

HOME TAKEOVER PILOT PROJECT  
PEOPLE WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE  
KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW SUMMARY  
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### AIM

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The aim of this project was to understand the experience of people who have been through a home takeover situation, including the factors contributing to the onset of the home takeover, and the barriers and facilitators to resolution.

### METHOD

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Six key informant interviews were conducted with people who have experienced a home takeover in Grey County, either as a target (n=5) or a perpetrator (n=1).

### MAIN FINDINGS

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#### **Factors that contributed to the home takeovers:**

- **Targets:** empathy for the perpetrators' situation and a desire to help; significant pressure to house the perpetrator; a desire for social connectedness; and, hope for financial/household contributions.
- **Perpetrators:** mental health and addictions issues; needing a safe space to use substances; a lack of temporary housing including long housing wait lists; a need to demonstrate safe and stable housing in order to maintain child custody or visitation rights; and, living in survival mode.

#### **Negative impacts of the home takeovers on the target and neighbourhood:**

- Physical, mental and financial harm; damages to, and theft of, belongings; feelings of hopelessness and loss of control; neighbourhood disruption; and, loss of home.

#### **Target suggested home takeover prevention strategies:**

- Be cautious about who you let stay in your home; work with the housing provider to create a formal agreement with any potential new roommates or tenants; and establish a community location for safe use of drugs.

#### **Barriers and facilitators to resolving the home takeovers:**

- **Barriers:** fear of repercussions from the perpetrator; lack of service provider understanding of the issue of home takeovers; victim-blaming; and, difficulty reading and understanding the home takeover resolution process.
- **Facilitators:** service provider acknowledgement of the home takeover including support with contacting the police; service provider understanding of home takeover response strategies; neighbours and service providers keeping watch of what's happening in their units and neighbourhood; and, targets not being afraid or ashamed to ask for help.

### NEXT STEPS – HOME TAKEOVER RESPONSE FRAMEWORK

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The results of this summary will be used by the Home Takeover Advisory Committee to help inform development of a home takeover response framework for local community service providers and other opportunities for action.

## BACKGROUND

In November 2021, a collaborative pilot project began to address the issue of home takeovers identified by Grey County Housing and the resulting impacts on tenants, families, and neighbourhoods. A committee was formed, and made up of several partners including housing, mental health services, police, fire, public health, and other community organizations. Knowledge keepers and Indigenous organizations were also consulted with and invited to attend meetings. The pilot project includes several components including a literature review; communication and resource development; engaging people with lived experience; response framework development; and evaluation. This report summarizes the results of the engaging people with lived experience component.

## AIM

This component of the project sought to engage people who had been through a home takeover in order to better understand their experience. The goal was to use those experiences to help shape a home takeover response framework for local service providers.

## GUIDING QUESTIONS

This component of the project was guided by the following questions:

1. What factors contributed to the home takeovers?
  - a. For the target?
  - b. For the perpetrator?
2. What were the impacts of the home takeovers?
3. What are home takeover targets' views on how a home takeover can be prevented?
4. What were the barriers and facilitators to resolving the home takeovers?
  - a. What role did community service providers play?

## METHODS

### SAMPLE AND RECRUITMENT

Purposive sampling was used to recruit a sample of six participants including five home takeover targets and one perpetrator. In order to be selected, they must: have been living in Grey County; have personally experienced a home takeover in the past; not be currently experiencing a home takeover; and be willing to have a conversation about their experience with the home takeover. All interviewees were known to, and invited to participate by the interviewers and were compensated with a \$25 gift card for their time. Seven individuals were interviewed, but one was excluded from the sample because they had only a second-hand account of a home takeover experienced by their neighbour.

## DATA COLLECTION & ANALYSIS

Semi-structured interviews were conducted in-person by one of three interviewers from April to June of 2022. All participants selected a pseudonym or had one selected for them. Interviewers used an interview guide (Appendix A) which was developed based on the guiding questions. Interviews were about one hour in length and notes were taken by the interviewer and then provided to Grey Bruce Health Unit for analysis. A Program Evaluator, Public Health Nurse, and Health Promoter used content analysis to systematically code the data and identify the main themes.

