

Aiden: “It’d be nice to see like, where, like, what things are offered? There’s no real like, like, say a pamphlet or like anything that you can look at to see if there’s certain services you need. That kind of would be my suggestion just because you don’t really know what they offer.” Milo: “There was one instance where I called because someone in the building was overdosing, and I didn’t know what to do. And someone was like, “hey, call the shelter, they’ll call an ambulance for you.” I called the shelter. She told me she couldn’t do anything.” Aiden: “If you got caught using a bunch of times, you could run the risk of getting kicked out. Again, like if you’re getting a fight with somebody or something like that, I believe in you can get kicked out too.” Dusko: “None of them work. None of [the resources] help. There’s still lots of homeless people on the streets.” Quinn: “Same thing, someone just told me about it. I showed up.” Harry: “I didn’t even get the right information on moving in. But it was [snaps fingers] do it.”

“Complicated.”

Caitlin: “Like I said, a lot of that stuff that I found out about, like different services, has just been through word of mouth.” Milo: “Yeah, I think you would have had a better chance to get in if you were in the shelter, but I wasn’t in the shelter at all. But I think it also just depends on the person... it really, just depends. Because anyone can get into transitional housing if they’re from the shelter or not. And I think it just really depends on if you’re trying to get into transitional housing, I think they consider your experience at the shelter. And how you interact with other people in the shelter.” Ron: “Well, it had to do with being threatened to be kicked as well as getting some more of my old age pension because they had me cut down to 50 some odd percent of my pension.” Amanda: “Just not knowing where you’ll be or being able to have your phone plugged in when you need it to be. Just little things like that throws everything off.” Aiden: “Like, I didn’t even know what the SPDAT was back Before and, you know, I didn’t even know that they had the transitional housing until you ask about it, right?”

Park Stories

Issue Four: Navigating

In the first zine, *Get In Line*, we mapped how coordinated access and the shelter system is supposed to work on paper. In creating *Park Stories*, we wanted to take a closer look at how people experienced navigating the housing and shelter system, including how they learned about the rules and resources involved.

During the interviews, people talked about how difficult, confusing, and downright complicated figuring out the resources and regulations can be. Sometimes the rules were posted in plain sight, but most often people had to either figure out the rules as they went, or they had friends or workers to help them navigate the shelters, or accessing OW, ODSP, housing, etc.

These are the stories and themes that were shared.

In the summer of 2022, the Research for Social Change lab set out to learn: What is it like to experience homelessness in Peterborough, Ontario? And what are people's experiences seeking services from Peterborough's homeless-serving system?

Over about a month, we interviewed 48 people who were experiencing homelessness or had a history of homelessness in Peterborough. Most of these interviews took place in Victoria Park, a popular hangout and sometimes camp site across the street from the One Roof Community Centre. Participants were given a \$25 honorarium to thank them for their time.

*We are sharing what we heard in a series of zines called *Park Stories*. When the series is complete, we will collect them into a larger volume. Every individual quoted in this zine has been given a pseudonym to protect their privacy.*

This zine and the research it draws on was supported by Reaching Home: Canada's Homelessness Strategy and United Way Peterborough & District.

How do people learn about the rules and resources?

Show Up at Places.

Harry was able to get a bed at a shelter by “just walking off the street” because he “just heard it was available.”

Bill got services with a local agency because he knows “[he] can just call in anytime ... just walk in.”

Reading posters, signs, flyers.

When Jake arrived in Peterborough “[he] went to the library and got a street map” to figure out where services are located. He recommends other people do the same!

Gary found services by “just walking around. They post them though, right? There’re posters around everywhere you can go.”

Sam: “They tell you and there are rules posted on the walls. There’s a bulletin board. Each mission, each place that I’ve been to out here that I can remember, they post the rules.”

