



# SLAVE LAKE

2023 Alberta Provincial Housing  
& Service Needs Estimation

COMMUNITY REPORT





## **Slave Lake Homeless Coalition Society**

Prepared By:  
Rural Development Network  
(780)-964-2736  
11443 - 143 Street, NW  
Edmonton, AB

# Acknowledgements

RDN's physical office is located on the Traditional Territories of Treaty 6 and is home to many Métis and Inuit Peoples. As a national organization, we also acknowledge that RDN staff and the communities we support, live, gather, and organize across Turtle Island.

Inuit, Métis, and First Nations Peoples are experiencing homelessness at disproportionately high rates compared to non-Indigenous people in Canada. Unlike the common, colonialist definition of homelessness, Indigenous homelessness is not simply defined as lacking a structure of habitation; rather, it is more fully understood as a loss or breakdown of relationships between individuals, families, and/or communities and their land, water, place, family, kin, each other, animals, cultures, languages, and identities. RDN recognizes the ways in which settler relationships to both the land and the Peoples of this land have been broken and misused, causing and contributing to Indigenous homelessness. We also recognize the ways in which our presence on this land continues to uphold colonialism and reproduces dispossession and violence for Indigenous people, further perpetuating experiences of Indigenous homelessness.

In an ongoing effort to support Indigenous communities in addressing issues of housing, homelessness, and service needs, we are committed to working to decolonize homelessness research and advocate to funders for Indigenous self-determination in the housing and social sectors.

We share this acknowledgement to reaffirm our responsibility and commitment to reconciliation.

We also recognize that this land acknowledgement is just that, an acknowledgement; it is but one step in our journey. We commit to working to uphold the conditions of the treaties that govern this land.





## We thank you.

This report and the information within were made possible through the efforts of many dedicated individuals and groups. We wish to thank the front-line staff at participating service agencies:

- Slave Lake Public Library
- WJS Canada, Slave Lake
- North Region Children's Services
- Town of Slave Lake
- Northern Lakes College Student Association

and the residents of Slave Lake for their support, dedication, and commitment to this project.

Funded in part by the Government of Canada's Reaching Home Program:





## About this Report

In 2023, the Rural Development Network (RDN) partnered with 22 organizations representing 45 communities across Alberta to conduct the third iteration of the provincial-wide housing and service needs estimation.

This report outlines Slave Lake's results within the provincial estimation, highlighting the number of residents who are housing insecure and their experiences with homelessness. This report is complemented by the [Alberta Provincial Report](#), which highlights the combined results of all 45 communities across the province.

This report is intended to support decision-making across organizations, funders and multiple levels of government around housing and homelessness by providing reliable and up-to-date data on housing and service needs in Slave Lake. It can also be used and referred to in the community for program and advocacy purposes related to housing, homelessness, and service needs.

Contact [info@ruraldevelopment.ca](mailto:info@ruraldevelopment.ca) for more information on Housing and Service Needs Estimations.



# Table of Contents

What does "Homelessness" mean?	1
Introduction	3
Methodology	4
Limitations	8
Results & Analysis	9
Objective Housing Situation	9
Exploring the Spectrum of Homelessness in Slave Lake	10
Slave Lake Population Overview	12
Housing & Service Needs Estimation Survey Respondent Population Overview	14
Housing Secure vs. Housing Insecure Survey Respondent Population Overview	15
Education, Employment, and Income Sources	18
Living Situation	22
Community Supports	26
Insights on Community Spaces	34
“What Would You Like to See More of in Your Community?”	38
What Does Homelessness Look Like in Slave Lake?	41
Opportunities Moving Forward	42
References	44

# Definitions

## What Does Homelessness Mean?

### Homelessness


According to the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness (Gaetz et al., 2012), homelessness is the situation of an individual, family, or community without stable, safe, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect, means, and ability to acquire it. It is the result of systemic or societal barriers, domestic violence, a lack of affordable and appropriate housing, the individual/household's financial, mental, cognitive, behavioural or physical challenges, and/or racism and discrimination.

Further, Indigenous homelessness considers the traumas imposed on Indigenous Peoples through colonialism. It is defined as a "human condition that describes First Nations, Métis and Inuit individuals, families or communities lacking stable, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect, means or ability to acquire such housing...Indigenous homelessness is not defined as lacking a structure of habitation; rather, it is more fully described and understood through a composite lens of Indigenous worldviews" (Thistle, 2017).

Most people do not choose to be homeless, and the experience is generally negative, unpleasant, stressful, and distressing. The national definition of homelessness notes that individuals who become homeless experience a range of physical living situations, including:

**Unsheltered:** Absolutely homeless, living on the streets or in places not intended for human habitation (e.g. living on sidewalks, squares, parks, vehicles, garages, etc.).

**Emergency Sheltered:** People who are staying in overnight shelters due to homelessness as well as those staying in shelters due to family violence.



**Provisionally Accommodated:** People with an accommodation that is temporary or that lacks security for tenure (e.g. couch-surfing, living in transitional housing, living in abandoned buildings, living in places unfit for human habitation, people who are housed seasonally, people in domestic violence situations, etc.).

**At Risk of Homelessness:** People who are not yet homeless but whose current economic and/or housing situation is precarious or does not meet public health and safety standards (e.g. people who are one rent payment missed from eviction, people whose housing may be condemned for health, by-law, or safety violations, etc.).

*(Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, Canadian Definition of Homelessness, 2012).*

**Insecure Housing:** For this report, the term housing insecure, or insecure housing, will be used to encompass the entire spectrum of homelessness which includes unsheltered, emergency sheltered, provisionally accommodated, and at risk of homelessness.





# Introduction

When it comes to homelessness and understanding its causes, the urban experience tends to dominate the conversation, mainly due to the “visibility” of individuals experiencing homelessness in urban centres. The issue of homelessness in rural and remote areas is far less understood and acknowledged because of its “hidden” nature. Further, recent data suggests that rural homelessness is prevalent at rates equivalent to or greater than urban per capita rates (Schiff, et al., 2022).

Recognizing this, RDN conducted the 2023 Alberta Provincial Housing and Service Needs Estimation with 22 organizations representing 45 rural, remote, and Indigenous communities across Alberta in an attempt to better understand what homelessness looks like in each community and across the rural provincial landscape. Specifically, the purpose of this estimation is to:

1. Develop a contextually relevant process for local service providers to engage and collect informed data with those who are at risk of or currently experiencing homelessness.
2. Provide a comprehensive picture of housing insecurity and homelessness in Alberta, including demographic information on who is experiencing homelessness and which services are being accessed and which services are missing.
3. Help inform service providers and municipal, provincial, and federal policies, practices, and funding decisions on homelessness, housing, and support services.
4. Develop recommendations and next steps for service providers and municipal, provincial, and federal governments.
5. Elevate and incorporate the voices of people experiencing homelessness in the solutions to end homelessness.

This is the third iteration of the Alberta Provincial Housing and Service Needs Estimation; it was also conducted in 2018 and 2020 with 20 and 24 communities, respectively. This will be Slave Lake’s first time participating in the provincial estimation.



# Methodology

The methodology employed in this Housing and Service Needs Estimation comes from the Step-by-Step Guide to Estimating Rural Homelessness, published by the Rural Development Network. RDN initially developed the Step-by-Step Guide to Estimating Rural Homelessness due to the lack of available, accurate, and current data on rural homelessness. A lack of data limits the ability of rural communities like Slave Lake to advocate for better resources for their residents.

The guide is unique in that it tackles the issue of housing insecurity and homelessness from a rural perspective and recognizes the difficulties that come with conducting standard Point-in-Time (PiT) counts in rural and remote areas. It instead uses a service-based population estimation approach, which allows for anyone, including small nonprofits and local front-line agencies, to gather data on gaps in local housing and service needs without adding additional strain to workloads and organizational capacities.

