Where Do We Find Help?

Examining Digital Communication Channels and Challenges for Services Supporting Houseless People in Edmonton Alberta

by

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Abstract

Purpose. When facing a housing crisis, it is crucial to know where to go for help. This Capstone research study examines access to and use of digital communications by individuals seeking houseless support in Edmonton, Alberta. Specifically, through a review of online and social media communication from a support service organization and six semi-structured interviews, I explore how support service organizations and their clients use digital communications, which channels they may prefer, and barriers they may face in accessing information digitally.

Methods. To answer my research questions, I performed a content analysis of 64 Facebook posts from the Bissell Centre's Facebook and conducted six, one-on-one semi-structured interviews with people who have experienced houselessness or work in the sector.

Results. My findings were consistent with existing literature and revealed that individuals benefit from a variety of communication strategies, given the diversity of preferences and needs in the population. I also found that unhoused people may experience the first and second level digital divides.

Implications. This study identifies limitations in current communication strategies undertaken by support services and compiles a list of digital barriers that organizations should consider when communicating their programs to clients.

Where Do We Find Help?

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Chapter 1: Introduction

"'I didn't know where to find help'"— one of the "most common structural barriers" preventing unhoused people from meeting their needs in Edmonton, Alberta according to research by Addorisio et al. (2022, p. 390).

Over the years, various initiatives, programs, and services have emerged to address affordable housing and rising houselessness[1] in Canada. Regardless, however, houselessness remains a critical public health concern, and there has been a rapid increase in houselessness over the years (Infrastructure Canada, 2022; Public Health Agency of Canada, 2022). In fact, research indicates that more than 25,000 people living in Canada will sleep in an emergency or temporary shelter at night, and in a one year period over 235,000 people living in Canada will experience some form of houselessness (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2019; Strobel et al., 2021).

[1] Unhoused, houseless, unsheltered, roofless, and other similar terms refer to the community of individuals who are experiencing hidden, temporary, episodic, or chronic houselessness (Echenberg & Munn-Rivard, 2020; Strobel et al., 2021).

For my Capstone research study, I will be using the terms "houseless" and "unhoused". On occasion, I may use *literally* "roofless" or "unsheltered" to describe the literal condition of living without shelter (e.g., sleeping in public spaces, outdoors, etc.). Although there are few peer-reviewed studies on the evolution of terminology around houselessness, current social justice discourse emphasizes using "unhoused" or "houseless" instead of "homeless" as a way to distance from the stigmatizing and derogatory connotations that stem from the term "homeless" (Ionescu, 2022; Slayton, 2021). I explore the meaning of houselessness in more detail in the following section titled, *Houselessness in Canada.* Additional definitions used in this study can be found in Appendix A.

Though these numbers are high, the reality in Canada is much more grim when we consider the known barriers to collecting accurate data on people living unhoused. Despite Canadian researchers using multiple techniques to collect population statistics, limitations in defining houselessness for measurement, recruitment, sampling, and more prevent researchers from compiling holistic information on houselessness in Canada (Dionne et al., 2023; Employment and Social Development Canada, 2019).

Because houseless people live in a variety of situations including in tents, shelters, on couches, and more and may not be included in population counts, researchers highlight that reported numbers are likely lower than the actual number of people living unsheltered or at risk (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2019).

Numerous studies underscore the impacts that houselessness has on a person's health (Addorisio et al., 2022; Employment and Social Development Canada, 2019; Public Health Agency of Canada, 2022; Public Safety and Solicitor General, 2022; Rhoades et al., 2017). For instance, researchers found that unhoused people age nearly 20 years faster than housed people and are more likely to experience physical and mental health problems over the long term, to sustain injuries, and to die at an earlier age than the general population (Anonson et al., 2022; Rhoades et al., 2017). In fact, researchers have even recommended using hospital emergency room data in Canada to collect statistical information on the unhoused community (Strobel et al., 2021). Similarly, Addorisio et al. (2022) stated that lack of access to appropriate care and the inability of the Canadian health care system to "appropriately serve these hard-to-reach patients" led to a "very high mortality" rate within the unhoused population (p. 393). For example, the B.C. Public Safety and Solicitor General (2022) reported a 75% increase in fatalities among individuals living unhoused in their province. In Edmonton, while the rate of fatalities has not

been reported, it is known that houselessness has doubled since the pandemic, and there has been a recent increase in encampments (Boothby, 2023; CBC News, 2022). Based on reports from April 2022, houselessness in Edmonton continues to rise (Swensrude, 2023).

Beyond healthcare, houselessness comes at another high cost to Canadians: more specifically, increased public service (e.g., healthcare, judicial) costs estimated at over $7 billion a year or approximately $50,000 per each person living unhoused (Anonson et al., 2022). With such high costs to the health and wallets of Canadians, it's no wonder why The Public Health Agency of Canada (2022) calls housing a human necessity. In fact, to "address the growing crisis" and steady increase of houselessness in the past few years, the Government of Canada has doubled the funding for their *Reaching Home: Canada's Homelessness Strategy,* which would go to "support services provided by shelters across the country….[,] education programs, job training programs and social integration activities" (Infrastructure Canada, 2022, para. 4).

Still, there are few reports of appropriate measures being enacted to assist unhoused people and address affordable housing. In reality, the opposite appears to be true. Governments appear to be scrambling to address houselessness alongside issues of lack of affordable housing, rising costs, and inflation. In Barrie, Ontario, for example, city councilors contemplated enacting an anti-homeless by-law that would prevent charities from assisting unhoused people in public spaces (Draaisma, 2023), and in Nova Scotia, the government partnered with an airbnb-style room rental app called Happipad that could have adverse effects on reducing unhoused people due to various digital and financial barriers, like lack of access to the app or an inability to pass a credit check (Gorman, 2023).

To prevent and reduce houselessness, the Canadian Housing Strategy identifies the benefits of programming and support services, and non-profit organizations are provided funding

to develop and manage programs to help the unhoused community (Government of Canada, 2018). The strategy highlights the benefits of providing community-based support for houselessness and funding non-profit organizations—indicating that this method allows support to be tailored to the needs of the individuals living in the area the organization serves. According to The Canadian Encyclopedia (n.d.), non-profit organizations have developed a range of supports to assist with critical, survival and long-term needs for unhoused people. Edmonton, in particular, has a number of services such as Bissell Centre, Boyle Street Community Services, Mustard Seed, Hope Mission, Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society, and more. Despite the number of services and range of supports, however, houselessness continues to rise.

There are countless reasons for the increase, most notably rising costs and the pandemic; however, there is limited research on how programming and support services are communicated to people who are at risk or unhoused. Moreover, although the Public Health Agency of Canada (2022) considers houselessness a public health crisis, it is unclear if public health communication campaigns have been developed to adequately connect Canadians with supportive services that could assist them in appropriate ways.

Research Questions

In this context, I am investigating the communication pathways used by support services to connect with low-income, inadequately housed or unsheltered individuals living in Edmonton, Alberta. Specifically, I consider the following research questions:

1. What type of communication channels do non-profit organizations in this sector use and for what reasons?
2. How do non-profit organizations in the low-income and/or unhoused support service sector use digital communication channels like websites and social media?

3. What types of barriers (e.g., technology access, digital literacy) impact access to support services for low-income or unhoused people? What potential accommodations/reforms might address these barriers?
4. In what ways are communications with low-income or unhoused people affected by the first and second level digital divide (e.g., access to connectivity and devices and competency using digital tools and devices)?

To answer my research questions, I plan to collect and analyse data through two qualitative methods: (1) content analysis of website and social media for a non-profit organization in Edmonton's unhoused sector; and (2) semi-structured interviews with individuals who have experienced houselessness and individuals who work for a non-profit organization in Edmonton's houseless sector.

Houselessness in Canada

For this research study, it is important to define and understand the scope of houseless in Canada beyond population statistics. To begin, there is more than one definition of houselessness, even in Canada (Echenberg & Munn-Rivard, 2020). Most definitions of this community group will reference the type of shelter–if any–a person may live in, as well as the length of time they have lived in inadequate conditions (Echenberg & Munn-Rivard, 2020). However, this still leaves a wide spectrum of defining characteristics for what it means to be houseless: from staying with friends, sleeping on couches to living in an encampment or surviving literally outdoors (Echenberg & Munn-Rivard, 2020). Moreover, a person's situation can change quickly, with some individuals finding housing after one day and others experiencing longer forms of episodic or chronic houselessness (Echenberg & Munn-Rivard, 2020). "Cyclical or episodic homelessness" is when a person moves "in and out of homelessness, sometimes as a

result of change of circumstance", and chronic houselessness is typically characterized as "long-term or repeated homelessness" (Echenberg & Munn-Rivard, 2020, p. 2).

This spectrum of individuals within the houseless community can create challenges with collecting accurate data on the number of individuals affected and the resources and solutions required for addressing this crisis. For instance, "hidden homelessness" refers to a category of unhoused people who may live with others, on couches, in motels, in overcrowded housing, etc. (Strobel et al., 2021). This group, while considered houseless by many definitions, are typically underrepresented in population statistics, particularly homeless point-in-time counts, because they do not typically use services and resources for unhoused people (Strobel et al., 2021). In fact, it is said that "nearly 1 in 10 Canadians… have experienced hidden homelessness" at some point in their life (Echenberg & Munn-Rivard, 2020, p. 2).

Similar challenges are experienced by houseless individuals living in rural areas. Contrary to the belief that houselessness is largely an urban issue, Schiff et al. (2022) found a considerable number of people living unhoused in rural communities. These individuals, as the researchers explained, fell within the hidden homeless category who were primarily "invisible" in population counts (p. 63).

Even less is known about individuals who are at-risk of houselessness. In Amore et al. (2011), researchers—critical of the complexity around identifying who is considered houseless—analysed the suitability of the European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion framework to define homelessness. They discovered that while the typology provided accurate interpretations and recommendations, a weakness was that it omitted an at-risk category (Amore et al., 2011). The researchers argue that it is necessary to identify and quantify the number of people who are at risk of houselessness under a related but distinct category to

properly address prevention—comparing the collection of this data to how many countries measure individuals at risk of unemployment.

Similarly, formerly unhoused people may also be considered at-risk individuals. Randle et al. (2021) analyzed data from a 2018 Canadian Housing Survey and highlighted that formerly unhoused individuals were now more likely to live in unaffordable, subsidized or rented houses and experience significantly higher core housing needs when compared to all households (Randle et al., 2021).

Stereotypes and the Perceived Identity of Houselessness

In a recent news article, a mother of a recently deceased man reminded readers that her son Luke was "'a lot more than a homeless person'" (Blanch, 2022). This transition of his identity as simply a houseless person is not uncommon. In their PhD dissertation, McCarthy (2013) discusses the houseless identity as one that "is socially constructed through various discourses and consists of an amalgam of stereotypes" (p. 46). McCarthy (2013) continues, noting that though this identity does not truly exist, being houseless can affect how a person is perceived to the point where it becomes their dominant identity—"overshadowing all other axes of identity" (p. 46).

By collapsing the houseless identity into one category guided by stereotypes, the view of houselessness can become one-dimensional—for example the "'bearded, dirty male'" or "'male panhandler'" (Klodawsky, 2006, p. 378 and Radley et al., 2006, p. 437 in McCarthy, 2013, p. 47). The issue with this one-dimensional view of who is unhoused is that programs, resources, support, and even communication tactics may not be tailored to the needs of this diverse community, particularly women and Indigenous people who, according to Uppal (2022), have the highest rates of previous houselessness when compared to other demographic groups.

Research by Desjarlais-DeKlerk (2017) addresses the misconception that unhoused people "exhibit a number of shared characteristics that should be addressed" and found that "people experiencing homelessness do not identify with one another nor necessarily recognize their shared characteristics or situation" (p. 14).

For the purpose of this research study, this perception of a stereotypical, singular identity for unhoused people can affect which communication strategies and channels are considered adequate to reach at-risk or unhoused people. For instance, a one-dimensional view of houselessness could lead researchers to conclude that individuals attending drop-in emergency meal programs are abusing "the system that continues to support them" and are perceived as not "in extreme financial need" if they wore designer clothes, drove newer cars or had a cell phone (Nichols, 2022, p. 592). Alternatively, it is known that hidden houselessness or "residing in precarious or inadequate housing" can include someone living in their vehicle (Strobel et al., 2021, p. 15), and individuals may take their valuables, which could include their cell phone, with them if they end up unsheltered. To the latter, research shows that although unhoused individuals may be affected by a "high rate of turnover in both phones and phone numbers" (Rhoades et al., 2017, p. 75), unhoused individuals do often have access to mobile phones and use digital communication channels such as websites and social media (Allen et al., 2022; Humphry, 2014; Rhoades et al., 2017). Overall, these observations underscore the importance of speaking directly to individuals who have lived at risk or unhoused when conducting research on unhoused members of the community.

Support for Low-Income and Unhoused People in Edmonton, Alberta

Support services assisting low-income and unhoused people in Edmonton, Alberta are primarily provided by non-profit, charitable organizations (211 Alberta, n.d.). Research

underscores the challenges non-profit organizations can experience with delivering a high volume of services while also focusing on funding operations and advocacy work (Kerman et al., 2022; Malenfant et al., 2019; Mosley, 2012; Phillips & Levasseur, 2004). For instance, Mosley (2012) found that a high number of organizations used insider tactics—relationship building with politicians—to lobby and advocate for their organization's issue (Mosley, 2012), which is just one example of how a non-profit organization's priorities can be divided.

In Malenfant et al. (2019), researchers found that shifts in priorities regarding fundraising changed the nature of the work in non-profit organizations ("NPO[2]"). In fact, respondents stated that fundraising was prioritized over all other goals, including the "actual" work of these organizations (such as providing support services), and that this shift required additional time and labour that detracts from other areas of their role (Malenfant et al., 2019, p. 46). Respondents also underscored that funding requirements came alongside requests of "'evidenced-based everything'" from funders (Malenfant et al., 2019, p. 45), thereby putting further pressure on an NPO to demonstrate how they achieve goals and objectives. Beyond high service demand and unrealistic workloads, additional challenges faced by these organizations included under-resourcing, limited capacity to address needs, and workplace distress (Kerman et al., 2022). More specifically, in a study that surveyed 700 and interviewed 30 participants who worked for an NPO, Kerman et al. (2022) found that workplace distress was common: Staff participants reported they perceived their work as "part of the problem" and experienced literal distress, trauma, and even death (Kerman et al., 2022, p. 4). In terms of this research study, it is important to acknowledge the pressures and competing priorities NPOs may already be facing. If service and program delivery are affected by these challenges, it is likely that communication

[2] See Appendix A for definitions of terms used throughout this study.

and awareness of services and programs may also be affected. The purpose of this research study is therefore to explore communication pathways and and barriers to identify insights, improvements, and accommodations to support at-risk and unhoused people in accessing support information.

Motivation for this Research Study

My motivation for investigating the communication pathway for support services for at-risk and unhoused people stems from personal experience. From 2007 to 2010, when I was a teenager and young adult, I experienced episodic houselessness. During my first experience with houselessness, I was literally unsheltered, but would have fallen in the "hidden homeless" category because I did not use any support services or shelters. I remember thinking my situation would be temporary, which is a common opinion among many houseless individuals, according to the research (Nichols, 2020; Snow & Anderson, 1987). I cannot remember if I would have considered myself houseless at that time, which is another common phenomenon, known as "distancing", that unhoused people experience (Nichols, 2020; Snow & Anderson, 1987).

Despite being a young person without shelter or support in Edmonton, Alberta, I did not seek support services or resources from a non-profit organization. After approximately one month, I transitioned into various short-term accommodations until the following year when I became unsheltered once again. During this episode of unsheltered houselessness, I met other people living in similar circumstances who showed me where I could access various supports including the Hope Mission Youth Homeless Shelter, Fort Road Victory Church free community meals, temporary labour agencies, short term housing placement through Boyle Street Community Services, and more.

Beyond learning about support services through peers and word-of-mouth communication, my lived experience also gives me some understanding of cell phone and internet use within the unhoused community. Even over a decade ago, I usually had a cell phone or access to a cell phone as did many of my peers. We would access the internet through wifi-accessible locations or the Edmonton Public Library. As underscored by Rhoades et al. (2017), however, my peers and I experienced "high turnover" with devices and contact numbers (p. 75). This means that we lacked access to devices, connectivity, and contact information. My lived experience is by no means the average unhoused experience because, as highlighted above, the breadth of houselessness is extensive and can be unique for those who experience it. However, my experience did highlight a potential communication gap in how individuals learned about the various support services available to them.

In the past decade, ways individuals access information has changed with the internet and the abundance of digital communication channels. Similarly, the ways that at-risk or unhoused individuals access information about support services has likely also evolved. In the next chapter, I analyzed existing research literature in this area to situate my study in relation to existing work in this space.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The following chapter is an overview of existing research related to my research study. Before my examination of previous literature, I outline the questions used to guide my review and my search strategy and eligibility criteria. In the sections that follow are summaries of related studies regarding preferred communication channels, the digital divide, and public health and support service communication.

