Building a Better Life: Relationships, Good Health, and Fostering Resilience

2019 Social Summit: From Isolation to Connection

Sherwood Park, Alberta
Tuesday December10 , 2019

Presenters: Marlene Mulder & Colette Cornejo

Building Relationships in the Community

- Edmonton Public Library
- 80+ community visits
- Community presentations
- Learning about Agency work
- Sharing resources and contributions
- Seeking advice
- Community developing rather than learning about the research plan
- Indigenous Elder and Immigrant Wisdom Holder

Project Goals

- **Connection:**
  To create research partnerships comprising service providers to immigrant and Indigenous people, municipal government, and researchers, in order to build a cohesive team to effectively address policy and programming issues.
- **Insight:**
  To learn how loneliness and self-esteem affect belonging, and how some can successfully use their Social Capital to strengthen their Human Capital to build better futures, while others have difficulty.

Research Structure

- Three-year SSHRC grant with 1 year extension
- Focus on newcomers, Indigenous peoples and homeless or marginally homeless
- Mixed Methods: face-to-face interviews (450 planned) focus groups, case study life maps
- 3 seasonal data collections
- Report drafts shared for review and feedback after each data collection point
- Ongoing presentations to participants/service providers
- Final report and research shared with public
- Aggregate data reports available to collaborators

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This research was supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC).

Guiding Principles/Rules of Engagement

The seven sacred teachings: love, respect, wisdom, courage, honesty, humility and truth

- Seek balance - respect for each other's differences.
- Willingness to learn from the new experience
- Use plain language
- Accommodate different learning styles
- Building trust as the cornerstone
- Being intentional in the collaborative process
- Provide regular updates through e-mail/website
- Draw on research experience and existing reports
- Ongoing and open communication
- Process that was relevant and beneficial to community
- Engaging diverse and equal participation from all

Partners and Collaborators

- Action for Healthy Communities (1)
- Africa Centre (1)
- Alberta Community & Social Services
- Alberta Culture & Tourism
- Alberta Health Services
- Ambrose Place – Niginan Housing
- Bent Arrow Parent Link Centre (2)
- Bissel Centre (2)
- Boyle Street Community Services (1)
- Bredin Centre for Learning in Alberta (1)
- Canadian Mental Health
- Catholic Social Services (1)
- City of Edmonton – Community Inclusion
- City of Edmonton – Family Supports
- City of Edmonton, Citizen Services, Millwoods Site (1)
- Creating Hope Society
- Distinctive Employment Counselling Services of AB (1)
- E4C
- Edmonton Community Foundation
- Edmonton Food Bank (1)
- Edmonton Immigrant Services Association (1)
- Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers (3)
- Edmonton Native Healing Center (1)
- Edmonton Public Library (3)
- Federation of Community Leagues
- George Spady Society (2)
- HIV Edmonton (2)
- Homeward Trust
- M.A.P.S. Alberta Capital Region
- Marian Centre
- Metis Child & Family Services Society
- Metis Child and Family Services Society (1)
- Multicultural Health Brokers
- Native Counselling Services
- Native Healing Society
- New in Town Aboriginal Welcome Service (1)
- Niginan Housing Ventures (Ambrose Place) (1)
- NorQuest College (Day Home Provider program) (3)
- NorQuest College (LINC program) (1)
- NorQuest College (Social Work program) (1)
- NorQuest College (Wetaskiwin Campus) (2)
- Rupertsland Institute
- The Candora Society - Edmonton (1)
- The House Next Door (1)
- The Mustard Seed (2)
- Wichitowin
- YMCA

Collaborator Voices

Man, was I ever happy to hear that NorQuest College was digging into the impact of social connection, with its Better Life Project. Emerging research reveals we have a quiet epidemic of loneliness in modern cities, to go along with epidemics of depression, debilitating anxiety and addictions.