Following the model proposed in the Step-by-Step Guide, RDN worked with communities and academics across Canada to develop a survey that reflected rural and remote community contexts. The survey was developed in accordance with the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness' definitions of homelessness. However, the survey itself was advertised as a Housing and Service Needs survey; this is a result of feedback from multiple service providers who are committed to minimizing the stigma associated with homelessness that could cause distress to their clients. By re-framing the language of the survey, service providers were able to encourage all clients to participate, instead of pointedly targeting certain individuals.

To further minimize stigma throughout the survey, rather than asking respondents to identify themselves as homeless or housing insecure, they were asked whether they consider their living conditions to be secure or insecure and to fill out checkboxes that determine their objective housing situation. Based on responses to the latter survey question along with subsequent data analysis, RDN was able to determine which respondents were housing unstable. As shown in

the results below, some individuals who don't consider themselves to be homeless or at risk of homelessness actually qualify based on the national definition of homelessness.

The same survey was used across all communities participating in the 2023 Alberta Provincial Housing and Service Needs Estimation project, with one exception; each community's survey was customized to meet their location parameters. Figure 1 showcases Slave Lake's location parameters.

## Figure 1: Slave Lake's Location Question on Survey

Q2. Where do you currently live (or which community do you live closest to)?

- ☐ Slave Lake
- ☐ Widewater
- ☐ Canyon Creek
- ☐ Assineau
- ☐ Mitsue
- ☐ Marten Beach
- ☐ I am not sure
- ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ Prefer not to answer

RDN worked with Slave Lake to develop a survey administration process that would ensure the greatest level of participation possible. For Slave Lake, surveys were advertised at service provider locations and online as an open Survey Monkey link across the community. Surveys were available through these locations and online for a period of four weeks: from March 1 to March 31, 2023.

Before the survey period began, RDN conducted orientation and training sessions with staff from participating agencies. During the training, emphasis was placed on clarifying survey terms, ensuring respondents' confidentiality and privacy, and

securing participants' informed consent. During each training session, resources were provided to staff to improve their understanding of the project and increase comfort in administering the survey. Training and resources also included the various ways to administer the survey in an open, non-intrusive manner, placing extra importance on meeting the individual's reasons for visiting the agency before offering the survey.

Important to note about the survey; to ensure the trust and anonymity of participants, each respondent was asked to give consent at the beginning of the survey and create a unique identifier. The unique identifier allows RDN to maintain the integrity of the data without knowing respondent identities. The unique identifier is a combination of letters and numbers from a participant's name and birthdate.

## Figure 2: Unique Identifier Question on Survey

Q1. Anonymous Unique Identifier (ex. John Smith, born on 15th November 1964)

H	N	What are the last two letters of your FIRST name?
T	H	What are the last two letters of your LAST name?
1	5	What is the DAY you were born?
6	4	What are the last two numbers of the YEAR you were born?



Slave Lake collected 219 survey responses during the four weeks. Of the 219 surveys, 66 were excluded. Surveys were deemed unsuitable and excluded for one or more of the following reasons:

1. Survey respondent(s) declined to give consent.
2. Survey respondent(s) declined to provide the unique identifier or provided improper unique identifier information (i.e. characters instead of numbers, etc.).
3. Survey respondent(s) submitted multiple surveys (determined based on unique identifier(s)).

Based on this, 153 were determined to be suitable for further analysis and will be the focus of the results outlined below.





## Limitations

Despite our best attempts to reduce stigma and increase the accessibility of the survey, not all clients who were offered a survey chose to participate. Additionally, staff at participating agencies were informed that participants under the age of 14 years old required guardian consent to participate in the survey. While this is inherently problematic and exclusionary, as most youth experiencing homelessness would not have a guardian present to provide consent, to maintain survey ethics, this requirement is in compliance with the Alberta College of Social Workers. Worth noting here is that not everyone who filled out the survey responded to every question.

As a result, there remains a portion of people experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity whose voices and lived experiences were not captured in this project. Therefore, while the trends, highlights, and recommendations made are very informative, it is important to remember that this report presents a conservative picture of the housing and services needs in Slave Lake.

# Results & Analysis

## Objective Housing Situation

As part of the survey, participants were asked the following question: *“Do you consider your housing situation to be unstable or feel you could easily lose your housing?”* Respondents were given the options “yes,” “no,” and “I’m not sure” to guide their responses. Of the 153 survey respondents, 35 self-identified as housing insecure and 15 indicated “I’m not sure.” Through further analysis, it was determined that 81 survey respondents are housing insecure according to the national definitions of homelessness. An additional 85 dependents and 102 adults reported as living with housing insecure survey respondents. Therefore, based on survey results, there are at least 268 community members experiencing housing insecurity in Slave Lake.

The top three reasons for housing insecurity in Slave Lake, as reported by survey respondents, are:

- 1.Low wages
- 2.Inability to afford rent/mortgage payments
- 3.Poor credit makes it difficult to secure housing



## Exploring the Spectrum of Homelessness in Slave Lake

Recognizing that the national definition of homelessness is complex, encompassing various housing situations across a continuum, it is important to better understand what housing insecurity looks like in Slave Lake. This can be achieved by exploring the experiences of the 81 housing insecure respondents.

To accurately place respondents along the spectrum of homelessness, a series of measures were used to understand their situations, including their self-identified housing stability response, their calculated housing stability, their current housing situation, the amenities they lack in their current home, and others. Early in the survey, respondents were asked to outline their current housing situation and were able to choose all situations that applied to them from a variety of statements that ranged from “I own the house I am currently in” to “I lived in supportive housing” to “I slept in a public space” and more. To accurately present what a journey of housing insecurity might look like for respondents over a month, we have included all responses, as respondents were able to select more than one statement.

An important thing to consider when reading this table is that people experiencing housing insecurity often fluctuate in and out of their situation; therefore, someone who was unsheltered one night might have been emergency sheltered or provisionally accommodated the next. As a result, we have highlighted every incident of insecurity respondents experienced in the past month to understand the journey of housing insecurity in Slave Lake.



**Table 1: Respondents by Housing Situation in the Homelessness Spectrum**

<b>Place on the Homelessness Spectrum</b>	<b># of Respondents in Each Category</b>
Unsheltered	8
Emergency Sheltered	7
Provisionally Accommodated	28
At-Risk of Homelessness	98

This table demonstrates the diversity of respondents' experiences with housing insecurity in Slave Lake and outlines that homelessness presents itself in more ways than simply sleeping outside. Respondents that have been identified as "At Risk of Homelessness" emphasized their difficulty in being able to afford their rent/mortgage and/or have stayed in a home with unsafe conditions such as physical construction hazards, no windows, no electricity, etc. Some of these respondents are also living in overcrowded accommodations where there are not enough bedrooms for the number of people staying there.