## LIMITATIONS

The findings included in this report should be considered in relation to the limitations of the study. Interviews were not recorded so the level detail in the notes provided varied between interviewers. In some cases, it was challenging for the analysis team to decipher full direct quotes from participants. For some quotes, the analysis team used square brackets to supply words to make these quotations clearer to the reader.

## PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

At the beginning of each interview, the interviewee was asked a series of socio-demographic questions. Of the participants (targets and perpetrator) included in this summary, three were currently experiencing homelessness, and three had a history of homelessness. None were immigrants, refugees or refugee claimants. Four identified as female, and two identified as male. All were experiencing at least one type of health challenge. All targets were over the age of 18, and the perpetrators were reported to be as young as 16 years. In two cases, children were reported to have been involved in the home takeover. In three cases, one perpetrator took over the home, and in two cases there were multiple perpetrators. (Table 1)

Table 1: Participant Demographics / Background / History

<i>Demographics / Background / History</i>	<i>Count of participants this applies to</i>
<i>Experience with homelessness* (targets &amp; perpetrator)</i>	6
<i>Homeowner at time of home takeover (target)</i>	1
<i>Rental tenant at time of home takeover (targets)</i>	4
<i>Multiple perpetrators took over the home</i>	2
<i>One perpetrator took over the home</i>	3
<i>Children were involved in the home takeover</i>	2
<i>Over 18 years of age (targets)</i>	5
<i>Under 18 years of age (perpetrator)</i>	1
<i>Male (targets)</i>	2
<i>Female (targets &amp; perpetrator)</i>	4
<i>Immigrant, refugee or refugee claimant</i>	0
<i>Experiencing at least one type of health challenge (targets &amp; perpetrator)</i>	6
<i>Illness or medical condition (target &amp; perpetrator)</i>	2
<i>Physical limitation (target)</i>	1
<i>Learning or cognitive impairment (target)</i>	1
<i>Mental health concern (targets &amp; perpetrator)</i>	5
<i>Substance use disorder or concern (targets)</i>	3

\*3 currently experiencing homelessness; 3 history of homelessness.

## FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO HOME TAKOVERS

### TARGETS

There were several factors identified as contributing to the targets' vulnerability to a home takeover including: empathy for the perpetrators' situation and a desire to help; significant pressure to house the perpetrator; a desire for social connectedness; and, hope for financial/household contributions like splitting rent, groceries, household tasks, drugs, etc. (Table 2)

Table 2: Factors Contributing to Home Takeovers - Tenants

<p><b>Empathy for perpetrator's situation and a desire to help</b></p>	<p><i>It began by feeling sorry for people using drugs in the street. I felt bad that I had a place to go, and they didn't. (Johnny)</i></p> <p><i>[The] family was being evicted and needed a short term place to stay... [I] felt sympathy for a family homeless with a 3 year old..." (ZS)</i></p>		<p><b>Desire for social connectedness</b></p>	<p><i>Most [of the perpetrators] I had just met. I was social and trying to make friends and happy I had a place to hang out. (Johnny)</i></p>
<p><b>Significant pressure to house perpetrator(s)</b></p>	<p><i>...my brother got out of jail and his worker called me to ask if he could stay with me for a week because he had nowhere to go and they could not find him a place. Because he has been a problem for me before, I didn't want to say yes, but they kept asking so I said yes...I don't like being asked if Bob could stay with me because it is hard to say no. (Larry)</i></p>		<p><b>Hope for financial / household contributions</b></p>	<p><i>...they would bring food or... "pay the house". They would share their drugs at first, but then they would skip out and not even do that. I got taken advantage of. (Johnny)</i></p>



