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HOME, please visit our website.

Homeless in Kenora Volume IV
A Collection of Stories



www.makingkenorahome.ca

Dreaming of Home

The stories in this booklet are written in the words of the storytellers.

Their real names have not been used.

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Created with assistance from Kenora-Patricia Child and Family Services.

Published February 14, 2011



Making Kenora HOME
COMMUNITY SOLUTIONS
FOR HOMELESSNESS

Tina

I have lots of tenancy stories. The place I live in now is not too bad but that's relative. The floor is spongy. The toilet chain is still waiting for repair by the landlord. Of course, it has been 4 months since I reported it. I'm pretty patient except that the landlord complained to me that the water was running in the toilet which increased his bill. You survive being a tenant by keeping a sense of humour. I couldn't keep a straight face when one landlord told me that I had to repair the hole in the floor where my four year old child fell through. He said the damage was our fault. Even if the child had jumped off the bed, he should not have fallen through the trailer floor. He only weighed 40 pounds in total.

Sometimes my sense of haha gets lost-like the time the police arrived at my door with a falsified eviction order. They were called because the landlord convinced them I was violent. I admit to being hormonally whacked because I was eight months pregnant but I doubt that a mother with three kids under the age of 9 has time to be a threat to anyone. The police were embarrassed and quite helpful when we went to the tenant tribunal where we proved that the order was faked. Of course the landlord just next claimed that she had sold the place so I still had to move anyways.

The next place was small. It was all that I could afford. There were seven of us squeezed into a little three bedroom place. The bedrooms were shotgun style-each leading into the other which didn't do much for privacy. Our landlord had mental health issues as well as a drinking problem. The first night we were in the place he showed up drunk. He used his key to open our door. We looked up to see him standing in front of us, drunk and exposed. He often entered our unit without permission but since we didn't have another place to go, we put up with it. We did make sure that the kids were never alone because we never knew why he needed to walk through our place.

After that I shared a place. It was a way to get a better rental. Unfortunately, I went out of town for awhile. My housemate didn't pay the rent. I returned and found the place emptied of everything. While trying to get my stuff back, the landlord had a fire in his storage shed and I lost everything-birth certificates for my children, family mementos, pictures-everything. There was nothing left but what I had with me.

It took awhile to rebuild after that. I found a cheap place with a crazier landlord. I worked at his business to pay for my rent. There wasn't much money except the tips I earned. The landlord wanted more than my labour. I laughed in his face. The next thing I knew, the door was removed from my apartment. I went to get help from the legal clinic. I was evicted before they could even respond. Again I lost my belongings. It took us a year to win the illegal eviction case and the landlord was ordered to pay me a compensation for my things since he failed to preserve them. Of course he refused. The case then went the Ministry of Housing. A year later, he was ordered to pay them a fine as well. The Ministry was happy but I knew this landlord better. It's been two years and neither the Ministry nor I have received any money. I laugh every time I see his fancy condo development sign.

I would like to get subsidized housing but there was a mistake made by welfare that resulted in arrears. I can't get back on their waiting list until the arrears are paid and I can't pay the arrears until I find work that pays enough. Right now I am only getting an average of 12 hours a week at minimum wage. I know that I will not be able to pay February's rent in full. I get vouchers for food but can't get basic necessities like sanitary supplies for my teenage daughter and myself. It's a hard knock life-but still, we laugh.



"My place sucks"

I had moved from an apartment building. It was bad there. It was even smaller and other tenants were always banging on about keeping my kids quiet. They are kids and kids can't stay quiet all the time.

I moved to a duplex but it's still small and has no storage space. I have a little back yard but we can't use it because it is not fenced. We can't leave toys outside because the neighbourhood kids will come over and break them. We can't walk in the grass because the neighbour's dog poops all over. I've complained but it didn't change anything.

The rent may be subsidized but I still have utilities. I would like to spend my child tax benefit on my kids, not my utility bills. Sometimes when I'm shopping, the kids pull me to the Nevada booth because they give out free suckers. Then I end up buying tickets because I'm tired and I think maybe, maybe I might win and it will be easier for my family.

The location is hard because we're far from town. I have to get my groceries once a month because the cab is \$15 one way. The best for me would be an apartment with an attached park located downtown so I could get around. Of course it would have to be subsidized with utilities included.