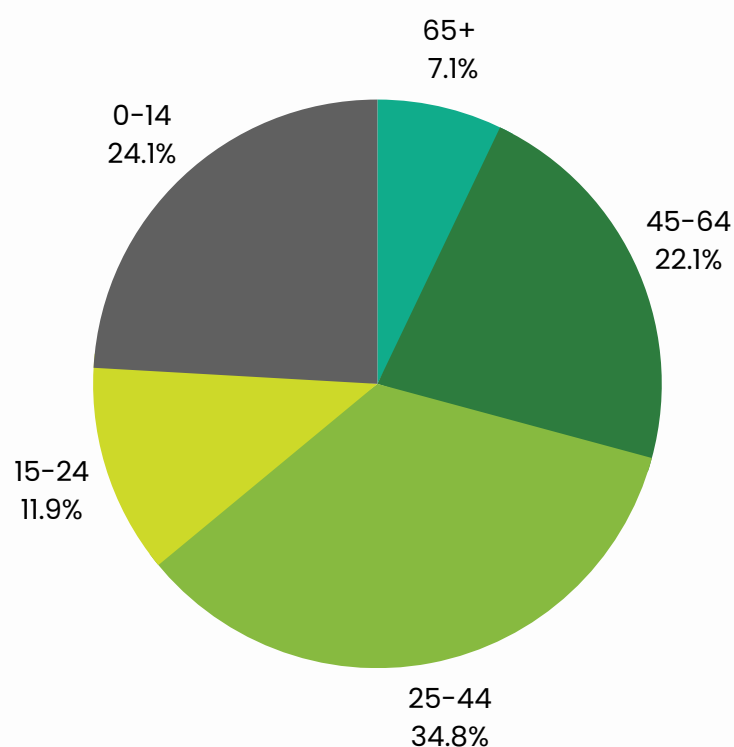
Respondents who indicated they experienced being provisionally accommodated noted stays in a jail/prison/remand centre and/or living in a home provided by their employer or owned/rented out by an Indigenous government. Some respondents also indicated staying in a home unwillingly because they have nowhere else to go and/or enduring violence because they had nowhere else to go.

## Slave Lake Population Overview


According to Alberta's Regional Dashboard (Government of Alberta, n.d.), the Town of Slave Lake covers a 14.4 square km geographical land base with a total population size of 6,377; making up 0.14% of Alberta's total population.

49.3% (3,145) of the population is reported as female, while 50.7% (3,232) report as male.

**Figure 3: Slave Lake Population Age Breakdown (2022)**



The average age of the population is 34.6 years in Slave Lake.



According to Statistics Canada (2021) Census numbers, 14.3% (955) of the population immigrated to Canada and 19.4% (1,290) of the population identified as a visible minority. Further, 26.7% (1,780) of Slave Lake's population identified as Indigenous; 59% (1,055) of whom are First Nations, 39% (690) of whom are Métis, and 1% (25) of whom noted multiple Indigenous ancestries.

The 2021 Census also reports that the Town of Slave Lake has 2,405 private households with an average of 2.8 people per household. Of the 2,405 private households, 65.7% (1,580) own their home, while 34.3% (825) rent their home with the average monthly rent for a two-bedroom dwelling listed at \$1,055. Additionally, 65.3% (1,570) of occupied private dwellings are houses and 16.4% (395) of occupied private dwellings are apartments. Single-family houses make up 39.4% of all private dwellings in the area. Further, 30.8% (740) of households in Slave Lake report one or more of the following:

- Spending more than 30% of their income on shelter costs,
- That their dwelling is “not suitable”, and/or
- That their dwelling has “major repair needs”.

The median after-tax income in the Town of Slave Lake is \$46,000 for individuals and \$95,000 for households. According to the Economic Research Institute (2023), the cost of living in the Town of Slave Lake is 9% higher than the national average and 3% higher than the provincial average for Alberta.

The surrounding Municipal District of Lesser Slave River No. 124 is home to an additional 2,681 people. The Town of Slave Lake serves as a local centre for the area and is also home to the administrative office for the Sawridge First Nation.

## Housing & Service Needs Estimation Survey Respondent Population Overview

153 community members responded to the Slave Lake survey; 68% (104) identified as female, 26% (39) as male, 1% (1) as gender non-conforming, and 5% (8) preferred not to answer. Additionally, 82% (126) of respondents identified as straight, 1% (2) as lesbian/gay, 8% (12) as bisexual/pansexual, and 1% (1) as asexual. Additionally, 8% (12) preferred not to answer.

Of the 153 respondents, 1% (1) were between the ages of 0-19; we know from their unique identifier, which asks for their birth year, as well as our ethical standards on the age of consent when administering the survey that this respondent is between 14-18 years old. 38% (58) of respondents were between 20-39, 46% (70) were between 40-59, and 16% (24) were 60 or older.

89% (136) of respondents were born in Canada (Turtle Island), while 7% (10) immigrated to Canada, and 5% (7) preferred not to answer.

64% (99) of respondents are white, while 23% (36) of respondents self-identified as racialized. 4% (6) of respondents indicated that their identity was not listed in the options provided and 8% (13) preferred not to answer. 27% (41) of respondents self-identified as Indigenous and 5% (7) preferred not to answer; 63% (26) as First Nations, 24% (10) as Métis, 2% (1) as Inuit, and 10% (4) as having other Indigenous ancestry.

8% (11) of respondents stayed in foster care, a youth group home, or under a youth/young adult agreement in the past, and 1% (1) preferred not to answer.

Lastly, in terms of demographics, respondents were asked to indicate if they have ever served in the Canadian Armed Forces/Foreign Military Service, Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) or Foreign Police Service, or local or foreign Emergency Services (EMS, Police, Fire Department). Of the 153 survey respondents, 1% (1) were in the RCMP or foreign police service, 7% (11) were in local or foreign Emergency Services, and 3% (5) preferred not to answer.



## Housing Secure vs. Housing Insecure Survey Respondent Population Overview

Table 2: Housing & Service Needs Estimation Survey Population Overview Comparison by Housing Stability

Demographic Characteristic	Housing Secure	Housing Insecure
# of Survey Respondents	72	81
Gender	Male: 18	Male: 21
	Female: 48	Female: 56
	Trans-male: 0	Trans-male: 0
	Trans-female: 0	Trans-female: 0
	Gender non-conforming: 1	Gender non-conforming: 0
	Don't know: 0	Don't know: 1
Sexual Orientation	Straight: 61	Straight: 65
	Gay/Lesbian: 0	Gay/Lesbian: 2
	Bisexual/Pansexual: 6	Bisexual/Pansexual: 6
	Asexual: 0	Asexual: 1
	Two-spirit: 0	Two-spirit: 0
	Don't know: 0	Don't know: 0

<b>Age</b>	0 – 19 years: 1	0 – 19 years: 0
	20 – 39 years: 19	20 – 39 years: 39
	40 – 59 years: 34	40 – 59 years: 36
	60+: 18	60+: 6
<b>Immigration Status</b>	Born in Canada: 64	Born in Canada: 72
	Born outside of Canada: 5	Born outside of Canada: 5
<b>Racial Identity</b>	White: 52	White: 47
	Visible minority: 16	Visible minority: 28
<b>Indigenous Identity</b>	First Nations: 7	First Nations: 19
	Métis: 4	Métis: 6
	Inuit: 0	Inuit: 1
	Other Indigenous ancestry: 2	Other Indigenous ancestry: 2
<b>Time in Foster Care, Youth Group Home, or Youth/Young Adult Agreement</b>	Spent time in care: 2	Spent time in care: 9
<b>Served in Canadian Armed Forces, RCMP, Emergency Services</b>	Canadian Armed Forces: 0	Canadian Armed Forces: 0
	RCMP: 0	RCMP: 1
	Emergency Services: 4	Emergency Services: 7

Based on this survey population overview breakdown, we can determine the following:

- Respondents identifying as female are 2.7x more likely than their male counterparts to be housing insecure
- 73% of Indigenous respondents are housing insecure
- 82% of respondents who spent time in care are housing insecure and 67% of housing insecure respondents who spent time in care are Indigenous
- 67% of respondents who have served/are serving in the Canadian Armed Forces, RCMP, or emergency services are housing insecure

