L,. Stewart, M, Veenstra, G,. Love, R,. Raphael, D,. and Makwarimba, E. 2009. ""Who do they Think we are, Anyway?": Perceptions of and Responses to Poverty Stigma." Qualitative Health Research 19 (3): 297-311. http://resolver.scholarsportal.info/resolve/10497323/v19i0003/297_dttwaaoartps.

interviews and focus groups, the study concluded low income residents largely believed that society saw them as lazy, disregarding of opportunities, irresponsible, and opting for an easy life.[41] Ruetter, et all highlights how poorly community and tenants have been defined and advocated for in Ontario and Alberta. The study also illustrates how de-valued those are who tend to be poor in Canadian society.

As critical scholars such as Pfieffer, Goetz, and August illustrate, the mainstream view of tenants in public housing is exaggerated and bleak to say the least. That is not to say that public housing projects do not have systemic issues, because they do. Rather, what I am proposing is to see public housing communities as public spaces, full of diversity and strong social networks. Public housing neighborhoods are not captivated by individualism and the pursuit of capital over anything else. With phrases such as positive spaces, public spaces, and genuine communities we can start to produce a counter-narrative to the dominate discourse and thus create a new reality for public housing in North America.

Phenomena of Mixed-Income Neighborhoods

Harvard sociologist William J. Wilson's famous social isolation thesis produced the notion of which social housing projects ought to be replaced with communities that are mixed-use and mixed income.[42] Within his social isolation thesis Wilson argues that low class behavior such as criminal acts, teenage pregnancy, and high dropout rates trickle down through generations.[43] Wilson established the theoretical framework for the current dominant phenomena of creating revitalization projects to, "fix" public housing communities. The notion to include

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[41] Reutter, Linda, Miriam Stewart, Gerry Veenstra, Rhonda Love, Dennis Raphael, and Edward Makwarimba. 2009. ""Who do they Think we are, Anyway?"

[42] Wilson, W. J. 1987. *The Truly Disadvantaged: The inner city, the underclass and public policy*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

[43] Thompson, Sara K., Sandra M. Bucerius, and Mark Luguya. 2013. Unintended consequences of neighbourhood restructuring. *British Journal of Criminology* 53, (5) (09). pp 925, http://search.proquest.com/docview/1492599696?accountid=15115.

wealthier individuals within public housing neighborhoods has been seen as the go-to policy tool for bourgeois bureaucrats who believe they can create better social integration and for the private sector to profit off the poor.[44]

Wilson's theory is strengthened by false assumptions that those who reside in high poverty neighborhoods do not have common or mainstream values. Wilson's theory also assumes that by injecting those of middle to high income brackets into poor neighborhoods will create communities of higher integration, while also bringing resources that will make the neighborhoods safer.[45] It is important to remember that all theories are based upon on assumptions; however, some theories can harm more than others. Wilson's thoughts have given birth to, "neighborhood revitalization projects" as they are known in North America. Revitalization projects are rooted in Wilson's philosophy because policy makers believe implementing wealthier people into the poorer community that social networks will form and therefore help the poorer individuals to gain, "proper" mainstream values.[46] This assumption is harmful as it creates a barrier filled reality in which those residents must overcome.

To critique Wilson's theory I would begin by stating that his notion of, "proper" mainstream values are constructed through the lens of discourse of disaster for disadvantage peoples. The premise behind Wilson's definition of proper is constructed in opposition to how residents within public housing communities have been perceived, which is improvised, uneducated, and criminalized. Wilson's theory advocated instead for emphasizing job training and education funding in poor neighborhoods. Wilson's assumption lead to a plethora of other academics like

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[44] Walks, R. Alan and Richard Maaranen. 2008. Gentrification, social mix, and social polarization: testing the linkages in large Canadian Cities. *Urban Geography* 29 (4). pp. 295

[45] Thompson, Sara K., Sandra M. Bucerius, and Mark Luguya. 2013. Unintended consequences of neighbourhood restructuring.

[46] Ibid

Oscar Lewis, Douglass Massey, and Nancy Denton and advocating how social integration and strong social networks would occur after you implement wealthier people further harms the discourse for those who call public housing their home.[47] The hypothesis that public housing areas will be better by injecting the rich has tended to be incorrect and has only lead to displacement and gentrification.[48]

The term mixed income housing has been widely used throughout the community and neighborhood literature. Mixed income housing amongst policy makers, new urbanists, and creative city scholars has been defined as improving, fostering social mix, and restoring a social balance amongst poor neighborhoods.[49] Mixed income housing is supposed to bring about social inclusion, stronger social interaction between different economic classes, while also reducing the social issues and other poor community effects that originate from concentrated poverty.[50] With mixed income housing being rooted in the notion of renovating and improving it starts to become clear that a positive narrative has been constructed around gentrification as a policy tool for the, "fixing" of what they perceive as poor neighborhoods.

The growing acceptance of mixed income housing is rooted in an economic incentive reality for governments of all levels, but in particular the local level.[51] With the dramatic rise of globalization, large metropolitan cities are being forced to compete in order to stay relevant within the capitalist system.[52] This is the reality government bureaucrats have constructed in order to justify the policy tool of injecting the rich into poor areas as a positive for all stakeholders. Anytime policy makers choose to tear down entire communities and rebuild them demonstrates how

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[48] Ibid

[49] Walks, R. Alan and Richard Maaranen. 2008. Gentrification, social mix, and social polarization. pp 296

[50] Ibid

[51] Ibid

[52] Ibid

little residents are heard within the process. Therefore, we must stay critical of such large revitalization projects, after all how would you feel if the state tore down your home?

Policy makers must rethink the narrative around those who live in public housing. Instead, narratives illustrated by Lipman showcase how market approaches, entrenched in neoliberal values are still the most common approach:

> According to this neoliberal logic, while public housing ... breed[s] dysfunction and failure, private management, the market and public–private partnerships foster excellence through entrepreneurship, competition and choice.[53]

Lipman highlights the narrative being constructed around modern day revitalization projects, which is rooted in neoliberalism. Furthermore, thoughts in favor of large revitalization projects began after the neighborhood effect thesis by Bill in 2005.[54] Bill's thesis puts forward the idea that larger and more complex social problems occur if areas are filled with high density poor individuals.[55]

> Arthurson unpacks the neighborhood effect thesis further by arguing that:

> [a] basic premise underlying support for the social mix is the idea that mixed income communities result in milieus that lead to positive change for disadvantaged residents. The anticipated outcomes relate mainly to developing inclusive communities that provide positive role models of good citizens and lead to other advantages such as access to labor market networks.[56]

Arthurson's words are important as he notes that social integration, as based upon within the neighborhood effect thesis, will produce holistic social outcomes because it provides a framework for stronger role models within the community. Essentially, Arthurson is articulating the

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[53] Lipman, P. 2008. Mixed-income schools and housing: advancing the neoliberal urban agenda, *Journal of Education Policy,* 23:2, pp. 123

[54] Bill, A. 2005. Neighbourhood inequality – do small area interactions influence economic outcomes?, Proceedings of the Second State of Australian Cities Conference, Griffith University, Brisbane

[55] Bill, A. 2005. Neighbourhood inequality – do small area interactions influence economic outcomes?

[56] Ibid

lack of belief in the residents of public housing as good members of society, thus stereotyping large groups of people.

The neighborhood effect thesis has been challenged within academia and barely any empirical research has shown that mixed-income neighborhoods promote safer and healthier communities.[57] Galster and Zobel further the argument against the neighborhood effect thesis by writing, "The US now faces the unenviable situation of having adopted a major new housing strategy with only a shred of evidence to suggest what effect it might have on social problems."[58] Amongst the heated literature there tends to be more of a consensus on the lack of empirical evidence and that revitalization strategies tend to do more harm than benefit. A strong example of this was the neighborhood response piece created by tenants of public housing in Richmond Virginia entitled, "We Call These Projects Home." This project was a grassroots and highly intellectual response by public housing tenants to the rebuild of their community to create mixed income housing.[59] The tenants wrote the 50 page response as a counter argument to the local governments anti public housing rhetoric.[60] The paper was constructed by local grassroots activists who organized and empowered tenants of public housing by having their voices heard and creating a policy response that showcased the pride and respect for their community.[61] "We Call These Projects Home" is a strong example that when tenant's voices are heard, the discourse gap between governments and the people who live in public housing is often large.

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[57] Ibid

[58] Galster, G. & Zobel, A. 1998. Will dispersed housing programmes reduce social problems in the US?, *Housing Studies, 13(*5). pp 619

[59] Right to the City Alliance. 2010. "We Call these Projects Home:Solving the Housing Crisis from the Ground Up. *Urban Justice Centre.* Retrieve from http://righttothecity.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/We_Call_These_Projects_Home-2.pdf

[60] Samara, Tony Roshan, Anita Sinha, and Marnie Brady. 2013. "Putting the "public" Back in Affordable Housing: Place and Politics in the Era of Poverty Deconcentration." *Cities* 35: 319-326.

[61] Right to the City Alliance. 2010. "We Call these Projects Home"

Martine August's piece, *Challenging the rhetoric of stigmatization: the benefits of concentrated poverty in Toronto's Regent Park* provides an alternative to the neighborhood effect and illustrates its major downfalls though the case of the Regent Park (RP) revitalization project. RP is Canada's largest public housing community and is currently undergoing a billion dollar renewal plan.[62] The title of August's piece alone is symbolic in his approach to try to change the discourse of Canada's most stigmatized community. What is even more impactful was August's two major findings that demonstrate how the revitalization of RP is harmful and was never wanted in the first place. His first major finding was that many residents within the RP community liked their home and felt a part of a strong community.[63] Having residents that say they valued and cherished their community starts to debunk the notion that public housing communities are dysfunctional as RP allowed for many residents to feel at home.

