

Final Report

135 & 103 Bannerman Avenue

Residents' Perceptions on their Housing Condition

Submitted to Byron Williams, Director

Public Interest Law Centre

Submitted by Susan Mulligan, MCP

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Objective

The purpose of this research document was to provide Byron Williams, Director of the Public Interest Law Centre, Winnipeg, Manitoba, with an objective account of the perceived living conditions and surrounding area on behalf of the residential tenants of 135 and 103 Bannerman Avenue in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Methodology

The research method applied was ethnographic. Ethnographic research employs a method of writing that is both qualitative and quantitative. Qualitative research relies on responses from individuals for the information rather than raw numeric data (quantitative research). Qualitative research values the opinions and perspective of the individuals who are participating as subjects in the research process. Ethnographic research is also based on fieldwork, which refers to face-to-face interviewing. Part of this qualitative process involved spending time at 135 and 103 Bannerman on various days during the research process. There was of great importance in gaining the insight of the persons who live in both locations and the ethnographic research methodology assisted in obtaining these insights.

As previously stated, the methods employed were one-on-one interviews with the use of a survey tool in order to gauge participant perception of the living environment and the surrounding neighbourhood of 135 and 103 Bannerman Avenue in Winnipeg, Manitoba. The survey tool included both open and closed-ended questions. About twenty-one residents live in 135 Bannerman and eight reside in 103 Bannerman. The goal was to interview 100 per cent of the residents. Seventeen surveys were completed out of the total of about twenty-nine potential participants. Twelve of the participants live at 135 Bannerman, and the remaining reside at 103 Bannerman.

Date of Survey (2007)	Number of Surveys
Thursday, December 20 th	3
Friday, December 21 st	5
Saturday, December 22 nd	5
Friday, December 28 nd	4
Total	17

Special attention was paid to how the surveys were conducted. The participants were aware that their personal housing tenure is under threat and evictions may occur in the very near future. The goal was to attain information related to the survey that was not influenced by this or other perceived threats.

Valuable time was spent in the common area of 135 Bannerman Avenue, before and during the time period of conducting surveys. This enabled observation of the environment and a level of comfort with the surroundings was obtained. The goal was also for the residents to get comfortable with my presence. This time spent in the facility was important because within the past two weeks there had been disruptions in their personal space. These disruptions included the presence of the media and several visits by various City of Winnipeg officials who conducted inspections of the facilities. The goal was to not to “befriend” the participants but to aid in not upsetting them further with disruptive actions in their place of residence.

In addition, special attention was also taken to not view any of the recent media accounts or to communicate with the building owner. The goal was to achieve an opinion of the housing situation in an objective fashion, without influence.

During the interview/survey process, the following measures were taken:

- Personal attire was dressed down, non-bureaucratic, non-official while on research site;
- There was a conscious effort to apply absolutely no pressure to participate in the survey process;
- The use of plain language was engaged;
- Interviews took place in privacy, unless the participant requested otherwise (no-one requested this);
- Interviews took place in the common area;
- Participants were screened as to whether they were under the protection of the Public Trustee or whether they had a special decision maker, and all respondents replied no;
- A statement of informed consent was read to and explained to participants with an opportunity to respond if there were any related questions;
- One participant had a low literacy level and the survey was read and signed once understanding of the survey and process was deemed appropriate;
- All participants had the opportunity to withdraw at anytime, refuse to answer questions of their choosing and were informed that the information would not be traced to their personal identification; and
- All participants were informed that the information provided may be used in legal proceedings by the Public Interest Law Centre in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Limitations

The limitations within this research were that a portion of the residents were reluctant to participate. The majority of the residents have mental disabilities and some have substance use issues. In addition, two of the participants experience Paranoid Schizophrenia* which contributed to a decreased interest in participation levels. However, by proceeding with the interview/survey process in a manner that was unobtrusive, this limitation had decreased with time spent at the facility and additional surveys were completed. Some of the respondents, who at one time indicated that they would not participate, changed their position and came forth to participate on their own accord.

Survey Results and Analysis

The survey consisted of four parts; Demographic and Socio-economic Status, Past and Current Housing, Support Networks and Neighbourhood Satisfaction Levels. The following section highlights the preliminary findings.

Ethnicity: Eight of the respondents reported to be of First Nations status, with two remaining participants reported being of visible minority.

Income: Participants have limited incomes and all participants, with the exception of one, are unemployed. The one exception supplements his income by providing caretaking services at both locations; however this individual also reported an annual income of less than 10,000. All participants reported that they expected that their economic situation would remain the same within the next 12 months.

Thirteen out of the seventeen respondents reported being on Disability Income for Employment Assistance Income (EIA) and the remaining four reported that their source of income was categorized as a Single Adult, also from EIA. All of the participants have annual incomes of less than 10,000.

Education Attainment: Out of the seventeen participants, one respondent reported having “some university.” The remaining participants reported “Grade 9 to 12 without a High School Certificate” with the exception of one respondent who reported having a “Grade 12 Certificate.”

Past Housing: The majority of respondents reported living in two or more accommodations within the past year, with three stating that they had lived in six or more places of residence within the past year. When asked if they had stayed at an emergency shelter within the past year, eight out of seventeen reported yes.

All participants held the viewpoint that if they were to move, they would have difficulties finding another place to live. The reasons included lack of damage deposit, limited source of income and lack of affordable, safe and adequate housing. One person stated that:

“I need to live independently but I need to be around people, I can’t live alone.”

Another person stated that:

“I have had nothing but trouble before moving here, with bed bugs and bad caretakers.”