PERPETRATORS

Several factors also contributed to the perpetrators engaging in the home takeover, including: mental health and addictions issues; needing a safe space to use substances; and a lack of temporary housing including long housing wait lists. In one case the perpetrator lacked transitional housing after being released from custody. In some cases the perpetrators were parents who felt a need to demonstrate safe and stable housing in order to maintain child custody or visitation rights. Perpetrators were also described as living in survival mode given their lack of housing and resources. (Table 3)

Table 3: Factors Contributing to Home Takeovers - Perpetrators

<p><b>Needing a safe place to use substances</b></p>	<p><i>They had no where else to...do drugs. (Alex)</i></p> <p><i>It was somewhere to use drugs because there is no safe consumption site... (Jamie)</i></p>		<p><b>Mental health and addictions issues</b></p>	<p><i>[They] all used substances and had nowhere else to go. (Alex)</i></p> <p><i>[Perpetrator] had newly diagnosed mental health issues. (SH)</i></p>
<p><b>Lack of temporary housing</b></p>	<p><i>They came because they had nowhere else to go...it was indoors, so people came and stayed. (Jamie)</i></p> <p><i>[It happened] while homeless and on the waitlist for county housing. [Perpetrator] used the unit to have supervised access to children. (SH)</i></p>		<p><b>Living in survival mode</b></p>	<p><i>They did it out of survival and having no place to go, sleep, use. Pure survival. (Johnny)</i></p>

## IMPACTS OF HOME TAKEOVERS

Targets experienced multiple negative impacts as a result of the home takeovers including physical and mental harm and feelings of fear, anger, shame, regret, and confusion. Financial harm was also experienced with perpetrators not contributing to rent or household expenses. Targets faced increased costs for utilities and in some cases additional expenses for removal of the perpetrators belongings and trash (inside and/or outside the home). Targets' experienced damages to, and theft of, their belongings. They described feeling helpless and that they had lost control of their own home. Neighbours were disturbed by the home takeover. Ultimately, some have lost their homes and are now facing homelessness themselves. (Table 4)

Table 4: Impacts of home takeovers on targets and neighbourhoods

<p><b>Physical and mental harm</b></p>	<p><i>I felt threatened many times. I was punched out if I asked people to leave. I was beat up multiple times. (Johnny)</i></p> <p><i>I was threatened and experienced physical [and] mental...harm. (Jamie)</i></p>		<p><b>Fear, anger, disappointment, shame, regret and confusion</b></p>	<p><i>[I felt] angry, disappointed in myself, and then...shame, regret, confusion. (Larry)</i></p>
<p><b>Financial harm</b></p>	<p><i>...[the perpetrator] did not pay rent or contribute to food or household expenses. (SH)</i></p> <p><i>...[they are] using a lot of electricity and bills [are] going up...[I was] charged \$700 to remove garbage in the yard...[I have] no money left...[I] can't pay my rent...(ZS)</i></p>		<p><b>Damages to, and loss of property</b></p>	<p><i>They stole my stuff. All of my personal belongings and clothes were stolen. (Alex)</i></p> <p><i>[They] broke items in the home [toilet] and expected [county housing] to pay for the damage. (ZS)</i></p>
<p><b>Loss of control, feelings of helplessness</b></p>	<p><i>People found out where I lived and started coming over. Just a few at first and then more. I lost control of who was there and who wasn't. They wouldn't listen to me or leave. I felt angry that they were taking advantage of my house. (Alex)</i></p>		<p><b>Isolation within the home</b></p>	<p><i>[I] now live alone in [my] bedroom. They have spread out to all the rooms...[I] can't use laundry facilities in basement of unit. (ZS)</i></p>

<p><b>Loss of home</b></p>	<p><i>I was evicted...but I left a week prior because I had no stuff left there...it had all been robbed...and there were too many people. (Johnny)</i></p> <p><i>I lost the home I previously owned. (Jaime)</i></p>	<p><b>Neighbourhood disruption</b></p>	<p><i>[He] also caused problems in [my] building with other people by wanting to start fights when he was drunk. County housing received complaints from other tenants about [his] disruptive behaviour in the building. (Larry)</i></p>
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**PREVENTING HOME TAKEOVERS**