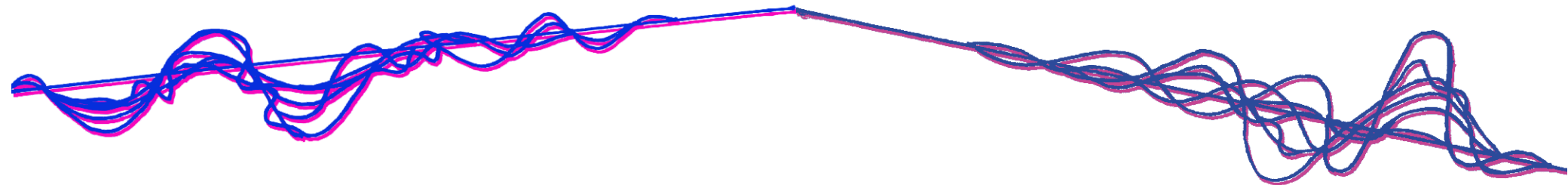
Taylor Swift: “I mean I’ve read the signs and they told me [the rules]. [The staff] usually talk to you first.”

Ask.

While staying at a shelter, Coli tried figuring out how restrictions were decided. He learned that “[shelters have] these levels. And... that’s how they and where they base the restrictions on... and I had to ask for that.”

Rose was looking for below market rental units and found out that a “[local property management company doesn’t] advertise that they have below market rent units... [[the company] just [doesn’t] talk about them or list them” but uses programs, like the CCRC, to rent those affordable units out. So, Rose asked “[a worker to reach] out and [ask the property management team] if they had any units, and... one was available.”

Caitlin: “I was almost joking when I asked my [OW] worker, “would you issue my shelter portion of my check for a campsite at Beavermead?” And he was like, “yeah, actually, I can look at that.” And I was like, “Oh, I was kind of joking, but that’d be really cool.”



People also learn the rules by breaking them.

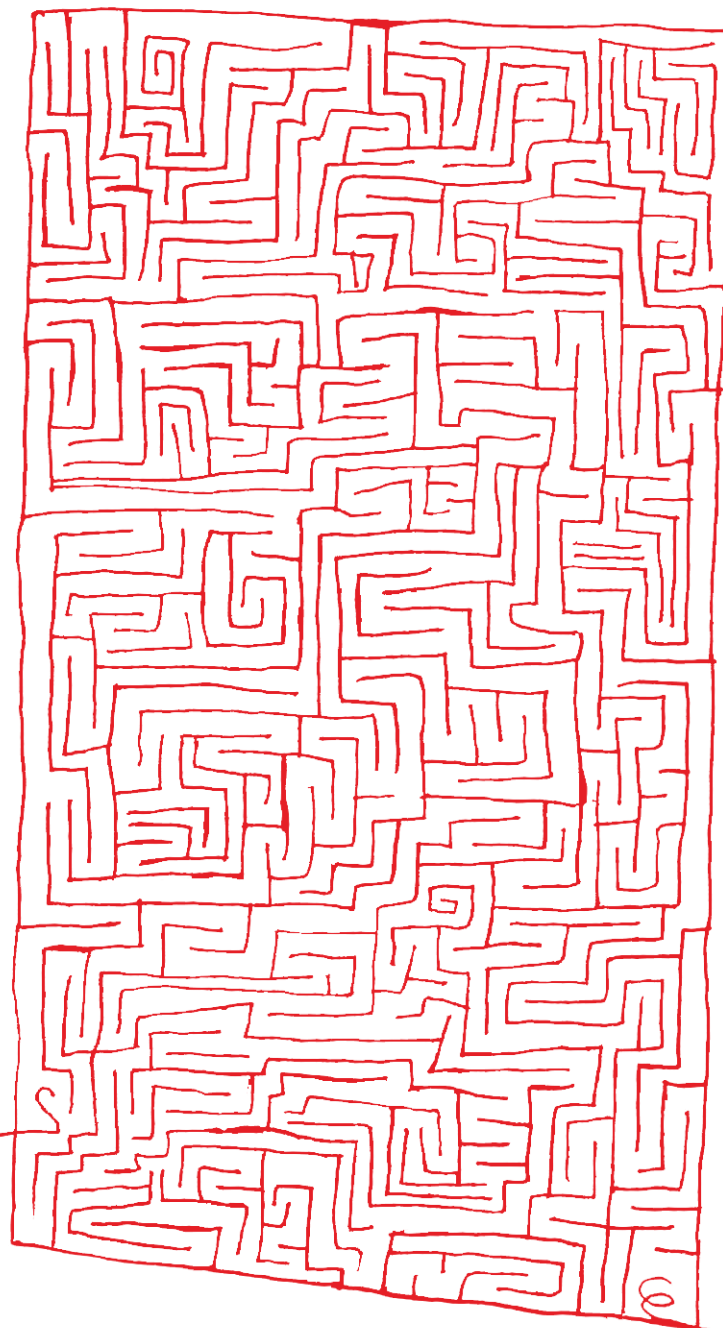
Daniel: “Level 5 is the worst. Okay, so level 5. You can’t get into any shelter in Peterborough... it happened to me twice... With me, most of the times I got kicked out was for getting high in the shelter or being disrespectful to the staff. I wasn’t really being disrespectful, they thought I was but I’m not that type of person.”