I can't think about owning a whole house because I still haven't even owned new furniture. Everything I have is a hand me down or bought second hand. When I was young I thought that I would have my own place but I didn't know how much it would cost. Right now I'm just hoping that I can get back to school and train for a good paying job. I don't want to live on welfare.

Julia Anne



I wish I could have a pet.

Making Kenora HOME invites you to take action against local poverty through:

*food bank donations
random acts of kindness
coffee break discussions
bake sales
meditation & prayers
winter wear drives
other projects of your choosing*

Miss Lonely Hearts

I live in social housing with my 3 kids but it's not just the cost of the rent that makes a place affordable. We live two miles from town and the buses don't run regularly enough to be useful. I had even managed to juggle being a single parent with a job but I lost it because of transportation. Ontario Works did help me buy a bike to get around the bus problem but that didn't solve working in winter or moving my kids around to where they need to be.

I do feel lucky though. We just found bed bugs in my unit and the landlord is helping. They told me what I need to do and are bringing in an exterminator fast. I'm grateful because I know other tenants who didn't get help. Their landlords just refused to do anything or else blamed the tenants and tried to get them to pay for the entire apartment building. It's hard to be a tenant.



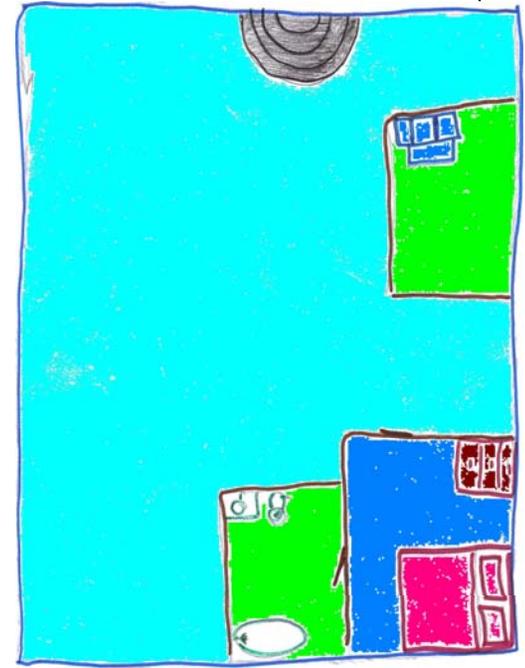
I've become a single dad with two teenage sons. I am trying to get custody of my baby also but without housing, I can't get custody. Right now we are living with my mom

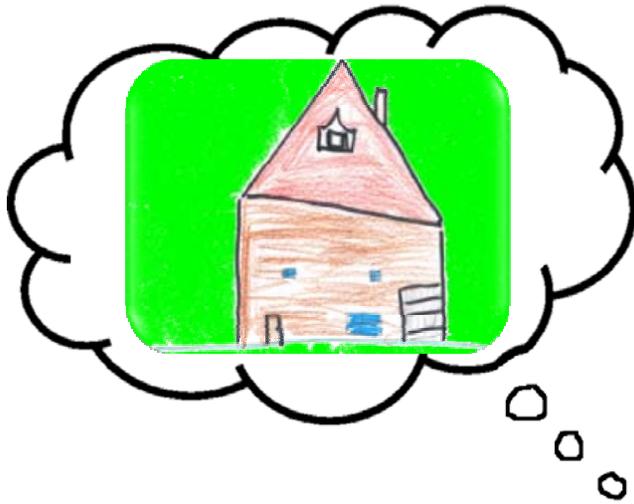
Jim

because we haven't found a place we can afford yet. I'm on disability. My mom already has my nephew living with her. My niece was also living here. It is only a three bedroom house. We all need privacy.

I tried applying for subsidized housing but it is a three to five year waiting list. I didn't expect to be living with my mother at my age. We eat separately because the table is so crowded. We're sharing beds to all fit in. Bathroom time is short. We all get along but it is cramped.

I looked and looked but I don't have the money. The only place I can afford is a one bedroom apartment. That's the best I can hope for. I will give the boys the bedroom. We'd be good tenants.





Beth

I'm raising my grandchildren. I can't afford to live in my apartment and will be moving away soon which is too bad because the children's parents and other grandparents all live in Kenora. I would have liked them to have lots of family contact but that won't happen yet.

