

Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

RAE BRIDGMAN, *Safe Haven: The Story of a Shelter for Homeless Women*. University of Toronto Press, 2003. Bibliographic references and index. ISBN 0-8020-4240-6 (bound), ISBN 0-8020-8084-7 (paperback)

Over the past two decades, homelessness has become a significant social problem in large urban areas in Canada and worldwide. Some of the factors that contribute to this growing social malaise are: the lack of affordable housing; cuts to welfare; removal of rent controls; unstable employment due to globalization, off-shoring and outsourcing; the release of inpatients from large mental institutions; and drug addiction and lack of treatment services. Less recognized is the gendered nature of homelessness. A disproportionate number of women live in poverty. Increasingly, women living on the streets have a history of abuse. They have fled home because of abusive spouses or fathers. However, women living on the streets are exposed to increased risk of violence at the hands of strangers. Housing for homeless women must address women's need for safety, support, and community.

The construction of one housing project designed to address the gender-specific needs of homeless women is documented in detail in Rae Bridgman's anthropological account, *Safe Haven, The Story of a Shelter for Homeless Women*. Bridgman, an associate professor in City Planning at the University of Manitoba, has considerable knowledge and understanding of homelessness, having received several Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada grants on housing chronically homeless women and as the co-author an earlier work, *The Anthropology of Homelessness*, with Irene Glasser.

Savard's is a second generation housing project developed by the Homes First Society in Toronto. Built with a utopian feminist vision, Savard's is a homeless shelter with very few rules, no curfews, no barrings or evictions, no expectation to change, and no requirement to take medication. The non-judgmental and non-intervention climate of this model of housing stands in stark contrast to the predominant 'continuum of care' model espoused by conservative governments that view the homeless as individuals requiring treatment and reform and stipulate adherence to psychiatric medication, abstinence from drug use, and adherence to rules as a condition for using homeless shelters.

Rae Bridgman was invited to document the design and development of this innovative housing project in 1994. This work represents an extension of her previous research on homelessness in Toronto; the development of the pilot housing project, Street City. Data collection was extensive and meticulous: participant observation; field notes of meetings; minutes of staff meetings; daily logbooks, and interviews with administrative staff. Conducting anthropological

research in this unstable environment clearly presented challenges. How does one unobtrusively observe and record the day-to-day activities of vulnerable and mistrustful residents, the dynamics between staff and residents, and the challenges faced by staff in implementing this utopian model of housing while dealing with funding uncertainties and burnout? Bridgman skillfully manages to present a sensitively written account of a unique housing project and the research conducted during its initial development. She inspires us to conduct innovative research that can change the society we live in for the better.

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