Councillor Scott McKeen – City of Edmonton

Community-Based Research Goals

1. To learn what is needed to support marginalized people in developing their Social Capital
2. To build strong community partnerships with service providers and local government

Designing the Path

Guiding Principles

Nurture working relationships
Honour and respect
Include community
Build Social Capital
Be sensitive to needs
Build research team
Seven Sacred Teachings
(love, respect, wisdom, courage, honesty, humility, truth)

Expected Outcomes

- Recognition of the importance of agency work
- Increased knowledge about community-based research
- Agencies have a resource of data to support their community service initiatives
- Participants feel validated and included in the project
- Participants can relate to the experiences of others
- Recognition and validation of the importance of Social Capital
- Agencies work together and share information

Planning research with the community

Small working group of 12 created: 40+ service providers

Received ethics approval

Data Collection: 28 interviews and 20 focus groups

Analysis and review

Present, Review, Interpret
- Focus on those with experience transcending marginalization
- Case studies to Life Maps
- Media, articles, community presentations
- Data showcase at EPL
- Working group meeting

Data Collection: 269 interviews and 23 focus groups

Analysis and review

Present, Review, Interpret
- Thank you cards with findings to participants
- Added analysis subgroups: ever homeless, problematic substance use, poor health
- Media, articles, community, and conference presentations
- Data showcase at NorQuest College
- Working group meeting

This [research project] I felt made our organization a partner from the beginning. We were able to contribute to the design and implementation of the project. Also, the data collection itself was an empowering and humanizing experience. The researchers were part of the community literally, and made the experience very comfortable ... -Community Collaborator

Storytelling and 3 Life Maps

Data Collection: 69 interviews and 7 focus groups

Analysis and review

Present, Review, Interpret
- Community presentations
- Media, articles, publications
- Community and conference presentations
- Data showcase and celebration at City Hall

Further Community Work

Further Research

Community Booklets

Conference & Publications

Analysis, reporting, animation, and dissemination

Challenges

- Creating and maintaining trusting relationships
- Changing faces of research team and community collaborators
- Managing expectations
- Honouring culture
- Balancing administrative and community needs

Building Relationships in the Community

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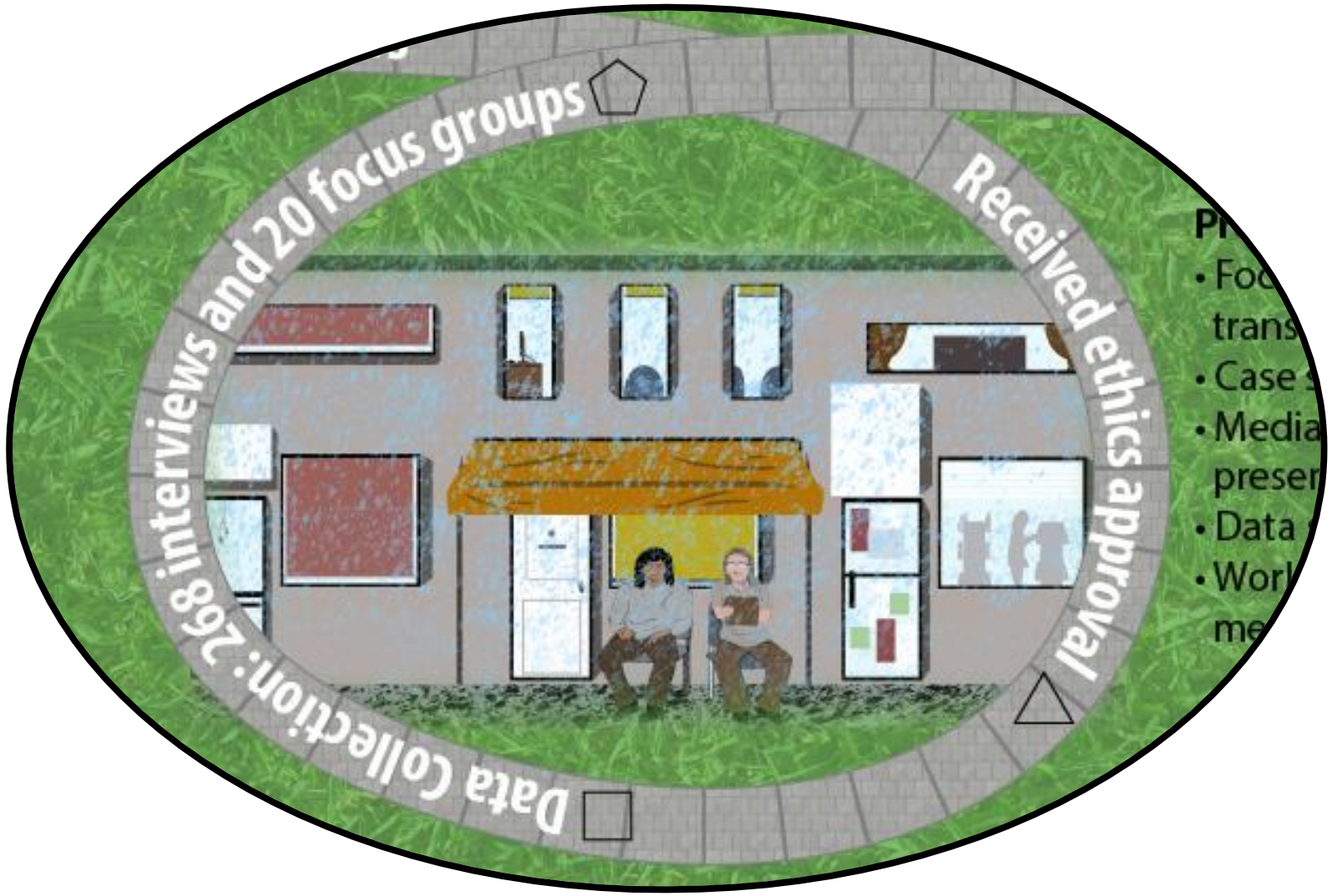
Community Choices and Options