Literature Review Research Questions

For my literature review, I focused on answering the following questions:

1. What is known about the ways that support service organizations communicate with at-risk and unhoused people?
2. How are unhoused people affected by digital divides?
3. How are public health messages generally communicated?

This line of inquiry was taken to understand the scope of the issue and the strategies that can be used to answer my overall Capstone research questions.

Literature Search and Eligibility Criteria

Houselessness has been researched from many angles and within many disciplines, with many current studies taking an intersectional perspective and researching aspects of houselessness for women, members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, people with substance or mental health issues, and more. Despite this range of research, there are limited studies available exploring strategic communication strategies involving unhoused people. With respect to how this topic area intersects with digital divides, while some studies explored the specific experience of digital use among the unhoused community, many studies analyzed the digital divide from a socio-economic perspective as a whole.

With such a wide array of research available, a flexible, interdisciplinary eligibility criteria was best suited for selecting the most appropriate research for my study. In addition to peer reviewed literature, grey literature, such as Canada's National Housing Strategy, was also included to determine if any housing or homeless prevention strategies contained information about communication pathways or digital use among unhoused people. Moreover, grey literature was also used to understand how Canada defines houselessness, which is integral in understanding who the audience is for prevention and intervention supports or communication strategies. Lastly, news articles were used to supplement information or within the situational analysis.

To find related studies, I used boolean search phrases in the University of Alberta library search tool and the Google Scholar search tool. My search phrases included various synonyms of "unhoused" or "houseless" including "unsheltered", "roofless", and more to capture studies who may use alternative language or be researching specific aspects of houselessness (such as living in an encampment, a shelter, or outdoors). In addition, I searched through related articles in the journals on the DOAJ website, an open-source database for research, as well as related articles in Taylor & Francis Online: Examples of two journals I found several articles in were the *International Journal on Homelessness* and *Information, Communication & Society*.

The search criteria I used was as follows:

Relatability to the Study

Due to the high volume of literature on houselessness, it was best to determine the literature most related to my study. Reading the abstract, I eliminated various studies: for instance, I removed studies that were focused on negative health or psychological outcomes for unhoused individuals (except where it related to digital accessibility). I also found related studies

that were not specifically about unhoused individuals, but instead explored strategies for my research design such as interview tactics for vulnerable people.

Publishing Date (Recency)

Stigmatization of unhoused people is not uncommon, even in academic, peer-reviewed research. Canadian society's understanding of houselessness and housing rights have evolved to a more ethical standpoint over the years, and it is more common to find stereotypical and biased commentary in older research studies. As stated in the section on unhoused stereotypes, stereotypical commentary can lead to potentially false or misleading conclusions.

Geographical Location

With the volume of research on houselessness, I prioritized research conducted in Canada. Studies from Canada, particularly those on policy or communication preferences, are more applicable to my study. The unhoused experience in Canada may be different than it is in other countries due to the demographics of houselessness in Canada, notably the overrepresentation of Indigenous people who experience houselessness (Echenberg & Munn-Rivard, 2020). Despite the sample population's differences, I still included related international studies to ensure I considered diverse perspectives or approaches on communication strategies or accommodations for digital accessibility barriers or limitations.

Number of Citations

With the high number of studies, I also began searching using Google Scholar and viewing studies with higher numbers of citations from other researchers. Studies that are frequently used by other researchers are more likely to be of higher quality and/or include foundational theories or findings. One example of a foundational study found using this method is Snow and Anderson (1987).

Biased Statements

While this was challenging because some objective, academic writing can be written in a cold or sympathetic manner, research studies with intentional biased statements, such as those that dehumanize, demonize, or *other* unhoused people, are of low quality.

Sample Size and Diversity

Studies were also prioritized when they had higher volumes or more diverse sample sizes, particularly with surveys and interviews. Studies with large sample sizes provide more robust, reliable statistical data. However, when investigating context, it's important to remember "analysis must be in-depth and focused on only a small sample or a few individuals' situations" (Mayan, 2009, p. 11). Diverse demographics was also made a consideration to mitigate studies with potentially one-dimensional, stereotypical representations of houselessness.

Researcher Background and Number of Researchers

In addition, I looked at the researcher's background and other studies, which led me to industry professionals such as McCarthy. Moreover, while I used studies with one researcher who collected data, I prioritized studies with multiple researchers or data collectors (e.g., studies that had research assistants involved) so that there was more than one examiner. In Query et al. (2009), the researchers recommend content analysis, in particular, is performed "by at least two trained coders who are unfamiliar with the research questions or hypotheses being studied" to help ensure "intercoder reliability" (p. 90).

With such a high volume of studies to choose from, I used additional tactics to eliminate studies that suggested the journal or author was less reputable than those in other studies, such as the paper's adherence to a traditional style, like APA or MLA, and typographical or grammatical errors.

Overall, there were limited studies on communication strategies regarding houselessness, but an abundance of studies on houselessness and the socio-economic impacts of the digital divide. I was able to examine the subject from a variety of perspectives using a range of interdisciplinary studies. My exclusion criteria then helped pare down the literature to inform my study.

Review of Existing Literature

There are a number of studies that explore possible channels to communicate with low-income or unhoused people. I note a caveat: such research lacks a recognition of the diversity of the unhoused community, as explored in the introduction, or the gaps in data regarding this "hard-to-reach" audience (Addorisio et al., 2022, p. 393). This could create an incomplete picture of the communication preferences. In this section, I will highlight existing literature on the communication preferences for unhoused and houseless individuals, digital communication use, support as interventions for houselessness, and aspects of public health communication and communication strategies.

Preferred Communication Channels for Low-Income or Unhoused People

Despite the gaps in the research, there is some existing literature on the communication preferences of unhoused people, with many studies highlighting how lack of internet or mobile connectivity or access can exacerbate challenges for unhoused people (Humphry, 2014; Marler, 2021; Rhoades et al., 2017). In a US study by Allen et al. (2022), for instance, researchers found that various channels including website, social media, and face-to-face communication successfully provided COVID-19 public health information to unhoused people but highlighted the challenges unhoused individuals face with consistent connectivity to the internet. In addition, they underscored that in-person communication was often preferred because individuals could

clarify information or ask questions. Likewise, Rhoades et al. (2017), in comparison of Pew Research Center (2013) on cellphone use for the general population, found phone use for unhoused people was comparable based on individuals of the same age. That being said, the researchers acknowledged the limits of their study's sample—noting that their sample did not include individuals who did not engage in an emergency housing service. This is a common limitation as described in the stereotypes section above.

Other studies also affirmed the use of multiple communication channels among unhoused people, particularly digital: for example, Humphrey (2014) concluded that 95% of the nearly 100 unhoused respondents they surveyed had access to a mobile phone, and Bhandari and Sun (2021) found that the subreddit, r/Homeless was a highly active community that connected and assisted each other in many ways including with finding support.

Still, print or face-to-face communication is preferred by some unhoused individuals for certain information. Harris (2020), for example, discovered that face-to-face communication was preferred over other channels and also found that self-service channels, while functional, were insufficient for communicating with recently-unhoused people who are experiencing a crisis and are likely feeling distressed and impatient. Likewise, Allen at al. (2022) and Barile et al. (2020) found that face-to-face communication was typically preferred. Reitzes et al. (2016) found that although homeless people do use ICTs, they also primarily rely on informal, in-person communication for support and resources. Similarly, research by Barile et al. (2020) emphasized peer-to-peer communication and recommended using "peer outreach workers or ambassadors" as a tactic for communicating to unhoused individuals (p. 275). The authors highlight the benefits of this method of face-to-face communication because it can mitigate the use of stigmatizing communication by staff members that can deter individuals from accessing services. In contrast

to the studies presented above, Linos et al. (2022) identified print postcards as a preferred pathway, especially over newer communication channels, because it is a passive, undemanding method to receive information. Linos et al. (2022) also found a strong distaste for phone communication, particularly for obtaining support services, because the "direct bureaucratic interaction in real-time" would cause mental strain on service users (p. 711). In fact, the researchers found that even in countries with higher rates of literacy, many people avoided both phone and email communications because of the emotional burdens and capacity challenges those channels can present.

Media richness theory highlights certain media characteristics that improve the understanding of information and quality of communication (Kte'pi, 2020). The richness of each medium affects the outcome of the communication: For instance, "email lacks the tone of voice, prosody, and other audible paralanguage of a phone call, which often leads to misunderstandings" (Kte'pi, 2020, para. 3). Media richness theory suggests that face-to-face communication is the richest medium since it allows people to ask questions or seek clarity (Allen et al., 2022; Kte'pi, 2020).

Overall, Kreps and Bonaguro (2009) quote Rimer (2000) to remind readers that evolving, versatile approaches to communicating with unhoused people is a benefit: "as the communications menu grows, we need not view the options as dichotomous choices but instead pick and choose among them to meet the needs of different people at different times for different topics" (p. 386).

Digital Divides and Social Inclusion

Although numerous studies underscore that unhoused people have access to and use digital communications, they also draw attention to the obstacles unhoused people experience

due to poverty and unstable living conditions (Reitzes et al., 2016). Such obstacles are known as digital divides. Digital divides can be described as the differences in distribution of technology and digital literacy based on factors such as “social and economic inequality” (Reitzes et al., 2016, p. 73). As the researchers emphasize: “technology is an important resource that may improve health and wellbeing” and therefore it is important to address the impact of digital divides experienced among low-income and unhoused individuals (p. 73). This highlights that digital divides are, at their core, “fundamentally based on social inequality" (Pieterse, 2010, p. 167, cited by Rashid, 2016, pp. 309–310).

Traditionally, the digital divide highlighted the inequity of digital access, but as new insights on the divide are explored, researchers have expanded to the concept of a second and third level divide (Regnadda, 2020). The second level divide, Regnadda (2020) explains, is beyond connectivity and access and looks at the digital skillset: for example, a person’s ability to navigate the web as well as use digital tools to benefit themselves. The third level of the divide is regarding the aftereffects of digital technology use and the ability to produce positive outcomes, such as career growth, using ICT (Regnadda, 2020). In fact, the researcher underscores how “socially disadvantaged individuals or groups” typically do not use digital technology to improve their standing in society, such as by advancing their career (p. 3).

When it comes to intersections between poverty and technology, there are many obstacles that can affect unhoused people in effectively using digital devices, tools, or communication channels, particularly to find information about support services. This includes, as discussed above, lack of consistent access to internet connectivity (Rhoades et al., 2017). In addition, a person’s level of education—particularly literacy—can directly affect a person’s ability to navigate the internet and use a digital device (Rashid, 2016, p. 320). Lack of consistent use could

prevent users from becoming comfortable with devices and developing safe, positive online behaviours, but when combined with lower literacy, individuals could be more susceptible to engaging with bad actors.

In addition, digital barriers, particularly with respect to health communication, are likely to rise as "interactive technology" is ingrained in the delivery of health and social services (Fixsen et al., 2021, cited by Fixsen et al., 2022, p. 672). While some authors, such as Rhoades et al. (2017), suggest that the digital divide is "narrowing" (p. 75), the generalized use of newer, "disruptive" technologies such as predictive algorithms or AI will only broaden the divide (Regnadda, 2020, p. 17). For example, Regnadda (2020) argues that algorithms are designed in a way that favours the privileged majority—"penaliz[ing] and discriminat[ing] those already at the margin of society" (p. 2). In fact, patterns based on existing social dynamics can lead to "algorithmic profiling" and, even more subtly, lead to differences in treatment based on protected human rights classes, such as race, age, or gender (p. 4, 6). As Regnadda writes:

> *"Digital society has brought about changes in scale and pace like never before. Artificial intelligence, robots, machine learning, smart technologies or algorithmic governance are the emblem of this new society. Their impact on the economy, education, leisure, health and governance is yet to be fully grasped"* (p. 40).

With internet and digital use becoming "normalized" and "routine" within daily tasks and obligations, research emphasizes how widespread access (or not) to a digital device and internet connection can affect a person's daily life: hindering "efforts to obtain employment, access current news and debates, and secure online government services" (Wellman et al., 2001, by

Haight et al., 2014, p. 504). For people who live unhoused, digital barriers to accessing online forms or government applications can impede someone from regaining housing and/or stability. One such digital barrier is web accessibility. Brown et al. (2016) in Rhoades et al. (2017), for instance, found a higher presence of age-related disabilities within the unhoused community. As well, people with visual disabilities can be hindered by a wide range of web features, if accessibility is not considered during development of the digital communication channel. Poor text-to-background contrast, missing alt text, or animated elements are just some examples of how web design could be inaccessible for users. A low-income person who needs an accommodation to effectively use a mouse may also be unable to purchase the accommodating tool, thereby preventing them from comfortably using a computer or laptop (Goggin & Newell, 2000, by Regnadda, 2020).

Support Services as Healthcare Interventions

In their 10-year strategic plans, both the Canadian and Alberta Government highlight funding for community partnerships, initiatives, programs, and other types of assistance directed to preventing or reducing houselessness (Public Services and Procurement Canada, 2018; Alberta Secretariat For Action On Homelessness, 2008). Likewise, in a BC Housing study regarding factors assisting formerly unhoused people in maintaining long term housing, access to personalized support resources was a main factor—second to affordable housing (Sedkey et al., 2011). Further, in their content analysis of the r/homeless subreddit community, researchers Bhandari and Sun (2021) identified two themes related to social support including requests for material or informational assistance (Bhandari & Sun, 2021). In addition, Zare (2016) indicated social support—as in emotional support provided through a social network, such as an addictions group—can help improve a person's ability to overcome barriers and manage issues. Similarly,

Nilsson et al. (2019) underscored the benefits of support services but emphasized that more services—as well as service improvements—are needed to adequately address houselessness. For example, while researchers Barile et al., (2020) found that services for basic needs like food, shelter, and clothing were the most used, a speaker at a webinar hosted by National Network for Youth (2021) indicated that crisis interventions were often prioritized over prevention interventions, which, in turn, could result in more crisis support being available compared to other types of support. However, numerous researchers argue that overall support (even with the need for improvement) is an evidence-based intervention and a viable homeless prevention and reduction strategy (e.g., Bhandari & Sun, 2021; Nilsson et al., 2019; Parvanta et al., 2018; Public Services and Procurement Canada, 2018; Sedkey et al., 2011; Strobel et al., 2021; The Alberta Secretariat For Action On Homelessness, 2008; Zare, 2016).

Public Health Communication

Public health is a broad field that focuses on promoting healthy behaviours and the prevention of disease and illness (Parvanta et al., 2018; Public Health Agency of Canada, n.d.). Health communication research has been used to address numerous issues, including communication gaps that hinder access to "health facilities, personnel, and information" (Kreps & Bonaguro, 2009, p. 381). Public health communication, in particular, is a multi-faceted, interdisciplinary area of communication studies that uses a variety of communication strategies to promote positive health outcomes and prevent health risks to individuals and communities (Kreps & Bonaguro, 2009; Parvanta et al., 2018). According to Parvanta et al. (2018), steps to developing a public health communication plan includes setting out "evidence-based interventions", being the action you would like individuals to take as a result of the communications, as well as identifying the relevant audiences (p. 47). Similar to this, Kreps and

Bonaguro (2009) emphasize the problem-solving, issues-oriented, and strategy-promotion nature of health communication.

Although social support communication as an intervention for houselessness is supported by the literature, there is little research considering public health campaigns or health communications that promote support to prevent houselessness or assist those already living unsheltered. Moreover, even among the limited research on communication of support resources, recent studies conducted in Edmonton, Alberta emphasize lack of knowledge regarding available services—citing it as a main "barrier to care" (Addorisio et al., 2022, p. 390). Not only does this study confirm the existence of a gap in communication of resources, it also confirms the existence of this issue in Edmonton, Alberta in particular.

Studies in other geographical areas confirm that these gaps can impact a person's ability to seek support, for example resulting in people sleeping in unsafe situations before learning about emergency shelters (Ahajumobi et al., 2020). According to Ahajumobi et al. (2020) spreading awareness on available services is critical in assisting people with preventing or exiting houselessness.

In short, public health communication interventions regarding supports for houseless people are a required—but missing—public health communication strategy. There is also a lack of clarity on the communication of services that are provided. For instance, although houselessness is considered a public health concern in Canada (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2022), a review of existing literature and policies did not expressly indicate how governments address communication about support resources or programs. In fact, although both Canada's and Alberta's 10-year strategic plans regarding affordable housing and houselessness prevention reference programs and services, neither plan mentions communication strategies that might be

used to disseminate program or service information to the public (Public Services and Procurement Canada, Government of Canada, 2018; The Alberta Secretariat For Action On Homelessness, 2008).

Research indicates that non-governmental organizations are taking on this role. Since support for unhoused people is managed through programs and initiatives developed through community partnerships and charities, it appears that communication about these services is also managed by these groups. In fact, these non-governmental organizations are expected to communicate their own services and programs to the surrounding community. In addition, there are proven communication strategies, such as the multi-step flow theory, that promote using an influential community leader or group to disseminate information to audiences for a higher impact (Mahoney, 2016). This theory reinforces the use of organizations that are within the community to communicate service information. However, at present it is unclear whether organizational challenges noted above (such as limited funding and staff) impact an organization's capacity to disseminate service information to people in need (Kerman et al., 2022; Malenfant et al., 2019; Mosley, 2012). In this context, my study investigates if and how support information is being communicated by NPOs through digital channels and if there are any obstacles or barriers that prevent low-income or unhoused people from accessing this information. In the next chapter, I discuss the methodology that I used to answer these questions, before turning to a discussion and analysis of my findings.