August's second major finding was from an interview of at-risk teenagers after their community was demolished. The majority of these teens denounced the revitalization project and explained how it destroyed their social networks.[64] Furthermore, many of the teenagers committed crimes or felt as though they were more likely to commit a crime due to the distribution of the social fabric within the community. August's article within the Toronto Star, which provided follow-up research, showcases that the revitalization of RP has done more harm towards the former residents of RP then positives as it has led to displacement and the destruction of social ties.[65]

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[62] August, M. Challenging the rhetoric of stigmatization. pp. 1320
[63] Ibid
[64] Ibid
[65] Toronto Star. "How 'revitalization' is leading to displacement in Regent Park." Toronto, ON: 2014, accessed from http://www.thestar.com/opinion/commentary/2014/05/05/how_revitalization_is_leading_to_displacement_in_regent_park.html   .

Jim Sliver also added to the Canadian pro-public housing tenant literature through his book, *Good Places to Live.* Sliver's work articulates how neoliberalism has reinforced revitalization projects that look to rid of public housing all together. However, Sliver makes the argument that public housing is not the variable for causing poverty in Ontario or Canada, rather the government divestment in public housing has allowed the stigma of blighted buildings to create a negative reality for those who reside within them.[66] That is to say that society and policy makers, through a neoliberal lens have constructed their views on the people in public housing based upon the physical buildings on the community. As Sliver research demonstrates, public housing had a positive history join North America and that positive reality was altered when government began to divest in public housing in order to benefit the private housing sector. Having residents voices heard within the literature offers evidence towards the production of a counter narrative to the negative discourse that has been constructed around peoples of public housing. More work similar to August's and Sliver's must be done to combat the stigma around the people of public housing.

Amongst the literature there is a missing gap on the perspectives, voices, and opinions amongst the Ontario Residents in public housing. In order to break long history of governments treating poor like objects for ill-conceived policy experiments grounded in questionable assumptions, we need to compare public and policy discourse about PH residents with lived experience. This study looks to do exactly that by providing public housing tenants of London, Ontario to share their lived experiences and showcase that life within those blighted buildings are worth living.

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[66] Silver, J. 2011. *Good Places to Live: Poverty and Public Housing in Canada*

Methodology

There are two underpinning research questions that are guiding this research project. The first is, to what extent does the media and government discourse about public housing residents differ from the lived experience of public housing residents? The second questions which is, in what ways can the lived experience of public housing residents inform a new discussion that better serves their public housing policy needs, acts as a follow up policy recommendation piece that will allow the research to hopefully lead to change. The case studies that I will be analyzing are the two largest and most stereotyped public housing communities in London, Limberlost and Southdale. The first questions originated out of my own personal experience living in public housing in London Ontario. I wish to explore if my positive experience of living in public housing was more wide spread. I also wish to demonstrate three distinct discourses that surrounds public housing in London, Ontario; the media, LMHC, and the residents themselves. By doing a media review of public housing documents, reviewing LMHC strategic plan, and running focus groups it has shown three distinct problem definitions within public housing. This methodology was chosen to best showcase the difference in problem definition of public housing and the discourse that goes along with it.

Throughout this paper is it imperative to remember that the basis of critical narrative analyses is the belief that discourse does not only allow us to interpret our reality, but also has the power to create and re-create reality. Exploring narratives and examining messages and metaphors within public housing can allow us to reshape the communities to one of positive spaces, while still addressing the systemic issues at hand. As Darcy notes, the repetition of language and phrases can create social practices. I argue that the constant negative language toward public housing has created a discourse that demonizes residents of public housing and has reinforced

harmful state social policies toward public housing communities. With that being said, one must remember that discourse also has the power to recreate that reality to one of empowerment and value.

Media Review of the London Free Press

Firstly I have conducted a media review of the largest media outlet, the London Free Press (LFP). I have observed and describe major articles within the last five years in order to evaluate how the media understands the people within public housing. For the purpose of this paper I analyzed 12 articles and narrowed by search by using key words such as, "Public Housing" and "low-income residents". I also used key search words such as the neighborhoods names. This large and influential newspaper will determine how the media and subsequently many residents depict the narrative surrounding public housing residents. The goal is to see if negative words and stories are constantly affiliated with public housing articles.

City of London and LMHC Policy Review

Secondly, I have conducted a government policy review. This approach consisted of reviewing LMHC current strategic plan and City of London's housing reports to see the discourses used. The reasoning for this approach is to investigate if the City of London and LMHC are using the de-concentration of poverty of theory to create their current policies for public housing communities. Furthermore, I have also analyzed how LMHC views their tenants and if they are developing policy with tenants or for them. This distinction is crucial as it will demonstrate the autonomy and belief government has in the tenants of public housing. Assessing the main governmental plan and London Housing First Strategy will allow me to see if public housing is being prioritized amongst. It is my hope to better understand if the dominant and high level policy

from the city is harmful and wasteful after being implemented within public housing communities or how they affected the tenants of public housing.

Hearing the Tenant Voice: Focus Groups

Lastly, I have conducted focus groups with tenants of public housing. The reasoning for conducting focus groups is to gain the perspectives of current public housing residents. The emphasizes of the groups will be to actively listen and gain their views into what their community means to them, how there lived experience differs from the government and media discourse, and there opinions on how to better policy. The significant outcome of this project is to find out alternatives public housing residents believe local government should pursue. Often times many projects look to find more questions. Although more questions are vital, I believe empowering tenants to produce policy alternatives can lead to better use of government resources while also understanding that tenants of public housing are citizens as well.

I conducted the focus groups or community conversations as they were described to tenants, in a local non-profit who was embedded within the Limberlost and Southdale communities, the London Community Chaplaincy (LCC). In order to gain trust and a good turnout, I consulted with the LCC to see what would be best way to gain meaningful information from tenants. The first step conducted was to create a flyer that would be easy to read for newcomers which also possessed a picture of me so tenants, particularly mothers could recognize who they would be talking to. Secondly we used the term, "community conversation" as opposed to, "focus groups in promotion and talking with tenants as focus groups may be hard to understand or too intimidating. Furthermore, I knocked on every door within the communities to personally hand out flyers in each community (see appendix 4 & 5). Accompanying me was a community developer who worked at the LCC unit in each community and they also happened to live in the communi-

ty. Having a respected resident along with me while going door to door allowed me to gain trust amongst tenants, this allowed them to provide meaningful feedback. I went door to door to every house and handed invitation twice in each community in order to demonstrate commitment and get my face known in the complexes. Lastly, the LCC provided light refreshments and childcare so every family could attend. I wanted to ensure that there were no barriers for tenants and families of all ages to attend. That was able to occur thanks to the LCC.

I also believe that articulating to the participants that I, the interviewer have had similar experiences and grew up in public housing. The reasoning for sharing my story was that residents will be more open for communication in order to produce meaningful information that is often lost when being interviewed by a stranger or government worker as opposed to someone who can from similar socio-economic circumstances. The interviews will consist of broad and open-ended questions that explore the participants' perception of their community, current government policies, and revitalization of public housing, safety, and policy alternatives. When addressing these broad questions, I will provide residents with the opportunity to lead the discussion in areas of which are most important to them. I will then follow up with participants afterwards and ensure that they can debrief with one another and I after the interview is conducted. Lastly, the taped interviews will then be searched through in order to find the major themes and context that emerged from them. As the interviewer, I hope to be facilitating conversation and have a note taker that will write down common answers and themes amongst the groups. I ended up having 13 participants, 6 in Limberlost and 7 in Southdale. The object of these interviews is to simply engage those who are often left out of the policy conversation of their own communities. After gathering all of the information I will propose policy recommendations that have voiced by the tenants.

The Harsh Statistics: A Brief Overview

This study is going to be conducted within two public housing communities within London Ontario: Limberlost and Southdale, These two communities have often been stereotyped more so then other neighborhoods within London Ontario. These two communities also represent the environment and socio-economic make up of those that reside in public housing. Amongst the demographic in public housing communities within London Ontario there has been a particular increase in Aboriginal people and newcomers to Canada, both of whom, sadly, occupy a large part of low-income earners.[67] The statistical makeups varies slightly between Southdale and Limberlost, as they are the three largest public housing communities in London. Limberlost has the highest population with 680 while Southdale has the second largest with 549 (see appendix 3).[68] What is also a common characteristic amongst the two communities is that they were all built between 1966 to 1971 and are all row house type buildings.[69] That is to say that they were built during the public housing of the Federal Government anti slum policies in long connected semi-attached dwellings.

What is most surprising about the statistics gained from LMHC was the amount of working households within the communities and the average annual household income. South dale which has 172 units that incorporate 224 adults and 325 dependents has only 7 working households.[70] As this community has the least amount of working households it also possesses the least average annual income per household at a shocking $10,416.00.

	Southdale	Limberlost
Number of Units	172	160

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[67] LMHC. 2012. "Strategic Plan 2013-2016." London & Middlesex Housing Corporation.
[68] LMHC. 2015. Statistical Table Created by Senior Staff.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Ibid

	Southdale	Limberlost
Number of Adults	224	247
Number of Dependents	325	433
Total Population	549	680
Average Annual Income per household	10,416,00	14,316.00
Number of Working House-holds	7	27
Year Built	1971	1973
Building Type	Row House	Row House

[71] Table Source: LMHC Senior Management Team - Tenant Administration

To put things into perspective, only 10% of the residents found within these four public housing communities make slightly above or meet the poverty line. To truly demonstrate the inner

city and suburb difference in London, all four of these communities combined average annual income ($52,728) does not even come close the average income of Hyde Park, $112,000.[72]

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[71] The following table was created for me by senior management at London Middlesex Housing Corporation for the sole purpose of this paper.
[72] Kerr & Decker-Pierce. 2014. "Income Inequality Increasing in London." London Poverty Research Centre. Retrieved from http://povertyresearch.ca/this-is-an-example-of-some-news/

What should be also be pointed out is that for every parent there are almost two kids per household within these communities. The truly amazing stat that cannot be quantified is how these families are feeding and taking care of their families on less than $15,800.00 a year. That low amount is also very telling of employment barriers public housing residents are facing in London as out of 519 units there are only 58 that are working. This amounts to only 8.9% of public housing households having employment. These statistics highlight the inner-city and suburb divide, but also highlights the systemic barriers that these residents face, such as employment barriers,

In Contrast, one of the wealthiest..