- Assistance offered for advertising data collection events
- Option to open data collection with a smudge or a prayer
- Talking stick available for use in the focus group
- Choices offered for data collection events:
  - Location
  - Day of the week and time of day
  - Food served
  - Gift cards offered
- Options for after-care
- Dissemination that is valuable to the community – visuals, plain language, no jargon

Building Relationships on the Research Team

Building Relationships with Participants



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Vetting, Reflection & Changes x 3

- Working group
- Languages and translation
- Talking stick – second round
- Income and household number question
- Refocus on participants
- Expansion of numbers
- Life Maps instead of traditional case studies
- Life Map celebration & presentation
- Having community experts respond to findings and interpretation
- Adding three subgroups for specific analysis (homeless ever, substance use problems in past year, poor health)

Building Relationships through Case Studies

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Voices of Research Participants

I like this study because you cannot know if you do not talk to the people involved.

Voices of Community Collaborators

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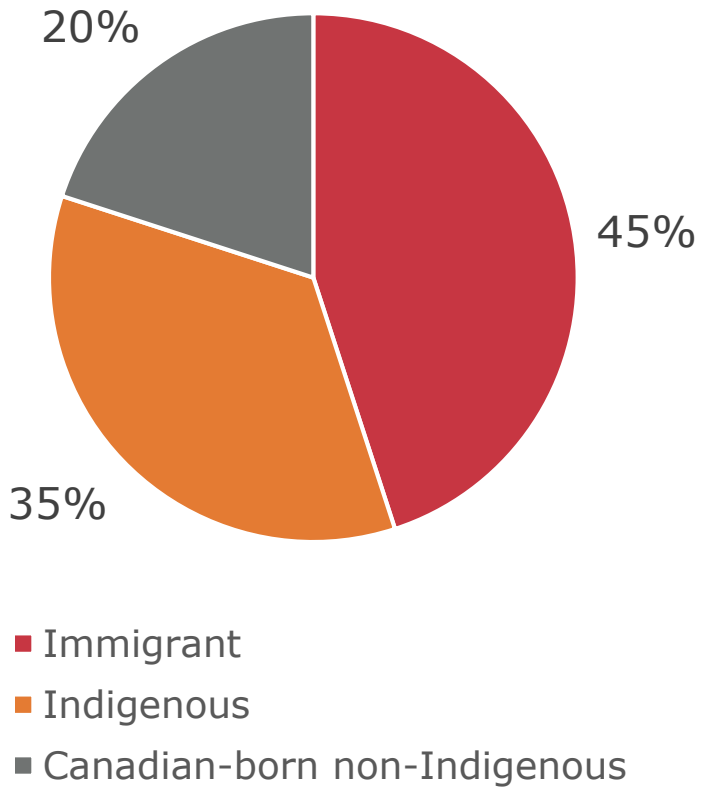
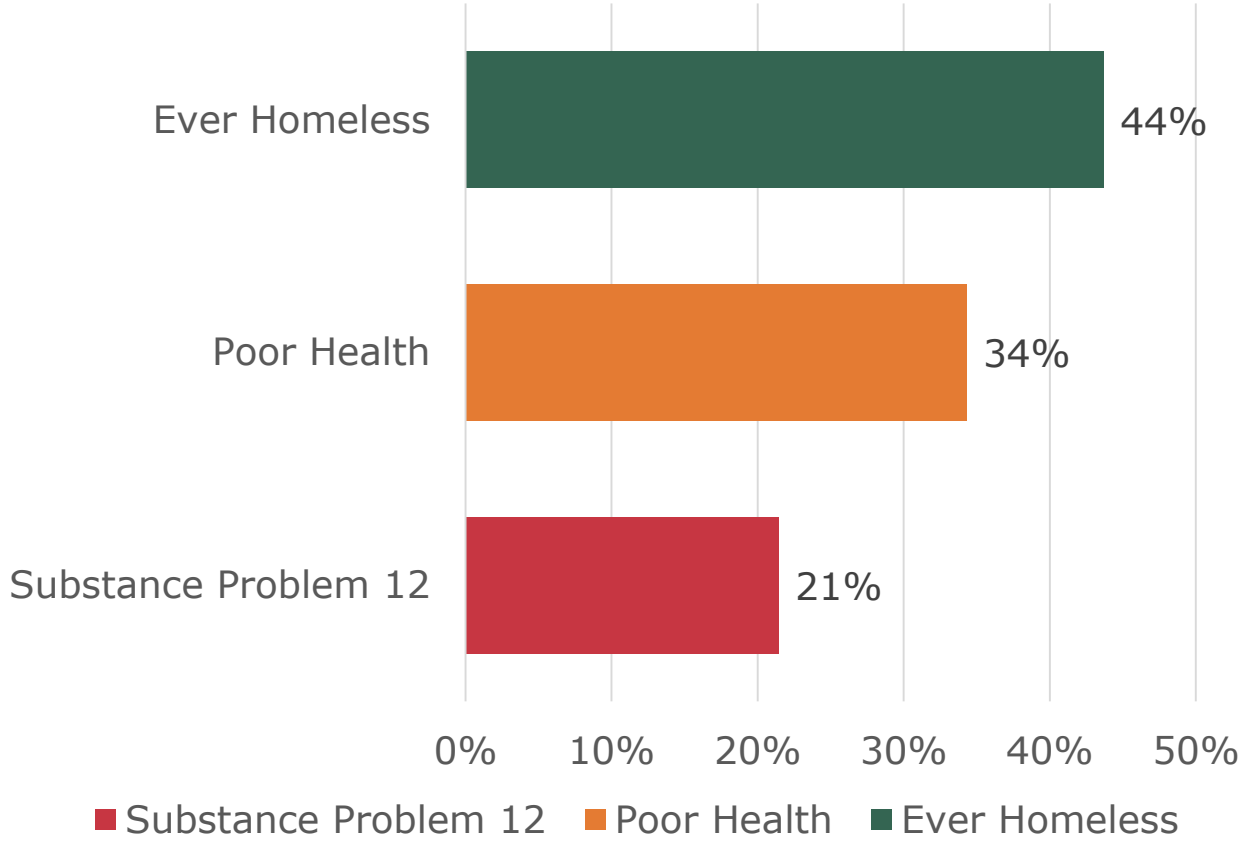
Voices of Research Team Members

This experience has been very enriching both on a personal and professional level … I have a better understanding of how to optimize Social Capital in our communities for better services and problem solving. I have widened my own Social Capital … I learned a crucial skillset that has added to my research experience.