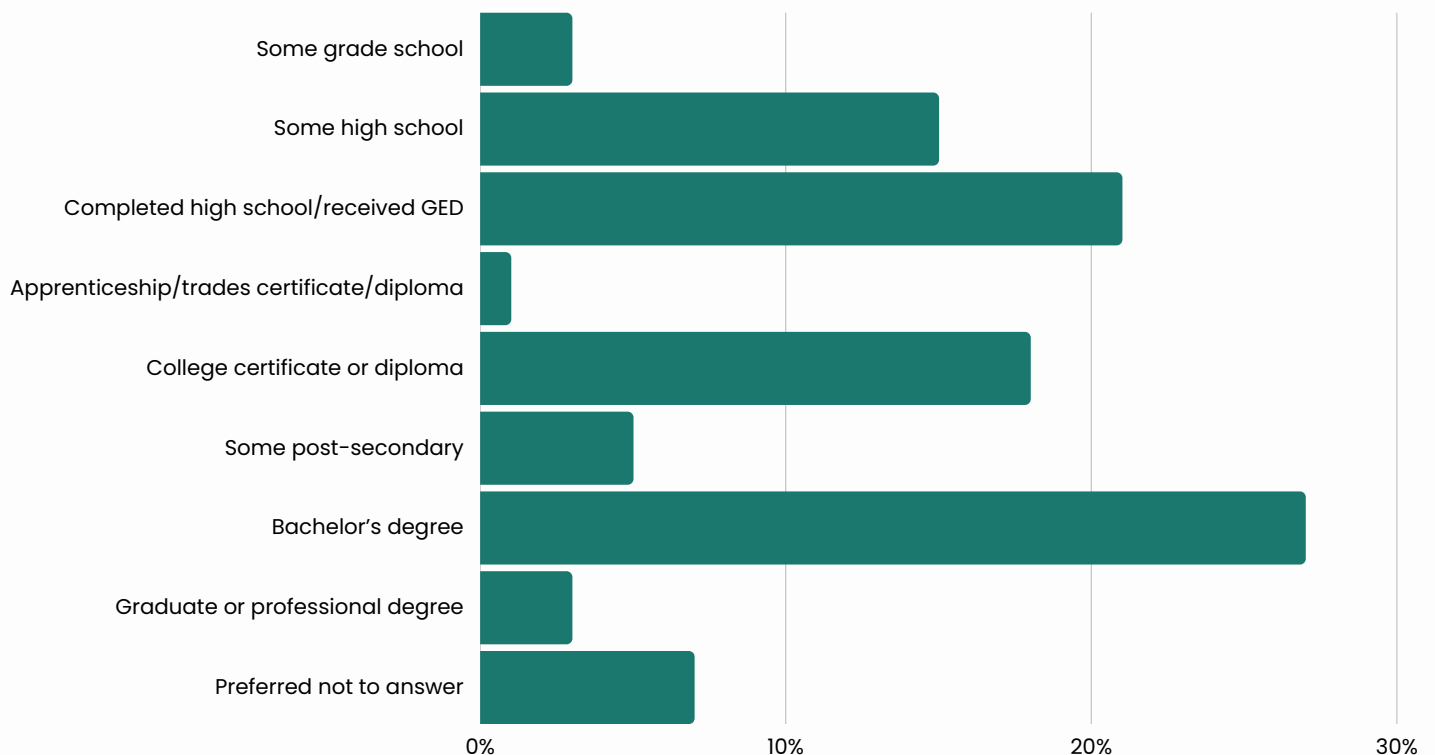
*\*Note that the rest of the reported results and analysis will focus on housing insecure respondents unless otherwise indicated.*




## Education, Employment, and Income Sources

Respondents indicated various education levels when responding to “*What is the highest level of education you’ve completed?*” 3% (2) of respondents have completed some grade school, 15% (11) have completed some high school, 21% (15) have completed high school or received their GED, 1% (1) have an apprenticeship, trades certificate, or diploma, 18% (13) have a college certificate or diploma, 5% (4) have some post-secondary, 27% (20) have a Bachelor’s degree, 3% (2) have a graduate/professional degree, and 7% (5) preferred not to answer. This can be seen in Figure 4 below.

**Figure 4: Respondents’ Education Levels Breakdown**







Additionally, 71% (52) of respondents are employed and 4% (3) preferred not to answer; 90% (46) of those employed are full-time, 8% (4) are part-time, and 2% (1) are seasonal.

Recognizing that many respondents are not full-time employed, we asked them, “*What are your sources of income?*” Respondents were encouraged to check all that apply from the following list of options: *Job-related* (e.g. employment, partner/spouse’s income, alimony/child support, etc.), *Government-related* (e.g. Seniors Benefits, Veterans’ Benefits, Disability Benefits, Employment Insurance, Student loans, etc.), *Tax-related* (e.g. child and family tax benefits, GST refunds, etc.), or *Informal* (e.g. bottle returns, panhandling, money from family and friends, etc.).

Respondents noted 85 times that they receive job-related income, 11 times that they receive government-related income, 36 times that they receive tax-related income, and 10 times that they receive informal income. Additionally, respondents noted 14 times that they have other sources of income including credit card loans and four times that they preferred not to answer.

Further, respondents were asked to disclose their approximate household income for the previous year. Responses varied widely, as seen in Table 3.

**Table 3: Respondents Approximate Household Income in 2022**

<b>Total Household Income in 2022</b>	<b># of Respondents Per Income Level</b>
\$30,000 or less	18 (25%)
Between \$30,001 and \$49,999	8 (11%)
Between \$50,000 and \$69,999	13 (18%)
Between \$70,000 and \$89,999	8 (11%)
Between \$90,000 and \$109,999	4 (5%)
More than \$110,000	10 (14%)
Prefer not to answer	12 (16%)

This can be broken down further to understand household income level by housing security status, as seen in Table 4.

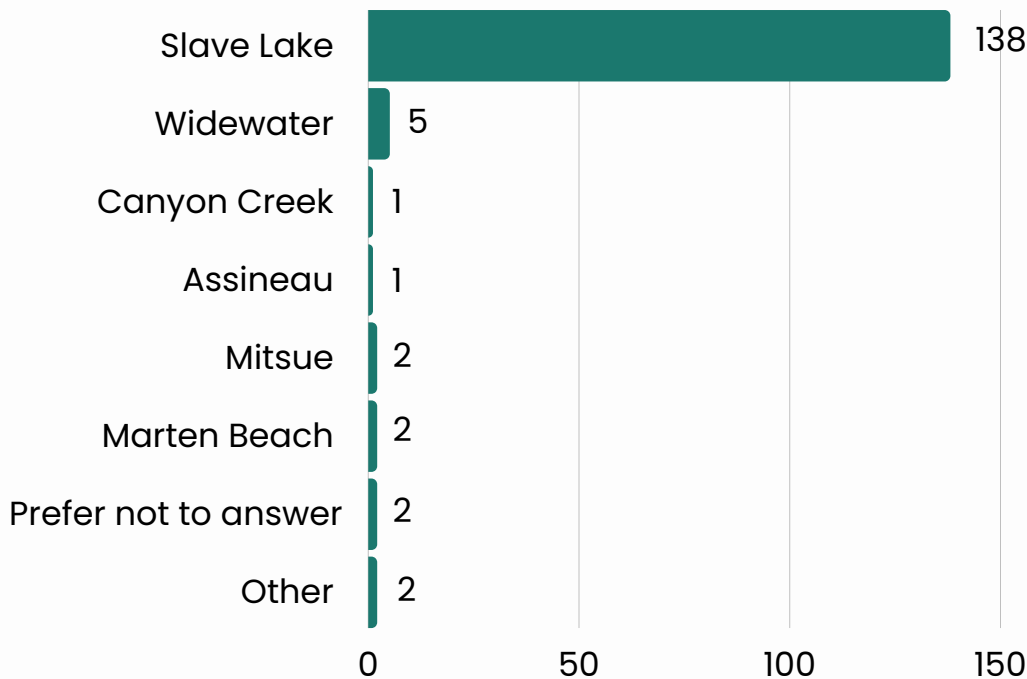
**Table 4: Respondents' Household Income in 2022 by Housing Status**

<b>Total Household Income in 2022</b>	<b># of Housing Secure Respondents Per Income Level</b>	<b># of Housing Insecure Respondents Per Income Level</b>
\$30,000 or less	2 (3%)	18 (25%)
Between \$30,001 and \$49,999	4 (6%)	8 (11%)
Between \$50,000 and \$69,999	3 (5%)	13 (18%)
Between \$70,000 and \$89,999	7 (11%)	8 (11%)
Between \$90,000 and \$109,999	10 (15%)	4 (5%)
More than \$110,000	26 (40%)	10 (14%)
Prefer not to answer	13 (20%)	12 (16%)

## Living Situation

Residents from across Slave Lake responded to the survey, as can be seen in Figure 5.