Yet another person reported that they had lived in so many places, but none of which were safe. This person declared that:

“I have been beaten up so many times. I was scared to sleep or come out of my room. Once I stayed in my room for days until I had to come out because I was starving.”

Current Housing: When asked about their current residence, respondents overwhelmingly reported that they were content and felt safe. Respondents were asked how they located their current housing. The majority (98%) responded that their EIA worker referred them to this location, with one person stating that they heard about the building through friends. Three people had lived at 135 Bannerman before moving to 103 Bannerman. One person reported that he had lived in 135 Bannerman Avenue once before and stated that:

“Peter gave me another chance. I blew it before when I lived here and did not follow the rules. I am glad to be back and I was able to do a lot of thinking while I was away.”

Mobility rates are very high among the residents. Five out of seventeen residents have lived in the buildings for approximately one year, with the remaining having lived in the building for less than six months.

When asked what they liked most about living in the buildings, the majority responded that it was quiet, clean and safe. It is important to note that all of the residents stated that their current housing was “better” than the previous place they lived. The following comments highlight the residents’ perceptions about their living condition:

“Warm, nice beds, nice rooms, safe and clean.”

“Peace and quietness.”

“What I like most are the people that live here.”

“The cleanliness”

“I like that there are single rooms to your-self.”

Services: All of the respondents shared concerns over the food. They are not satisfied with the serving size or the quality of food given. There is no hot plate cooking allowed in the building (suites do have microwaves) and while the participants did not share concerns over this issue, it was primarily the portion sizes and content.

Maintenance and Concerns of Safety: Residents were satisfied with the maintenance of the building and had limited concerns over safety issues within the building. One person reported that the maintenance could be improved, but also stated:

“It wasn’t too bad.”

Yet another person stated that:

“The maintenance is amazing, they fix things very fast.”

One key issue was that the tenants did not have access to their mail boxes and therefore could not retrieve their mail. Another issue is that the telephone in the common area was not working.

When asked if they felt safe in the building, the majority of the participants responded that they viewed the environment to be very safe. One person stated:

“I like the safety, especially when I sleep, I am not scared anymore living here.”

There was limited substance mis-use reported within the building; however, it was clearly stated that:

“They stay to themselves when they are using, they pace around with heavy shoes on their feet, that’s about it...it’s not loud partying or anything like that.”

Two respondents stated that security could be improved. One participant reported that the security cameras and the sound recording devices within the building “catch people” when they break into suites. This person stated that the security devices act as a deterrent for theft but also reported that it would be better if security was increased. The rule of having “no outside guests” was viewed as a possible improvement in safety around the building. In 103 Bannerman, residents reported that televisions were recently stolen (within the past year), including one in the common area.

Sense of Community: When asked if they spent time in the common area or “lounge” the participants reported that they do, but not everyone reported spending time there on a regular basis. All respondents stated they visit each other in their private spaces. Many

reported that they were having issues of boredom and would prefer if there were group activities within the building.

In terms of recreational activities, some (30%) of the participants stated that they liked to go for walks in a nearby park or sit outside in the common area in the rear of the building during the summer months. All of the residents are equipped with a television and access to cable in their personal living quarters (supplied and included in the tenancy agreement). None of the respondents have computers or VCRs and one person reported to having a small stereo system.

Support Networks: Overwhelmingly, the participants reported that they felt that they have strong support networks. Four persons have families that live in the vicinity of the dwelling. The majority (97%) reported that the people who live in the building offer them a support network through friendship.

All of the participants spoke very highly of their relationships with EIA workers. They reported having extremely “caring encounters” with them and felt that this was a support network for them. As previously stated, many were referred to this building by their EIA worker.

Neighbourhood Satisfaction: All of the respondents were very satisfied with the surrounding neighbourhood. They liked the “quietness” and the services available to them, such as food stores, Laundromats and fast food facilities. As previously stated, many walk to the park located close-by. Overwhelmingly, the participants stated that they did not like living in the “core are of downtown” and appreciated the “suburban nature” of the area. Some expressed regret that “the surrounding neighbours did not approve of them living close by.”

Additional Comments: Participants were asked if they had anything else they would like to add that was not asked of them within the survey. The following comments were offered:

“They have to give this place a chance. If they kick us out, we will be homeless.”

“We need more foods that are nutritious.”

“These people who live here have mental health issues, they can't find another place to live, they would not last a minute on Main Street or in the hotels there, they will get hurt, beaten, they'd be lucky to survive. I shed a tear when I think about it.”

Conclusion

It is my professional opinion that the residential buildings, 135 and 103 Bannerman provide the tenants safe, adequate and affordable housing. It is also my opinion that funding for services, such as nutrition, recreation, and mental health programming would greatly contribute to the well-being of the residents.

The residents were very clear that they did not want to move and that this housing was a great improvement to their last place of residence. During the past five years, I have had the opportunity to conduct ethnographic research in a large number of rooming houses in the inner city as well as fifteen residential hotels along the Main Street in Winnipeg (approximately 200 face-to-face surveys within the housing locations). It is my opinion that 135 and 103 Bannerman are managed and maintained to a much higher level of standards than 95 per cent of the buildings I visited.

In closing, if the tenants were to be evicted, especially without a sound re-location plan in place, it would create enormous burden and personal trauma for the persons who reside in this building. Finding alternative housing for these residents, given the current rental market in Winnipeg, would also present a great challenge.

* According to the Schizophrenia Society of Canada, "Paranoid Schizophrenia is characterized by hallucinations and/or delusions, usually of persecution but less commonly are grandiose in content." For more information see: <http://www.schizophrenia.ca/english/index.php>