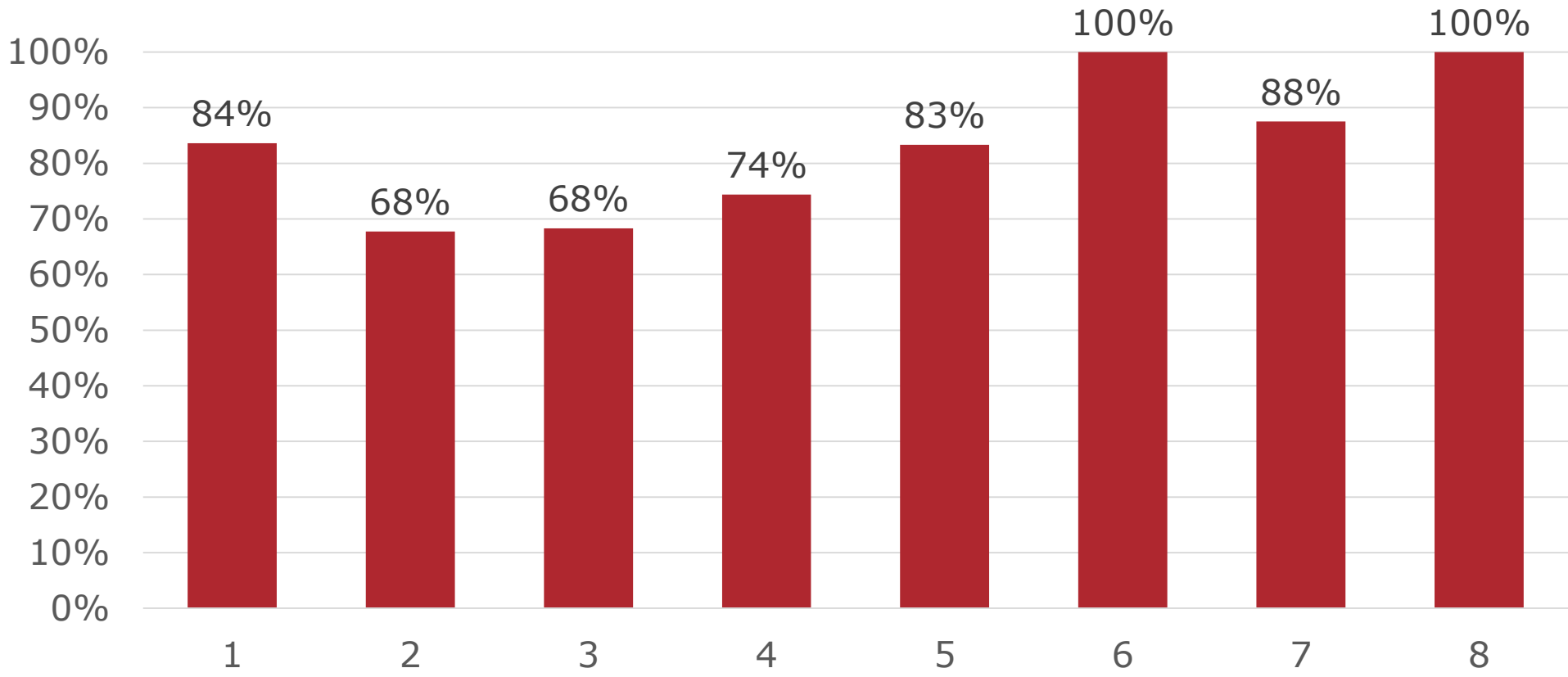
Participants: Who They Are

606 face-to-face interviews; 