The rent is \$900 which doesn't include heat or anything else. I was working full time but the pay didn't cover expenses even before I had childcare costs. There's a waiting list for daycare subsidies. The kids will be in school before they get to the top of that list. The waitlist for subsidized housing is about 3 years. I can't afford to wait that long. The children need a home that I can afford now. I have to look at the future. I am a hard worker but I will not earn enough money to pay rent, childcare, food costs, clothing and all the other things that the children will need. I have to have subsidized housing. There's none here.



Family Income Levels-Monthly

| | Net | Medical |
|---|-----------|---------|
| <i>Ontario Works</i> | | |
| Single Parent + 2 children | \$1,155 | limited |
| Couple + one child | \$1,162 | limited |
| <i>Ontario Disability Support Program</i> | | |
| Single Parent + 2 children | \$1,728 | limited |
| Couple + one child | \$1,755 | limited |
| <i>Minimum Wage Earner</i> | | |
| Single (35 hrs weekly) | \$1119.28 | none |

Client Service Northwest Community Legal Clinic

| Issue | % of tenant families experiencing |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Evictions (all) | 88 % |
| Evictions-arrears | 38% |
| Debt-utilities | 19% |

Nutritious Food Basket Northwestern Health Unit

| Individual | Age | Monthly Cost |
|------------|-------|--------------|
| Male | 31-50 | \$238.40 |
| Female | 31-50 | \$200.96 |
| Male child | 4-8 | \$148.20 |



Average Rental Rates-Monthly Kenora Private Market (CMHC)

| <i>Unit Size</i> | <i>Average Rent</i> | <i>Utilities</i> | <i>#</i> |
|---------------------|---------------------|------------------|----------|
| 1 bedroom | \$568.00 | not included | 160 |
| 2 bedroom apartment | \$799.00 | not included | 169 |
| 3 bedroom apartment | \$1039.00 | not included | 8 |



Average Utility Costs-Monthly

| <i>Houses</i> (1200 sq ft) | <i>Oil</i> | <i>Electricity</i> | <i>Gas</i> |
|-------------------------------|------------|--------------------|------------|
| Oil Heated | \$333.00 | \$225.00 | n/a |
| Electrical Heat | n/a | \$475.00 | n/a |
| Gas Heated | n/a | \$225.00 | \$275.00 |



There are five of us living in a small three bedroom unit. To get to my home, I have to go up 3 flights of stairs. It is a challenge getting

a 5 year old, a 3 year old and a baby up those stairs and when I get groceries, it's really a struggle. I am on the waiting list for a four bedroom unit but they told me it would be another 4 years before a place is found for me. Right now I share a bedroom with my three year old. There is not much room for me but my kids needs come first. My entire welfare cheque goes to cover shelter. It's not just the rent, it's utilities that drive up the cost. My child support, which is deducted by Ontario Works, covers my food for the month. Of course it only covers it when the cheque doesn't bounce. Because it is automatically deducted, when the cheque bounces, it's already been deducted and it's a month before the error is fixed and the money is replaced. The child tax credit covers my transportation. There is nothing left beyond that. I am a really good budgeter but it's hard. My eldest son has allergies and we have to be careful about the food we give him. Getting fresh fruits and vegetables is really hard for him. There should be more money left once I pay for my shelter costs.

Riki

Frances

At the age of 37, I stood at the side of my husband's grave. I had my three children beside me. I didn't expect to be a single parent and I didn't choose this path but I was on it. It has been a hard path since then but I am all the kids have and there is nothing that I wouldn't do for my children.



I worked hard to provide for my family since I was widowed 29 years ago. I still believe that there will be better days. I have seen worse. I try to be positive but sometimes I cry "why me". There is nothing fair about how life is dealt out. I tried to give back to others over the years. The best part of working at the women's shelter was being able to encourage other women to believe that they could make their own lives. In my work there and in my work at the school, I told them all-if there is only one thing to learn from me, its that everyone deserves to be safe. I didn't have that in my younger days but I wanted it for others. My stubbornness, strong will and humour has got me through it all.

I thought that once I got my pension, life would be easier but it didn't happen. I still have to work. There is no rest yet despite my age. The kids grew up but my eldest has a disability and she has a son. I know how hard it is to be a single parent so I help as much as I can. The money never goes far enough but at least the love is there. That we can count on.

Of all the challenges we have faced as a family, finding suitable housing has been the hardest. The rents aren't affordable on our income or the units are not adequate. Sometimes it is just not safe. I could tell you many stories. We did have a few good landlords but we also had some stink-ers.