Census Tract 555.0008.00 in West London in the Hyde Park Area

Population 2011 Census
4,293 persons
(+4.3 % increase since 2006)

LIM, after tax (2000): 3.6% → LIM, after tax (2012): 4.5%
Median Income (2012):
Couple Families $112,010
All Families and Non-Family Persons $91,260

income barriers, and stigmatization. Although, it is important to acknowledge the barriers, it is even more important to investigate how public housing residents are surviving within their communities with such a lack of funds.

In terms of the broader London case, many Londoners reside in poverty. As of 2011, the poverty rate in the London Census Metropolitan Area (CMA) was 12.3%, which is significantly higher than Ontario at 8.8% and the rest of Canada at 9.0%.[73] The socio-economic context worsen as 17% of London CMA families live below the low-income-cut-off with 46% of single parents and 20% of children living in poverty.[74] Furthermore, 1 in 2 immigrants who reside within the London CMA also live below the poverty line.[75] London is also home to the second highest unemployment rate at 9.2% in 2013 and an estimated 11,000 households receive Ontario Works (OW) each month, where 36% of recipients were youth under the age of 18.[76] Moreover, the London Food Bank usage has also drastically increased amongst all citizens from different walks of life, whether it be single parent, families, seniors, or the working poor.[77] The socio-economic within London clearly demonstrates a need for a well-functioning and heavily funded social housing organization.

London Free Press Discourse on Public Housing

Through the dozens of LFP articles reviewed over the last five years (2010-2015) there has been a certain tend of thought amongst them as significant events lead to the reporting and publishing of many articles. The most covered events during the media review consisted of bed bugs, meth labs, crime, and stereotyping surveys that asked if residents have a mental illness or addiction. Not surprisingly there were no recent articles of the pockets of good that exist, or positive things that residents have been doing in their communities. Although, what was surprising was how vilified public housing as a community was. There seemed to be no glimmer of hope or

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[73] Ibid.
[74] Ibid.
[75] LMHC. 2012. "Strategic Plan 2013-2016."
[76] London-Middlesex Housing Corporation (LMHC). "An Information Guide About Our Services." http://www.london-housing.ca/PDFs/booklet-information-guide-about-our-services.pdf. pp. 1-18
[77] Ibid.

value within London's PH communities. In fact, the words and pictures they used painted a harsh and negative reality around the physical space and residents of public housing Either it was a bed bug infestation , meth lab exploding, or wrongful surveys being handed out to residents. The interesting and importance fact about these events is not that they were rare and that public housing itself, did not create these events, nor did the residents.

"Much-Maligned Complexes"

In an article written January of 2013, the London Free Press demonstrated how it and many people of come to describe public housing communities in London. Within the opening paragraph the author, Randy Richmond writes that, "Summer recreation camps for kids in social housing, as well as security patrols and regular upkeep at the much-maligned complexes, will be in peril if politicians push hard for a tax freeze."[78] The emphasis here is on the phrase, "much-maligned complexes." The word malign refers to harmful, evil in nature, and destructive. Malign has also often been linked to diseases. For a London Free Press (LFP) author to open an article on how a tax freeze may harm tenants of public housing with comparing their communities to something as evil in nature showcases how impactful they can be on creating a destructive narrative. Furthermore, the picture used within article is also powerful as it depicts a falling apart playground (See Appendix 6). Images are important when constructing a narrative as they speak volumes to the reader. Is this particular photo they show a snip it of the children climbers that has no children playing on it and is deteriorated. The notion that there are no children playing on the climbers is symbolic as it can mislead the reader to believe that kids in public housing are out causing, "trouble" as opposed to being on the climbers and being watched by their parents. I want to reiterate that I am not trying to exaggerate, but I am simply recreating and showcasing

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[78] Richmond, R. 2013. "Social-Program Architects Cheated." London Free Press: London, Ontario. Retrieved from http://www.lfpress.com/2013/01/13/life-less-livable-for-poor.

how symbolic the words and images are within not just this article but all of the articles within the LFP. The images that they publish speak as loud and if not louder than the words they used to describe public housing, such as malign.

The article goes on to illustrate how the City of London at that time was considering cutting $481,000 which is equivalent to a 6 week summer recreation program, stop the painting inside unused occupied by long term tenants, and most importantly cut patrols by off-duty police officers that was hired by the corporation to keep tabs on the, "high-crime" areas.[79] The notion that LMHC hires off-duty police officers to roam their neighborhoods perpetuates the notion that they are filled with criminals. In fact, London's public housing is comprised of a blend of proud varying ethnic backgrounds, families, and seniors. When the LFP suggests that stopping the extra surveillance of public housing by off-duty officers it insinuates that crime will grow because the, "bad neighborhoods" are not being watched. Again, Richmond's comments can allow the readers mind to paint a vilified picture of public housing that is simply not true.

"Eaten Alive in Public Housing"

The second major theme of articles recently was surrounding bed bugs in public housing units. The title of the most telling article was, "People Eaten Alive in Public Housing."[80] The bold title within itself is harsh depict how the story reviled that LMHC took much longer than 24 hours to investigate the so called, "infestation."[81] What is also surprising about this article that is different than several other LFP articles is that they interviewed a tenant. Gaining tenants perspectives and insight should be essential when publishing any article about any community, let

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[79] Richmond, R. 2013. "Social-Program Architects Cheated."

[80] O'Brien, J. 2014, "Eaten Alive in Public Housing." London Free Press: London, Ontario. Retrieved from http://www.lfpress.com/2014/03/23/eaten-alive-in-public-housing

[81] O'Brien, J. 2014, "Eaten **Alive** in Public Housing."

alone public housing. Although, the tenant comments were slim and not full of substance it still put forth the condemnation that all public housing units and residents are plagued with beg bugs, which is simply not the case. Returning back to the headline, one can only get shivers and tend to think of the residents as plagued individuals. What they article does not state is that Beg Bugs have been as issue throughout London, Particular in private low income housing units. The fact that they include public housing particularly within the title in reference to being eaten alive deems these communities and everyone within them in a negative light.

The online Story is also assisted with even photos of one apartment building with beg bugs. Again, these powerful images tell a story of their that public housing tenants live in bug infested conditions, further demoralizing public housing complexes and the tenants within them. It is important to note that although this topic was only covered a couple of times it has the potential to harm the viewing of public housing residents for other Londoners. What is even more fascinating is that the online version of these articles displays a plethora of photos to showcases the bed bugs in a particular public housing home. Although the article is written to attack LMHC on its inability to address the problem in a reasonable time period, one cannot put help to begin to generalize about the conditions on tenants within public housing.

"*Are You Addicting to Drugs or Have a Mental Illness*?"

One of the most recent and harmful reported incidences reported amongst public housing is London was about a simply survey that looked to stigmatize and eroded trust amongst tenants and the boys that governs them, LMHC. The survey that was sent out to 900 tenants asked two questions that was extremely telling for how both society and LMHC sees their tenants (see appendix 8). The first question close to the end of the survey was, "Are you (or a person in your

household) Living with a mental illness, if yes please write the name of the mental illness."[82]
This particular questions, although short speaks volumes in terms of privacy issues, and a belief
that tends to see people in public housing as mentally ill. Now, I believe LMHC was not mean-
ing to do any harm to their tenants when this was sent out to over 900 tenants and intended for
2400 more; however, the narrative this questions creates when tenants ride it can cause years of
broken relationships between the housing corporation and tenants. The intent of the survey was
supposed to better understand current mental illness within the community in order to better pro-
vide social surveys to meet their needs.[83] A private land lord, either low or high income would
never ask their tenants if they possessed any sort of mental illness. Why should it be any differ-
ent for people in public housing? It is because a negative discourse has been contracted around
them that make false assumptions that, those who live in public housing are sick and do not act
like the rest of society.

The second crucial questions in the survey was the very last, "Are you (or a person in
your household) living with an addiction? If yes please write the kind of addiction."[84] Once
again we see the LMHC trying to find out what addiction plague their tenants. As stated before,
they are no intention to use the information to harm their tenants; however, informally tenants
have been labelled as now both drug addicts and mentally ill. Again, this may be strong language
but this a phenomena that has occurred nowhere else in market value complexes. This question
established the notion that people in public housing are much more likely to be society's sick and
non-rational agents.

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[82] Richmond, R. "London Middlesex Housing survey draws fire for questions on mental illness and addiction." Lon-
don, ON: 2014, accessed from http://www.lfpress.com/2014/09/24/mental-health-questions-cause-concern
[83] Richmond, R. "London Middlesex Housing survey draws fire for questions on mental illness and addiction
[84] Ibid

This notion is reinforced within the article when the author quotes a so called housing advocate Jeff Schemer quote within the article who argued that they survey was good because it can identify issues and sure tenants are being accommodated. Schemer goes on to further to say that, "…many tenants are elderly, improvised, dealing with mental illness or addiction or both and have no other place to go."[85] Schemer comments only support the negative stereotypes that are being painted over entire neighborhoods in public housing. There are no states to support Schemer claims; in fact poverty in the entire city of London has grown drastically with the loss of large industries that provided well-paying jobs such as Kellogg's and Caterpillar[86]. As of 2010, the poverty rate in the London Census Metropolitan Area (CMA) was 12.3%, which is significantly higher than Ontario at 8.8% and the rest of Canada at 9.0%.[87] The socio-economic context worsen as 17% of London CMA families live below the low-income-cut-off with 46% of single parents and 20% of children living in poverty.[88] Furthermore, 1in 2 immigrants who reside within the London CMA also live below the poverty line.[89] London is also home to the second highest unemployment rate at 9.2% in 2013 and an estimated 11,000 households receive Ontario Works (OW) each month, where 36% of recipients were youth under the age of 18.[90] Moreover, the London Food Bank usage has also drastically increased amongst all citizens from different walks of life, whether it is a single parent, families, seniors, or the working poor.[91] The socio-economic within London clearly demonstrates a need for a well-functioning and heavily funded social housing organization.