50 focus groups; 3 life map case studies

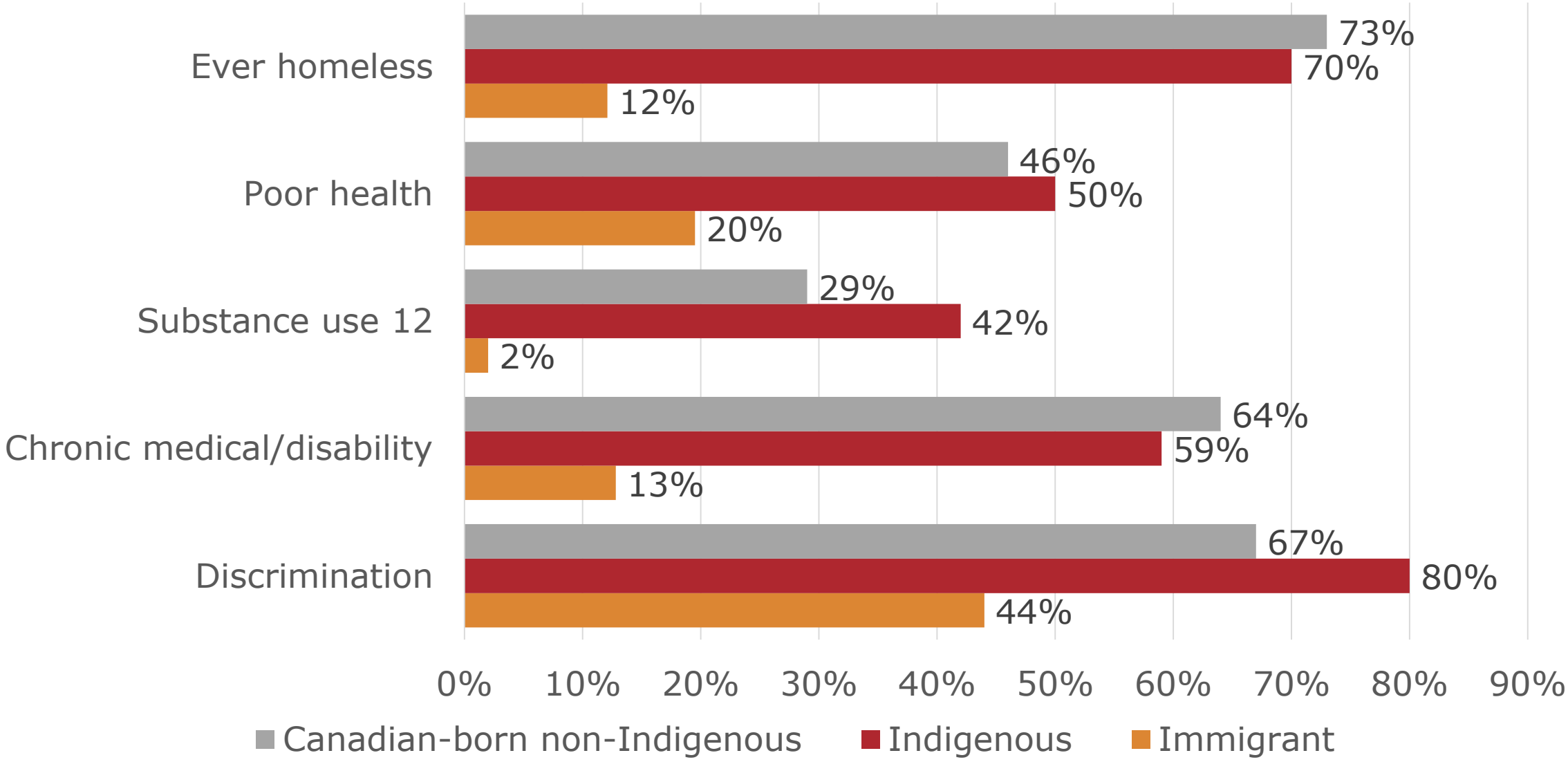