Respondents were asked to describe what could be done to prevent home takeovers. They emphasized the importance of being cautious about who you let stay in your home. They also suggested the development of a formal agreement in advance of any new roommates/tenants moving into the home. Working with the housing provider to create this type of agreement would offer an opportunity for home takeover education and safety planning. The establishment of a community location for safe use of drugs was also suggested as a prevention strategy. (Table 5)

Table 5: Target perception of strategies to prevent home takovers

<p><b>Be cautious about who you let stay in your home</b></p>	<p><i>It happened really fast. Slippery slope – once you let one person stay, they spread the word. (Johnny)</i></p> <p><i>Don't let people in your apartment...once you do it's too late. (Alex)</i></p> <p><i>One wrong move, one wrong tenant, and it could happen [to you]. (Jamie)</i></p>
<p><b>Work with housing provider to create a formal agreement with any potential new roommates or tenants</b></p>	<p><i>Avoid roommates and get them on a lease. Write out the contract instead of a verbal agreement, and the timeline. Make sure you have the same values with anyone moving into your space. (ZS)</i></p>
<p><b>Community safe injection site</b></p>	<p><i>If people had somewhere else to safely use [drugs]...a safe injection site, they wouldn't have had to take over my home. (Jamie)</i></p>

## BARRIERS AND FACILITATORS TO RESOLVING HOME TAKEOVERS

Respondents were asked to describe how their home takeover situation ended, including any community service support they received. In doing so, they reflected on the factors that facilitated resolution of the home takeover. These included: service provider acknowledgement of the home takeover including support with contacting the police; service provider understanding of home takeover response strategies including the option to relocate the target to a home in a different location where perpetrators might be less likely to find them; neighbours and service providers keeping watch of what's happening in their units and neighbourhood; and, not being afraid or ashamed to ask for help. (Table 6)

Targets also described the barriers they faced in resolving their home takeover situations. These included: fear of repercussions from the perpetrator if they were to contact police; lack of service provider understanding of the issue of home takeovers; victim-blaming; and, difficulty reading and understanding the resolution process (including eviction). (Table 6)

Table 6: Barriers and Facilitators to Home Takeover Resolution

BARRIERS		FACILITATORS	
<b>Fear of repercussions from perpetrator if they were to contact police</b>	<i>I couldn't involve the police for fear of repercussions; I'd be in danger. (Johnny)</i>	<b>Service provider acknowledgement of the home takeover and support with contacting police</b>	<i>It was helpful when [housing worker] acknowledged the problem and gave it a name. (Johnny)</i>  <i>The housing workers encouraged me to call police...and stayed with me while I called. (Larry)</i>
<b>Lack of service provider understanding of the issue of home takeovers</b>	<i>They would say 'go to the hospital' [and] that just made me feel less in control with what would happen to my house when I was gone. They told me none of these people were my friends and that messed my mindset right up. Made me feel belittled and like I didn't matter, not human. (Johnny)</i>	<b>Service provider understanding of home takeover response strategies</b>	<i>They could have moved me to a new address...further from downtown...a fresh start – no one would know where I lived. (Johnny)</i>  <i>They need to offer social workers, wrap around supports to people who are homeless...(Jaime)</i>

BARRIERS		FACILITATORS	
<b>Victim-blaming</b>	<p><i>I received no community support. I was blamed for what happened at that address. (Jamie)</i></p> <p><i>I shouldn't be blamed for what guests (that I didn't invite and couldn't control) did. (Alex)</i></p>	<b>Neighbourhood and service provider watch</b>	<p><i>If neighbours pay attention to what is going on, and step in to help... (Larry)</i></p> <p><i>I would have liked more help calling the police. There would be so much yelling in my apartment and I wondered why the cops never came. I wished they would. (Johnny)</i></p>
<b>Difficulty reading and understanding the resolution process (including eviction)</b>	<p><i>I feel like no one explained the paperwork to me or protected me. (Alex)</i></p> <p><i>[When I was evicted] I didn't understand the legal jargon. (Johnny)</i></p>	<b>Ask for help</b>	<p><i>Be very careful; make sure you're in control and as soon as you're not, don't be ashamed – ask for help. (Johnny)</i></p> <p><i>Call your worker or police. (Larry)</i></p>

**NEXT STEPS – HOME TAKEOVER RESPONSE FRAMEWORK**

The findings captured in this summary will be used by the Home Takeover Advisory Committee to help inform development of a home takeover response framework for local community service providers and other opportunities for action.