**Figure 5: Breakdown of All Survey Respondents by Location**



To better understand respondents' current living situations, respondents were asked to indicate if they rent or own their home (or if neither is true for them). 35% (28) of housing insecure respondents indicated that they own their homes, 45% (36) indicated that they rent their homes, 14% (11) noted that they neither own nor rent, and 6% (5) preferred not to answer. Comparatively, 82% (59) of housing secure respondents own their homes, 11% (8) rent their homes, 4% (3) noted that they neither own nor rent, and 3% (2) preferred not to answer.

Further, respondents were asked, “If you pay rent or a mortgage, how much do you pay per month?” Of the responses, rent and mortgage prices varied.

**Table 5: Rent or Mortgage Costs per Month by Housing Status**

<b>Rent/Mortgage Cost</b>	<b># of Housing Secure Respondents Paying Rent/Mortgage Costs</b>	<b># of Housing Insecure Respondents Paying Rent/Mortgage Costs</b>
Less than \$500	0	2 (3%)
Between \$500 to \$999	6 (9%)	13 (16%)
Between \$1000 to \$1499	18 (26%)	20 (25%)
Between \$1500 to \$1999	20 (29%)	18 (23%)
Over \$2000	6 (9%)	11 (14%)
I don't pay rent or a mortgage	15 (21%)	12 (15%)
Prefer not to answer	5 (7%)	3 (4%)

Among housing insecure respondents, whether they rent, own, or are in a different situation entirely, 25% (15) do not have sufficient and affordable heating and 15% (9) do not have access to safe drinking water.

**Table 6: Breakdown of Respondents' Missing Amenities**

<b>Missing Amenities</b>	<b># of Respondents Missing Amenities</b>
Indoor plumbing/bathing facilities	7 (12%)
Sufficient and affordable heating	15 (25%)
Safe drinking water	9 (15%)
Refrigeration	6 (10%)
Electricity (or equivalent - i.e. solar power)	5 (8%)
Cooking facilities	6 (10%)
Fire protection (smoke alarms, fire extinguishers)	12 (20%)

This breakdown highlighted respondents who lack basic amenities and is one of the ways in which respondents' objective housing situation is calculated. Some respondents self-identified as housing stable but lacked amenities that would consider their housing situation stable according to the Canadian definition of homelessness, including indoor plumbing, heat, electricity, and access to safe drinking water.

13% (19) of all respondents, 13% (10) of which are housing insecure, have always lived in Slave Lake. Of the housing insecure respondents who were not born there, 41% (31) have lived in the area for more than eight years. Respondents who are not from Slave Lake were also asked to indicate why they came to this community.

The top three reasons respondents came to the area are:

- 1.To be closer to family (28%)
- 2.To start a job (21%)
- 3.To look for work (17%)

Other reasons people moved to Slave Lake include for the lifestyle the community offers (8%), to find housing (5%), fear for safety/fleeing from violence (5%), to attend school (5%), to reconnect with culture, community, and traditions (5%), to access services/supports (4%), and environmental displacement (1%). 5% (6) of respondents indicated "other", and 2% (2) of respondents preferred not to answer.





## Community Supports

To better understand service needs and gaps in Slave Lake, respondents were asked: “Which support services do you access?” The main reasons respondents access support services are to help with health and wellness (35%), basic needs (17%), and family/parenting (14%).

**Table 7: Reasons Why Respondents Access Support Services**

<b>Services Accessed</b>	<b># of Housing Secure Respondents who Accessed these Services</b>	<b># of Housing Insecure Respondents who Accessed these Services</b>
<b>Basic Needs</b> – Food, shelter, clothing, etc.	0	18 (21%)
<b>COVID-19</b> – PPE, information, supports	0	13 (15%)
<b>Crisis Financial Support</b> – Eviction notice, utility bill problems, damage deposits, etc.	0	1 (1%)

<b>Family/Parenting -</b> Child care, parenting/family issues, relationship issues, child developmental assessment tools/referrals, etc.	6 (24%)	9 (11%)
<b>Financial -</b> Employment, housing, training/education, etc.	0	3 (4%)
<b>Health and Wellness -</b> Addictions, mental health, physical health care, spiritual/cultural, etc.	15 (60%)	23 (27%)
<b>Legal -</b> Separation/divorce/ custody, wills/estates, employment/labour standards, landlord/tenant issues, immigration issues, criminal/misdemeanor, etc.	1 (4%)	6 (7%)

<b>Support Services</b> - Help with government forms, help with accessing government/other programs or services, access to technology, etc.	2 (8%)	7 (8%)
<b>Transportation</b> - Access to basic services/education/employment, medical transportation	1 (4%)	4 (5%)

To further understand respondents' abilities to access the necessary support services, we asked: *"Which of these services were you able to access in your community?"* and *"Which of these services did you have to access in another community?"* followed by, *"If applicable, how long did you travel to access these services (one-way)?"*

Respondents were most likely to access basic needs and health and wellness services in Slave Lake, while health and wellness and legal services are most accessed outside the community, as seen in Table 8.

**Table 8: Services Accessed by Housing Insecure Respondents by Location**

<b>Services Accessed in the Community</b>	<b># of Respondents who Accessed these Services</b>	<b>Services Accessed Outside of the Community</b>	<b># of Respondents who Accessed these Services</b>
<b>Basic Needs</b> – Food, shelter, clothing, etc.	37 (14%)	<b>Basic Needs</b> – Food, shelter, clothing, etc.	14 (9%)
<b>COVID-19</b> – PPE, information, supports	27 (10%)	<b>COVID-19</b> – PPE, information, supports	12 (8%)
<b>Crisis Financial Support</b> – Eviction notice, utility bill problems, damage deposits, etc.	24 (9%)	<b>Crisis Financial Support</b> – Eviction notice, utility bill problems, damage deposits, etc.	14 (9%)
<b>Family/Parenting</b> – Child care, parenting/family issues, relationship issues, child developmental assessment tools/referrals, etc.	32 (12%)	<b>Family/Parenting</b> – Child care, parenting/family issues, relationship issues, child developmental assessment tools/referrals, etc.	14 (9%)

<b>Financial -</b> Employment, housing, training/education, etc.	29 (11%)	<b>Financial -</b> Employment, housing, training/education, etc.	16 (10%)
<b>Health and Wellness -</b> Addictions, mental health, physical health care, spiritual/cultural, etc.	38 (14%)	<b>Health and Wellness -</b> Addictions, mental health, physical health care, spiritual/cultural, etc.	31 (19%)
<b>Legal -</b> Separation/divorce /custody, wills/estates, employment/ labour standards, landlord/tenant issues, immigration issues, criminal/ misdemeanour, etc.	25 (9%)	<b>Legal -</b> Separation/divorce/ custody, wills/estates, employment/labour standards, landlord/tenant issues, immigration issues, criminal/ misdemeanour, etc.	20 (13%)

