At Home in the North: Visual Storytelling
July 22, 2021

The purpose of this meeting was to introduce the idea of a coordinated, collaborative AHIN visual storytelling project. The meeting was led by Eric Weissman, assistant professor at UNB, who has experience using visual storytelling tools to communicate and share knowledge about peoples' lived experiences with homelessness. Below is a summary of Eric's presentation and the discussion that followed.

For more details about some of the visual storytelling tools discussed in this meeting, and examples of Eric's prior work, please see the recording and PowerPoint presentation posted to the At Home in the North website (www.athomeinthenorth.org). You can also contact Eric directly (eric.weissman@unb.ca) if you have question, would like more information, or want to be involved in the project.

Presentation: Visualizing Place

Using visual storytelling tools can be a powerful means of mobilizing knowledge about housing needs and challenges to a wide audience, and there is an opportunity for this Partnership to coordinate to produce a highly impactful series of stories about the lived experiences of homelessness in the North. The goal of this project would be to create a virtual community to collaborate on a number of different visual components, which can help us (and other stakeholders) understand what place and home means to people.

Indigenous, remote, and underhoused communities tend to be at the very end of internet and communication services provided to communities in Canada. When a community has limited internet access, it can be difficult to be engaged. The North is also a vast and diverse region. By reaching out to these communities and generating virtual content, we can provide developers, administrators, and communities with a clear understanding of local concerns. This approach can also be used to share information between people across the North about how they are adapting and navigating their housing challenges.

Visual storytelling content can include online interviews (over Zoom, Skype, etc.), video recordings of important places, stories, and activities, photographs of important items (textiles, fashion, food, etc.), art (drawings, paintings, graffiti, tattoos, etc.), design concepts (e.g., poor designs vs. good designs). It can feature many different groups of people (residents, elders, architects, youth, scholars, landlords, administrators, etc.). An important aspect of the project would also be a collaborative editing process, which would allow those participating and generating content to be involved in editing and approving the final products. The specific topics, tools, platforms, and people involved in the project can be tailored to the particular needs of the communities participating.

Immediate objectives:

- Outreach, establishing connections, and invitations;
- Thematic groups to determine main questions to address within their networks;
- Determine digital and technical capacities and establish protocols for content creation;
- Set up data collection, logging, and storage systems on the website, as well as design and implement interactive pages.

<u>Main discussion points</u>

Overall, the project proposal received positive feedback and interest from meeting attendees. The main points that were brought up were:

1. The need to develop a strategy for getting people involved.
   It was suggested that a Facebook campaign would be useful. It was also suggested that AHIN members could access their various media connections to generate interest in the project. CBC and CTV have recently been interested in featuring housing issues, and that existing interest could be used to direct people's attention to the project and as an avenue for engagement.

2. The need to compartmentalize and coordinate.
   There is a need to compartmentalize this project into different phases and tasks, all with different objectives. There is also a lot of research, initiatives, and collaborations happening within the AHIN network, and it would be great to open this up to feature the people working on these issues within and adjacent to AHIN. The AHIN website could become a repository for many kinds of stories and work. Collaboration with other networks would be beneficial as well, such as CMHC and the visual storytelling projects that they are working on.
   It will be important to take an inventory of what visual storytelling projects are already being pursued within and outside of AHIN.

3. Ethical and respectful methods.
   Ethical considerations will need to be discussed in detail to ensure participants are protected, and no information is shared that they are not comfortable with. This is especially important when working with families and children. It was emphasized that collaborative editing with participants will be an important part of this project that helps ensure final products are acceptable and appropriate.