**Participant Information Sheet**

**\* FACILITATOR TO READ ALOUD; PARTICIPANT TO KEEP\***

**Project Title:** Home Takeover Pilot Project

**Purpose of Project:** We want to know what it has been like for people who have been through a home takeover. The information you tell us will be used to help service providers (for example: Grey County Housing, Owen Sound Police) learn about how to help people in home takeover situations.

**What you are asked to do:**

1. Tell us, and answer questions about, your home takeover experience.
2. It will take about an hour of your time.

**Privacy:** Our discussions will be kept private and you will not be identified in any data that is shared or results of it. Your name will not be shared with other participants or service providers. I will take notes during our conversation. Notes will be typed up on a password-protected computer as soon as possible after our conversation, and the paper copy will be destroyed. Notes about or direct quotes from your story will be attributed to a made up name.

**Risks and Benefits:** The questions I ask today might bring up uncomfortable feelings. If you need support during the interview, please say so and I can help with that. After the interview, some support options include:

- 211: For information about and connection to resources and supports in the community
- 1-877-470-5299: Mental Health Crisis Line of Grey Bruce
- 911: If your life is in danger

There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this interview, though the stories you choose to share might help other people who experience home takeovers in the future.

**Sharing of Results:** A summary of our conversation will be combined with conversations from other participants, and then shared with local service providers (such as Y Housing, CMHA, first responders, and housing providers)

**Compensation:** You will be compensated with a \$25 gift card following our conversation today.

**Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal from Study:** It is your decision if you would like to be a part of this project and participation is entirely voluntary. You do not have to answer any question if you don't want to and we can stop the conversation at any time. Your participation will not affect your ability to use or access services in any way. There is no penalty for ending the conversation.

**Questions:** If you have any questions before, during, or after the conversation you may contact me at using the information at the top of this page.

Facilitator Name: _____
Affiliation: _____
Contact Information: _____ _____

Thank you for your time.

**Home Takeover Pilot Project: Participant Consent Form**

**\*FACILITATOR TO KEEP\***

This study was explained to me by [facilitator name] \_\_\_\_\_.

By continuing with the conversation:

\_\_\_ I am agreeing to participate in the conversation.

\_\_\_ I understand that my words may be quoted directly and, if used, will be attributed to a made up name.

\_\_\_ I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about this conversation and what is expected of me

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant\*

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\* You may sign your initials or first name only to protect your identity.

## Home Takeovers – A Conversation Guide to Engage People with Lived/Living Experience

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Facilitator: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Screening Script:**

I am talking to people about their experiences with home takeover. For this conversation, home takeover means a friend, relative, or someone else goes into a home and takes it over. They might use it to crash, do things that are illegal, steal from the person who lives there, or just generally overstay their welcome and make others feel unsafe. It can lead to legal problems or eviction.

**Have you ever been involved in a home takeover?** [YES, proceed] [NO, thank and end]

**Do you think there a home takeover going on in your home right now?** [YES, thank. Engage in conversation about supports. Do not complete interview at this time] [NO, proceed]

**Are you willing to have a conversation with me about your experience with home takeover?** [YES, proceed with consent form] [NO, thank and end]

### **Introduction** [to be read aloud with participant]

- I am going to ask some questions about you and about your experience with home takeover.
- It will take about an hour, and you will be compensated with [\$25 cash/gift card] following our conversation today.
- There are no direct benefits to you for participating, now or in future. The information you share, along with conversations with other people in the community will help service providers build a new response to home takeover.
- I have a few questions to guide our conversation, but I hope you will feel free to add any other thoughts or comments that you feel are important. You can choose not to answer any of the questions, and can choose to end this conversation at anytime.
- This conversation is anonymous, your identity will be kept a secret. Notes about or direct quotes from your story will be attributed to a made up name.
  - Would you like to make up a fake name for yourself? [YES: \_\_\_\_\_] [NO: a name will be made up for you]
- The conversation will focus on one home takeover experience. You will have an opportunity during the conversation to describe other experiences of home takeovers.