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[85] Ibid

[86] Ibid

[87] LMHC. 2012. "Strategic Plan 2013-2016." London & Middlesex Housing Corporation.

[88] London-Middlesex Housing Corporation (LMHC). "An Information Guide About Our Services." http://www.london-housing.ca/PDFs/booklet-information-guide-about-our-services.pdf. pp. 1-18

[89] London-Middlesex Housing Corporation (LMHC). "An Information Guide About Our Services."

[90] Ibid

[91] Ibid

The article ended with an intriguing and significant quote from an elderly resident who said, "I filled out the whole thing, but I didn't answer those questions because it should not matter to them (LMHC)."[92] This quote is important as it speaks to the notion that how LMHC went about gaining vulnerable information was wrong. As this project seeks to do, it is radical to suggest that the lived experience within public housing is different than the perception that clouds over those who reside in public housing. This tenant's quote shows some light into how if their

tenants are mental ill or addict, a survey is not the right way to go about that. It is important to acknowledge that the LFP showed sympathy for the residents within this article and brought this sad organizational mistake to light. On the other hand, it still showcased a negative story surrounding public housing tenants.

City of London and LMHC Policy Review

City of London's Housing First Model

In 2013, The City of London produced their plan on housing and homelessness prevention plan entitled, "*A Homeless Prevention System for London Ontario: A coordinated and integrated individual and family centered housing stability approach that is outcome focused and designed to address, reduce and prevent homelessness in London.*"[93] Throughout this three year implementation plan about charting a new holistic path to affordable housing there are many positive statements made such as, "homelessness starts in a neighborhood ad requires a neighborhood response to achieve lasting and positive outcomes."[94] The document goes on to define the

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[92] Richmond, R. "London Middlesex Housing survey draws fire for questions on mental illness and addiction."

[93] City of London. 2013."A homeless Prevention System for London Ontario: A coordinated and integrated individual and family centered housing stability approach that is outcome focused and designed to address, reduce and prevent homelessness in London." Neighborhood Children and Fire Services. Retrieved from http://www.london.ca/residents/neighbourhoods/Documents/London's%20Homeless%20Prevention%20System.pdf

[94] City of London. 2013."A homeless Prevention System for London Ontario" pp. 4

housing first approach as, "a way to shift the priority to move individuals and families quickly into housing with support, and then begin to work on the issues that led to their homelessness from the stability and safety of their own home."[95] The housing first model does have its benefits as it sees housing as the foundational building block to stop homelessness and systemic poverty.

With that being said, the housing first model does have its downside as it is rooted in de-concentration of poverty theory and also seems to advocate for the elimination of public housing neighborhoods. Only mentioned once in the document is the notion of "scattering" affordable housing stock. In fact, it says directly in the plan that the City of London's system "will increase and develop efficient, attainable, scattered and diverse housing stock."[96] Scattering, is a significant piece to the housing first model. It essentially advocates to create mixed-income housing or to sprinkle the poor throughout the city. This notion when paired with Stephen Giustizia, a senior manager of social housing with the City of London quote from the Minister's Forum on Affordable Housing and the Private Sector demonstrates that revitalization and private investment is top priority of social housing in London:

> Affordable housing development attracts private investment. It produces results and clearly has what we call a multiplier effect on local communities and the economy, it saves money in other services areas, in other ministries and in other sectors. It also relies on the continued participation in investments of all orders of government.[97]

To fully unpack Mr. Giustizia words would take an entirely new paper; however, to stay in the scope of this paper one can come to the conclusion that London wishes to create more mixed-income housing. To put so much faith into the private sector to create public housing takes away the responsibility from the public sector. Furthermore, the private sector does not have the same end goals as the public sector; therefore, the outcome may harm the poor, which has tended to

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[95] Ibid. pp 1
[96] Ibid.
[97] Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH). 2014. "Minister's Forum on Affordable Housing and the Private Sector: A Summary." Retrieved from ontario.ca/affordablehousing

happen.[98] The Housing First Model is rooted in an ideology of de-concertation of poverty theory as stated earlier. To, "scatter" the poor while believing that the private sector can better help increase affordable housing is deeply rooted both neo-liberalism.

I also wish to acknowledge that the City of London does not want to solely displace the tenants in public housing nor does it seek to intentionally harm the poor. In fact, the document lays out many good principles. However, it lays the foundation to attack public housing communities as opposed to reinvesting in the neighborhoods. The document itself believes in a neighborhood approach but never once mentions how it will reinvent or provide LMHC with more funds to better some of the poorest communities in London. The purpose of this paper is to showcase that public housing neighborhoods need to be valued as much as any community. It also seeks to showcase that public housing is not the causer if poverty, but rather the divestment in public housing is the causer of poverty. August and Sliver who are the some of the largest voices against mixed-income communities in Canada show that private investment does not always lead to better affordable housing projects, in some cases in has diminished the housing stock and destroyed social fabric.

Nowhere does the City of London account or acknowledge the downfalls of scattering people throughout the city. Rather, the document reinforces market logic as it wishes to have people have choice in their housing section.[99] Choice is important, but why can't public housing complexes be good places to live? Many residents have expressed how they like living in Limberlost and Southdale. Many more would say the same if their voices where heard more in the policy process and if the City of London and LHMC would work closer together to help provide more funding and opportunity for public housing communities. Here we see the City of London

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[98]August, M Challenging the rhetoric of stigmatization.
[99] Ibid.

producing its own discourse, one that is for scattering the poor while trying to create more supportive housing. How can one create a supportive environment when they de-value where some already live?

LMHC Strategic Mission and Vision.

As Byrson and Moore state, the mandates, mission, and values laid out at the beginning of the strategic planning process indicate the public value of the organization.[100] The mission, mandate and values will also crate and provide social justification and legitimacy on which the organization future depends. Furthermore, public and non-profit organizations are externally justified as they are characterized by the state to pursue certain public purposes.[101] Public organizations are constantly looking for ways to demonstrate their legitimacy and ability to create public value or they risk having budgets cuts within the current paradigm of new public management (NPM).[102] With the current way of thinking within the public sector consisting of being private sector minding, it makes the mission and vision statements even more complex for social services as often times they are expensive and inefficient in their nature.[103] NPM is calling all social services to be efficient and effective; however, with affordable housing lacking stock and needing significant capital resources, it makes the strategic planning and thinking that much more necessary and complex.[104]

LMHC strategic mission as found within the 2013-2016 strategic plan is, "To provide quality, affordable and sustainable housing accessible to those who are eligible."[105] LMHC also

[100] Bryson, J. M. (2011). Strategic Planning for Public and Non Profit Organizations: A Guide to Strengthening and Sustaining Organizational Achievement. Fourth Edition. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

[101] Bryson, J. M. (2011). Strategic Planning for Public and Non Profit Organizations

[102] Ibid.

[103] Denhardt, J Vinzant, and. Denhardt, R. (2000) "The new public service: Serving rather than steering." *Public administration review 60*, (6): 549-559.

[104] Denhardt, J Vinzant, and. Denhardt, R. (2000) "The new public service."

[105] LMHC. 2012. "Strategic Plan 2013-2016."

goes on to note that their strategic plan begins with their mission, which is important as Byrson notes that the organizational mission provides a sense of purpose.[106] Moreover, the mission may be able to spill over into an earlier version of success, which can then identify possible efforts at issue identification and strategy development. In terms of LMHC's mission, it has turned into a vision of success that is both simply and people oriented. Their vision is as following, " LMHC becomes the preferred housing choice for people need."[107] What is central to me within Byrson's text but apparently not to LMHC is how the community can shape mission and how vital community is to carrying out a mission.

As LMHC is a unique local government services that deals with building and sustaining community for those who are heavily stigmatized in our society, the notion and importance of community is central to building any effective strategic plan. What community means is this circumstance is actively engaging and co-authoring a strategic mission. With LMHC mission being people centric, as it looks to be the top, "choice" for those in need does not demonstrate what people already in the community want to see. Byron articulates in a short passage that community can be useful to developing a proactive vision that, "embodies" vital issues and values.[108] Words are important as they can shape the reality around us, especially within the strategic planning process. When Byrson says, "embodies" values and issues that is central to creating a meaningful mission statement that is at the core of what individuals within the community see as being important. Furthermore, it also demonstrates the organizations belief and commitment to engaging, and more importantly, listening to current tenants. LMHC current vision and mission statement within their current strategic plan does not embody the needs and values of current

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[106] Bryson, J. M. (2011). Strategic Planning for Public and Non Profit Organizations
[107] LMHC. 2012. "Strategic Plan 2013-2016."
[108] Bryson, J. M. (2011). Strategic Planning for Public and Non Profit Organizations. pp, 127.

tenants. Therefore, that leads me to believe that their focus is on gaining new tenants, which is important; however, it leaves out the innovative voices and concerns for those who already reside within these beautiful communities.