Owen was banned “for fighting... I go outside and go away from him. And then he follows me outside and he starts to shit on me and I blow a gasket and I stop and I smash him... I get banned for 3 months, but they don’t ban the guy that follows me outside and still shoots his mouth off.”

Basically, it all means you learn as you go...

John: “No. For me... it was learn as you go.”

Aiden: “Yeah, it was just being at the Brock and kind of saw what they offer and went from there.”



Human connections are important! Why?

Many people we listened to talked about the importance of having social connections. Talking to people at the shelters helps you learn about what is or is not expected during your stay. Knowing service providers with colleagues at different services or shelters makes it easier to get referrals to programs. As humans, we are wired to connect with other people.

Knowing people can make it easier to find resources and programs.

Angus: “My experience with trying to access housing in general has been that you need some sort of in in order to get anywhere. The reason I was able to get [references] so quickly was because I was involved in counselling... so my counsellor was able to pass along my information to a worker who then got in touch with me relatively quickly.”

Sam: “I ended up getting housing through [a local service]. I spent a lot of time in the hospital just for different reasons. A lot of health issues. And I just reached out to the workers at the hospital. And they worked wonders for me. They got me housing really quick.”

John: “Two weeks after I submitted the application, I got my room, my one bedroom, which is across the street... very very fast... I just assumed that it was just D. See, with the amount of people that they have, they ended up making all of these connections... he knew what he was doing, you know, he knew how to fill out the paperwork properly. And to add things that should be added that weren't being added.”

You can share what you learn with other people.

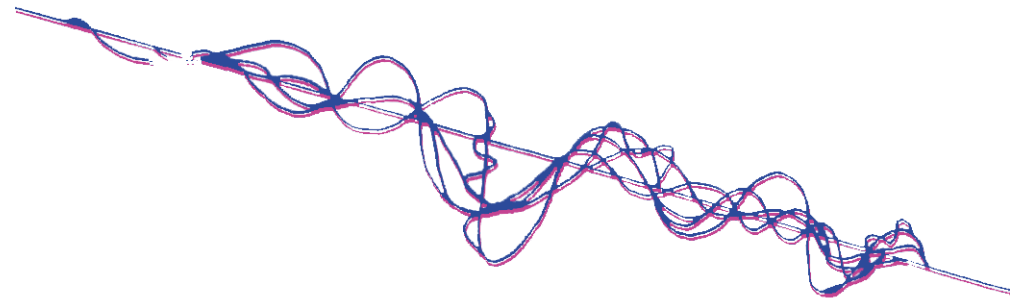
Jake: “I would talk the other guys into — and to the staff — to encourage them to talk to the social worker. The social worker would really help you look for a place, look with landlords. She would pay last month's rent and get you a free bed. That's what she did for us. It was great.”