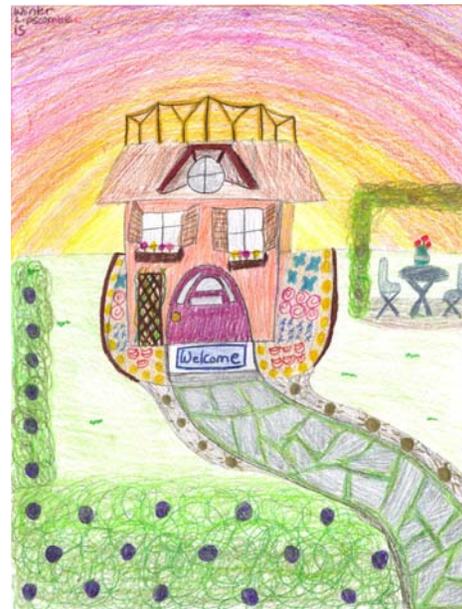
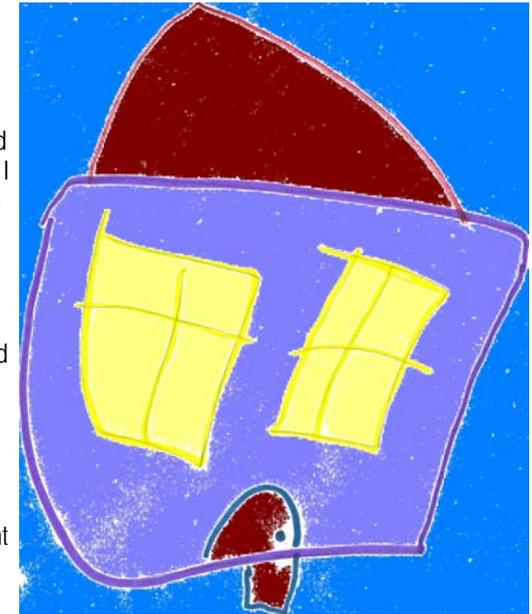
One time we had a landlord who stayed in Kenora and whose wife stayed in Winnipeg. Each month we would pay our rent directly into the landlord's bank account. Thank heavens we kept the receipt because the wife showed up demanding our rent arrears. She claimed that her husband said we weren't paying the rent. We showed her our receipts and she was confused so she went to their trailer and found where the money had gone when his girlfriend answered the door. We laugh about it now but I can tell you when your landlords break up, the property gets divided and then it's the tenants that lose their homes.

I tried to take a landlord to tribunal over the disrepair in the place we had. We took photos of the water damage down the walls. In his testimony, the landlord claimed that the marks on the walls were caused by our cats spraying while in heat. Even the adjudicator was surprised that I would have a cat who could spray clear up to the ceilings. It must have been a powerful cat! We won but ultimately you lose because when a landlord gets mad, he will find a way to get you out one way or another.

Neighbours and neighbourhoods make a difference. There are some subsidized units in the city but they are in a bad neighbourhood. I am fearful for my grandson's safety. He has had trouble enough with bullies at school so I can't just put him in the middle of the roughest neighbourhood in town. Even the hope of getting geared to income units is beyond us because of this.

A landlord did offer a deal once. It was quite an offer. The house was beautiful. The landlord told us that we could have it for \$790 monthly. It was a deal. We were pretty excited until the rest of the terms were explained. The elderly owner would have a bed downstairs and wanted a family in the house. I asked what the family was for. Apparently the owner would have the full run of the house and the tenants would be responsible for doing the housework, cooking his meals, doing his laundry and other unspecified personal care chores. On top of that, we were expected to pay him the money for the privilege of caring for him. Perhaps we should have taken the deal but the gentleman obviously needed a bath and I wasn't about to give him one.

Hydro and heat keep going up. When you rent a place, they promise you low utilities and good insulation but they are never honest



about it. One bedroom that my daughter had was terrible. If you put your hand on the inside wall, it would freeze. You are promised repairs that never happen. When you complain they blame it on you. There is no winning in this rental market.

I know how much we're struggling and I don't know others are making it. We live as cheaply as possible and walk everywhere. We budget our money carefully and are never extravagant. It used to be that I would feel badly because I could only put five dollars into the collection plate to help others. Now I can't even do that.

I can laugh. I can keep our home, wherever it is, a peaceful haven for my daughter and grandson. I can offer my experience. I can persevere. I can do these things because I have to. I am all that my children have.