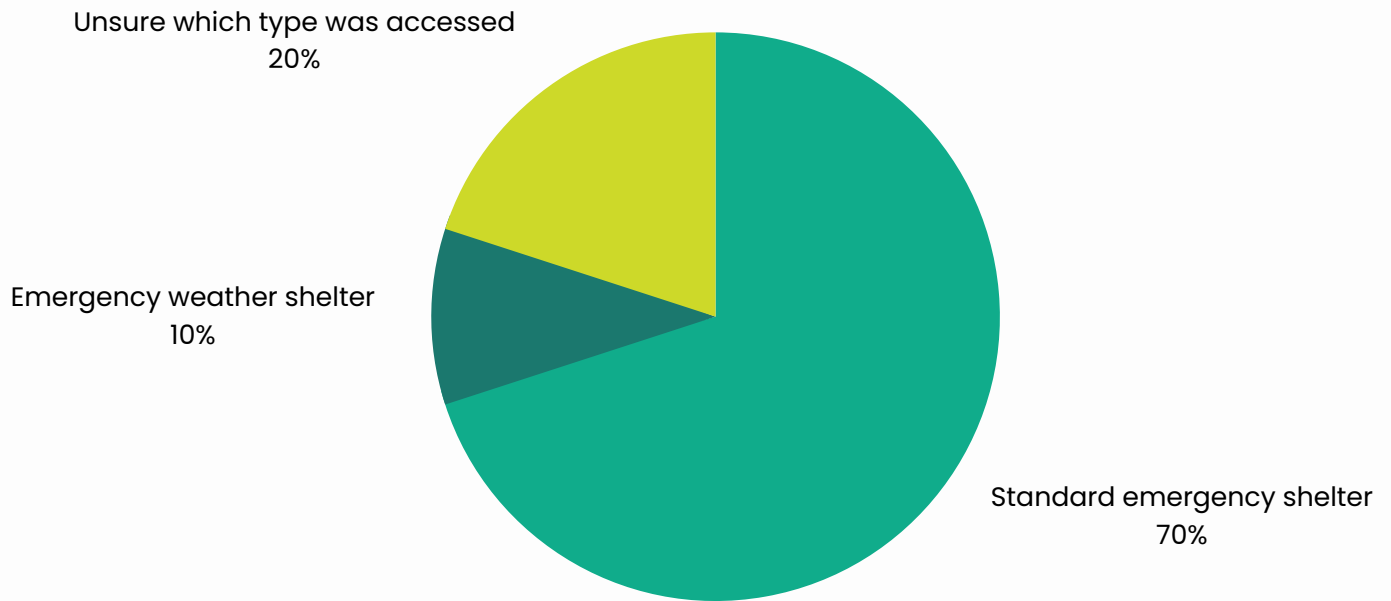
<b>Support Services -</b> Help with government forms, help with accessing government/other programs or services, access to technology, etc.	26 (10%)	<b>Support Services -</b> Help with government forms, help with accessing government/other programs or services, access to technology, etc.	15 (9%)
<b>Transportation -</b> Access to basic services/education /employment, medical transportation	21 (8%)	<b>Transportation -</b> Access to basic services/education/ employment, medical transportation	18 (11%)

Respondents noted travelling an average of two hours one-way to access services. Time and distance to access services outside of the community is a barrier for some respondents; while 60% of respondents travel by vehicle to get to these services, 14% rely on family members or friends, 4% rely on public transit or e-bus, 10% rely on taxis and/or a service agency staff arranging a ride for them, and 12% resort to hitchhiking to access services.

What's important to consider is that respondents who are unable to access the necessary support will continue to experience housing insecurity at much higher rates than those respondents who can access the support needed to stabilize their housing situation.

13% (10) of respondents accessed an emergency shelter in the past 12 months and 4% (3) preferred not to answer; 70% (7) accessed a standard emergency shelter, 10% (1) accessed an emergency weather shelter, and 20% (2) were not sure which type of shelter they accessed.

## Figure 6: Emergency Shelter Use



Of the respondents who needed shelter services but did not access them, several reasons were provided as to why, as outlined in Table 9. The top two reasons why respondents did not access shelter services when they needed them were because there was isolation from social support and safety concerns.



**Table 9: Reasons Respondents Did Not Access Shelter Services When Needed**

<b>Reason for Not Accessing Shelter Services</b>	<b># of Respondents</b>
The right kind of shelter wasn't available (for example, I needed a women's shelter and couldn't access one)	1 (3%)
The shelter was full	4 (12%)
There was no shelter in my area	4 (12%)
I didn't meet the intake criteria to access the shelter	1 (3%)
I didn't feel safe	5 (15%)
The shelter was unclean	1 (3%)
The shelter did not welcome me because of my gender identity	0
Alcohol/substance use is not permitted on site	2 (6%)
Lack of disability accommodations	0
Lack of transportation	3 (9%)
No pets allowed	3 (9%)
Isolation from social support (family, partner, friends, etc.)	5 (15%)
Prefer not to answer	3 (9%)



## Insights on Community Spaces


Wanting to ensure the respondents had the opportunity to reflect on their experiences in the community, they were asked; *"What are two things you love about the community and what are two things you don't love about the community?"*

In analyzing responses across both housing secure and housing insecure respondents about what they love about Slave Lake, two themes emerged: the sense of community and parks and recreation.

Sense of Community: Respondents overwhelmingly spoke of their love of the community in terms of size, location, and feel. Respondents love how small and rural the community is with many respondents indicating a love for the comfort and safety they feel in Slave Lake. Respondents also appreciate how beautiful Slave Lake is and the amount of support the community provides. Respondents also spoke to the "feel" of the community, mainly attributing this to the people in the community. More than anything else, respondents emphasized over and over again their love for the people in Slave Lake; how friendly people are, how welcoming people are, how supportive people are, how close-knit people in the community are, and people's community spirit.

Parks and Recreation: Respondents spoke of their love for the parks and green space in and around the community, for the recreation opportunities, and for the proximity to additional nature spaces in the community. Respondents love the community's proximity to the lake, the beach, walking and hiking trails, and campgrounds. Many also noted the ability to participate in a variety of outdoor recreation activities year-round, including hunting, fishing, and camping as huge sources of enjoyment. Others spoke of the natural beauty of Slave Lake's landscape.

In contrast, when discussing the things they don't love about the community,



respondents spoke often of the lack of affordability, and a lack of services within the community.