With the mission being the guiding principles for establishing the strategic management in order for implantation, or the why the organization does what it does, it becomes one of the most important and beginning steps of the strategic planning process.[109] The vision articulates or works out what the organization should look like or how it should carry out its mission. This distinction that Byrson makes between mission and vision is important to note because a strong vision of successes is dependent upon an organizations mission statement, or more distinctly in LMHC's case, the communities beliefs and values.[110] LMHC and many other public housing organizations are not using mission and vision statements to take the radical step of trying to produce a counter narrative against the dominant discourse of tenants being lazy, drug addicts, and criminals. In fact, LMHC furthered that discourse with their drug addiction and mental illness survey. A simple mistake like that can cause years of distrust between LMHC and tenants and the 2013-2016 strategic plan could of been the beginning of trying to reverse that broken relationship.[111]

LMHC's Strategic Values and Beliefs

The case for community oriented strategic planning within LMHC 2013-2016 becomes more apparent within their values as beliefs. Stated earlier, I noted that their mission and vision does not truly embody the thoughts and aspiration of the current tenants but focuses on being the best housing service provider for those in need. LMHC vision and beliefs advocate for being ten-

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[109] Lane, J.-E., & Wallis, J. (2009). "Strategic management and public leadership." *Public Management Review,* 11(1), 101-120.
[110] Bryson, J. M. (2011). Strategic Planning for Public and Non Profit Organizations. pp, 127.
[111] Richmond, R. "London Middlesex Housing survey draws fire for questions on mental illness and addiction."

ant focused and valuing those who reside in public housing communities in London and Middlesex County. First, LMHC values are as such, that LMHC becomes: Tenant focused; leaders; respectful; accountable; collaborative; innovative, and inclusive.[112] These values demonstrates how LMHC has defined their issue, which begins with their values toward themselves and the tenants. The most central value here is being tenant focused. I would define this value as their distinctive core competency as it central to the organizations success and showcases how they can create public value with their stakeholders and opposed to for. Byron defines a distinctive core competency as something other organizations cannot replicate.[113] With that being said, LMHC had the ability and connection to their tenants more so then any other organization. Now, the ability to which they achieve and work towards being tenant focused with determine their success on their distinctive core competency of being tenant focused.

LMHC beliefs also highlights their high-level objectives, desired outcomes and guiding principles when establishing their strategic plan. For example, LMHC believes that housing provides the foundation for stable lives, that every individual has the right to safe, stable, and adequate housing, and that is it vital to recognize and honor the diversity of the people they serve.[114] Furthermore, they also believe in desired outputs such as ensuring their tenants received the social programming they require and always measuring the results in a quantifiable way within the strategic plan.[115] Within these beliefs are two inherently conflicting beliefs between NPM and New Public Service (NPS). On one hand, there are trying to serve, rather than steer, which is central to NPS; however, on the other hand they are trying to establish outcomes with an empha-

[112] LMHC. 2012. "Strategic Plan 2013-2016."
[113] Bryson, J. M., & Alston, F. K. (2011). Creating Your Strategic Plan: A Workbook for Public and Non Profit Organizations. Third Edition. San Francisco: Jossey- Bass.
[114] LMHC. 2012. "Strategic Plan 2013-2016."
[115] Ibid

ses on measuring the results.[116] Trying to create and integrate community while also working towards understanding your tenants in a meaningful way, cannot simply be measured to domesticate results. As a matter of fact, many public administration scholars such as Denhardt argue that when an organization constantly tries to measure outcomes, leads to them constantly producing outputs.[117] I see the desire and emphasis on measuring results within the strategic planning process as a significant hindrance to a unique and outcome oriented service such as providing public housing. I fully understand the need to measure certain results for maintenance and capital costs; however, strategic planning, within the framework of social or public housing providers should not be obsessed with measuring as it takes away from producing actual outcomes.

LMHC Desired Outcomes

Found within LMHC strategic plan are four desired outcomes that have been linked to four strategic pillars. The first desired outcome is that all tenants live in clean and well-maintained buildings.[118] This outcome has been linked directly to their operational pillar where LMHC sets out goals to foster excellent customer service, grow tenant retention, and revitalize how they manage their properties. In order to develop this desired outcome and vision the organization asked itself the question, what processes and operations must they excel at?[119] Operations and day to day tasks speak to strategic management. Humanyun Kabir defines strategic management as a process that assists in addressing, implementing and evaluating cross-functional decisions within the organization that helps achieves its end goals.[120] Furthermore, strategic management begins with strategic planning with its main objective to address the organizations

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[116] Denhardt, J Vinzant, and. Denhardt, R. (2000) "The new public service."
[117] Ibid
[118] LMHC. 2012. "Strategic Plan 2013-2016."
[119] Ibid
[120] Kabir, S. M. H. (2007). "Strategic Planning in Municipal Government: The Case of City of Ottawa." *Canadian Social Science*, 3(5), 5-14.

goals.[121] I believe Eden and Ackermann provide the best definition of strategic management for the case of LMHC, "a pro-active process of seeking to change the organization, its stakeholders and the context, or environment within which it seeks to attain its aspiration."[122] Eden and Ackermann's definition better suites the case study of LMHC because it pushes the boundaries to further the involvement of stakeholders. Maintenance and day to day operations may not seem to need stakeholder participation; however, this would be the maintenance of their communities, backyards, playgrounds, and homes. With that being said, day to day operations such as maintenance becomes stakeholder centric and therefore tenants should be more involved with the strategic management of the operational pillar.

The second desired outcome is that tenants experience stable, and successful tenancies with LMHC. The organization has linked with desired outcome with capacity pillar. The strategic question they asked themselves to better tenant experience was, what type of cultural, employees, and technologies would the organization need? This question speaks volumes to the strategic thinking processes that was occurring within LMHC as this outcome lays the foundation for the rest of the strategic planning process. Furthermore, it also puts tenants at the forefront of achievements. Having LMHC trying to ensure that tenants have a successful and stable experience with LMHC and in their public housing communities showcases their commitment to tenants. However, similar to the third desired outcome, tenant empowerment, LMHC never defines their terms. Byron argues that clarification of objectives and desired outcome are central to ensuring a strong strategic planning process.

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[121] Kabir, S. M. H. (2007). "Strategic Planning in Municipal Government

[122] Eden, C and Ackermann, F. (1998) *Making Strategy: the Journal of Strategic Management.* Sage publication: London.

LMHC strategic plan has progressive language and goals such as trying to empower tenants.[123] Although, with not fully and clearly understanding what "tenant empowerment" or "successful tenants" are, then LMHC may fail to create their long term outcomes.[124] Moreover, having a key performance indicator such as, percentage of tenants empowered does not solve the clarification problem.[125] Now, the question they asked themselves for tenant empowerment is significant because it brings forth the notion of, what are the desired outcomes for the tenants we serve? This question should be the core of the strategic planning process for LMHC as it gives tenants a voice as to how they want their communities to development and what resources they actually need. Throughout the strategic plan, there was little reference to planning and creating policy with tenants as opposed to for.[126] Too many public housing organization are doing the ladder, which has harmed tenants and communities more than it has helped.

The final desired outcome is that tenants have access to the community recourses, services, and supports they need. Once again, LMHC begins their desired outcome with a tenant focused language. In fact all four of LMHC desired outcomes begins with the word, "tenants". As stated in the beginning, LMHC vision and mission are not as tenant central as the rest of the plan. This point is vital as Byrson notes that public organizations mission creates how the rest of the strategic plan is established and carried out. With that being said, LMHC has created a strategy map to visualize and prioritize their strategic pillars and desired outcomes within their strategic plan. They begin their linear plan with their values and mission that then goes upwards towards guiding beliefs, financial pillar, capacity pillar, operational pillar, tenants pillar, and ends

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[123] LMHC. 2012. "Strategic Plan 2013-2016."
[124] Ibid.
[125] Bryson, J. M., & Alston, F. K. (2011). Creating Your Strategic Plan: A Workbook for Public and Non Profit Organizations.
[126] LMHC. 2012. "Strategic Plan 2013-2016."

with achieving their vision. The ordering of their strategic map is both intriguing and telling as the financial pillar comes before the tenant pillar.[127]

When evaluating if LMHC is a tenant focused organization, the strategic map showcases how NPM values of economic importance and efficiency is still at the forefront of LMHC. LMHC strategic map also demonstrates the strategic management plan for the organization. Throughout LMHC strategic plan, it is worded to be tenant focused and tenant oriented; however, their plan to carry out their vision is financial and operational focused. In order for LMHC to truly be tenant oriented, the tenant pillar should be located at the very beginning of the strategic map, even before the organizational vision because the tenant's voice should directly influence the organizational vision and beliefs. Once again LMHC, as many social housing organizations and public organization have done is produced a strategic plan that looks to involve the stakeholders directly, but never allowed the stakeholder to be the prime co-creator of the process from the vision to the implementation plan. The notion of co-creation with tenants is central to producing tenant empowerment and a tenant focused organization, which LMHC says it is trying to produce.

What the Tenants had to say: Limberlost

Limberlost is larger in terms of population then Southdale and possesses fewer units then Southdale with 160 units encompasses 247 adults and 433 dependents. With a population of 680 and 160 units that means each household has an average occupancy of close to 4.5. In terms of working household and average income, Limberlost has by far the highest number of working households with 27, but only the second highest annual household income with $14, 316.00. Limberlost has 24 less units with a breakdown of 203 adults and 338 dependents within the

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[127] Bryson, J. M., & Alston, F. K. (2011). Creating Your Strategic Plan: A Workbook for Public and Non Profit Organizations.

community. This amount to close to 2 dependents for every adult in Limberlost, most of who are single mothers. Limberlost was also the last public housing to be built as it was done in 1973. The community also has an active social committee that is constantly advocating for the community amongst local politics Lastly, the community is painted with murals done by artists from the community and sprinkled with playgrounds. The community also surrounds a basketball court which can often be seen having many kids shooting hoops as it was described as the, "heart" of the community for many youth.