Chapter 3: Methods

This chapter presents the research design and methodology that I used to answer the research questions. My research design collects and analyses data in two phases using two qualitative methods: (1) phase one, content analysis and (2) phase two, semi-structured interviews. For phase one, I conducted a content analysis on the Bissell Centre's website and Facebook posts published in January 2023 to April 2023. For phase two, I conducted six semi-structured interviews with individuals who either have lived experience with housing instability, poverty, or houselessness or who work for an NPO. Using these two methods to collect data assisted in 'triangulating' my findings to improve the rigour of my study (Oliver, 2012, p. 120). In the sections below, I explore the reasons I chose these methods as well as my process for data collection and analysis.

Phase 1 Data Collection: Qualitative Content Analysis

Content analysis is the most common method for researching health communication messages sent to the public (Tian & Robinson, 2014). It is also an unobtrusive, systematic and procedural methodology ideal for analyzing a variety of texts, including webpages, social media posts, and more (Croucher & Cronn-Mills, 2019; Maier, 2017; Tian & Robinson, 2014). A common tactic for content analysis is "descriptive statistics", which involves counting occurrences of a particular word, concept, or theme (Tian & Robinson, 2014, p. 200).

For this phase of my research design, my primary goal is to determine how NPOs currently use their digital communication channels—in other words, what are the most common types of messages on a NPO's website or social media channel? Additionally, I investigated the user experience to determine any barriers or obstacles a service user may face when obtaining information about a service.

Due to limited resources for this study, my analysis was restricted to one NPO and one of their social media platforms, whichever account posted multiple times a month and had the highest number of followers or likes. My sample organization was selected based on the following criteria:

1. Located in Edmonton, AB
2. Offered front-line services to low-income people (ideally unhoused people)
3. Had an active social media presence, defined as two or more posts a month

To select my sample organization, I started by using a boolean search phrase in Google Search in order to find an NPOs in Edmonton, Alberta that met my criteria. To reduce bias and include some randomization to my sampling, I examined the results in the order they appeared and chose the first NPO that met my criteria. After reviewing the second search result page without finding a suitable sample, I simplified my search phrase to "homeless help Edmonton", which is the search query I would enter if I was in need of assistance and looking for support.

The first result was a City of Edmonton webpage with a title—"Responding to Homelessness in our Communities" (*Responding to Homelessness in Our Communities*, n.d.), which did not meet my criteria. The second result was the Bissell Centre.

Having met the criteria, I chose to analyze the online communication of the Bissell Centre. Bissell Centre is a non-profit organization in Edmonton, Alberta and offers services directly to low-income and unhoused people, providing support services in areas such as housing outreach, employment services, and more (*Programs*, n.d.).

Similar to the strategy used by Draper (2022) in their MACT Capstone paper, I performed an initial investigation of non-profit organizations in Edmonton, Alberta to examine

their social media presence to refine my research design and coding sheet. The results of that investigation, along with changes to my research design, are included at the end of this section.

Design and Analysis

To analyze the Bissell Centre's website, I reviewed various web pages from the perspective of a person in need of support service information. I looked at the homepage, information on support, contact information, and more. To analyze Bissell Centre's social media, I reviewed all of their publicly available Facebook posts published in January 2023 to April 2023. This resulted in analyzing a total of 64 posts.

The coding approach I used was both inductive and deductive, combining existing concepts and frameworks from other studies with insights gathered during the review of data. New insights were integrated into coding principles, as data was analyzed using a "constant comparison" coding approach (Croucher & Cronn-Mills, 2019, p. 164). This meant that I analyzed some posts multiple times. According to Bell and Kravitz (2014), I should use codes that are "mutually exclusive" and "exhaustive" (p. 149). However, I found that communication goals can often overlap, which interfered with creating exclusive codes on social media posts. Overall, I used a simple, yet effective coding scheme and limited collection to only what is needed to answer the research question (Bell & Kravitz, 2014; Tian & Robinson, 2014). In addition, I collected interesting insights that fell outside of the coding scheme through note-taking.

To collect and manage my data, I used a consistent data collection sheet with space for notes (see Appendix B). After collection, I transferred data to a Google Sheet for further analysis and to determine trends and patterns.

Data Collection

I collected data from a total of 64 posts of original content from Bissell Centre. In total, 78 posts were initially collected for review but 14 posts were removed from the study. I removed three posts because the post or image did not include any content to analyze, and 11 posts because they were reposts from other organizations and thus not original content from the Bissell Centre. Bissell Centre reposted from a variety of organizations including Bent Arrow Society, Boyle Street, Find[3], Global Edmonton, and more. In addition, there were two reposts from the Bissell Thrift Shop that were included in the study, given that the thrift shop is an organization operating within the Bissell Centre.

In my first examination, I went through each post using a highlighter and pen to tag sections in the post and identify preliminary codes. In my second examination, I used multiple pen colours and underlined the post section as well as its corresponding code. At the same time, I transferred this data to my data collection sheet in Google Sheets.

Defining Codes

Below are definitions of the codes used during my analysis.

Promote (service). Promotion of service was tagged whenever Bissell posts contained at least one mention of a free service available to service users. The post did not need to be directed toward service users. Including the audience in future studies may assist in investigating the communication gap more thoroughly.

[3] The Find website was reposted by the Bissell Centre on Facebook numerous times. Find is a website created in partnership by the Government of Canada, the Government of Alberta, the City of Edmonton, and Homeward Trust Edmonton. Due to its government collaborators, I examined the purpose of the Find website to determine its relevance to communication of services, particularly communication by government entities. However, I found that the site was primarily for people with money to spend based on its homepage content, shopping cart section, donate buttons, and currency adjustor.

Promote (organizations). Promotion of organizations were tagged when posts mentioned a specific organization, such as IKEA or City of Edmonton. Self-promotion was more challenging as it could be argued that all posts are self-promotional; however, promotion of Bissell was tagged when the post would outline specific behaviours, actions, or accomplishments achieved by Bissell. For example, in a post on their new safety walk and harm reduction program, Bissell underscored that this new program signified their commitment to listening to the community and their needs within consultations. Self-promotion was also tagged if Bissell used possessive language in front of services or events, e.g., "Our program" or if alternative titles that include Bissell's name were included in the post as supplementary information, e.g., "Walk for Bissell" being used in posts that already mention "Coldest Night of the Year".

Educate (issue). Educate on an issue was reserved for posts that communicated facts or statistics on information directly related to housing or houselessness.

Educate (related to Bissell). Educate in relation to Bissell was used when the facts or statistics were directly tied to how Bissell, or a program or event by Bissell, helps the houseless community. An example is a post on the free tax clinic that identified $1.4 million worth of returns were provided to 482 tax service users.

Storytelling. Storytelling did present some challenges with respect to what is considered a success story, but ultimately, it was decided that a description of an engaging or entertaining occurrence or experience, particularly involving people or groups, was considered a story. The subject had to be tied to the reason for the study, i.e., success, tragedy, self-care. In a future study, further defining the parameters of storytelling versus simply relaying events would be beneficial.

Fundraising (donate money, items, etc.). This subsection of fundraising included requests or mentions of monetary or material donations as well as purchase to donate. Requests to participate in programs were not included in this section.

Fundraising (participation). This subsection of fundraising looked at individual participants and included requests to participate to fundraise (such as requests to participate in the Coldest Night of the Year) and thank you's to past or current participants.

Fundraising (organizations). This subsection of fundraising looked at organizations such as partners or sponsors and included calls for new partners and sponsors, thank you's to past or existing partners or sponsors, and commentary on successful partnerships or sponsors.

Alternative support (volunteering/hiring). This subsection is also under fundraising and includes calls for volunteers or Bissell job postings.

Themed posts/general communications. Themed or general communications was reserved for operationally-focused posts such as building closures or hours of operation.

Assessment

To assess patterns in these codes, I used a google sheet formula (an example being "=JOIN(", ", FILTER($A3:$A12, $B3:$B12=TRUE))"), to compile the codes for each post into a list. Using another Google Sheet formula ("=COUNTIF($B3:$CA3, TRUE)"), I then counted each code. Counting each code helped with viewing the kinds of messages Bissell posted on Facebook holistically. See Appendix C for more details on this process.

Phase 2 Data Collection: Semi-Structured Interviews and Qualitative Content Analysis

For phase two of data collection, I conducted six one-on-one semi-structured interviews with individuals who have experienced housing instability or houselessness or who work for an NPO. Interviewing individuals who are affected by houselessness or work for an NPO helped me

gather in-depth insights. Moreover, it helped me investigate how others learn about support services as well as any barriers or obstacles they may face while accessing information using websites or social media.

Research Design

In the section below, I outline the particulars of my interview research design, including my sample, recruitment strategy, data collection strategy, instruments, setting, and more.

Sample. I selected two types of participants to interview:

Participant group one. Individuals who have experienced housing instability or have lived unhoused. I sought to recruit participants who have experienced instability within recent years. This ensured more valid data because the participant's experiences will align to society's consistent use of digital communications and therefore they are more likely to have an understanding of current gaps in communication pathways.

Participant group two. Individuals who work at a front-line service provider for low-income or unhoused people. Although it is ideal that participants are current employees because responses will regard ongoing issues, it is not required that participants are currently employed with an NPO.

Recruitment. To recruit participants, previous literature recommended that I work with a local group or organization to establish connections (Addorisio et al., 2022; Mack et al., 2005). In research by Addorisio et al. (2022) in Edmonton, Alberta, researchers worked with Boyle Street Community Services (n.d.), a charitable organization that supports people experiencing poverty and houselessness. However, for this research study that analyzes communication pathways to accessing support services, recruiting participants through an NPO could influence consent or lead to bias in the results, since the participant might feel obligated to participate

because of their relationship to the organization that assisted with recruitment. Therefore, I decided to use multiple methods (explored below) to recruit participants living in Edmonton, Alberta.

Keeping my recruitment materials and the consent form as short as possible was highly important. This was because, in research by Reitzes et al. (2016), a considerable number of participants revoked consent after starting the questionnaire, and it appeared to be related to the length of the questionnaire.

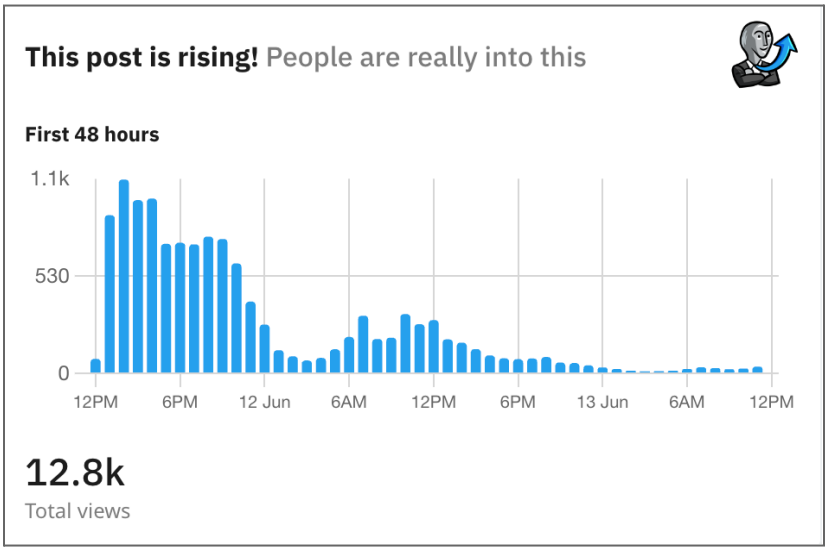
After obtaining ethics approval (Pro00128725) on May 30, 2023, I recruited participants using the following three methods:

- Recruitment through posters on bulletin boards (approved for public use) inside Edmonton Public Libraries. I recruited one participant using this method.
- Snowball recruitment tactics through research colleagues and participants. I asked colleagues and participants to provide my contact information and a copy of the poster to individuals they know who may be interested in participating. I provided my contact information to them to help ensure there are no feelings of obligation towards participating due to the person's relationship to the person who connected us. I recruited one participant using this method.
- Recruitment through a social media post on the subreddit r/Edmonton using my recruitment poster, as shown in Appendix D. Reddit, according to research by Bhandari and Sun (2021), has a robust, active unhoused community on the subreddit r/Homeless. I posted on r/Edmonton to help ensure participants reside in Edmonton, Alberta.

The reddit post was the most successful recruitment method, especially under time constraints. My post generated a high volume of response and interest, and I was even required to close and hide my post after only three days. I recruited four participants using this method.

Image 1.0. Metrics for my recruitment post on subreddit r/Edmonton[4]

Image 1.1. Post views and time series chart for my recruitment post on subreddit r/Edmonton[5]



In addition, several other interested individuals commented on the post, directly messaged me through Reddit, or emailed my UAlberta email. These individuals did not respond to my initial invitation to participate and thus were not considered successfully recruited. One individual, who was also not considered successfully recruited, accepted my invitation to participate but was unavailable for an interview due to scheduling conflicts.

[4] Metrics were captured on June 14, 2023.
[5] Metrics were captured on June 14, 2023.

Setting. Providing participants the opportunity to choose the interview location helps individuals feel in control and more comfortable, which, in turn, helps to create a more positive, equal experience for participants (Croucher & Cronn-Mills, 2019). This is important, especially when working with participants who may be experiencing stigmatization and othering due to being houseless. I conducted interviews in a virtual or public location of the participant's choosing based on a list of a few suitable places:

1. Virtual meeting through Google Meets
2. Coffee shop of their choice located in north central, downtown, or south central Edmonton
3. Edmonton Public Library of their choice located in north central, downtown, or south central Edmonton
4. For participants who work at a non-profit in the low-income or homeless sector, their place of employment (if in Edmonton, Alberta)

One participant requested an in person interview at an Edmonton Public Library, and the remaining five participants chose to meet virtually.

Instruments. I used several tools to assist with recording, collecting and organizing interview data, such as:

- An iPhone 13 and voice memo app to record the interview.
- An iPad, apple pencil and Goodnotes digital notepad app to support digital note taking during the interview. I used Goodnotes' digital recording tool as a backup recording in case I experienced any technical issues with my Voice Memo app. However, my backup recordings did not help with low-quality audio, which was my only technical issue.

- NaturalReader, text-to-speech tool, to assist with reading consent forms to participants, if requested.
- Otter.ai transcript tool, a speech-to-text software, that assists with developing transcripts from a recording.
- Taguette to analyze and code verbatim transcript text.

According to research by Croucher and Cronn-Mills (2019), as the interviewer, I was also considered an instrument within the data collection process. My credibility, mannerisms, skills and previous experience affected the quality of the interview including in how I approached follow up questions and interpreted responses and data. These factors were taken into consideration when collecting and analysing data.

Data protection. Numerous steps were taken to protect the participant's personal information. For instance, each participant was assigned a pseudonym, and identifying information, such as their name or place of employment, was redacted from the interview transcript. Consent forms and other files were stored digitally. I received one physical consent form, which was scanned, saved digitally, and then destroyed. The device used for storing data was password protected and kept in a locked, secure space.

Moreover, the instruments I used to collect, transcribe, or analyze data were not used to record personal data or for permanent storage. Once instruments were used, data was downloaded, stored digitally, and deleted from the application. In addition, instruments such as Otter.ai and Goodnotes have cybersecurity and encryption software in place to safeguard a user's data (Goodnotes, n.d.; Otter.ai, n.d.).

Design Strategy. I scheduled interviews for 30 to 90 minutes with approximately 15 minutes at the end of the interview for an optional debrief at the participant's request. I found that my interviews typically lasted for 36 minutes with 3 hours and 39 minutes in total.

One obstacle that I prepared for, but did not come up, was the possibility of traumatic disclosure or interviewing individuals who may have PTSD. In Kahan et al. (2019), researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with service users (many of whom had experienced houselessness and gender violence) and found that individuals unexpectedly disclosed various traumatic incidents during interviews. In research by Lalonde et al. (2021), psychological safety was addressed after the interview through an extensive debriefing. To address this concern, I offered debriefing and the mental health resource, but none of the participants requested to debrief or obtain a copy of the mental health resource (see Appendix E).

To mitigate concerns from this obstacle, I also attached the interview topics to the participant consent form. I decided to share topics in advance to provide participants the opportunity to decline to comment on certain topics, advise supervisors of the interview subjects, or withdraw from the study entirely. One participant used the topics to obtain approval from their supervisor to participate in the study.

Along with ethics approval, informed consent was required to ethically interview human participants. For the consent form, I recognised that language and readability level could be a barrier to equitable informed consent, and a person's understanding of the consent could be affected by literacy (in particular reading) level and skills. For this reason, I used plain language as much as possible in the consent form. I did experience some challenges with this, particularly with sections required by U of A ethics and simplifying my study while still clearly stating the goals, purpose, risks, and more.

