

tural conditions that create poverty and injustice in the first place: a new home for a family is a wonderful thing, but why are the families in this region so poor in the first place? It is critical that we maintain a double focus here and both celebrate our successes while at the same time being cognizant of the much larger challenge underlying the structural inequalities that require a practice of social architecture.

In spite of the structural critique, these stories are powerful. They demonstrate, again, what individuals and a small group of people can do. They are anecdotes to a media-saturated world that encourages passivity and apathy and to the elitist discourses in some architectural domains. They show us that we, individually and as a profession, can be useful, we can do good deeds with good design. All of the participants in the many projects would probably agree with Hurley when he responded to a query about what is he going to do after architecture school. "I'm going to do things that need to get done in this world" (p. 227). Amen.

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#### HOMELESS WOMEN AT HOME?

*Safe Haven: The Story of a Shelter for Homeless Women* by Rae Bridgman. Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press, 2003. 161 pp., \$45.00 hardcover, \$21.00 paper.

In this short, insightful volume, Rae Bridgman describes the life history of Savard's, a homeless shelter in Toronto dedicated to chronically homeless women. Based on four years of ethno-

graphic fieldwork including extended participant observation, exhaustive field notes, daily logbook entries, participation in staff and advisory board meetings, and unstructured interviews with staff, Bridgman examines the process of creating Savard's. She provides a lens through which to view the "day-to-day rhythms of life" of its residents (p. 6) and "the inherent tensions between the 'vision' [the alternative proposed] and the 'practice' [the reality of bringing the vision into being]" (p. 7) of the facility. A unique setting, Savard's was designed by women for women, initially to provide shelter for a total of 10 homeless women. Unlike most shelters for the homeless, Savard's emphasizes non-intervention and zero-eviction policies. There are few rules and operating policies; indeed, the shelter is designed and operated to grant women street survivors opportunities for choice and empowerment.

*In Safe Haven, the very concept of a safe haven is understood to be a reaction against existing crisis-driven, time-limited, bureaucratic, and rule-bound ways of addressing homelessness.*  
(p. 10)

Bridgman's ethnographic focus moves beyond classical methods of research on the homeless that describe and prescribe solutions to the quandary. Instead, she seeks to describe how an innovative project evolves through multiple phases of development and implementation and proves to be successful. Bridgman's story informs readers about "home, homelessness, new visions, places of strength and a way forward" for chronically homeless women (p. 15). She employs a wide array of sources to characterize the homeless epidemic among women in Toronto, to explain ties between mental illness and homelessness, and to critique homeless shelters and related initiatives that address chronic homelessness. The strength of Bridgman's contribution comes from the comprehensiveness of her perspective and her ability to sensitively relay the chronology of the creation and implementation of Savard's in a manner providing intimate insight into the lifestyles of women street survivors. This volume should appeal to scholars and practitioners from many different disciplines as it recounts the lived experiences of those who developed the *Safe Haven* vision, those who made it happen, and those who worked and lived there.

The text is well-written and clearly organized. Though not a "how-to" guide, each chapter is designed to share a different element and perspective on the *Safe Haven* story. An introductory chapter establishes a context. Bridgman outlines the purpose of the initiative, describes her use of an ethnographic approach, identifies key themes emerging from the research, and concisely outlines the manner in which the story will unfold in subsequent chapters. In Chapter Two, Bridgman tells the story of what it was like to provide outreach to homeless women on the streets of Toronto prior to the opening of Savard's. She describes how outreach to individual homeless women rather than the use of a more traditional focus group methodology was a critical component of involving them in the planning process. Such an approach entailed identifying individual homeless women's preferences in a manner that facilitated the creation of Savard's as a response to the diversity of experienced need rather than the filtering and homogenizing of a group process. Chapter Three defines chronic homelessness, makes connections with mental illness, reviews previous initiatives for ending chronic homelessness, and provides strong justification for the creation of a shelter such as Savard's. In Chapter Four, the vision of *Safe Haven* emerges as Bridgman presents information on the processes of decision making and principles of non-intervention that became the essence of Savard's identity and distinctiveness. Chapter Five turns Savard's from a vision into a reality; information is provided on the planning and design of the facility. The reader is then taken inside. In 21 pages of excerpts from a simulated sample week of daily logbooks, we are provided with a window on the everyday experiences of the staff and residents. As the story unfolds, it becomes apparent that the staff holds strongly to maintaining the original vision of Savard's. But in Chapter Seven, we learn how experience leads to "utopian pragmatics" (p. 102), changes, and a "natural progression" in operation as the project evolves over time. Finally, in a reflective concluding chapter, Bridgman summarizes and ties together the strands of her treatise as she focuses on what was learned from the story of Savard's.