You can learn what others know.

When asked how she was connected to a shelter Julia said “at the time, I just knew from other people — just acquaintances and stuff — about it. So, I just called them, and they took me in.”

Caitlin: “Like I said, a lot of that stuff that I found out about, like different services, has just been through word of mouth... it's mainly just from talking to people.”

When Ben was homeless he “[surfed] the streets sleeping in parks and shit... then a friend of [his] told [him] we have [a shelter]” so Ben accessed that shelter's services.



Why is it so complicated?

Many of the people shared with us the challenges they face while navigating the system. Things like lack of communication, confusing rules, or the rules being enforced differently all came up in conversations.

Little to no communication between staff and service users.

Ron shared with an interviewer that his stuff was thrown out by a shelter when he moved on.

“I was never told. I was at the other shelter — by staff not by the management — that [I] had 30 days to get [my] stuff if [I] get kicked out... but all of a sudden, it’s 10 days. All my jeans, all my underwear, socks, everything.”

Rick was assaulted while he was at his place. To avoid further assaults he asked to stay at a motel for a few days. A worker gave him a document to sign but he was never told what that meant for his housing situation.

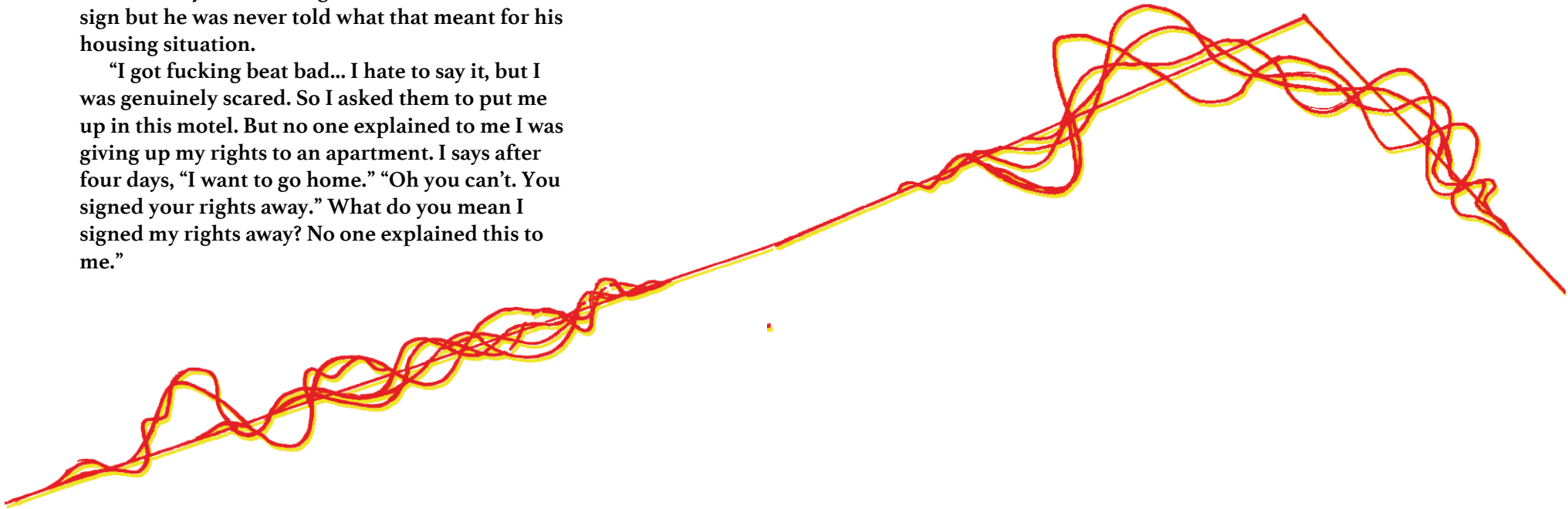
“I got fucking beat bad... I hate to say it, but I was genuinely scared. So I asked them to put me up in this motel. But no one explained to me I was giving up my rights to an apartment. I says after four days, “I want to go home.” “Oh you can’t. You signed your rights away.” What do you mean I signed my rights away? No one explained this to me.”