> *"The City of London does not care about us. You never see them investing in us, you never see them bringing services to us. Why not? Why can't we be invested in?"*[128]

This participant directly emphasized that LHMC was doing what it could but it is the City of London who does not fund housing in the city, especially public housing. This participant also heavily suggested that the City should invest in his community. The statement of, "why can't we be invested in speaks volumes as it suggests that public housing tenants should be treated as equally as the tenants in the private condos and townhouses across the street. In fact, during my duration there the road was being paved and the public housing entrances were left in rubble and filled with stones after the renovation. Lastly, there was a clear frustration amongst other participants as well with the City of London and LMHC. Although the negative response was varied between the City and LMHC. The notion of government investment into public housing was also a point of emphasizes; however, few tenants side that they do not want government involved any more then what they already are in the community.

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[128] Focus Group conducted on Wednesday July 29th at London Community Chaplaincy. This participant responded was an adult new comer to Canada and has lived in public housing for 2 years.

"This community is great, the people are good and my neighbors are good. I am educated and so is my neighbor. We both have graduated from Fanshawe and both still cannot find a job to help raise our families.[129]

This participant eradicated the myth that educated citizens do not reside within public housing. He also highlighted the fact that he cherishes the neighborhood and those who lives within it. He went on to say that there are, "bad" people in every neighborhood and that Limberlost was no different. This is a significant point as many people tend to think the opposite of that almost everyone who resides in people housing are lesser citizens. This participant demonstrated the value and pride some people take within the public housing community. To him and his kids it was home. In talking further, this particular individual was a new comer to Canada and received two degrees from Fanshawe in computer and electrical technician. Sadly, as a new comer he has faced many other societal barriers and is still unable to get a job in his field. Within the quote he referred to his neighbor who also graduated from Fanshawe as a Law Clerk. She was also an immigrant who has lived in Canada for many years but it still unable to get a job in her field of work. It is also important to highlight that not every participant thought Limberlost was a, "great" community. All tenants spoke of problems with some tenants and a few seemed to dislike their community. Although, the overwhelming majority thought that there was some good. Many participates acknowledge the general negative stigma of their neighborhood and simply said that it was not true but also brought forth some negative aspects such as garbage clean up and how others come into the community to use or sell drugs.

"They don't treat us like humans. They Renovate all around us but never here."[130]

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[129] Focus Group conducted on Wednesday July 29th at London Community Chaplaincy. This individual was also a new comer to Canada.

These particular words spoke very loud within the focus groups and had many other tenants in the room agree. To go as far to say that there are not treated as humans clearly illustrates the disconnect by LMHC and their tenants. It also shows the disapproval and lack of support and trust some tenants have with the City of London and the Housing Authority. Many of the residents then talked about how their floors are horrible and their walls and windows are draftee. this raises their heating bill making it too expensive that leaves them with little left over to feed their families. Many tenants also then spoke up about LMHC and other tenants not taking proper care of garbage disposal and clean up. Many participants in the room clearly felt like second class citizens compared to those who live in private market housing and have the means to properly renovate their homes. My experience living in public housing was that the buildings were not properly maintained or cared by LMHC which then lead to some tenants not taking care of their units. This then creates the massive stigma of public housing communities being full of lazy people and garbage. Clearly there is deep seeded hate amongst some tenants that LMHC and the City of London need to try to rebuild.

"I feel safe in this community. That is not to say that everyone is perfect but I rather have my kids play in the complex then outside of it, you know. Everyone here looks after one another and my kids have many friends in the complex." [131]

The notion of safety in the Limberlost community was overwhelming positive. Every participant said they felt safe in their community as it was their home. They all also noted to liking how the housing complex was built as it allowed many eyes to focus on the center of the community where the majority of kids play. As much as the media and literature like to paint

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[130]Focus Group conducted on Wednesday July 29th at London Community Chaplaincy. This participant was a middle age women who has lived in public housing for over 5 years.

[131] Focus Group conducted on Wednesday July 29th at London Community Chaplaincy. This participant as a single mom who has raised her kids in public housing where she has resided for over 10 years.

public housing as an area ridden with crime, that was simply not the case during the focus groups conversation. Many of the tenants expressed how some adults and kids misbehave but it was never to the extent of being unsafe. Having an overwhelming response of community members feeling safe in public housing offers a direct counter narrative to the current discourse that surrounds the Limberlost community. Sadly, another participant said that she saw few tenants in the neighborhood neglect their kids and never supervise them. The topic of partnering then became a heated debate and some agreed and some did not. Although it was made clear that some tenants do not actively care for their children in a positive manner.

> *"Housing community to me, is the people. Many of my friends here are like family, they understand the kind of bulls&*t we have to deal with and the struggles we go through."[132]*

The row housing style, which is typically frowned upon amongst the public housing literature was actually a positive for community building as well. Many of the participants said they got to know their neighbors better and relied on one another more due to the lack of supports provided to them. The majority of the participants all said the people best exampled community in public housing. For example, no tenants moving into public housing have stoves or fridges provided in their unit; therefore, tenants must bond quickly with one another to find the best place to get utilities or share from a neighbor until they obtain them. Having units facing inwards and located close together fostered community in their opinion, which can be surprising to many who have never experienced living in public housing. I had a similar experience growing up as my neighbors always helped watch and raised me. The above quote also speaks to the social fabric found within the community that Martin August speaks about. There are informal networks created by people. They need one another and help one another go through similar things. When

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[132] Focus Group conducted on Wednesday July 29th at London Community Chaplaincy. Although, many people said similarly things these participant stressed the point as she has resided in public housing for over 15 years.

the poor are placed with the rich they will be further stigmatized and never receive those supports from the community like they do in public housing.

All of the participants also made it very clear that they like the diversity in the community. The parents also expressed they like how their kids got to be exposed to varies cultures at young ages. Diversity and exposure to the, "other" is a wonderful positive of public housing. Having so many different ethics living so close to another has also created strong social fabrics. For example the LCC holds community meals at the basketball court. Many expressed how they loved community events where they could all come together. Lastly, they also expressed how they loved having the LCC based in the community. A strong example of good programs that occurs by the LCC is their new summer leadership program for youth in public housing. All of the parents loved the work and kids programs the LCC was providing.

"Garbage is a massive problem, it is so hard to keep things clean,. Sometimes I just give up because it is so frustrating. And because there is garbage everywhere people think we are slobs and lazy."[133]

The biggest complaint of the public housing community was the garbage that lays in the street, doorways, and playgrounds. Every participant found it very upsetting that some adults never cleaned up and that the community did not do more to clean up the neighborhood. This also allotted to some participants making concerns about certain tenants. Some advocated for cameras as a deterrent or having more drug and crime prevention programs for all ages.

The central themes that came from the Limberlost community was that they felt stigmatized, that the people represented the community, and that their community was safe. As stated before, many tenants said that the community was not perfect but they felt nobody took the time

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[133] Focus Group conducted on Wednesday July 29th at London Community Chaplaincy. Many people in the focus group stressed this point.

to listen to them because they are poor. The overall view of the community was very positive. Another fascinating point was that many of the residents wanted to move out of public housing, but not because they disliked the community. It was simply the fact that when they bettered their lives they wanted to give their affordable housing unit to someone or some families who really needed it like they did.

What the Tenants Had to Say: Southdale

There was 7 tenants that took place in the focus group at Southdale. The majority was women with 5 and 2 men. There was representation from varies ethic groups and they were all parents. Southdale, although located in an entirely differently part of the city is similar in size of units to Limberlost having only 12 less. A significant factor of Southdale is that it is the poorest in terms of average annual household income at 10,416.00. A contributing factor to that is that there are only 7 working households. Southdale also has the most units at 172 but a smaller population then Limberlost at 549. This bring the average occupancy per unit to 3.2 and an average of 1.5 dependents to adults. Similar to Limberlost, Southdale is surrounded by a basketball court where the majority of activity happens. Southdale, just like Limberlost has the LCC operating out of a housing unit and provides leadership programs, health and wellness workshops, youth programs, chaplaincy needs and also offers a library for all to access. Unique to that community is healthcare facilities found within the complex such as health nurse station and a wellness center for new mothers to help them care for their infants.

"There is a stigma around us throughout this city and its plain wrong. I mean the first question I

was asked when I put my kids into school was what kind of assistance I was on. People, even the

education system sees us as lower class and uneducated."[134]

This quote was brought up quickly when the discussion turned to outside perspectives on public housing. This particular participant went on to say that she saw strength and determination amongst the people. There was also a participant with an HBA in economics from Ivey at Western University. After that statement came, many participate began to tell stores of neighbors and community members with degrees and diplomas. It was made very clear that education does not lack in public housing, particularly in Southdale and Limberlost. The quote above, which every participant agreed with also demonstrates that there is a clear understanding by tenants of the negative feelings surrounding towards them. During this conversation someone spoke up and said, "We are not ghetto! We are human beings like everyone else. We may just be struggling a little more." This statement also speaks to the fact that the negative discourse surrounding public housing is a severe hindrance to tenants in terms of social standing. Although that discourse has not established a negative reality amongst all tenants. It may have for some, which many tenants spoke about, but they demonstrated a counter narrative. A narrative where people are full of strength and determination. Participants spoke to the fact that if you did not process strength and determination then poverty would destroy you, both mentally and physically.