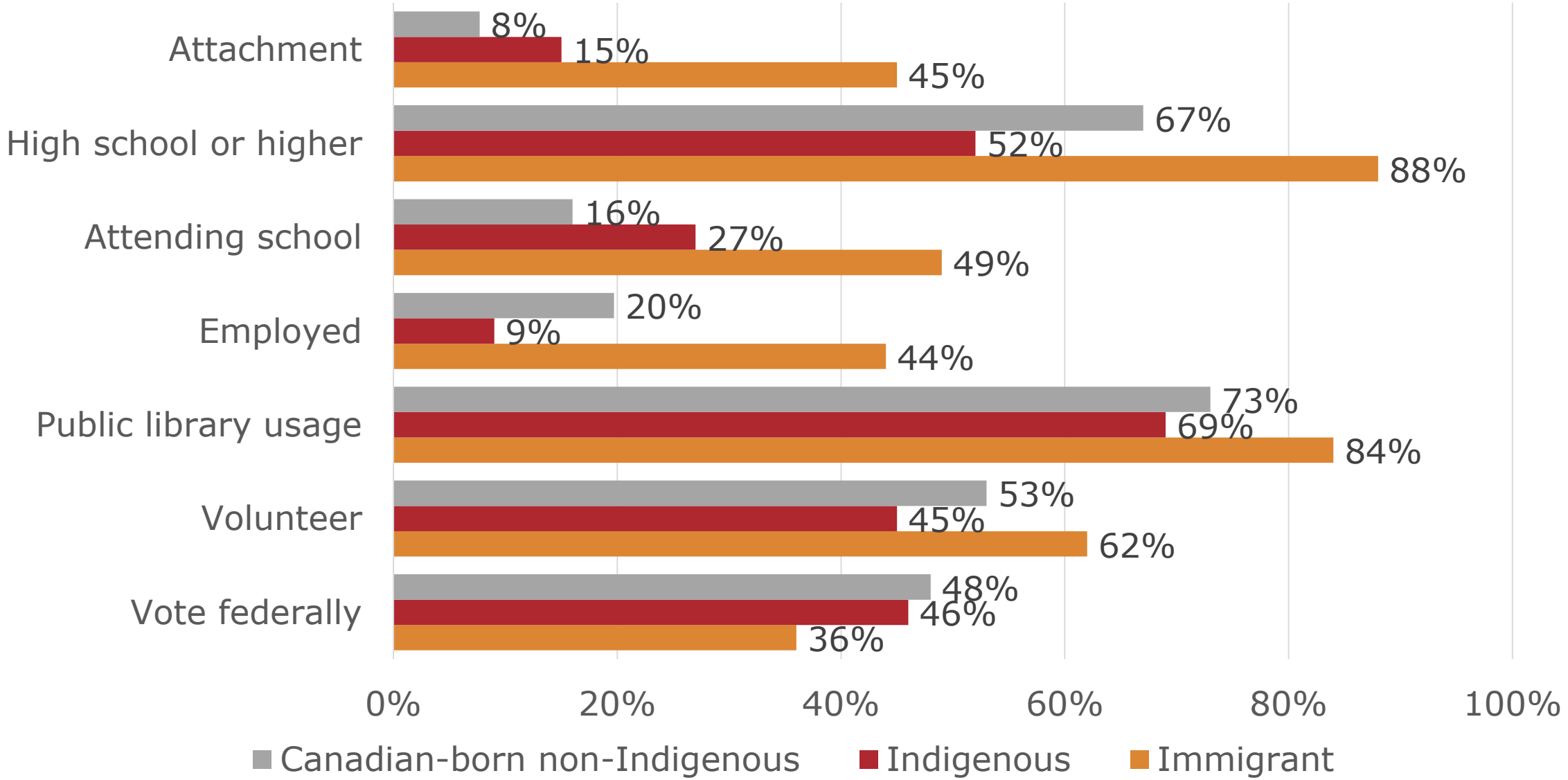
Proportion under the Low Income Cut-off by Number in Household