To accommodate participants of varied education levels, I planned to assist with reading out consent forms or connecting participants to a text-to-speech reader, such as NaturalReader; however, none of the participants required support with reading the consent form. In contrast, one participant experienced challenges with signing and returning a digital copy of the consent form to me. In a future study, I can bypass this obstacle by getting ethics approval to collect consent verbally if a person is unable to provide a signed copy of the form to me.

Interview Topics. I developed two versions for topics and questions based on the participant group. Although questions had similar themes, they were different because the interview goals with each group were different. In the next section, I discuss the topics for each group.

Participant Group One. For participant group one (individuals with experiences living in unstable housing situations), my questions pertained to their experiences learning about and/or accessing support from an NPO as well as which channels were used for finding information, with a specific focus on digital communication and any challenges/barriers such as access, connectivity, or literacy. Five participants were interviewed based on their lived experience with housing instability.

Participant Group Two. For participant group two (individuals who work at an NPO), my questions pertained to their experiences working for an NPO that serves low-income or unhoused people. I asked how the organization manages and conducts communications with its service users, if their organization has a communications plan, or how their service users find information about their services. In addition, participants were asked questions specifically related to digital communication and the digital divide, such as the perceived channel preferred by their service users and whether they have witnessed service users struggle with access to

technology or digital literacy. One participant was interviewed based on their experience working in the sector.

Speaking to individuals with life experiences as a service user or provider assisted in helping me understand communication pathways to finding support and barriers to using digital communication and for more in-depth analysis of the literature review and the initial data collection method, content analysis of social media posts.

Data Analysis and Coding

Following ethics approval and interviews with participants, qualitative content analysis was used to review interview transcripts. To draft the interview transcripts, I started by uploading the audio files to Otter.ai, a tool that uses speech-to-text software to create a transcript. The accuracy of the transcripts in Otter.ai differed greatly. The tool had more difficulty parsing the text for interviews with participants whose voices were low or who had an accent. Background noise also affected the quality of the transcript. To correct them, I listened to the transcript in Otter.ai, which highlights the section in text as it replays the audio and used a separate Google Doc to adjust and revise the transcript for accuracy. I took notes during this process to capture some of my initial findings. Once the transcripts were accurate, I uploaded them to Taguette, a qualitative analysis software, to perform an in-depth qualitative analysis of the interviews.

Coding was performed using an open, inductive coding process where line-by-line review of content will lead to observations that will then be developed into codes (Croucher & Cronn-Mills, 2019).

My codes fell under the following categories:

Experience. I recorded whether the participant disclosed a positive, negative, or neutral experience with services.

Communication channels and preference. I recorded the participant's experience or opinion on the tools they did or would use if they experienced housing instability. In some cases, participants provided information on what they did use when they needed support as well as what they would use now. For instance, one participant indicated that they used social media to find information on a service provider but when asked what they would do now, they indicated that they would use Google search.

Obstacles. Under this category, I recorded the type of obstacle and whether it was access related, technical, or something else.

Suggestions. Under this category, I recorded tools or channels that the participant highlighted as beneficial or suggested as a method to communicate with unhoused people. For example, one participant discussed the benefits of using the 211 chatbot and how it would connect them to the information they needed quickly and easily.

Other themes such as the participant's emotional state, burden on service users, and the concept of community responsibility were also discovered during coding.

Design Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

Content Analysis Coding Limitations

Codes should have been "mutually exclusive" and "exhaustive" (Bell & Kravitz, 2014, p. 149). However, because some communications can have multiple objectives, it was not possible to create exclusive codes. In future studies, coders may be able to broaden or adjust categories, the sample, or collected data to create fulsome, unique codes regarding message objectives or channels for unhoused people.

Another limitation occurred with the period of time the posts were collected, January to April as 40.63% (N=26) of the posts were regarding their Coldest Night of the Year (also called Walk for Bissell) fundraising walk. For a more diverse sample, literature recommends that researchers use a random sampling technique over a longer period of time. In particular, it is recommended researchers avoid periods of time that likely pertain to one topic or season (like a winter event).

Lastly, there was a limitation with resourcing and the size of the study. As the only coder, I was not able to achieve "intercoder reliability" (Query et al., 2009, p. 90), thereby affecting the variability of my study. This was exacerbated by the subjective nature of the codes. I reduced this limitation by operationalizing my interpretation of the code and coding content within defined constraints.

Interview Setting Limitations.

For the library interview, my design did not include plans to mitigate possible space concerns around seating, volume, and privacy. The library chosen by the participant was a small, recently renovated community library. There were limited quiet, private spaces for the interview. I chose the best location, based on what was available, but the location was not ideal. Not long

after the interview started, the seats surrounding the participant and I filled with people, and the noise in the room was loud and disruptive.

Because of this space limitation, the interview audio recording has background noise—preventing me from transcribing certain words or sentences within the interview. In addition, the participant—at times—appeared uncomfortable responding to research questions regarding their experiences in earshot of others and so they spoke quietly. They did appear to get more comfortable towards the end of the interview, based on them using more slang in their responses, but they kept their voice low throughout the entire interview. Although a public library can be a good place to hold an interview, it is recommended that researchers vet the space prior to interviews, find spaces with bookable meeting rooms, or work with library staff to find quiet areas to interview.

For the virtual interviews, I indicated to participants that they could turn their camera off for comfortability and anonymity, and four participants kept their camera off. Virtual interviews where the participant had their camera off were more challenging because they lacked non-verbal cues. Without non-verbal communication, I was unable to discern if the participant could hear and understand me. For example, whenever the participant would pause for longer than expected, I was uncertain if they were thinking of a response or if we were experiencing a technology issue. There was also one interview where poor connectivity disrupted our conversation numerous times, and another interview where the participant's background noise affected the quality of the audio recording. These types of disruptions may be unavoidable, but researchers should seek ways to limit technology and other issues as best as possible.

Lastly, although disclosing topics in advance of the study assisted in preparing participants and ensuring they could obtain approval from supervisors, it may have also biased

my results by prompting participants to consider or answer questions in a particular way. For instance, they may have felt obligated to focus on digital communications as opposed to other communications due to the prominence of digital communications in the topic list. Regardless, I would still provide the topics in advance if I replicated this study because the benefits of providing the responses in advance, particularly when working with a group that could be affected by PTSD, outweighed this limitation.

In the next chapter, I present the results of my data analysis, commenting on both Phase 1 and Phase 2 of my research design.

Chapter 4: Findings

This chapter is divided into three sections: findings from the initial investigation performed on Bissell Centre's website; findings from phase 1, a qualitative content analysis of Bissell Centre's facebook posts; and findings from phase 2, a qualitative content analysis of six one-on-one semi-structured interviews with people who have experience with housing instability or who work in the industry.

Initial Investigation Results

As indicated in my methodology section, I performed an initial investigation of my sample organization similar to the strategy used in Draper (2022)'s MACT Capstone graduating paper. Below are the results of that investigation.

Findings from Analysis of Bissell Centre's Digital Communications

Based on their social media activity, I selected Bissell's Facebook channel for data analysis. Although Bissell's Twitter was the most followed channel with over 13K followers, Facebook—the second most followed channel—was selected for data analysis due to its higher number of original posts (compared to retweets).

The Bissell Centre's social media presence is comparable to other non-profit organizations in Edmonton, Alberta that work in the low-income/unhoused support service sector. Table 1.0 illustrates the social media presence of four NPOs in Edmonton, Alberta. These NPOs are long-standing, high-profile organizations in the sector. They have served the houseless community for decades, including when I experienced houselessness.

Table 1.0. Facebook and Instagram metrics by organization located in Edmonton, Alberta[6]

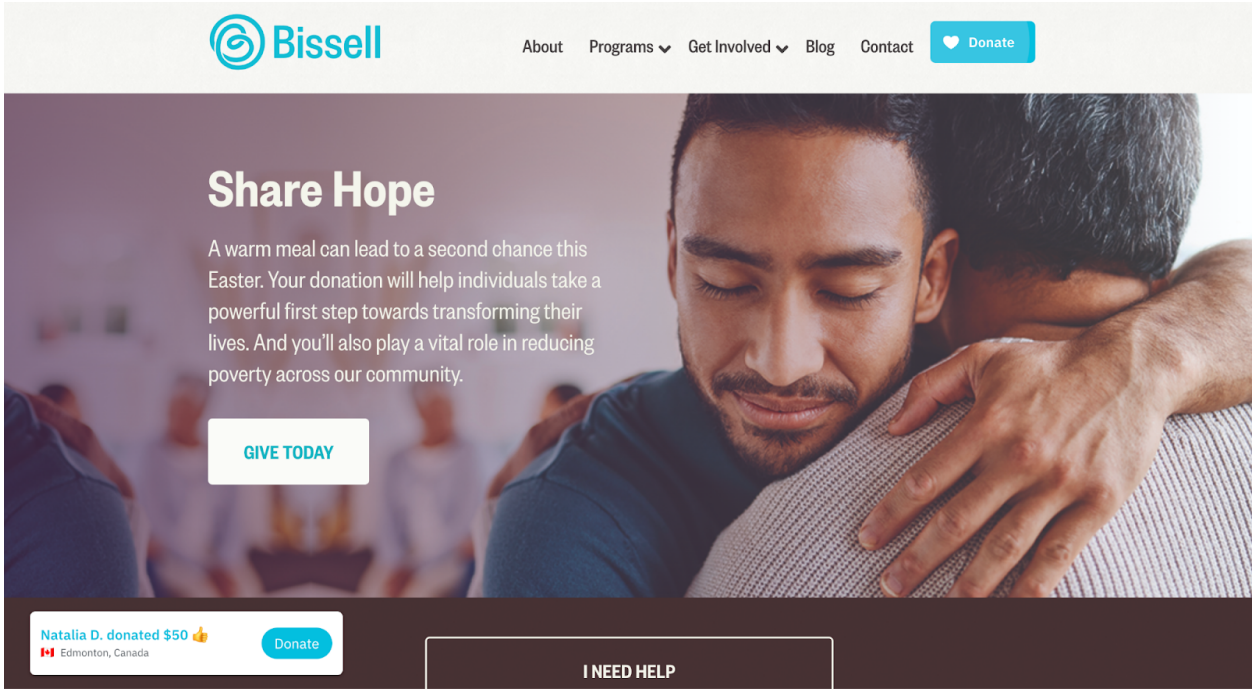
NPO	Facebook	Instagram
Bissell Centre	11K likes, 12K followers	@bissellcentre 771 posts, 9,547 followers, 4,985 following
Hope Mission	16K likes, 17K followers	@hopemission 1,446 posts, 5,073 followers, 981 following
Mustard Seed	16K likes, 18K followers	@themustardseedyeg 1,340 posts, 4,319 followers, 570 following
Boyle Street Community Services	9K likes, 10K followers	@boylestreetcommunityservices 663 posts, 4,935 followers, 767 following

As mentioned, I also examined the Bissell Centre's website. For this investigation, I reviewed the website through the lens of a service user in need of a support service or program.

On the landing page, I found messages regarding donations and recent donors highlighted through different color buttons, web banners, and popups. However, the centre of the page had a distinct background and a large button with the phrase, "I need help". Based on its clear phrasing and prominent location, I can surmise that most service users in need would click this button to learn how to access assistance. Image 2.0 shows the Bissell Centre website's homepage.

[6] Data collected in March 2023 (Bissell Centre, n.d.-a; Bissell Centre, n.d.-b; Bissell Centre, n.d.-c; Boyle Street Community Services, n.d.-a; Boyle Street Community Services, n.d.-b; Hope Mission, n.d.-a; Hope Mission, n.d.-b; The Mustard Seed Canada, n.d.-a; The Mustard Seed Edmonton, n.d.).

Image 2.0. Screen capture of the Bissell Centre website's homepage[7]

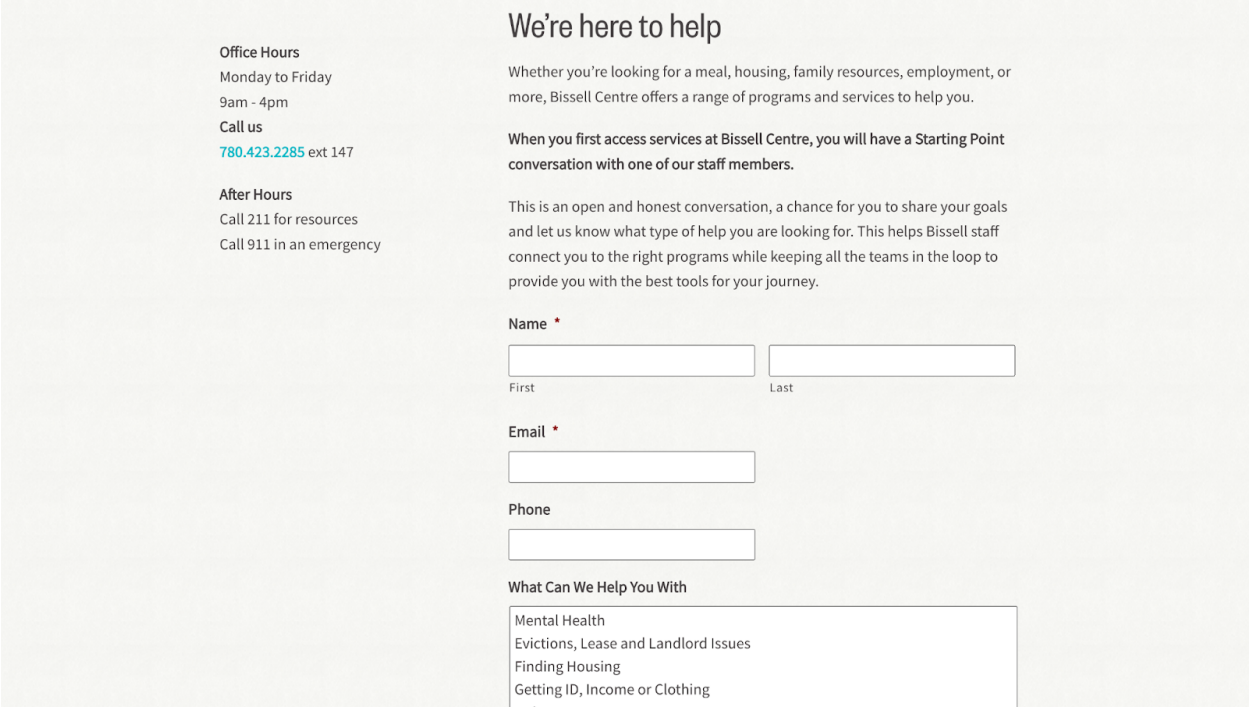


Upon clicking "I need help", a user is shown a contact page with a submission form. On the left, Bissell Centre lists their hours and phone number as well as 211 for resources and 911 for emergencies. Their address is not listed.

The form is intended to generate an "open and honest conversation" between support workers and service users where individuals can comfortably share their goals and needs (*Help*, n.d., para. 3). However, I noted that Bissell Centre's contact form requires email, which may prevent some users from interacting with it. Image 2.1 shows Bissell Centre's form submission webpage.

[7] Image was captured in March 2023 (Bissell Centre, n.d.).

Image 2.1. Screen capture of the Bissell Centre's help page[8]

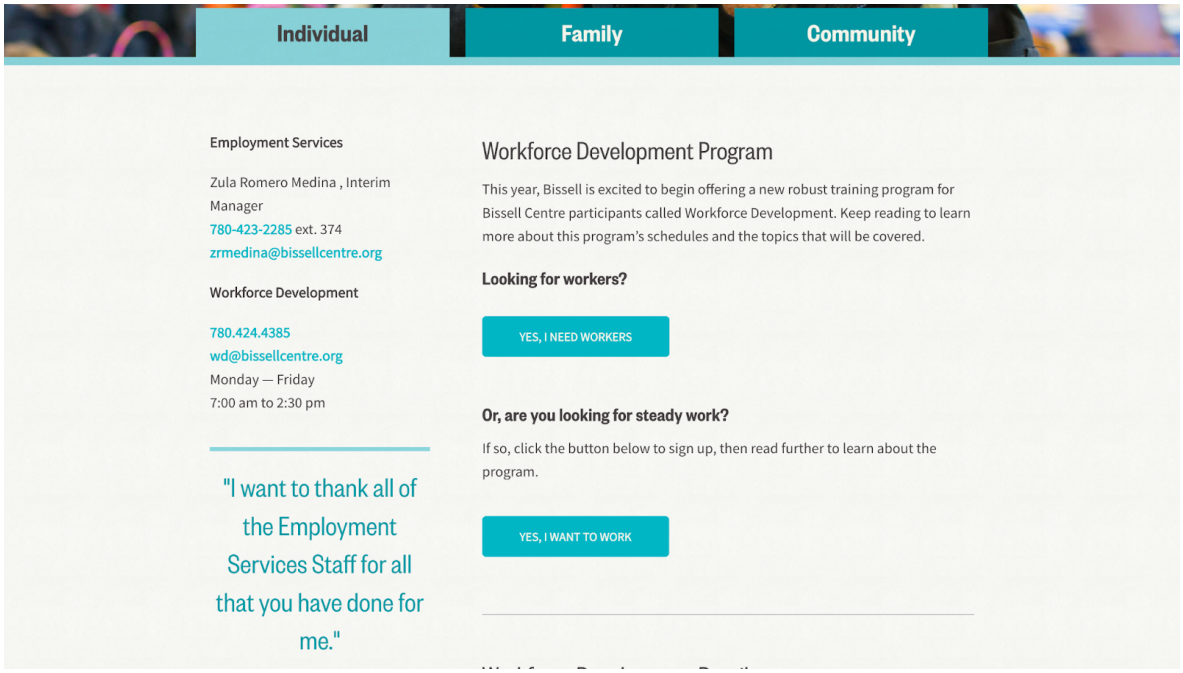


Lower on the form page, there was a button that states 'other services'. This button brings users to a programming page where a person can refine their search by selecting more information by 'individual', 'family', or 'community' (*Programs*, n.d.). This study focuses on the pathway for service users without reference to dependents, so I selected 'individual'. On this page, I sorted through numerous available services from housing and employment assistance to annual obligations like tax filing services. A future study on the pathway for family services in particular would be beneficial but is outside the scope of my current investigation.