The rules were so unclear.

Milo shared his confusion about being accepted into transitional housing.

“Yeah, I think you would have had a better chance to get in if you were in the shelter, but I wasn’t in the shelter at all. But I think it also just depends on the person... because anyone can get into transitional housing... I think they consider your experience at the shelter. And how you interact with other people in the shelter.”

Angus: “I have found that people will place rules, but if you fight them, they make exceptions. But like how the fight works is still unclear to me because, for example, the shelter we stayed with in Cobourg exclusively no pets. However, there was a family there that had their dog that was allowed. I wanted clarification on that and never really got it.”



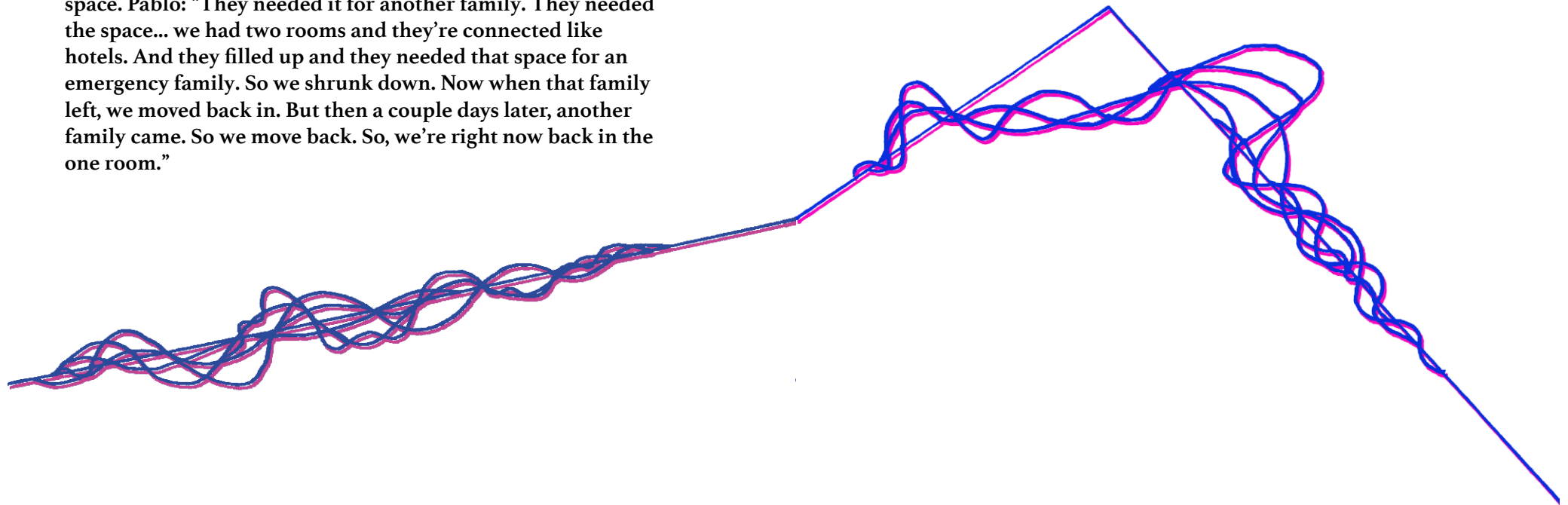
The biggest reason that coordinated access and the shelter system is so challenging to navigate is because there are not enough resources available for people. There is not enough housing for folks, let alone affordable housing. Even if there was adequate housing, the city overall is not completely accessible. Shelters are usually full. Aside from referrals, there are very little sharable materials to learn about services. These are some of the insights the people we talked to shared.