Barriers to a Better Life



Protections



Social Capital = Bonding + Bridging Relationships

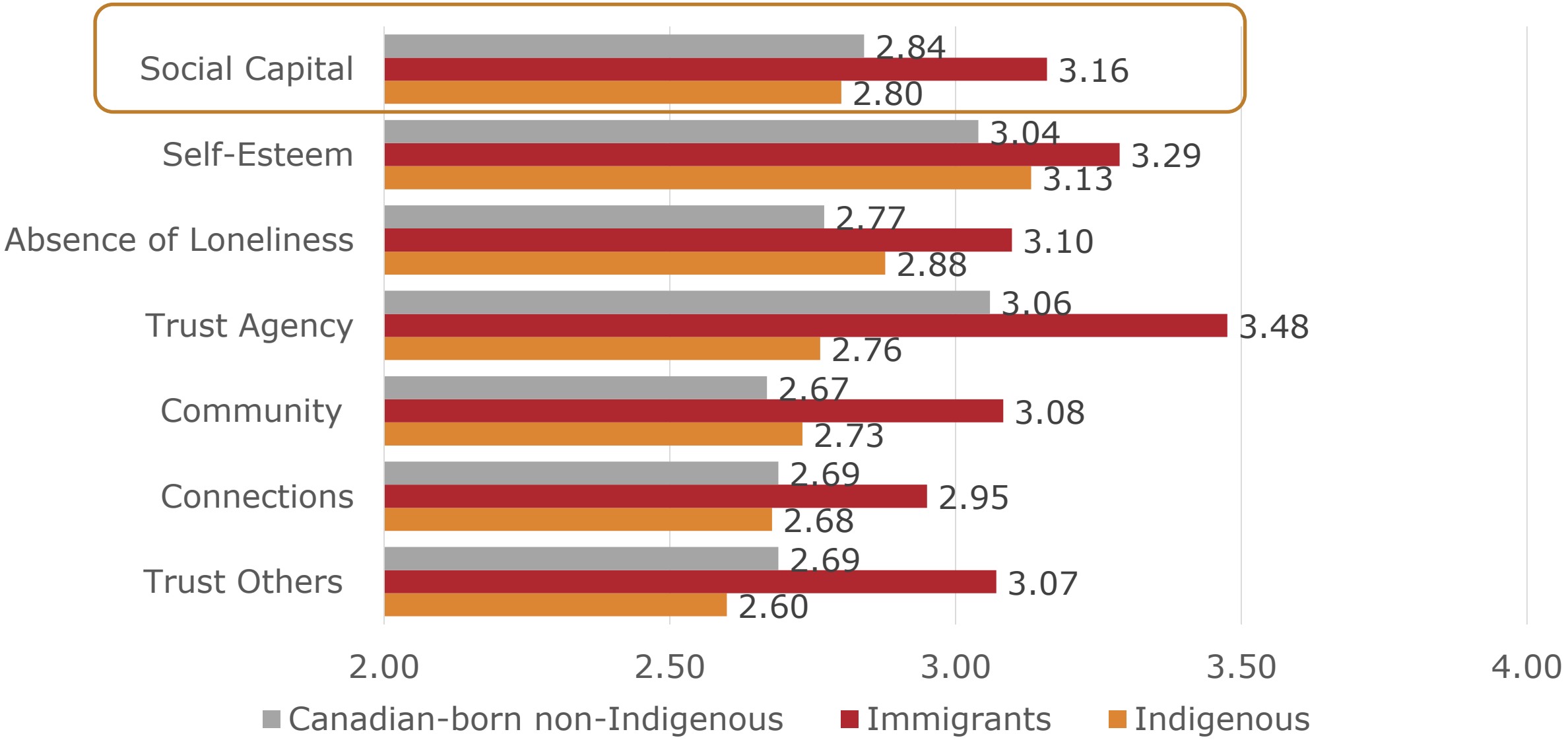
Bonding Relationships – Everyday relationships with people like me (family, friends, neighbours)