Support information for individuals includes several pages on topics including outreach services, housing services, employment services, and more. Pages were well-organized with clear headers, additional contact information where applicable, and links and buttons to additional information where needed. See Image 2.2

[8] Image was captured in August 2023 (Help, n.d.).

Image 2.2. Screen capture of the Bissell Centre's employment services (programs for individuals) webpage[9]

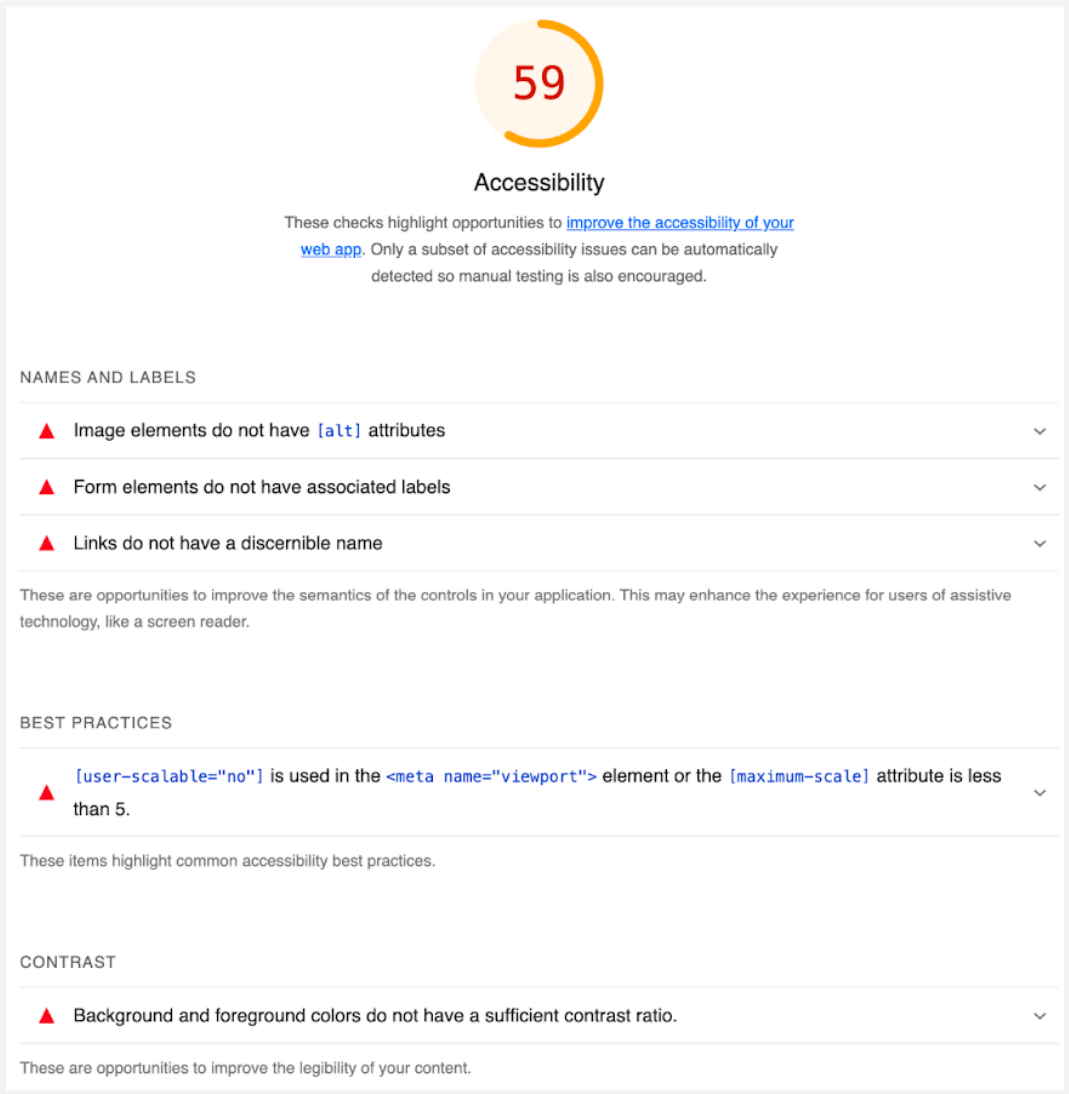


From a web accessibility perspective, I noted that Bissell Centre could improve by adding alt text in images and using distinct and information anchor text for links and buttons. These changes might help ensure information is accessible to individuals who are accessing web content using a screen reader device.

To get a better understanding of Bissell's accessibility, I conducted a web accessibility test using Google Lighthouse. Google Lighthouse is part of the developer toolkit, Chrome DevTools, which is built into the Google Chrome browser (Open Chrome DevTools, n.d.). Lighthouse measures web page performance and provides tactics to optimize your webpage based on the mobile or desktop performance. I conducted the web accessibility test in mobile as opposed to desktop because existing research indicates unhoused individuals are more likely to be mobile users instead of tablet or desktop users. The results are presented in Image 2.3 below.

[9] Note. This screen capture was taken in August 2023 (Programs, n.d.).

Image 2.3. Screen capture of the Bissell Centre's Google lighthouse report on web accessibility[10]



In addition to alt text and informative links, the Lighthouse report shows Bissell can also improve accessibility by changing text and background colors for legibility.

[10] The report is from August 2023 and based on the Bissell Centre's employment services (programs for individuals) webpage, shown in Image 2.3. Full image of the accessibility report can be found in Appendix F.

Overall, Bissell Centre has a clear and clean website. However, for an unhoused audience, web accessibility is integral, and Bissell Centre could change a few elements to improve the accessibility of their submission form and their website.

Phase 1: Content Analysis of Bissell Centre's Facebook Posts

After analyzing its overall website, I reviewed the Bissell Centre's Facebook posts from January 1 to April 27, 2023, inclusive. Below I outline my key findings from this analysis of social media data.

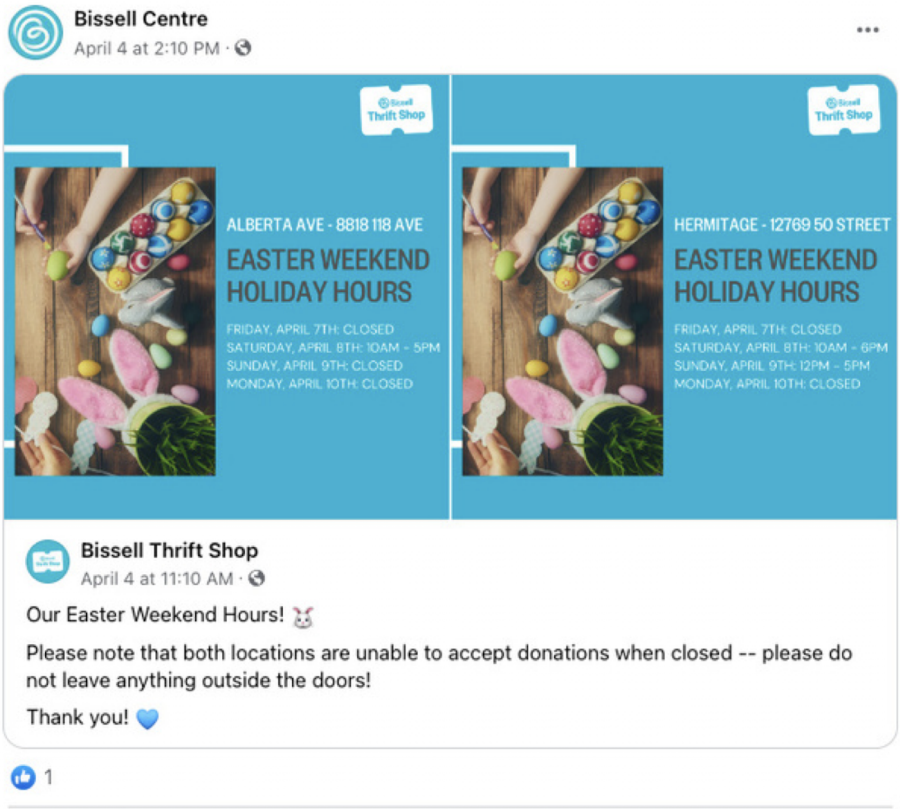
Trends and Patterns on Bissell's Facebook Posts[11]

My analysis of these social media posts revealed certain trends that seemed to indicate a communications strategy used by Bissell Centre. For example, many posts (34.38%, N=22) mentioned a *notable day/period* or *holiday* such as Black History Month, Earth Day, Volunteer Appreciation Day, Easter, etc. Using themes and notable days, particularly more mundane days such as 'Volunteer Appreciation Day' suggests Bissell is planning their content and aligning posts to a social media content calendar. If Bissell is aligning posts to a social media content calendar, the likelihood that Bissell also has a written communication strategy in place increases.

Only 10.94% (N=7) posts were *operational, general communications*, which refers to non-industry, business-operational communication such as building hour adjustments, construction, directions, addresses, and more. Although posts can promote services while communicating operational information, these posts did not necessarily promote any particular service and instead simply stated the message for their followers' awareness. See image 3.0. as an example.

[11] There were a total of 32 comments, which were not analyzed as part of this research study.

Image 3.0. "Operational" Facebook post by Bissell Centre/Bissell Thrift Shop



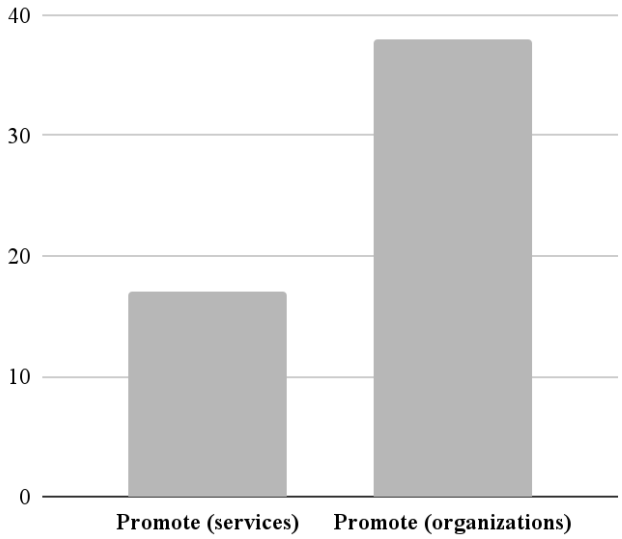
There were three posts from Bissell Thrift Shop. Although I removed reposts from the data set, I chose to include two reposts by Bissell Thrift Shop because they were posts created by Bissell and still fell within the scope of this study. One post on the Bissell Thrift Shop was posted by the Bissell Centre. The Bissell Thrift Shop posts were typically operational, as shown in image 3.0, and often communicated for fundraising purposes, specifically *donation through purchase* (12.50%, N=8).

I also found 104 incidents[12] (162.50%) of posts with *actionable goals* such as *promotion* (85.94%, N=55) or *fundraising* (76.56%, N=49). This finding is important because it shows Bissell Centre is using call to actions in their posts, which also suggest that they are following

[12] Codes were not exclusive, and posts could be tagged with more than one code.

best practices for social media and, in my opinion, increases the likelihood that their organization adheres to a more robust communication strategy.

Table 2.1. Results of content analysis on Bissell Centre Facebook posts – Promotion breakdown



Promotion included promotion of services or organization, and organizations—either the sample NPO, partner/sponsor organizations, or alternative organizations that were not necessarily listed as partner/sponsors—were promoted two times as often as services (organizations: 59.38%, N=38; services: 26.56%, N=17). Within this category, Bissell itself was promoted in half the posts reviewed (50.00%, N=32), which is expected given it is their social media platform. An example of Bissell's self promotion is with posts regarding Black History Month and their practices of anti-discrimination or the Transgender Day of Visibility and their measures to keep transgender service users safe. Moreover, in looking at the types of fundraising communicated by Bissell, I found participation in a program or event (like Coldest Night of the

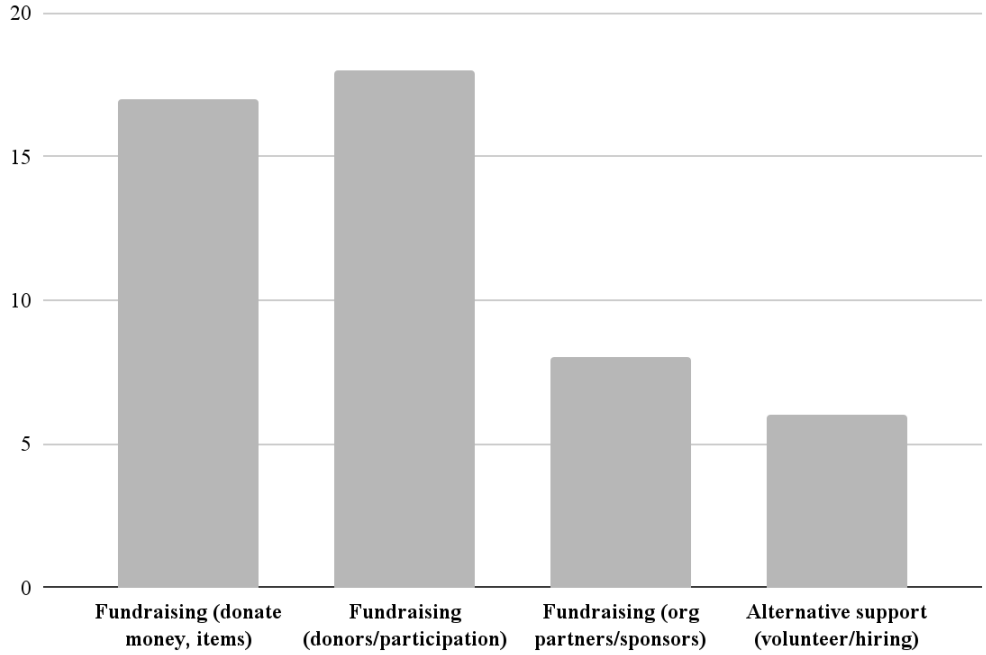
Year) occurred slightly more often than requests of monetary and material donations (28.13%, N=18 compared to 26.56%, N=17).

This is a significant finding because it shows that Bissell sees more value in individuals participating in programs and events than simply donating. This may be because participating in an event helps Bissell spread awareness by encouraging a form of engagement that people are more likely to post on social media. In other words, a person is more likely to post a photo of themselves walking at a Bissell event than sharing a monetary or material donation. This strategy of encouraging social events that are more likely to garner social media user engagement aligns to the multi-step flow theory because individuals share their experience with their community for a higher impact.

Further, in comparing participation and monetary donations, I found Bissell more often requested individuals to participate for fundraising (23.44%, N=15) instead of donating money (17.19%, N=11). In addition, some of the posts regarding monetary donations were tied to funding goals or achievements and related to participation for fundraising.

Similarly, Bissell also promoted services, themselves, or organizations without any mention of donation or participation. An example is a post where Bissell mentioned Coldest Night of the Year as the event that the Royal Alexandra Hospital Foundation sponsored: In this post, Bissell thanked the organization but did not directly invite participation, partnership, or sponsorship.

Table 2.2. Fundraising breakdown on Bissell Centre Facebook posts



Determining the primary call to action was not within scope for this research study. However, this information would have helped determine the goals under promotion, if it was to generate awareness, build reputation, or demonstrate goodwill, for instance. It could also be argued that promotional goals could also be for the purposes of fundraising. A future study focusing on the perceived communication objectives of NPOs with multiple coders (for intercoder reliability) would be helpful in answering these more in-depth questions.

Table 2.3. Results of content analysis on Bissell Centre Facebook posts from January 1 to April 27, 2023[13]

Categories	Count	% of total (64 n)
Promote (service)	17	26.56%
Promote (organizations)	38	59.38%

[13] Broader table of results can be viewed in Appendix G.