Aiden: “It’d be nice to see like, where, like, what things are offered? There’s no real like, like, say a pamphlet or like anything that you can look at to see if there’s certain services you need.”

Pablo and his family were placed in one room, instead of two adjoining rooms, because more families needed the ‘extra’ space. Pablo: “They needed it for another family. They needed the space... we had two rooms and they’re connected like hotels. And they filled up and they needed that space for an emergency family. So we shrunk down. Now when that family left, we moved back in. But then a couple days later, another family came. So we move back. So, we’re right now back in the one room.”

The options for emergency housing are pretty low. The numbers go further down when accessibility concerns are also needing to be addressed.

Angus: “Yes, it’s difficult to find housing that works for me because a lot of buildings only have one accessible room, if they have any accessible rooms at all. And a lot of the time, it’s not necessarily available. Just because the shelter system is so overwhelmed that they kind of put people in whatever rooms they possibly can. And so that might mean that the only accessible room in the building is occupied by someone who doesn’t necessarily have a disability but is still homeless and needs the bed.”



People have talked about the struggles of navigating the coordinated access and shelter system. They have also talked about things that would improve their experience of the system or ways that they made learning and navigating easier. These are some of the ideas and stories that we heard.

More communication around emotional and physical support, as well as the rules.

Ben: “It’s a lack of talking to people. Okay, you know, like, do you need meds? Do you need, you know, just support or someone to talk to?”

Get to know people. Information can be shared between people.

John: “So, once I was in the shelter, I started to understand and identify all of the resources within the community that these people were utilising... Because [the people] will say, “Hey, we’re going for lunch at the Community Centre, would you like to come along?” We’d go, and then I would learn about that. And then, “We’re going to the food bank, you have to register to bring your identification.” So they were teaching me along the way, the people.”

Social Workers who are trained to navigate several systems (housing, shelters, mental health, etc.)

Julia: I think we should all be assigned some type of worker that covers all the agencies. (That) has some kind of say or pull or something, involvement, with mental health, (with) everything. Just that would be helpful. To meet with us whenever — night and day — just some kind of worker that we’re all assigned to have to help us with whatever.



This zine’s lead author was Thamer Linklater. It relied on contributions from Naomi Nichols, Jimmy Frickey, Samantha Blondeau, Marisa Mackenzie, Will Pearson, and Joey Lavictoire. Line art by Thamer.

Thanks for reading!

www.socialchangelab.ca



Julian: “Well for instance the work start up, I did a programme through employment planning and counselling. I forget what it was called, but basically you go and do 60 hours in there, where they give you workshops and stuff, and they pay you for that. That doesn’t come out of your ODSP. And then after that, you get a placement for up to six weeks, I think it is. Yeah, so when I got that I was entitled to the \$500 work startup. But I found out because I signed consent form or whatever with employment planning and counselling, that they actually called them to pay for my smart serve and all that that I was getting through them. But everyone else in the class, they didn’t call their workers and stuff.” Derek: “Yeah, it was 5 different workers over the time.” Julia: “I got kicked out of Crossroads for being 8 minutes late one night.” Rose: “Well, the instance at Covenant House: A friend of mine heard that I was homeless and said, “Yo, do you want to come hang out at my house for the day? We can order pizza and play video games?” And I was like, “Hell yeah, I do.” And so, I went outside to meet them. They were pick me up in their car, and I didn’t want to be standing right in front of the shelter, so I just walked down the block, and sat on the curb and waited. And a guy comes running up to from the shelter running up to me yelling, “You need to be in the courtyard! You need to be in the courtyard!” And I was like, “I don’t understand what you’re talking about right now.”



PARK STORIES is a series of zines produced by BfE SuperCrew at Trent University’s Research for Social Change Lab. The zines document the stories and observations that people with experiences of homelessness shared with us in Victoria Park in 2022.

You’re holding Issue Four — Navigation.