From a practical standpoint, those who will most benefit from the story include social workers and other providers with an interest in understanding the lives and circumstances of chronically homeless women. Concentrating on

architectural and design elements, Bridgman's work highlights the need to acknowledge homeless women's life experiences and to incorporate their thoughts and views regarding appropriate and meaningful design into the construction of shelters that are consonant with the perspective of clients who are often mistrustful, insecure, alienated, and ill-served by traditional approaches to residential design. Unfortunately, only a short chapter is dedicated to the design phase of the project and to these critical issues. Although brief, this chapter offers crucial insight into initial brainstorming sessions with the architects as well as photographs and sketches of "sleeping nooks" that were designed with the aim of helping each woman to make her own space in the shelter and to transform this space into a secure place. The goal for the design of Savard's is to generate the kind of environment that will help women to "come inside" and achieve "special flexibility, choice, and a sense of ownership" (p. 73).

Though this book defines chronically homeless women as those on the streets or those having short-lived periods of being housed, "who is or is not homeless remains a slippery question" (p. 25). It is arguable that some individuals, despite not having a shelter overhead, do not consider themselves as homeless. Bridgman's work may have benefited by exploring this phenomenon, for it could have serious implications for policy and for the design and philosophy of future shelters. For example, consistent notions of home in the scholarly literature include feelings of security, control, identity, and connectedness (Dovey, 1985; Rowles, 2003). Though the goal of Savard's was to respond to the ways in which the women wanted to live and be in that space, and not necessarily to create "home," Bridgman's research could have benefited from further examination of how homeless women define home, for perhaps then the *Safe Haven*'s project could more accurately "evolve and change as the women involved teach, educate and inform us about their strengths, abilities, issues, needs, wants and perspectives" (p. 58).

By the end of two and a half years, five women had moved into alternative housing options, three successfully set up their own households, and one left Savard's to live in another transitional shelter. Three women went back to life on the streets, but they maintained regular contact with Savard's. Paradoxically, could it be that the

support provided by that contact and the possibility that they could always return gave these women the security/comfort they needed in order to call street life "home"? While staff of the shelter fostered the women's contacts, it seems that more concrete, although unforced, intervention — for intervention was occurring at Savard's (as admitted by staff) — might more effectively initiate the transition from street to shelter. Bridgman did not report findings comparing transition from street to traditional shelters/homes that endorse rules and regulations versus the non-intrusive environment provided by Savard's. Such comparison may be important from a policy standpoint.

Though Bridgman eloquently and creatively shared the story of Savard's — a story about homeless women in a new-wave shelter that offered few rules — we felt that she might have offered us even more had she incorporated a more developed, theoretically focused, and policy-oriented interpretation. There is a responsibility for researchers of Bridgman's caliber to move beyond description. Certainly, Bridgman accomplishes her mission of documenting Savard's story in a manner that will inspire others to explore alternative methods to

help women street survivors. Her contribution, a non-judgmental exemplar of practical qualitative feminist research, lies in providing a rich experiential description that can serve as a foundation for continued efforts at better understanding the multidimensional complexity of the transition between being homeless and at home. We just wish that she had been a little more directly prescriptive and taken us a little farther along the pathway.

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