Categories	Count	% of total (64 n)
Educate (issue)	2	3.13%
Educate (related to Bissell)	17	26.56%
Storytelling	7	10.94%
Fundraising (donate money, items, etc.)	17	26.56%
Fundraising (participation)	18	28.13%
Fundraising (organizations)	8	12.50%
Alternative support (volunteering/hiring)	6	9.38%
Themed posts/general communications	27	42.19%

In my analysis, 29.69% of posts (N=19) highlighted and thanked participants, donors, partners, or sponsors. I also found that 26.56% of posts (N=17) in this dataset were used to promote a specific service. These numbers show a slight inclination to posts thanking contributors over communicating to service users. It is also worth noting that some posts, such as one on the Workforce Development Program, communicated the service to collaborators and contributors, particularly to encourage hiring of program graduates, as opposed to service users.

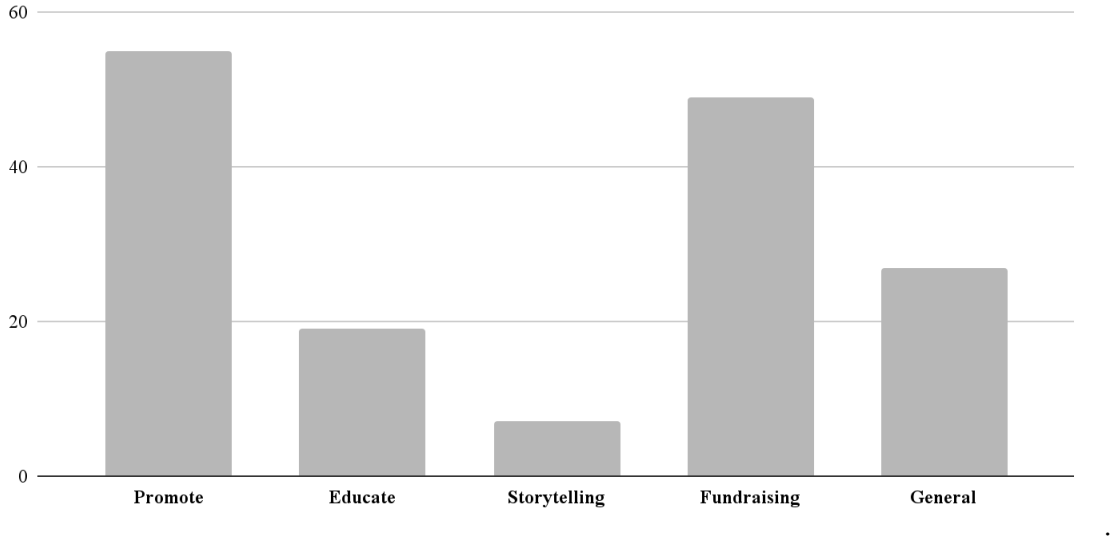
This finding suggests Bissell primarily uses their social media platform to target supporters, such as donors and participants, instead of people in need. Moreover, even when services are communicated on social media, informing users of the program may not be the primary objective of the message. See image 3.1.

Image 3.1. Facebook post on Workforce Development directed at organizations.

Overall, numerous posts communicated about specific programs. For example, 26.56% (N=17) of posts promoted a program offered to service users, in particular, the free tax clinic, child services, employment assistance, and holiday meals. Although I did not record the target audience for these posts, any post on a service offered to low income or unhoused people helps spread awareness of the services offered. If service users followed Bissell, they would still learn about a number of services available to them through social media.

Looking at Table 2.4, it is clear that Bissell's posts focus on promotion and fundraising; however, I did not anticipate storytelling to be as low as it is with only seven (10.94%) of the posts. I assumed that storytelling would be an integral part of communicating on social media, particularly to share the stories—and humanity—of individuals who experience houselessness. In addition, I also assumed general or themed posts would be much lower (N=27, 42.19%). I found themes and notable days that I did not know existed, such as Financial Wellness Month, as well as obscure, mundane (yet still notable) days such as Blue Monday.

Table 2.4. Broad results of content analysis on Bissell Centre Facebook posts



As illustrated in Table 2.5 below, there were 981 reactions with an average of 15.33 reactions on each post. The posts with the highest levels of engagement were seen in the broad category of promotion (85.94%, N=55) with fundraising (76.56%, N=49) as a close second.

Table 2.5. Engagement on Bissell Centre Facebook posts from January 1 to April 27, 2023[14]

Total engagement	981 reactions	32 comments	181 shares
Average engagement	15.33 reactions	0.50 comments	2.83 shares

The post with the most reactions was on an Edmonton current event, the death of a police officer (78 reactions, 2 comments, 3 shares). The second post with the most reactions (57 reactions, 0 comments, 9 shares) was a Coldest Night of the Year post regarding fundraising. Coldest Night of the Year (also called Walk for Bissell) was mentioned 40.63% (N=26) times, demonstrating the organization's social media goal to promote events that individuals can participate in or donate to.

During the period I analysed, there were no direct requests for new sponsor or partner organizations to assist Bissell, there were no hiring posts for Bissell opportunities, and there were no stories that could be described as tragic or upsetting that pertained to houselessness. Most intriguing, there were no posts that mentioned housing or homeless policies, either for or against. The closest post regarding a policy change was a post promoting Bissell's tax clinic that highlighted a recent change to tax rules, which rules were not directly related to houselessness.

Summary of Phase 1 Data Analysis

Overall, Bissell Centre's Facebook post was primarily used to communicate promotional or action-oriented (participate, donate, etc.) messages. I observed multiple messages using a

[14] Shows average engagement data for 64 Facebook posts. 47 of the posts were from January 1 to March 26, 2023; 13 of the posts were from March 27 to April 20, 2023; and 4 posts were from April 21 to 27, 2023.

theme or notable day or holiday to introduce the post. In fact, it appears as though many posts started by mentioning the thematic period or holiday in the first sentence.

I found that Bissell Centre's Facebook aligns to a strategy and content calendar based on the thematic nature of many of the posts, which suggests that Bissell Centre is strategic in how they use their social media. Although audience was not measured and was outside the scope of this study, an unexpected finding was that service promotion posts were not necessarily directed to service users, but instead positioned as a benefit of donating, i.e., what Bissell will accomplish with donations, or as a call for support to service providers (like employers) on behalf of service users. That said, available services were communicated 17 times (26.56%), including many services such as the workforce development program (3.13%, N=2) and the free tax clinic (6.25%, N=4) being specifically named in the post. In total, however, NPO social media accounts, although a viable tool to communicate to the many individuals an NPO must reach including volunteers, participants, donors, partners, and sponsors, are not predominantly used to communicate service information to service users.

Phase 2: Interviews

This section presents findings from interviews with six participants in June and July 2023. All six participants had experience living unhoused. One participant, who was recruited as someone with experience working for an NPO, disclosed during the interview that they lived unhoused before working in the industry.

Below I explore the various insights collected from the interviews, with particular focus on perceived communication channel preferences, attitudes on digital communication, reported obstacles using digital communication channels, and organizational communication practices.

Table 3.0. Interview length, location and recruitment breakdown[15]

Group	Interview length[16]	Interview location	Recruitment
1	00:16:00	In person, Edmonton Public Library	Edmonton Public Library poster
1	00:29:00	Virtual, Google Meets	r/Edmonton subreddit
1	00:35:00	Virtual, Google Meets	r/Edmonton subreddit
1	00:30:00	Virtual, Google Meets	r/Edmonton subreddit
1	00:40:00	Virtual, Google Meets	r/Edmonton subreddit
2	01:09:00	Virtual, Google Meets	Peer contact

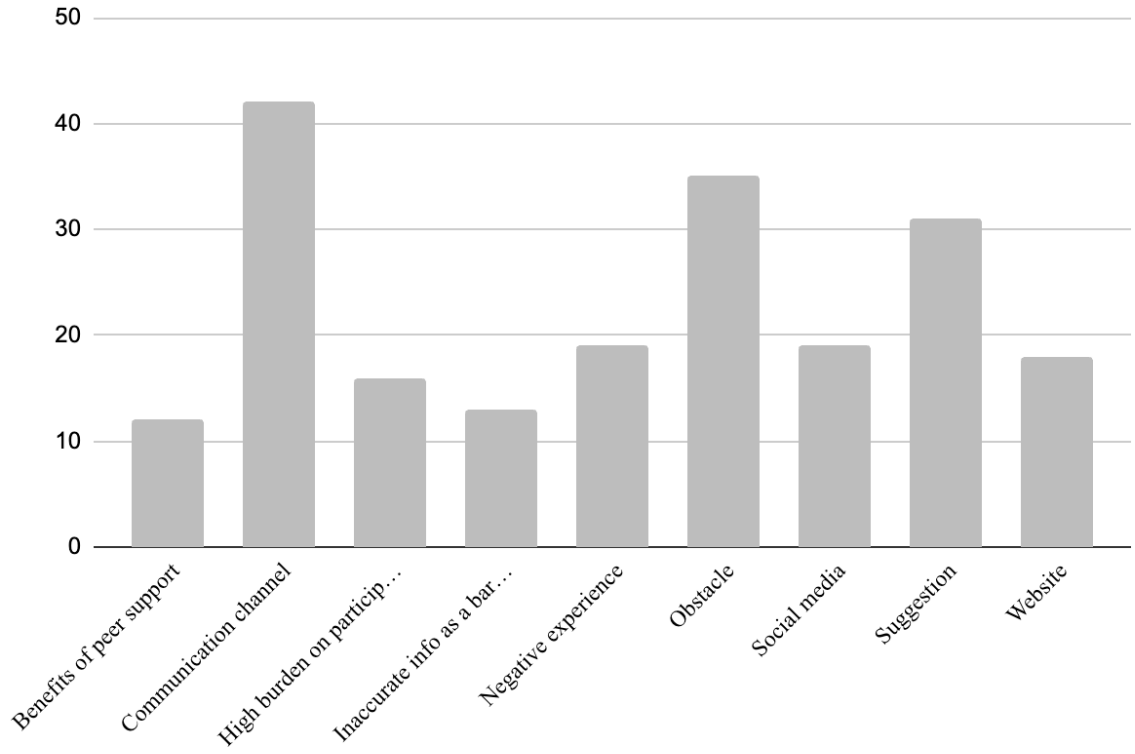
Given the difference in questions, I was only able to compare and state statistical information on participants in group one. For that reason, sections begin with comparisons, trends, and patterns on participant group one and then include related commentary from the participant in group two.

[15] 3 hours and 39 minutes in total; 36.5 minutes on average
[16] Approximate time

Overview of Findings for Phase 2 Interviews

The most common themes in interviews for participant group one were communication channels, obstacles, and suggestions.

Table 3.1. Common topics discussed in interviews



For a study on communication, it is not surprising that "communication channels" was the most discussed topic throughout interviews. Moreover, with the focus on digital barriers, it is also not surprising that "obstacles" were also highly discussed.

In interviews with participant group one, there were over 30 instances of suggestions for communication based on their opinions and lived experiences. Some suggestions for more appropriate communication with unhoused individuals included "advertisements on government websites", "influencers", "street outreach", "multilingual and accessible materials", "workshop

events", "stalls" (such as mall kiosks), "text message(s)", "flyers", and more. Other suggestions were provided in response to obstacles raised by the interview participants. For instance, one participant indicated that websites should be "easy and quick to understand… a minimum sort of definition should be there: what is this and what is that." Another participant highlighted the need for accessibility: "Information should be available in such a way that the people with disabilities… can access it."

The following sections explore the responses from participants in more detail. Drawing primarily from participants in group one, I discuss results in three areas that pertain to my research questions: channel preferences, opinions on digital communication, and digital barriers.

Perceived Communication Channel Preferences

When I asked participants in group one how they would search for information, (N=4, 80%) of participants indicated that they would attempt to find information online first. In fact, all participants discussed the benefits of using digital tools, including websites and social media, to find information. In addition, many other channels were mentioned, including chatbots, word-of-mouth communication, peer-to-peer communication, workshops, and more.

Although it is inconclusive which communication channel was preferred among group one participants, all five participants indicated that they had access to a phone while experiencing housing instability. One participant described a phone as essential: "it is a gateway into services that they need... Right there in the palm of their hand." Another participant highlighted using their phone to search for information: "it is the fastest."

However, when it came to making actual phone calls, most participants reported negative experiences involving waiting for return phone calls or calling inaccurate numbers. Two participants shared the following negative experiences regarding phone calls:

> *"...People don't really like answering phone calls. And don't give a call back. I tried for two days to contact someone out there… But I didn't get a call back."*

> *"When calling… [they] are usually busy, they don't pick up phones, like right away. And some of the services are, like, they are open from only Monday to Friday, and they are not on the weekend."*

When asked about access to phones by unhoused people in general, participants stated multiple times that, though some do not have phones, many unhoused people have their own or can access a phone. For example, one participant directly stated: "we [unhoused people] use smartphones and, you know, use social media." Similarly, another participant, when asked about finding information on support services, indicated "everything is actually sorted [out]" if they have access to a smartphone.

Participants in both groups were asked how important it was for a support service to have a digital presence, and all participants (N=6, 100%) highlighted its importance. One participant, for instance, stated: It is "very important. The list you can access… to go there or use the phone or use some else's phone… or tablet. Everyone has a phone nowadays, right?".

In terms of social media, experiences using social media to find information were primarily neutral or positive, with at least two participants highlighted social media's necessity in today's world, indicating "social media platforms play a huge role in this era" and that they "are actually the heart of today's generation, people can't live without social media." That said, there

was also one comment on how social media could be weaponized against an organization and negatively affect the organization or program's reputation:

> *"Like [if] a person didn't have a good experience in a particular center. So he might just write negative comments about it. Even though the center is really good, the staff are helpful… [they could] make fake accounts or you know ask his friends to do that… [which could] really spoil the image of that particular center."*

In all the interviews with group one, I asked participants how they would approach finding information if they did not have access to a phone or computer. Responses varied. One participant (N=1, 20%) stated "the library" and three participants (N=3, 60%) stated that they would ask to borrow someone's cell phone. One participant stated that they would seek assistance from a police officer (N=1, 20%), which, when combined with the disclosure that they were new to Canada, suggested that individuals may seek out globalized symbols of safety such as police or government services as opposed to NPOs.

In person communication was seen as beneficial and as essential at times: "listening to someone else might be fairly different." Trust was also a benefit of in person communication: "people usually tend to believe in word of mouth." At least one participant stated that they "prefer to talk to somebody" to get information and another participant stated it was "better" to use in person communication when exploring community services.

Peer-to-peer communication was also highly important for numerous reasons including providing reviews, directions to support services, spreading awareness, and more. Two participants (N=2, 40%) highlighted the importance of using peer information to vet programs.

In fact, one participant disclosed that they seek peer reviews to ensure the program is safe to use as a member of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community. Throughout the interview, this participant discussed discrimination a number of times, recounting an experience where they "walked out" of an in person housing interview, because the questions turned "vulgar" and "way too personal."

Overall, as highlighted in my introduction and literature review, people who have experienced housing instability are unique with varied opinions on which communication channel is best to reach unhoused people. As a whole, it appears that using more than one channel is the best solution so that organizations can reach individuals where they are.

With respect to the perspective of NPO employee, I learned that a multi-channel strategy is already in place at some NPOs: "we have a website; we have a long history… there is regular communications amongst the departments sent out from the community space staff [that includes a calendar on] everything from Indigenous support, church services, clothing, bank, housing workshops, community space hours, available times for laundry,… posters,... newsletters… [recurring, drop in] housing workshops." The participant continued listing strategies their organization used to communicate with unhoused people: "word of mouth is a big one. Like current word of mouth amongst community members." They also described an outreach program that involved finding individuals in places they could be, including hospitals.

Reported Obstacles using Digital Communication Channels

All participants in group one (N=5, 100%) reported perceived or experienced obstacles with using digital communication channels. Throughout the interviews with participant group one, obstacles were discussed over 35 times. The highest reported digital obstacle was tied between digital literacy and technical skill, with each concept being discussed seven times throughout the interviews within participant group one. For example, one participant disclosed that they struggled to use "certain unfamiliar digital tools" on NPO websites.

In contrast, another participant indicated that certain tools, like smartphones, are no longer difficult to operate: "using your mobile phone is not something that is complex." They continued, stating it did not require a lot of education but that it can become complicated when people start switching into a new operating system, such as between iOS and Android. This comment underscores another key concern with digital literacy and technical skills: lack of consistency among devices and even digital service providers like Microsoft and Apple. Taken together, the contrasting responses demonstrate the distinctive experiences with digital communication and varied levels of knowledge of how to operate digital tools.

Participants also highlighted other obstacles including lack of accessibility (usability by people with disabilities), poor UX or UI and complicated digital interfaces, lack of access and connectivity, and platforms that are not designed for mobile. During the interviews, three participants reported literacy or lack of technical skills (N=3, 60%), two participants highlighted privacy concerns (N=2, 40%), two participants discussed lack of access/connectivity (N=2, 40%), and two participants made statements regarding web accessibility/mobile friendliness (N=2, 40%). With respect to mobile friendliness, "I have a lot of experience where my phone

can't be used," the participant recalled, "Because the mobile will give you just the skeleton of the information".