Bridging Relationships – Relationships with people different than me with different networks (teachers, community groups, across social and ethnic groups)

Social Capital Themes

- Community engagement – 12 statements
- Feelings of connection to others – 4 statements
- Feelings about self – 3 statements
- Loneliness – 7 statements
- Trust for others – 5 statements
- Trust for service providers – 5 statements

Social Capital Component Means by Group



Causal Relationships – Regression Variables

Dependent Variable – Social Capital

Independent Variables

- Gender
- Attachment
- Health
- Education
- Employment
- In school
- Problematic substance use last 12 month
- Participation in spiritual/religious activities
- Frequency of discrimination
- Residential school (self or parent)
- Years in Canada

Significant Positive Effects

	Health	Religious/ Spiritual Participation	Age
All participants	X	X	
Indigenous	X	X	
Immigrant	X		X
CBNI	X		
Substance 12	X		
Ever Homeless	X	X	
Poor Health	n/a	X	

Significant Negative Effects

	Discrimination frequency	Ever homeless	Substance Use 12
All participants	X	X	X
Indigenous	X		
Immigrant	X	X	X
CBNI	X		
Substance 12	X		n/a
Ever Homeless	X	n/a	
Poor Health	X		

What We Learned

- People are resilient
- There are many challenges
- Participants are educated
- Relationships are key
- Good health is important
- Discrimination is common
- Being homeless at any time makes a difference
- Trust is variable
- Work-arounds help people navigate barriers

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External Supports I Use to Build a Better Life

- Community
- Counselling/Therapy
- Cultural connections
- Education
- Elders/Ceremony/ Traditional Practice
- Employment
- Faith communities
- Family
- Health care
- Justice system
- Mentors/ Teachers
- Programs & Services
- Shelter/ Food
- Skill building opportunities
- Staff at agency(ies)
- Transportation

Skills & Characteristics I Use to Build a Better Life

- Caring nature
- Communication skills
- Confidence
- Courage
- Honesty
- Humility
- Integrity
- Leadership
- Non-judgmental
- Perspective
- Positive attitude
- Resiliency
- Respect
- Self-awareness
- Self-care
- Stress management

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What I Give Back To The Community

- Acceptance
- Advocacy
- Calmness
- Caring
- Communication
- Connecting people
- Consistency
- Honesty

- Hopefulness
- Leadership
- Patience
- Positive role model
- Understanding
- Volunteering

Case Studies - Life Maps

- No traditional case studies
- In-depth analysis, extensive time
- Needed expertise and original artwork
- Confidentiality (people and space)
- Consistency of people
- Guided by participant
- No Interruptions
- Clarification only
- Vetting and verification then releasing project

It takes as long as it takes!

Questions for discussion

1. What have you learned from this presentation that is helpful to your work?

2. How can you apply this learning to your work?

Contact Information

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Data products available for download at:
norquest.ca/better-life