"I feel a sense of togetherness and awareness here in Southdale. Many of us moving in with

nothing or coming from horrible situation. My community members understand my position and

the stuff I have gone through. We witness the good and the bad in this community like the drug

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[134] Focus Group conducted on Thursday July 30th at London Community Chaplaincy. This participant was a single mom for many years who has lived in public housing for over 10 years.

and booze abuse. But I can also go to my neighbors and borrow anything I need. I guess you got-

ta take the good and the bad."[135]

This quote spoke to a lot of what was currently occurring in Southdale. As opposed to Limberlost. Participants expressed the concern that drugs, and particularly alcohol was becoming a serious problem in the community. Many felt safe but some expressed the need for more out-reach to those who are struggling with addiction in the community. Many participants also spoke to the sad fact that this environment makes them and their kids stronger as it provides motivation to move out and leave the community. There was a participant who lived in Southdale for 10 years and brought forth the notion of the good and the bad that reside in the community. To her knowledge and many others they felt stronger together. Even with many of the participants feel-ing left behind by government and the community they felt stronger together. This notion speaks to the fact that public housing can be a social and policy network as it puts those with a similar negative characteristic in society's eyes together. Being impoverished brought some residents

together and also tore some apart. De-concentration of poverty theory would advocate for remov-ing concerted impoverished tenants and many tenants debated this fact. There was no consensus and some wanted to stay together as they felt better understood while many felt concentrated poverty hinder their ability to succeed in life as it increases stigma.

"They [LMHC] Do not do enough around here. They do not come to our community barbecues,

they don't organize anything or even get to know us. All we have is someone to complain to."

When the conversation turned to LMHC all of the participants were angered and disap-pointed with the presence of LMHC in the community. Many members described LMHC or,

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[135] Focus Group conducted on Thursday July 30th at London Community Chaplaincy. This participant was a single mom for many years who has lived in public housing for over 10 years.

"London Housing" as many called it as, "paper pushers." There was a clear distinction that LMHC was not doing enough in the community. A participant brought up the fact that they got 10 pages of numbers to call when they moved in and that was it in terms of interaction with LMHC. Another story which was brought up was that of a tenant who went in to inform the housing worker of his new born child and was ignored only until she spoke up and said, "what do you want!" I fully understand that this was only one story; however, all agreed that this was the type of housing workers they were dealing with. This is simply unacceptable. LMHC needs to hire certain people who can understand and be passionate about housing. I also learned that the housing workers embedded in the community only works two days a week and solely listens to complains. When any worker in a front line social service is only exposed to complaints then it may be hard to see the tenants and positive and strong individuals. As will be suggested in the policy recommendations, LMHC needs to increase their presence in the community and create community builders in order to move to being a socially oriented organization as opposed to ad-ministrative and bureaucratic.

"I live 5 meters from a fenced up and half blown up unit. How do you think people perceive me? Some mornings I can smell the mold. All I am trying to do is raise my kids and provide them with a better life. But nobody thinks of that. This half blown up unit makes me scared and makes me hate my community."[136]

Significant to Southdale was the unit which had an explosion in it due to drug making. This half blown up unit with a tarp on the roof and a fence around it was a main concern for the participants. All saw it as a failure amongst LMHC for not having it torn down yet and rebuilt. Some participants advocated for them building a park as opposed to new units. The most preva-

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[136]Focus Group conducted on Thursday July 30th at London Community Chaplaincy. This participant was a father who has lived in public housing for 4 years.

lent theme during this discussion was how that physical blight made them feel more stigmatized then other communities. Many spoke to the fact how they were known as the drug infested community where no one should go. It was very clear that this building needs to be dealt with in a meaningful and timely way in order to help rebuild trust amongst tenants and LMHC. A possible recommendation by a participant was to hold a vote on possible ways to deal with the unit. This would help build trust and also devolve decision making to those who actually reside within the community.

Southdale had some similar traits and themes throughout the focus groups discussion as Limberlost. It was made very clear that in both communities the LCC was an outstanding organization that does the majority of community development and children programs in both complexes. Many expressed the fact that without the chaplaincy their kids never would have been able to go to camp or learn leadership skills. Another significant theme throughout both communities was how the tenants understood the perceived stigma that surrounds them and agreed that it was not true. Mostly all of the participants had some form of post-secondary education, volunteered their time to charity, and were trying to better themselves. Both community participants also felt relatively safe in their community. Safety was a little bit more of a concern in Southdale as opposed to Limberlost but they were not nearly as worried as what the discourse needs to showcase. Southdale and Limberlost both described community in public housing as the people. Overwhelming participants demonstrated and articulated the strength and dedication needed to deal with poverty. It was made clear that the discourse is radically different amongst the tenants as opposed to LMHC, the media, and the City of London.

Recommendations by The People

Throughout the focus group conversations at both Southdale and Limberlost there was clear and tangible policy recommendations being made by the tenants. The purpose of this paper was to actively listen to public housing residents and see what changes that want to see happen in their community. Therefore, the following policy recommendations were created by the people with the people. I assisted in the details but the overall theme and suggestions were solely established by the people. The quality and importance of their policy suggestions also demonstrates how public housing tenants truly know their communities best and therefore know what LMHC and the City of London can do to make it better as they live it every day. The following list below was not completed in any particular order but just represented the voice and consensus of new policies the tenants wanted to see.

1. **To hire a full-time community developer within each community.**

"LMHC Administrators need to leave their administrative officers and come be with the people. We need someone who works here, who has lived experience, you know! We need a familiar face that knows the community best, someone who builds relationships. They do not even know what goes on here. I feel like I can't trust them or go to them with problems cuz

nothing gets done."

Overwhelmingly, and in both communities all participants brought forth and agreed with the idea for LMHC to hire a full time community developer. The majority felt that there was a disconnect between the tenants and LMHC. They also want more social events and LMHC sponsored programs for adults and kids in the community. Some participants thought the LCC was funded by LMHC. When I had to inform them that it was separate from housing, many of the residents through their hands up and said, "LMHC does nothing in this community then." This

also demonstrates the lack of institutional knowledge and awareness of what LMHC does within the community. The tenants wanted a familiar face that was based in the community and became embedded within in as opposed to having to call or go downtown.

Therefore, the tenants wanted the community developer to have particular skills sets and experience. For example they all expressed that lived experience would be a top quality within he candidate as they would feel less judged because that worker would of felt the same stigma. The objective of the community builder would be to create trust between LMHC and tenants while also doing social events to better community. They would act as the go-to-face for any concern in the community, which could result in building trust. Many residents highlighted how they would appreciate a familiar face in the community and how it may force the negative residents to act better because they know there in someone in the community to hold them accountable on a regular basis. As stated before, having a community builder in each public housing complex would demonstrate LMHC trying to truly empower tenants as acknowledged in their strategic plan. A community building could also begin to lay the foundation for more social interaction with LMHC and tenants in each community. This would be a somewhat costly investment by LMHC; however, it would show their commitment to tenant's empowerment and trust building.

2. Establishing a Resident Committee with policy influencing power.

"Why can't we help make decisions around here. I know many people that would sit on a committee but we want to be able to more than just suggest things. We know what's best, we live it

every day."

Another significant and tangible policy recommendation was the creation of a tenant or residents committee. The majority of participates at both communities brought forth the suggestion of creating a tenant committee that could oversee issues within the complex, plan social events, make and have presentation from LMHC. The participates wanted a vote on policies being made in the community. They did not just simply want a voice on policy, they wanted it to be heard. Establishing a tenant committee that can be very active in policy making and possibly get a vote or must be presented the idea by LMHC may seem radical. However, it devolves the power to the people and creates an interactive relationship between tenants and LMHC. The tenant committee would also demonstrate LMHC commitment to tenants' empowerment while also directly attacking the negative stigma surrounding public housing tenants.

The committee could be structured with a limited amount of seats and a revolving chair member in order for all committee members to have the leadership role within the community. Informally, the committee could begin to internally build leaders and bring more social awareness to public housing in London, Ontario. As suggested above, the community builder could play an active role in helping to establish the committee until it became self-sufficient with enough tenant volunteers. Furthermore, having a revolving chair member of the community will allow for the voice and power to change within the committee to ensure the community elite does not dominate the opinion of the community. This would be a low monetary investment by LMHC but it would rely on heavy personnel and time commitment from LMHC. Although, as stated in their strategic plan, a tenant committee with some form on policy power or influence would be a true commitment to tenant empowerment as they would be able to make change in their community.

3. Bring back the THAW program and make suggestions for alterations to the RGI rent calculator.

"They say public housing is affordable but it's just not. I had no utilities and for some reason my hydro bill is normally higher than my rent. LMHC also makes me pay higher when I make more or if my kids work. How does that make me want to make more when I then have to pay more?"

One of the most telling policy alterations that is needed amongst public housing tenants was the costs both monetary and social of working. In many respects, it is more affordable to not work due to the financial equation LMHC and the City of London uses to calculate rent costs. For example, a mother brought forward how she should not work in order to keep the rent down; however, after paying all of their bills, her and her husband have to raise 4 kids of $500 a month. The THAW program (The Heat and Warmth program) was a grant offered by the City of London and the Salvation offers that offered up to $500 in utilities payments for those who could not afford high utility bills during times of need.[137] This program was widely used by tenants of public housing because of their unusually high hydro bills, which mostly all residents were facing. Sadly that program was discontinued by the City of London to only a loan program which many of public housing residents can no longer qualify for.[138] The point of concern was that nobody could pinpoint why their hydro costs were so high, even when many tenants complained to London Hydro and LMHC. This may also be a point of emphasis for an investigation into why some hydro bills were more than rent for public housing residents.

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[137] London Housing Registry. 2014, "Housing Support Services." Retrieved from http://londonhousingregistry.com/links/guides/housing-support-services/
[138] City of London. 2012. "Business Plan: Homelessness Prevention." Retrieved fromhttp://www.london.ca/city-hall/budget-business/business-planning/Documents/2014/48%20Homelessness-Prevention-2014.pdf

Furthermore, if their children begin working they have to claim their income, which will result in increased rent. There was a teenager at the focus groups that lived in the community and worked with the LCC running kids camps. She felt sad for working because she knew it was costing her family more. That should never occur, particularly when the youth is working to do well in the community. This produces a public housing policy paradox. To motivate people not to work in order to pay rent and keep struggle was never the intent of rent geared to income policy; however, it has created an unintended consequences of keeping the poor from getting employment. The perceived stigma of that policy paradox is that people tend to think people in public housing are lazy simply do not want to work. My focus group insured me that is not the case.