When it came to access, though all five participants in group one reported having a phone when experiencing unstable housing (N=5, 100%), two participants indicated that connectivity and access were barriers for them at times (N=2, 40%). They indicated that they had to rely on free wifi to access the internet:

> *"I have to rely on wifi because I didn't have that much money at the time to find some packages or… subscriptions. So it was challenging for me…"*

> *"I didn't have proper internet connection, due to high subscription fees, so I had to depend on wifi. That is something which, you know, I couldn't get wifi all the time."*

The top obstacle reported by participants was information accuracy. Inaccurate information can occur in various ways, such as when links break, organization names or policies change, or, more specific to digital practices, when sites are not properly maintained or periodically audited. Inaccurate information was discussed 13 times over four interviews. The participants explained a number of situations where website or social media information was inaccurate and prevented them from accessing information in a timely manner. One participant stated they felt "fake [false] hope" when they trusted online information and attempted to visit the support service in person. They explained how they "travell[ed] over to that particular place:

> *"When it comes to that now, 'okay, this was part of what the program was offering before'. So I know that is really a waste of time and waste of money. I would say that is the most important loss… a lot for people like me.*"

The participant in group two addressed the challenges NPOs experience with respect to accurate information.

> *"Staff changes, funding changes, agency policy changes, and trying to keep up with that ourselves so that we're not mistakenly referring people to be further frustrated at another agency, because we've told them that this is what we've heard they do and then they don't do that anymore."*

Another digital barrier regarding privacy and safety revealed a key finding: It appears both lack of *and* high-level digital literacy can result in individual's feeling unsafe while using an NPO's website. This observation was made after one participant, when asked about the risks of digital platforms, commented on the increased data and security risks from using "websites, which are not made in HTTPS, like a secure protocol." Looking at my sample organization for phase 1, Bissell Centre, I found their website is made in HTTPS. However, organizations without trained web editors may not know the importance of HTTPS, which could increase the risk of unauthorized individuals accessing and stealing user data. Individuals with low, or even moderate, digital literacy may not be aware of HTTPS and how it helps protect user information, but at the same time, users with high digital literacy may feel insecure using tools that they know are unsafe.

The participant in group two, when asked about barriers or obstacles they have witnessed users experiencing, explored a long list of digital barriers that can affect unhoused people such as inclusive design, accessibility, lack of access, facility and service bans, costs, and more.

> *"You know, it's a privilege…, I own my own laptop…. Most of our participants do not have that luxury. Some of them due to mental health have been banned from the library…. [preventing] them from accessing… the other free source of using a computer…. Even if they have a computer, do they have internet? Internet can be very expensive."*

On language and literacy barriers in particular, they indicated that their organization works with people "who have organic brain injuries…, have had strokes…, damage to their eyes [and are]... partially or fully blind."

This participant also underscored digital applications that can "feel invasive" depending on what information or documents a person is required to submit. The participant continued, noting how someone who is unfamiliar with digital devices and safety could react to submitting an application online: it's "this box that your stuff goes out in the air and anybody can grab it." Overall, if a participant was already concerned with security, submitting personal information and documents online may trigger feelings of distress.

Attitudes Regarding Digital Communication

For the most part, participants recorded positive experiences with digital communication, highlighting moments where digital communication helped them find the service they required. However, at the same time, some participants recounted negative experiences with obtaining information about a support service as a whole—not necessarily through digital communication. I discovered that strain on service users was a negative experience that was expressed over 15

times by all five participants of group one. Two examples highlighted by participants included requiring several eligibility interviews to qualify for a program and “stand[ing] outside and lin[ing] up in the cold” to access temporary housing.

That said, even while expressing their frustrations with communication on support services, multiple participants clarified that they understood the barriers NPOs face when it came to communication channels and accurate information, while also supporting the high volume of service users that required their assistance, often urgently. As one person put it: “they are handling people in… bulk quantities. So, you know, they don't have the ability to concentrate on every one at a time.”

The participant in group two was asked their opinion on AI. The participant underscored the need for human interaction when working with people who may be in crisis. They stated that although this could be done digitally, such as through text message, having a legitimate, human exchange was essential when working with people in need. The participant stated communicating with a person when experiencing housing instability can help to minimize frustrations or even fear (i.e., lack of understanding of digital privacy). Moreover, the participant, who disclosed that they were Indigenous, indicated that their culture also affected their view of AI. Although AI was not discussed with other participants, this response alone suggests that some cultures, such as Indigenous cultures, may not be comfortable with using AI to obtain assistance during a crisis.

Additional Findings

There were other insights that I found interesting and valuable. These insights are not directly related to the research questions or digital communication, but highlight other challenges regarding the communication of support services. One participant, for example, spoke about "two contrasting experiences" when they attempted to find support.

For the first experience, they recounted their frustration as they waited for a support service to call them back: "I sometimes felt that they were pretending to care," they stated, "I tried for two days to contact someone… But I didn't get a call back."

This participant continued, explaining the time they waited "for a very long time in the cold… just to be rejected".

In fact, the participant was told to wait by several NPO workers: "people just start a folder, there was one or two staff who just sort of said, I don't care, you need to wait, you need to wait."

In a more positive experience, the participant described a tiring day, but cheerfully highlighted that they were treated with respect and received help that same day: "I even got four pieces of clothing and just $18, which is something I would remember."

Another notable finding was participants exploring the importance of community responsibility and assisting your neighbour: "Individual people can make some small contribution, you know, to help people find accommodation."

Lastly, another relevant discovery was the importance of trust with service providers. Trust, as well as obtaining reviews or endorsements from peers or experts, was mentioned numerous times. In fact, participants from group one proposed a variety of solutions to address trust from using "influencers" and government ads, to creating a "peer to peer network"

involving "people who have successfully transitioned into stable housing." Social media also played a key role in trust. For example, as one participant indicated:

> *"So if they have Instagram… and they regularly, say, upload stories, upload summaries, fundraise or… [post] important information…. the more online engagement, the better a person will feel about that particular place. Okay, like Bissell Center is one where, okay, they are now posting good things…. [The people] might be feeling secure and safe over there. It also reflects through the comment section…. [and] a person who is in need, like me, I can see the comments, I can see their reviews on the social media platform."*

Summary of Phase 2 Findings

In this section, I explored the findings from the six semi-structured interviews I conducted with individuals who have experience with houselessness personally or professionally. I explored interview responses under three main themes: communication channel preferences, reported obstacles with digital communication channels, and attitudes on digital communication. I also highlighted additional insights regarding one participant's contrasting experiences and the importance of trust with service providers.

Overall, it was not conclusive which channel was most preferred by houseless people. However, my findings confirmed that people experiencing houselessness can typically access and use digital communication channels. Moreover, my research demonstrates that NPOs can improve access and usability of their digital channels and tools by simplifying the information and design.

Numerous obstacles such as inconsistent access to the internet and—at times—digital skill disparity, the interviews confirmed the presence of the first and second level digital divides (e.g., access to connectivity and devices and competency using digital tools and devices).

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

In this chapter, I reflect on my study and connect my findings to existing literature. I summarize my analysis and discuss key observations regarding using digital communications to reach unhoused people, the still-in-effect digital divide, competing communication priorities, accountability for communication, and additional findings on social media as a tool for fundraising and peer communication networks. I conclude this section by presenting limitations and ideas for future research.

Using Digital Communication to Reach Unhoused People

Throughout my literature review, I explored the research on unhoused people and their communication preferences. Similar to the findings by previous researchers (e.g., Allen et al., 2022, Humphrey, 2014, Rhoades et al., 2017), all five interview participants, who had experienced housing instability, had access to a mobile phone. That said, it was also true that consistent access and internet connectivity (e.g., Allen et al., 2022) were also described as obstacles by interview participants.

Like previous literature, which found that self-service channels could exacerbate feelings of distress for individuals experiencing a crisis, two interview participants explored feelings of frustration surrounding navigating NPO websites to research information on support.

In addition, the previous research underscored the value of face-to-face communication, indicating that it was preferred for the delivery program information for unhoused individuals. Two participants in group one stated in person communication was the best method, and the participant who worked for an NPO, also stressed the value of in-person communication above all else: “we're all humans in this, and we need to have that human experience together. And I need to know, I need to feel your need, so that you feel less burdened.” These findings are

consistent with media richness theory, which indicates face-to-face communication is the richest medium and is ideal for communicating with people experiencing distress.

Existing literature also specified that print communication can be beneficial. During interviews, I also found that participants suggested print communication, such as flyers or calendars, especially to communicate to individuals who do not use or have access to digital communication channels.

Lastly, previous studies did not recommend phone call communication because it could lead to mental strain on individuals. Likewise, participants discussed numerous negative experiences regarding phone calls, including the challenges faced with "try[ing] to say everything on the phone." My findings are consistent with previous studies, confirming that telephone communication is not an ideal channel for unhoused people.

Taken together, it is clear that people prefer a variety of communication channels depending on their own experiences. In other words, as explored in the stereotypes section of my Capstone, a robust communication strategy to reach diverse unhoused people cannot narrow down the preferences to one or two primary channels. In fact, as indicated by Desjarlais-DeKlerk (2017) it is a misconception that unhoused individuals have "shared characteristics" and "identify with one another" (p. 14). Although some groups may have similar preferences, individuals experiencing houselessness have unique identities and an effective communication strategy would be equally as unique and diverse to reach the many different types of people who are living at risk or unhoused.

The Unyielding First and Second Level Digital Divides

Although previous studies confirmed that the digital divide still negatively impacts individuals with a lower socio-economic background, researchers did not agree on whether the

divide was closing or expanding (e.g., Regnadda, 2020; Rhoades et al., 2017). Likewise, my findings show the divide closing in some regards, such as access to mobile devices, but also expanding in others, particularly as new technologies are integrated into everyday use and possibly change the landscape of how healthcare and support services are accessed. Moreover, one interview response regarding NPOs using the HTTPs protocol prompts the question: who is technically falling behind in the digital space, the service users or service providers?

Based on my analysis of their Facebook posts, the Bissell Centre appeared to understand the basics of digital marketing. However, the Bissell Centre is not the only organization that serves unhoused people and based on them being operational for decades, I can surmise that their digital platform is likely managed better than other NPOs who may be less known and receive less funding. Throughout interviews, in fact, multiple participants described obstacles that can stem from ineffective or incorrect UX and UI. For example, one participant expressed frustration, commenting that they had to "go deeper and deeper… through each and every tab and such things like that."

As technology continues to expand into new areas, like AI, "smart technologies", or "algorithmic governance" (Regnadda, 2020, p. 40), I suspect fewer service provides will support offline methods of communication and the digital divide will continue to grow—potentially leading to many more marginalized individuals feeling incapable of navigating digital channels or tools.

Competing Priorities in NPOs

In previous literature, it was found that NPOs are currently burdened with competing organization priorities. A simplified example is an NPO choosing between fundraising or developing a new curriculum to support a new programing. My findings were consistent in this

regard. When looking at Bissell Centre's Facebook posts, for instance, it is clear that posts have more than one objective, with most posts falling under promotion, fundraising, or both promotion and fundraising.

Interview responses also explored the variety of expectations for NPOs, including "handling people in bulk quantities", keeping information up to date, and being responsive to service users when needed. For example, one response from the participant who worked for an NPO also corroborated the range of responsibilities expected from NPOs when they described keeping up with various changes: "staff changes, funding changes, agency policy changes," etc.

Who's Responsible for Communication?

Accountability for communication of support services is a tricky concept. Existing literature suggests that NPOs manage their own communication and this was substantiated in my findings based on participants in group one describing websites and social accounts managed by Edmonton NPOs and with the participant in group two listing a wide range of strategies employed by their organization.

As suggested in the literature review, there does not appear to be any higher authority (such as municipal, provincial, or federal governments) who are accountable for the communication of services to unhoused people. Instead, NPOs communicate their own services to their community, a strategy that aligns to the multi-step flow theory. However, this strategy can also hinder individuals from finding services quickly and easily when organizations do not update their information properly or miscommunicate services provided by alternate NPOs. Within interviews, participants indicated inaccurate information at the number one barrier preventing them from accessing services, but with NPOs already handling a range of objectives, the question becomes is an NPO the only group responsible for communicating services to

unhoused people and at what point is a public health communication campaign needed to assist with the delivery of service information to unhoused people?

Additional Insights

Social Media, a Tool for Fundraising

My findings indicated that social media communication can effectively reach unhoused people. However, my findings also determined that social media is primarily used as a fundraising or promotional tool and donors and participants were the primary audiences. In fact, the participant who worked for an NPO reported that social media helped "the privileged community… see what's going on, and be able to know where they can help." They continued by recounting a time when a call for water on social media resulted in "trucks filled with water" pulling up to donate. Moreover, it appears that social media as a fundraising tool can also benefit individuals experiencing houselessness by establishing trust through the sharing stories of people they've helped and the types of replies they receive on their posts.

Peer Communication Networks

Peer communication was a theme found in both my content analysis and interview results. For instance, Bissell Centre's Facebook included various posts that encouraged event participants to share the event with friends. Likewise, peer communication was discussed multiple times in each interview. Some participants highlighted their role in supporting their friends and others discussed the benefits of reviewing peer information to determine if a service was worthwhile.

These findings, alongside existing literature around the use of the r/Homeless subreddit (Bhandari & Sun, 2021) and the need for emotional support and support networks to help individuals stay resilient (Zare, 2016), suggest that the unhoused community would benefit from

an online forum specifically regarding houselessness in Edmonton. In fact, with the successful communication Bhandari and Sun (2021) observed on r/Homeless and my success in recruiting through r/Edmonton, developing a subreddit such as r/Houselessyeg may help individuals connect with information and support from their peers.

Limitations and Future Research

There are a number of limitations with the replicability of this study. First, due to resourcing, I was required to limit my data samples. By reviewing only one social platform for one NPO in Edmonton, Alberta, the replicability of my study will be affected. Moreover, I was only able to interview six participants in total (five from participant group one and one from participant group two), which reduced the variety of perspectives I was able to gather and impacted the generalizability of my study as a whole.

In addition, I was only able to find one person who worked for a NPO, so I was unable to compare their viewpoints with other participants. This limited the variability of my study. Lastly, without a second coder, I was unable to achieve "intercoder reliability" (Query et al., 2009, p. 90), which also affects the variability of my study.

In review, if I replicated this study, I would directly ask participants their preferred communication channel. Although I was able to identify channel preferences through various responses from participants, a direct question on communication preferences may have indicated a definitive communication preference or illuminated alternative channel opportunities for NPOs such as TikTok or Discord.

To end, this Capstone study provided an initial exploration of a perceived communication gap, and there are various future studies that could explore this gap in more detail. For instance, researchers could compare the social media posts of multiple NPOs in Edmonton, Alberta, or

Canada. Likewise, researchers could explore the digital divide, particularly as it relates to healthcare and the implementation of new technologies. Another study could explore a digital community for houseless individuals, such as by creating and analyzing an r/Houselessyeg subreddit. Lastly, in my initial investigation, I found a City of Edmonton webpage that, based on the page title, seemed to focus on Edmonton's response to houselessness rather than helping unhoused people, so future research on government-specific houselessness communication would also be worthwhile.

Conclusion

For this Capstone paper, I examined a perceived gap in the communication pathway for support services for low-income and houseless individuals. Despite some houseless individuals being indiscernible to researchers, previous literature confirmed digital communication channels are effective in reaching unhoused people, particularly as access to digital devices like mobile phones become more affordable and common among houseless people. Through an analysis of social media communication by a support service organization in Edmonton and six semi-structured interviews with individuals with professional and lived experience, my study validated the use of digital communication to reach unhoused people, but highlighted the importance of using multiple communication channels (including print or in person channels), sharing clear and straightforward information, and adhering to web accessibility best practices.