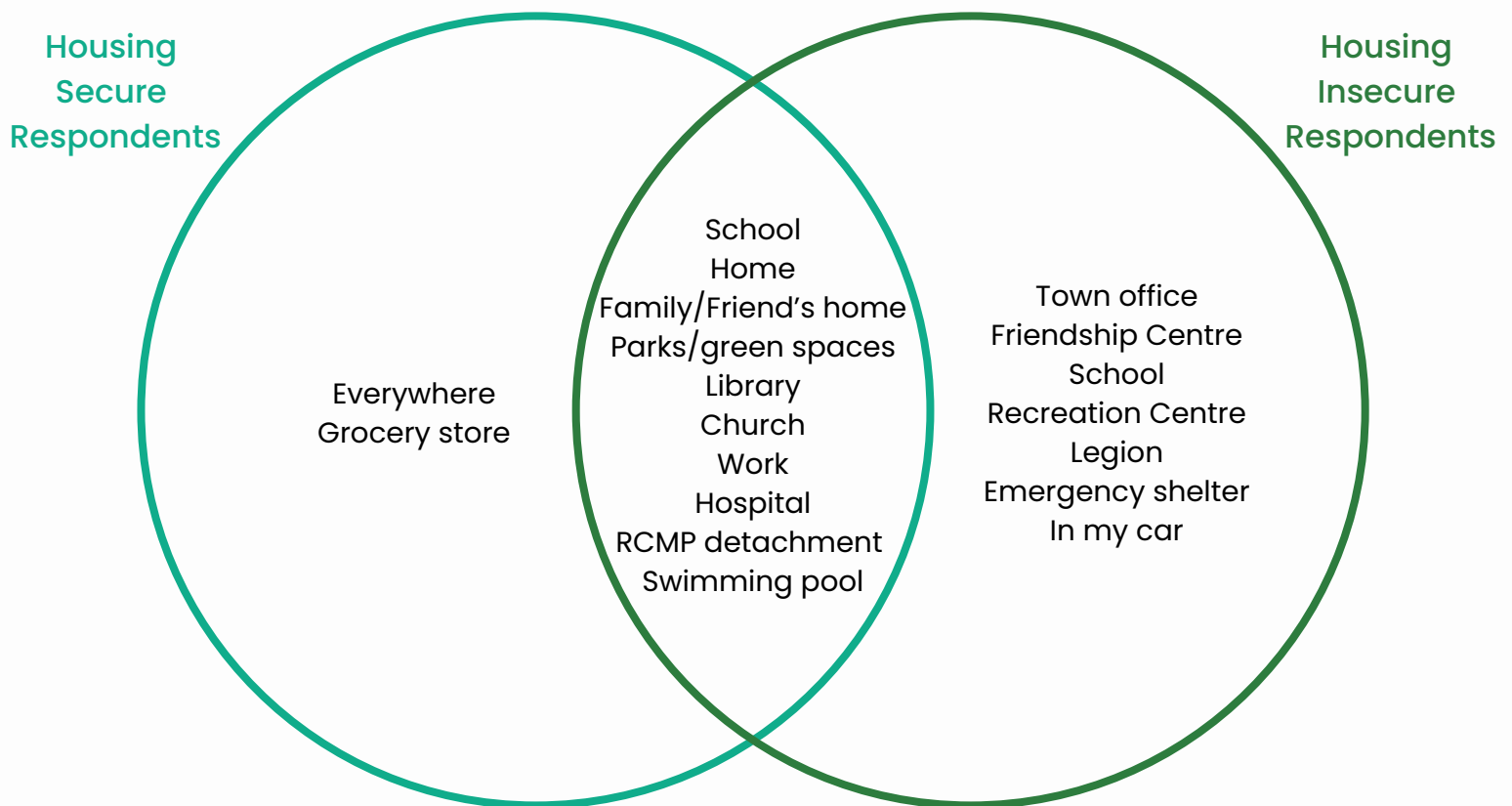
Lack of Affordability: Despite their love for the community, many respondents expressed frustration with the increasing cost of living in Slave Lake. Respondents noted the increasing cost of goods and services as a major source of concern. The increasing cost of food, gas, utilities, and taxes specifically, has made Slave Lake unaffordable for some. Others noted that rental costs in Slave Lake are increasing at unsustainable rates.

Services: Respondents often noted the lack of services available in Slave Lake when discussing what they don't love about the community. Specifically, respondents are frustrated by the lack of childcare options and the lack of medical services in the community. Many respondents also expressed their displeasure with the lack of addiction/substance use support. Additionally, respondents spoke about the housing shortage in Slave Lake, emphasizing the need for affordable housing. Others noted concerns regarding the lack of public transportation and road maintenance.

Additionally, many respondents expressed concerns about the number of people experiencing homelessness in Slave Lake and the lack of services available to support them in their housing journey. One respondent summarized several of the concerns, stating: "I am concerned about the homeless population and worry they are not getting the support they need."

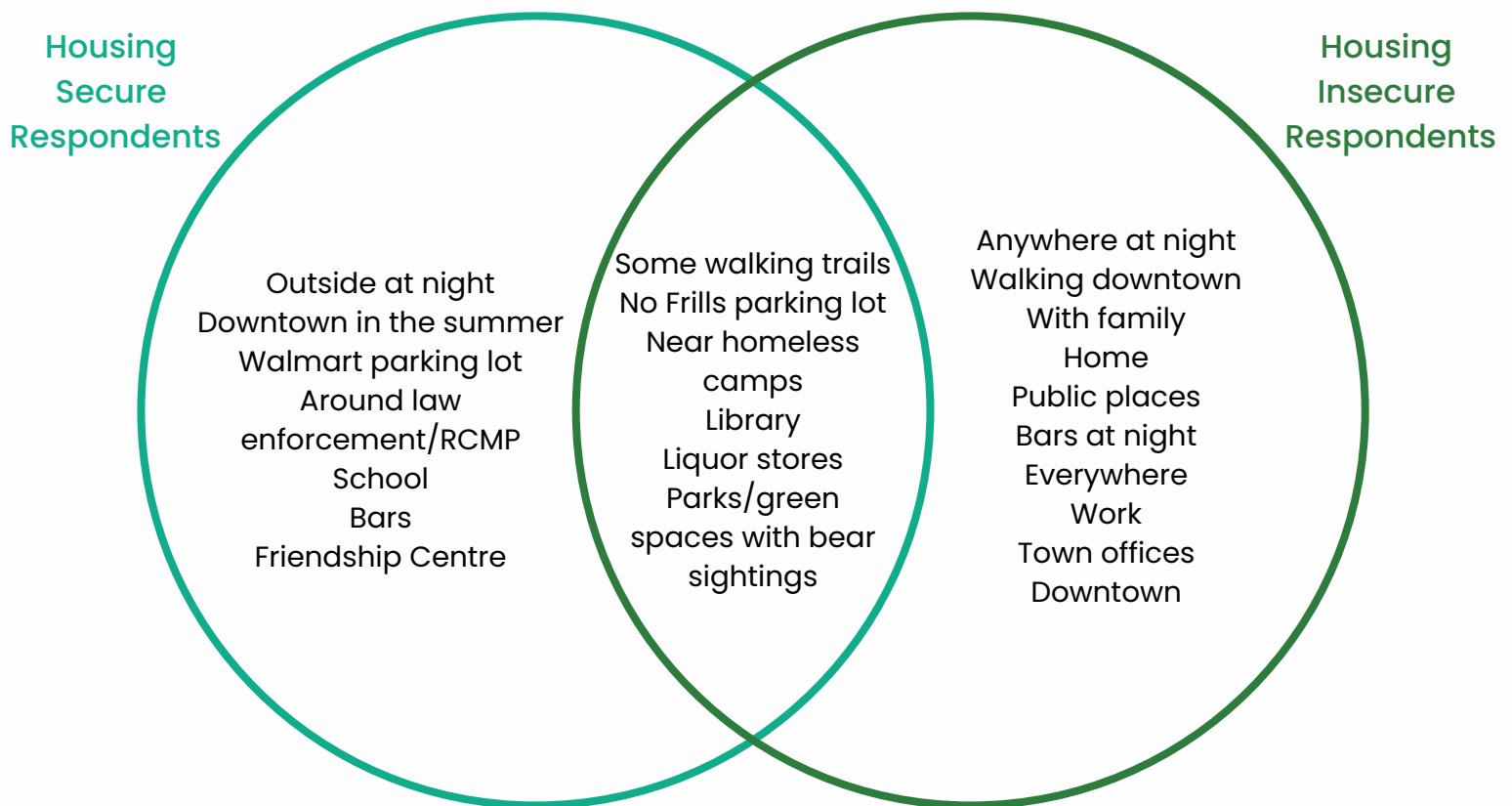
Respondents were also asked, *"What are two places that make you feel safe in the community and what are two places that make you feel unsafe in the community?"* Figure 7 highlights the spaces where respondents feel safe.