3. **Portable education and job training programs for new-comers and youth.**

"Bring education into our community. And I mean good education. We would work hard at it and it would better many tenants. Education can keep kids off the street and help newcomers gain valuable skills in order for them to gain meaningful employment. Open up a little portable or maybe even use a unit. Having it in the community would also allow for easy access

Lastly, A participant who had two diplomas from Fanshawe brought forth the recommendation to bring education, English language training classes, and job training programs into the community. It was made very clear that there were many individuals with education but some faced a language barrier of new skills barriers for London's job market. In terms of education, that would be delivered strictly to those who have none or need an upgrade. To bring not just any kind of education but good education through strong educational institutes like Western and Fanshawe could lead to many residents better their lives. LMHC could simply turn a unit into a class room for all tenants to sign up and use when needed. Western and Fanshawe could also in-still a volunteer mentorship and tutoring program for youth there as well. Dedicating a space in the

community for tenants not only promotes education and job training access, it breaks down the social barriers as well as transportation issue for many parents in the community with no access to reliable transportation. Keeping educational access close to home also demonstrates the pride within public housing while removing barriers.

Conclusion

The voices heard from the tenants in public housing spoke a counter narrative to the main stream policy discourse that is often being used by policy makers. After hearing the voices it was made clear that there are different policies from the government and tenants because they have defined the problems drastically different. The tenants within the community want investment and influence in their community; therefore, the want more involvement of a grassroots approach. The city defines the problem of public housing as poverty being too concentrated and therefore need to scatter affordable housing in order for the poor to have more choice in where they live. This speak directly to the academic work of Sliver and August who say that tenants are never consulted in a meaning way. The literature on public housing also severely lacks the direct input of tenants themselves. That is what this paper can add to the body of slim literature on public housing in Canada, particularly Ontario. The tenants' voices counter de-concentration of poverty theory, which is the main reasoning and backing for policy makers to discount public housing complexes and therefore the tenants who reside within them.

After completing my research and analyzing varying discourses I have found three distinct discourses that exists within London surrounding public housing; the media, LMHC, and the tenants. Each entity are saying particular and difference narrative which in turn has defined the issue around public housing harmful ways. The media tended to have a negative view of the public housing communities in London and therefore helped the negative stigmatization of the

tenants who reside within them. LMHC demonstrated an alternative to the City of London and the media as they demonstrated the want to be able to empower tenants and do more tenants lead initiatives; however, their actions never demonstrated the commitment to tenant empowerment. Although, LMHC does show some belief and pride in their tenants through their strategic plan, the City of London is on a clear path to scatter the poor throughout the city. It was clear that LMHC is trying to operate between to polar opposite narratives surrounding public housing while still trying to gain funding and operate these communities.

The most fascinating and telling discourse what that of the tenants. As demonstrated in the paper, the tenants dismantled the many stigmas' that have been falsely attributed to them. It was proud to hear tenants say that they felt safe in their communities, that they saw strength and determination, and that they many members were educated and caring members of society. The most fascinating and important part of this research for any policy maker is to understand what you can hear when you actively listen to the poor. Public housing does not cause poverty. It is the divestment in public housing that creates poverty. By no means do I wish to glorify public housing. The views shown in this paper reflect a new narrative of positivisms and resiliency within public housing. However, tenants also expressed issues that were also mentioned within the paper. That is why policy recommendations were made in order to help better the community from within it and most importantly, by the people. It is clear that the lived experience of public housing differs from the mainstream media and government discourse that surrounds them. We need to respect the resiliency of the tenants while also being aware that drastic poverty exists in public housing, which needs a different approach. An approach of grassroots initiative and tenant empowerment.   The tenants are citizens similar to everybody else. Why should they be forgotten about? Why can't they be invested in, Why can't they help make decisions in their own

neighborhood? All of these questions need to be asked more at the top policy making levels at the City of London at LMHC. Public housing residents need to be heard and most of all they need to see change. Too often are they promised change and nothing ever occurs. I hope this can be a push in the right direction if not a catalyst of change in these communities. After all, public housing can be great places to live.

Appendix Tables of Contents

Appendix 1 - Example of Focus Group Script:

Good evening everyone! I would like to start by welcoming you to this focus group and to thank you for taking the time to participate in our discussion. This evening we will be talking about how people in this community view their lived experience in public housing. Your contributions will help us in our work to improve access to the healthcare services for people in this community. Before we continue, let me introduce myself. My name is Tim Smuck and I will be your facilitator. My role is to encourage and guide our discussion by listening and asking questions. I will be asking lots of questions because I would like as much feedback from you as possible. Your participation and opinions are important! There are no right or wrong answers. Our discussion is being tape recorded. All of your comments and responses to questions will be kept completely confidential. Your name and anything else that can identify you will be removed from all written records. Any of the materials that come out of our discussion will be evaluated only by staff working on this project and will be kept secure and protected. Each of you should have a consent form. The consent form is meant to help you understand your role and rights in this discussion. Before we continue could everyone carefully read and sign this form. Please let me know if you have any questions. Our discussion this evening will last about one and a half hours or until we feel the discussion is exhausted. We will not be taking a break. If you would like to use the washrooms before we start or during, please do not hesitate. Before we start, let's review the ground rules so everyone feels safe and comfortable. Let's start by introducing ourselves…

Appendix 2 - Focus Group Questions:

Perspectives on Public Housing in General

1. How do you feel society views public housing in London, Ontario?

2. 2. How do you view public housing?

Thoughts on Revitalization and the Physical Space of Public Housing

3. What are your thoughts on the demolition or renovations of public housing?

4. What is the community fabric? Have you seen it in your community? How can rehabbing existing housing improve your neighborhood?

Lived Experiences in Public Housing

5. What do you like and dislike about living in public housing?

6. Are you generally satisfied or dissatisfied with the quality of life in your community? Why or why not? What are the issues you feel are most important to address.

7. What are some community strengths and connections, what are some weaknesses?

8. Do you feel safe in your neighborhood, why or why not?

9. What kind of diversity do you see in your community? How do the different ethnicities or races interact together?

10. Do you see strong social connections within your community? Possible through a Church, non-profit, or physical space?

Policy and Program Recommendations

11. What should London-Middlesex Housing Corporation do that it is not currently?

12. Do you feel that there should be more development in your neighborhood, why or why not? What would be welcome, what would not, in the way of institutional development?

Appendix 3: Statistical Table for Southdale, Limberlost,

	Southdale	Limberlost
Number of Units	172	160
Number of Adults	224	247
Number of Dependents	325	433
Total Population	549	680
Average Annual Income per household	10,416,00	14,316.00
Number of Working Households	7	27
Year Built	1971	1973
Building Type	Row House	Row House

Appendix 4: Limberlost Flyer Handout

Come Out and have your Voices Heard To Improve the Limberlost Community!!

How: Participate in a community meeting to have your voices heard on what's best for your community.

Who is Doing it: **Tim is a housing advocate** who cares a lot about Public Housing in London, Ontario. Tim Smuck is a Graduate student at Western University who **grew up in public housing**. **He is interested in sharing the lived experience on public housing.**

Everything will be confidential and no names will be used. I do not represent any government or business. This is only for my independent research.

When: **Wednesday, July 29at 3pm**
Where: London Community Chaplaincy in Unit 136 in Limberlost Complex

There will also be some food!!!!

Appendix 5: Southdale Flyer Handout:

Come Out and have your Voices Heard To Improve the Southdale Community!!

How: Participate in a community meeting to have your voices heard on what's best for your community.

Who is Doing it: **Tim is a housing advocate** who cares a lot about Public Housing in London, Ontario. Tim Smuck is a Graduate student at Western University who **grew up in public housing**. **He is interested in sharing the lived experience on public housing.**

Everything will be confidential and no names will be used. I do not represent any government or business. This is only for my independent research.

When: **Thursday, July 30at 3pm**
Where: London Community Chaplaincy in the Southdale Complex Unit 977

There will also be some food!!!!

Appendix 6 - Picture of Playground from LFP article:

Appendix 7 - Picture of a fenced in basketball court in South dale.

Appendix 8 - LMHC Tenant Survey:

4. Is it easy to reach LMHC staff during office hours? ☺ yes ☐   sometimes ☐   ☹ no ☐

5. Does LMHC staff return your telephone calls? ☺ yes ☐   sometimes ☐   ☹ no ☐

6. Does LMHC staff act quickly when you have a request? ☺ yes ☐   sometimes ☐   ☹ no ☐

7. Does LMHC staff treat you with respect? ☺ yes ☐   sometimes ☐   ☹ no ☐

8. In the last year, if you had a maintenance problem, were you happy with the repairs? ☺ yes ☐   sometimes ☐   ☹ no ☐

9. If you live in an apartment building, are you happy with the cleanliness of the common areas? ☺ yes ☐   sometimes ☐   ☹ no ☐

10. Are you happy with the grounds-keeping (grass cutting, etc.) on your property? ☺ yes ☐   sometimes ☐   ☹ no ☐

11. Are you happy with the snow removal on your property? ☺ yes ☐   sometimes ☐   ☹ no ☐

12. Do you feel safe inside your home? ☺ yes ☐   sometimes ☐   ☹ no ☐

13. Do you feel safe on our properties? (parking lots, pathways, hallways, common areas) ☺ yes ☐   sometimes ☐   ☹ no ☐

14. Are you (or is a person in your household) living with mental illness? If yes, please write the name of the mental illness. ✓ yes ☐   ✗ no ☐

_____

15. Are you (or is a person in your household) living with an addiction? If yes, please write the kind of addiction. ✓ yes ☐   ✗ no ☐

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