Furthermore, my research and earlier research (Addorisio et al., 2022) establish the existence of a communication gap specifically in Edmonton, Alberta, thus suggesting it would be beneficial to implement a comprehensive communication plan, ideally across multiple NPOs, or a public health communication campaign to help unhoused individuals. I end my Capstone report with the words of one of my interview participants, who eloquently stated:

> *"Information is power; knowledge is power. There are a lot of people out there who are homeless over… the fact that [they are unaware of] the right information, the right resources… even when there are opportunities for them."*

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Appendices

Appendix A. Definition of Terms

For the purposes of this study:

- *Non-profit organization (NPO),* unless stated otherwise, means non-profit organizations offering front-line services to low-income or unhoused people.
- *Support services,* in the context of this study, refers to support services for low-income or unhoused people. Some support services can include:
    - "Housing support"
    - "Advice and information"
    - "Health and psychosocial wellbeing support"
    - "Furniture support"
    - "Employment support"
    - "Food assistance"
    - "Education/training"
    - "Community development and networking"

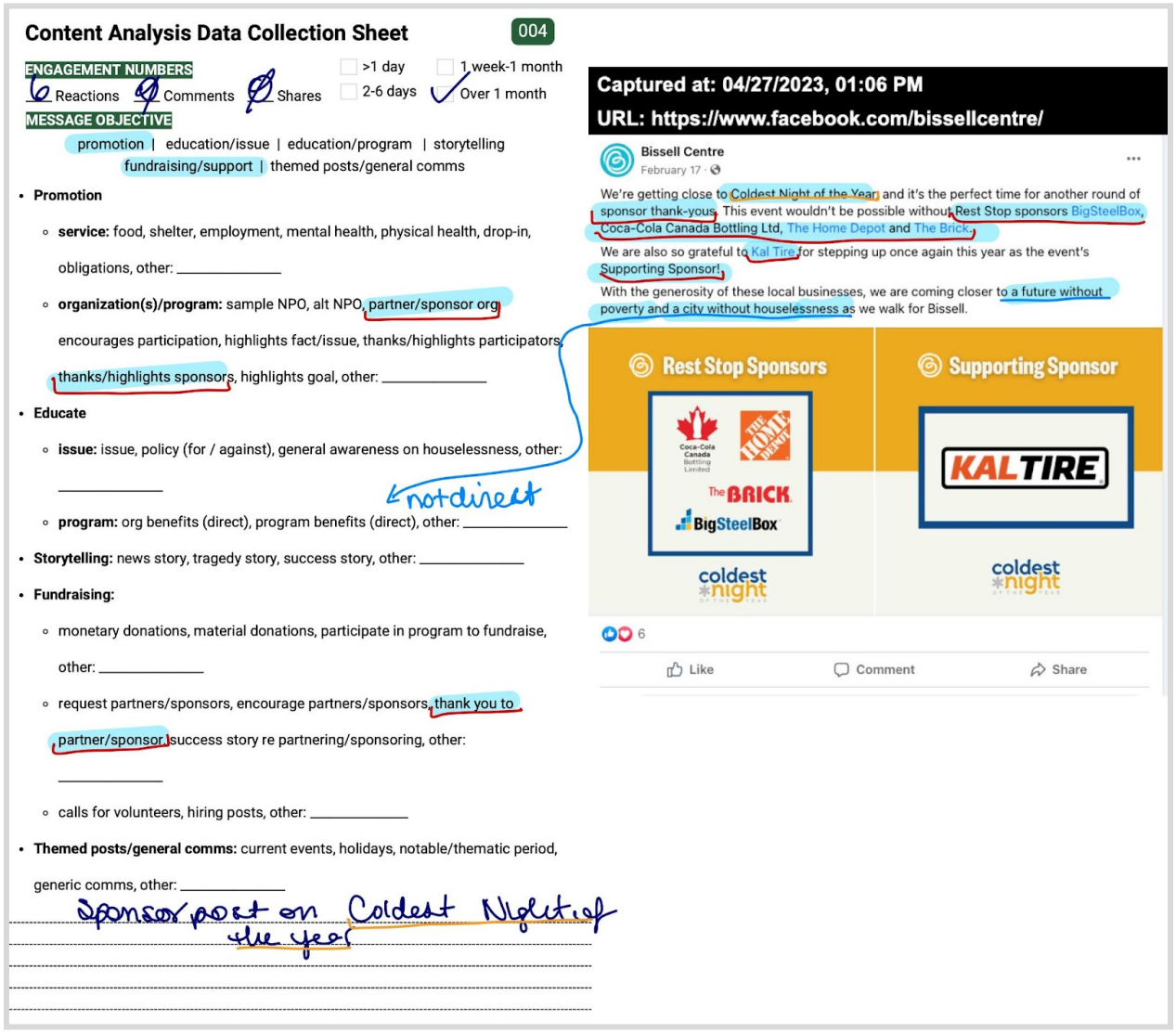
    (Rodriguez et al., 2021, p. 184)
- *Unhoused, houseless, unsheltered, roofless, homeless,* and other similar terms refer to the community of individuals who are experiencing hidden, temporary, episodic, or chronic homelessness (Echenberg & Munn-Rivard, 2020; Strobel et al., 2021).

For this study, there is no operational definition of houselessness because housing instability is not widely uncommon, and the research question can be answered by individuals who self-disclose as someone who has experienced houselessness. Research supports the use of self-identification for houselessness because, as highlighted by Scharrer and Ramasubramanian

(2021), operationalizing definitions can lead to othering. In social justice research, using "concepts"—although "a bit abstract"—can "represent relatively shared and widely accepted notions of what terms mean" (Scharrer & Ramasubramanian, 2021, p. 48).

Appendix B. Content Analysis Data Sheet

This content analysis sheet was developed by testing five to ten of the Facebook posts.



Content Analysis Data Collection Sheet 004

ENGAGEMENT NUMBERS
6 Reactions 9 Comments Ø Shares
☐ >1 day ☐ 1 week-1 month
☐ 2-6 days ✓ Over 1 month

MESSAGE OBJECTIVE
promotion | education/issue | education/program | storytelling
fundraising/support | themed posts/general comms

- **Promotion**
  - **service:** food, shelter, employment, mental health, physical health, drop-in, obligations, other: _____
  - **organization(s)/program:** sample NPO, alt NPO, partner/sponsor org encourages participation, highlights fact/issue, thanks/highlights participators, thanks/highlights sponsors, highlights goal, other: _____
- **Educate**
  - **issue:** issue, policy (for / against), general awareness on houselessness, other: _____
  - **program:** org benefits (direct), program benefits (direct), other: _____ not direct
- **Storytelling:** news story, tragedy story, success story, other: _____
- **Fundraising:**
  - monetary donations, material donations, participate in program to fundraise, other: _____
  - request partners/sponsors, encourage partners/sponsors, thank you to partner/sponsor, success story re partnering/sponsoring, other: _____
  - calls for volunteers, hiring posts, other: _____
- **Themed posts/general comms:** current events, holidays, notable/thematic period, generic comms, other: _____

Sponsor post on Coldest Night of the year

Captured at: 04/27/2023, 01:06 PM
URL: https://www.facebook.com/bissellcentre/

Bissell Centre
February 17 ·

We're getting close to Coldest Night of the Year, and it's the perfect time for another round of sponsor thank-yous. This event wouldn't be possible without Rest Stop sponsors BigSteelBox, Coca-Cola Canada Bottling Ltd, The Home Depot and The Brick.

We are also so grateful to Kal Tire for stepping up once again this year as the event's Supporting Sponsor!

With the generosity of these local businesses, we are coming closer to a future without poverty and a city without houselessness as we walk for Bissell.

Rest Stop Sponsors
Supporting Sponsor
KALTIRE
coldest night

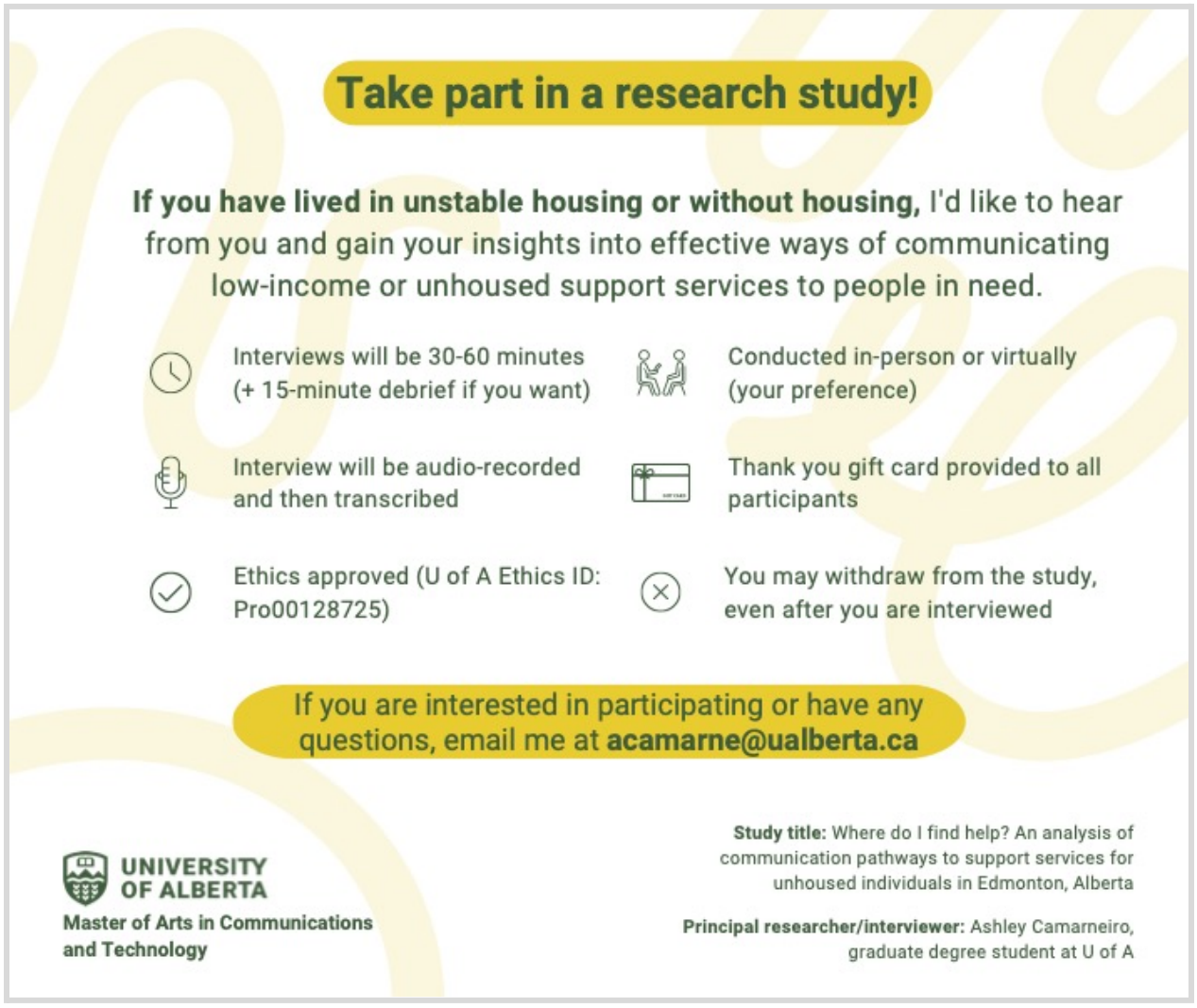
6
Like Comment Share

When transferring my content to my Google Sheet, I made some adjustments to the higher level categories as described on this content analysis sheet. Although this content sheet was helpful by allowing me to analyze the post and my opinions multiple times, this format allowed room for error when copying information to the Google Sheet. For future studies, I would revise this sheet so that I started with a digital tool that could capture—and count—all my codes.

Appendix C. Example of coding sheet with JOIN and COUNTIF formulas visible.

Item	Example	Count
All	=JOIN(", ", FILTER($A3:$A12, $B3:$B12=TRUE))	
Promote (service)	☐	=COUNTIF($B3, TRUE)
Promote (event)	☐	=COUNTIF($B4, TRUE)
Promote (org/partner)	☐	=COUNTIF($B5, TRUE)
Educate (issue)	☐	=COUNTIF($B6, TRUE)
Educate (org/program)	☐	=COUNTIF($B7, TRUE)
Storytelling	☐	=COUNTIF($B8, TRUE)
Fundraising (donate money, items or time)	☐	=COUNTIF($B9, TRUE)
Fundraising (partners/sponsors)	☐	=COUNTIF($B10, TRUE)
Alternative support (volunteer / hiring)	☐	=COUNTIF($B11, TRUE)
Themed posts / general comms	☐	=COUNTIF($B12, TRUE)
Program (service)	=JOIN(", ", FILTER($A14:$A21, $B14:$B21=TRUE))	
Food	☐	=COUNTIF($B14, TRUE)
Shelter	☐	=COUNTIF($B15, TRUE)
Employment	☐	=COUNTIF($B16, TRUE)
Mental health	☐	=COUNTIF($B17, TRUE)
Physical health	☐	=COUNTIF($B18, TRUE)
Drop-in	☐	=COUNTIF($B19, TRUE)
Obligations	☐	=COUNTIF($B20, TRUE)
Other:	☐	=COUNTIF($B21, TRUE)

Appendix D. Recruitment Poster



Appendix E. Mental Health Resources for Participants

This document was prepared to mitigate risks around traumatic disclosure. Two interview participants asked about the document but neither wanted to be sent a copy.

Mental Health Resources for Interview Participants

***For emergencies, please call 911**

24-hour Distress Line for immediate support
- Call 780-482-HELP (4357)

Online crisis chat
- Chat with someone one-on-one online at edmonton.cmha.ca

Information and to find social, health, and government services (open 24/7)
- Call 211 (or text 211 and type INFO)
- View more information at ab.211.ca

Wellness Together Canada (one-on-one mental health professional)
- Call 1-866-585-0445 or text WELLNESS to 741741 for adults
- More information and resources at wellnesstogether.ca

talksuicide.ca
- Call 1-833-456-4566 (toll free; open 24/7)
- Text 45645 (4 p.m. – midnight ET)

Hope for Wellness Help Line (for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples)
- Call 1-855-242-3310 (toll-free; open 24/7)

Alberta Health Services Addiction and Mental Health Numbers
- Mental Health Helpline - 1-877-303-2642 (open 24/7)
- Addiction Helpline - 1-866-332-2322 (open 24/7)
- Health Link - 811
    - More information at myhealth.alberta.ca

Resources
ab.211.ca
ab.211.ca/how-we-help/contact/
albertahealthservices.ca/amh
canada.ca/en/public-health/services/mental-health-services/mental-health-get-help
edmonton.cmha.ca
edmonton.cmha.ca/brochure/211-2/
myhealth.alberta.ca
talksuicide.ca
wellnesstogether.ca

Resource from Research Study by Ashley Camarneiro | Ethics ID: Pro00128725

Appendix F. Website accessibility report (Lighthouse)

Accessibility

These checks highlight opportunities to improve the accessibility of your web app. Only a subset of accessibility issues can be automatically detected so manual testing is also encouraged.

NAMES AND LABELS

- ▲ Image elements do not have `[alt]` attributes
- ▲ Form elements do not have associated labels
- ▲ Links do not have a discernible name

These are opportunities to improve the semantics of the controls in your application. This may enhance the experience for users of assistive technology, like a screen reader.

BEST PRACTICES

- ▲ `[user-scalable="no"]` is used in the `<meta name="viewport">` element or the `[maximum-scale]` attribute is less than 5.

These items highlight common accessibility best practices.

CONTRAST

- ▲ Background and foreground colors do not have a sufficient contrast ratio.

These are opportunities to improve the legibility of your content.

INTERNATIONALIZATION AND LOCALIZATION

- ▲ `<html>` element does not have a `[lang]` attribute

These are opportunities to improve the interpretation of your content by users in different locales.

NAVIGATION

- ▲ Heading elements are not in a sequentially-descending order

These are opportunities to improve keyboard navigation in your application.

ADDITIONAL ITEMS TO MANUALLY CHECK (10) Show

These items address areas which an automated testing tool cannot cover. Learn more in our guide on conducting an accessibility review.

PASSED AUDITS (10) Show

Appendix G. Codes and Findings for Phase 1 Content Analysis

The objectives collected can broadly be identified as promotion, education, storytelling, fundraising/support, general communications. Below is a full list of the codes used for my examination and the number of posts that met that criteria.

My codesheet also included ‘other’ and sections for memo writing.

Categories	**Count**	**%**
Promote (service)	17	26.56%
Promote (org/partner)	38	59.38%
Educate (issue)	2	3.13%
Educate (org/program)	17	26.56%
Storytelling	7	10.94%
Fundraising (donate money, items)	17	26.56%
Fundraising (donors/participation)	18	28.13%
Fundraising (org partners/sponsors)	8	12.50%
Alternative support (volunteer / hiring)	6	9.38%
Themed posts / general comms	27	42.19%
Program (service)		
Food	3	4.69%
Shelter	2	3.13%
Employment	4	6.25%
Mental health	2	3.13%
Physical health	2	3.13%
Drop-in	2	3.13%
Obligations	8	12.50%
Other: Tax Filing Services	4	6.25%
Other: Child Care Services	1	1.56%

Categories	Count	%
Other:	4	6.25%
Promote (org)		
Sample NPO	32	50.00%
Alt NPO	3	4.69%
Partner/sponsor org	10	15.63%
Other: Alt org	6	9.38%
Other org: Not directly listed as sponsor	3	4.69%
Educate (not org or program related)		
Issue	1	1.56%
Policy (for or against)	0	0.00%
General awareness on houselessness	1	1.56%
Educate (Org/program)		
Org benefits	4	6.25%
Program benefits	6	9.38%
Other: Event benefits	8	12.50%
Sharing a story		
News story	1	1.56%
Tragedy story	0	0.00%
Success story	3	4.69%
Other: Lived Experience	2	3.13%
Other:	1	1.56%
Fundraising		
Monetary donations	11	17.19%
Material donations	2	3.13%
Highlights fact/issue (for funding)	2	3.13%
Highlights goal	3	4.69%

Categories	Count	%
Other: Purchase to donate	8	12.50%
Fundraising (donor participation)		
Encourages participation	10	15.63%
Thanks/highlights participators	11	17.19%
Participate in program to fundraise	15	23.44%
Participate org sponsors/partner		
Request partners/sponsors	0	0.00%
Encourage partners/sponsors	1	1.56%
Thank you to partner/sponsor	8	12.50%
Success story re partnering/sponsoring	3	4.69%
Alternative support for Bissell		
Calls for volunteers	6	9.38%
Hiring posts	0	0.00%
Themed posts/general		
Current event	1	1.56%
Holiday	3	4.69%
Notable/thematic period	18	28.13%
General comms	7	10.94%