### **Demographic Questions**



1. Age:
2. Gender:
3. Did you have kids at home when you experienced the takeover(s)?
4. Did you come to Canada as an immigrant, refugee or refugee claimant?
  - a. If yes, how long have you been in Canada?
5. Do you identify as having any of the following health challenges? (**YES or NO only, participant does not need to specify what the condition is**).
  - a. Illness of medical condition (e.g. diabetes, arthritis, TB, HIV, chronic illness) [YES] [NO]
  - b. Physical limitation (e.g. challenges with mobility, physical abilities, dexterity) [YES] [NO]
  - c. Learning or cognitive limitation (e.g. dyslexia, autism spectrum disorder, as a result of ADHD or acquired brain injury) [YES] [NO]
  - d. Mental health concern [diagnosed or undiagnosed] (e.g. depression, bipolar, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)) [YES] [NO]
  - e. Substance Use Disorder or Concern (e.g. tobacco, alcohol, opiates) [YES] [NO]
6. Are you currently accessing health care services? [YES] [NO]
  - a. If yes (to 5e), do you have access to addiction services? [YES] [NO]
  - b. If no, what is preventing you from accessing services? (i.e. money, waitlists, stigma, not a priority, not helpful)
  - c. Are you aware of services available? [YES] [NO]
7. Do you have a history of homelessness (including current homelessness)? [YES] [NO]
8. Did you live in Grey County Housing when your home takeover happened? [YES] [NO]
  - a. If yes (to 7), do you still live in Grey County Housing? [YES] [NO]
  - b. If no (to 7a), did the home takeover lead to the end of your tenancy with Grey County Housing [YES] [NO]

### **Interview Questions**

1. **You said you had experienced a home takeover. Can you tell me a little bit about that situation? (If more than one: let's start with most recent).**
  - How did it start?
  - What happened to make you feel that this was turning into a takeover?
  - Could you tell me how that made you feel?
2. **Tell me a little bit about the person/people who came into your home.**
  - Did you know them? How? (friends, family, people you'd just met) Age? Occupation?
  - Why do you think they did what they did?
  - Did you feel threatened or experience any harm by the person/people that came into your home?
  - Do you know where the person/people are now?
  - Was the person/people who came into your home paying rent or providing any type of contribution?

**3. How did the situation end?**

- How did you feel once the situation was over?

**4. Were there any support services, agencies or workers involved in ending the takeover?** [Ex. Police, housing programs, mental health or addictions programs]

- Did you receive any support? From who? (e.g., agency/worker, someone you know personally)
- What did you find helpful about that support? What was unhelpful?

**5. If more than 1 home takeover identified above in Q1 – would you like to tell me about the other home takeover situation(s) that have affected you?**

**6. What do you think, if anything, could be done to prevent experiences like yours?**

- Is there a formal support from a worker or agency you wish you'd had to help in your situation? What would that have looked like?
- What could neighbours, family, or friends do?

**We are creating some resources to help people who might be affected by home takeover, and for the workers, police, and agencies that support them.**

**7. When someone is in a home takeover, what information do they most need to know?**

**8. When home takeovers happen, what do you think is most important for responding service providers to know?**

**Conclusion**

**9. Is there anything I haven't asked about that you think would be important for service providers helping people with home takeovers to know?**

**10. Do you have any questions for me at this point?**

Thank you again for this conversation. If you have any further questions about what we discussed today, you can contact me at the phone number on the information sheet.