Figure 7: Venn Diagram of Safe Spaces Responses by Housing Status



In comparison, Figure 8 highlights spaces where housing secure and housing insecure respondents felt unsafe.

Figure 8: Venn Diagram of Unsafe Spaces Responses by Housing Status



## “What Would You Like to See More of in Your Community?”

Respondents, both housing secure and housing insecure, outlined many things they would like to see more of in the community. Responses spoke of the need for more accessible and affordable housing and more support services in Slave Lake. This emphasis on housing is echoed in respondents' answers to a previous question they were asked: *“Does Slave Lake provide enough...employment opportunities; free/accessible recreational and social opportunities; social services; accessible and affordable housing; public transportation; access to food?”*

**Table 10: Respondents' Perceptions of Slave Lake's Provision of Services**

<b>Does the Community Provide Enough:</b>	<b># of Respondents Who Believe the Community Provides Enough...</b>	<b># of Respondents Who Believe the Community Does Not Provide Enough...</b>	<b># of Respondents Who Aren't Sure if the Community Provides Enough...</b>
Employment opportunities	76 (58%)	30 (23%)	26 (20%)
Free/accessible recreational and social opportunities	61 (46%)	54 (41%)	17 (13%)
Social services	83 (62%)	23 (17%)	27 (20%)

Accessible & affordable housing	16 (12%)	85 (65%)	30 (23%)
Public transportation	15 (11%)	101 (77%)	15 (11%)
Access to food (grocery stores, markets, food banks, etc.)	104 (79%)	18 (14%)	10 (8%)

Of note in Table 10 is the significant discrepancy in respondents who believe there is enough accessible and affordable housing in Slave Lake (12%) versus the number of respondents who believe more accessible and affordable housing is needed (65%) and the number of respondents who believe there is enough transportation (11%) versus the number of respondents believe more transportation is needed (77%).

Housing: Respondents overwhelmingly expressed a need for more accessible and affordable housing in Slave Lake. Many respondents noted the need for increased housing, citing a housing shortage in the community. More specifically though, respondents highlighted the need for affordable rental units, affordable seniors housing, and pet-friendly rental units. Others weren't sure exactly what type of housing is needed in the community but clearly expressed wanting to see more housing for unsheltered and emergency-sheltered residents. Lastly, a few respondents spoke to the need for support in advocating against predatory landlords.

Support Services: Respondents indicated several services that are needed in Slave Lake. As indicated by respondents, accessible and affordable transportation is at the forefront of services needed. Others emphasized the need for more health and wellness services, including medical facilities, a medical and



detox centre that would house and provide supportive programming for residents struggling with substance use, and mental health challenges. Additionally, many would like to see more access to basic needs for housing insecure residents.

Upon further analysis, an overall satisfaction score was generated to better understand respondents' perceptions of service provision in the community. It was determined that housing secure respondents are 51% satisfied, while housing insecure respondents are just 40% satisfied with service provision in Slave Lake. Important to note here is that the satisfaction rates calculated above speak to the lack of available services in the area rather than satisfaction with currently available services in the community.



## What Does Homelessness Look Like in Slave Lake?

In a report that is composed of mainly quantitative data, it can be easy to overlook the humanity behind the numbers reported. Using the most common responses from the survey, we were able to compile a profile of a “typical” respondent facing housing insecurity.

In the case of Slave Lake, this is a woman between 20–39 who lives with her spouse/partner and one dependent in a home she rents. She has lived in the community for over eight years and originally came to Slave Lake to start a new job. Despite being full-time employed, she reports her annual household income for 2022 as between \$30,001 and \$49,999. As a result, she spends more than 30% of her monthly income on housing.

The true diversity of respondents is illustrated in the Results & Analysis section, but this highlights what someone experiencing housing insecurity might look like in Slave Lake.




# Opportunities Moving Forward

Based on the findings outlined in this report, RDN has identified three opportunities to support housing insecure respondents moving forward. They are:

**1. Increase community awareness and understanding of housing insecurity and homelessness.** Community conversations around housing insecurity should have two goals: First, to broaden the community's understanding of and empathetic reaction to community members experiencing housing insecurity, and second, to help community members understand the various experiences of housing insecurity in Slave Lake. Of the 81 survey respondents who were identified as housing insecure, only 35 self-identified as housing insecure. It is possible then, that the 46 respondents who believe they are housing secure have never accessed supports that could help improve their current housing situation. Facilitating community conversations on housing insecurity and homelessness will help to ensure more people better understand their current housing status and at the same time, will hopefully encourage the community to show empathy and understanding towards housing insecure respondents' experiences.

**2. Consider public transportation options in Slave Lake.** Respondents indicated a lack of transportation as prohibitive to accessing support services, recreation opportunities, and shelter in the community. 10% of respondents relied on taxis and/or service agencies to coordinate rides and 12% of respondents hitchhiked to access services. Additionally, 77% of respondents do not believe there are enough public transportation options in Slave Lake. To ensure respondents can get the support they need to stabilize their housing situation, whether that be access to medical or mental health support, the employment centre, obtaining a job, or even finding housing, accessible transportation is crucial. Public transportation is often very difficult to provide in rural communities, due to lack of infrastructure and costs associated with operations. Consider creative and/or alternative options to public transportation such as car share programs, taxi credits, volunteer ride share programs, or other options to ensure community members, specifically housing insecure community members, can get around the community.



**3. Conduct an audit of current housing options in Slave Lake with the goal of increasing accessible and affordable housing.** Respondents overwhelmingly highlighted the need for accessible and affordable housing options in the community. As a result, it is important to highlight the need for affordable and adaptable housing projects to increase housing options in Slave Lake which could include income-based housing units, below-market-rate rental units, and/or advocating for more creative housing options. Additionally, supporting residents in understanding their rights as tenants and working to advocate for rental agreements that include pets would help many residents in their attempts to access housing.

## References

- Abedin, Z. (2022). *Step-by-step guide to estimating rural homelessness, 2nd Ed.* Rural Development Network. <https://www.ruraldevelopment.ca/publications/step-by-step-guide-to-estimating-homelessness>
- Economic Research Institute. (2023). Cost of Living Data in Slave Lake, Alberta, Canada. <https://www.erieri.com/cost-of-living/canada/alberta/slave-lake>
- Gaetz, S., Barr, C., Friesen, A., Harris, B., Hill, C., Kovacs-Burns, K., Pauly, B., Pearce, B., Turner, A., & Marsolais, A. (2012). *Canadian Definition of Homelessness*. Toronto: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press.
- Government of Alberta. (n.d.). Lesser Slave River No.124. Alberta Regional Dashboard. Retrieved April 26, 2023 from <https://regionaldashboard.alberta.ca/region/lesser-slave-river-no-124/#/>
- Government of Alberta. (n.d.). Slave Lake. Alberta Regional Dashboard. Retrieved April 26, 2023 from <https://regionaldashboard.alberta.ca/region/slave-lake/#/>
- Schiff, R., Wilkinson, A., Kelford, T., Pelletier, S., & Waegemakers Schiff, J. (2022). Counting the undercounted: Enumerating rural homelessness in Canada. *International Journal on Homelessness*, 3(1), 1-17. <https://doi.org/10.5206/ijoh.2022.2.14633>
- Statistics Canada. (2021). Census profile, 2021 Census of Population. Slave Lake, Town (T) [census subdivision], Alberta. Retrieved from <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?LANG=E&GENDERlist=1&STATISTIClist=1,4&DGUIDlist=2021A00054817029&HEADERlist=2,30,20,23,9,7,11,19,1,3&SearchText=slave%20lake>
- Thistle, J. (2017). *Indigenous Definition of Homelessness in Canada*. Toronto: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press.



Rural Development Network  
(780)-964-2736  
11443 - 143 Street, NW  
Edmonton, AB