

Informal Employment: Making a living in Calgary

Final Report

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## Executive Summary

Research relating to informal employment lacks a nuanced understanding of how people subsist outside the normative employment system, and tends to focus on the illegality of panhandling, or the nuisance aspects expressed by the public relating to binning. There is little focus on the lived experience of those involved, with the exception of work done by members of the geography department at University of Victoria (Gutberlet et al., 2007; Tremblay, 2009). As part of Phase 1 of the Calgary Homeless Foundation's 10 Year Plan to End (Calgary Homeless Foundation, 2007), the following report addresses the lack of nuanced understanding by drawing on ethnographic research conducted between May and August, 2010. The research results highlight the complexity of employing informal recycling and panhandling as a means to make a living, as outlined in the highlights below:

- **Secure, affordable housing was a concern for most contributors:** The Researcher observed in total two hundred forty-four individuals engaging in binning activities and thirty in panhandling activities. Of the observed, twenty-one informal recyclers and six panhandlers participated in the research. Five were housed, four of which employed binning as a means to pay rent. The fifth individual is a retiree living in elderly residence. When asked how their housing situation impacted their employment of binning, some noted that if they had secure housing, even just a room to rent, they would be less likely to bin. Others noted, typically the long term street individuals, that they will continue to bin to maintain contact with their street families and friends if they were provided secure, affordable housing;
- **Street Families provide support networks:** Individuals who have been binning and living on the street for extended periods develop close ties with similar like minded individuals, resulting in a fictive kin relationship. Long term individuals note they have "street" fathers, mothers, brothers, and sisters. They all express "respect" for each other as imperative to survival. "We look out for one another" and "if one of us needs something, we know we can get it from our group" are common expressions indicating the solidarity of the group. Furthermore, new individuals to the area are not initially trusted, but need to show their "respect" for others before they will be considered one of the family;
- **Binning is hard work:** An average day of binning begins between 5:00 and 7:00 a.m., and consists of up to two runs per day along a particular route or a switch between routes. A single day of binning can involve twenty-five kilometres of foot travel and earn an informal recycler between \$25 and \$40, which translates, at seven hours of binning, to between \$3.57 to \$5.71 per hour (by way of comparison, the Alberta minimum hourly wage is currently \$8.80 (Province of Alberta, 14/1997:12)). Extent of route and number of

times it is covered depends on the needs for the day, who else is collecting, and the weather. The oft repeated phrase "picking is hard work", is confirmed by the researcher's participation. Calgary can experience extreme fluctuations in weather and topography, and those who make their living in its back allies and lanes, can be exposed to a variety of circumstances in a particular day;

- **Binning/Panhandling work ethic:** Most contributors expressed a difference in approaches to informal recycling. A majority noted they attempt to maintain a high level of cleanliness along their routes. To the point of picking up after those few bidders who do not respect the work ethic and leave garbage on the ground surrounding the bins. They feel it is important to establish positive public relations, and one way to do so is by maintaining cleanliness along routes.

Likewise, those employing panhandling noted that it is important to maintain a positive relationship with the public. One long-time panhandler who has employed panhandling for the past four years noted that you would not make living panhandling if people were afraid of you. There would be little incentive to give to someone who offended people passing them on the street.

- **Binning is increasing:** Many participants noted a noticeable increase in the past year, resulting in increased competition. One contributor used the phrase "Binning has become an Amazing Race for homeless people" to describe the current situation. While the researcher observed over one hundred bidders, when asked, contributors consistently stated there were thousands of people employing binning;
- **Impact of City Blue Recycling Bins program:** The residential recycling program has impacted the number of recyclables informal recyclers have access to. Many contributors mentioned the Blue recycling bins have become another way to restrict their livelihood. Fines can be \$125 for collecting recyclables from a Blue bin not your own, and has produced yet another area of confrontation between residents, Bylaw officers and bidders;
- **Binning and panhandling as entrepreneurial enterprises:** Some individuals self-identified as entrepreneurs. They viewed their engagement with informal recycling and panhandling as self-started businesses that allowed them freedom from formal employment restrictions, such as a boss overseeing their activities.
- **Panhandling requires a certain personality:** Employing panhandling seems to cross a social barrier and be outside many informal recycler's comfort level. It requires a certain outgoing personality to be an effective panhandler (Lankenau,1999), but if an individual is comfortable asking for

money, it can be much more lucrative than binning. One veteran notes he can make up to \$80/day or more during special events like sports or concerts. Alternatively, another individual notes that he usually makes between \$10-\$20 a day panhandling. Research conducted in Toronto corroborates the finding that, unlike the popular myth, panhandlers do not make a substantial income from asking for donations (Bose and Hwang, 2002).

Those who predominantly bin do not usually panhandle, but the opposite is true. Many panhandlers will bin to supplement their income. The research showed predominantly physically disadvantaged individuals engaging in most of the panhandling, those in wheelchairs or over 60 years of age who may find binning outside their physical capability

### Unexpected Outcome

- **Panhandling is decreasing in the city of Calgary.** There appears to be only a few consistent panhandlers remaining (confirmed by Downtown Business Association Outreach program). The researcher observed thirty active panhandlers, predominantly in the downtown and beltline areas.

### Recommendations

As noted above, research results indicate panhandling is not as prevalent as informal recycling in Calgary. Considering this is the case, it is recommended the Province and city, focus their efforts and resources on the informal recycling sector of the population.

Often informal recyclers and panhandlers are seen as a nuisance, or freeloaders, within a society. A number of participants described increased interaction with Calgary Bylaw Services and Police Services, in addition to verbal discrimination, sometimes resulting in physical abuse from the general population. In one instance a binner was attack by a woman while in a bin. The woman closed the heavy metal garbage bin lid on his head simply because she did not agree with his livelihood. In contradistinction, many recount positive relationships with "clients" or those who leave donations of recyclable materials for the informal recycler. This client/binner relationship should be fostered, and with inclusivity as a foremost concern, the proceeding list of recommendations addresses informal recycling and seeks to raise awareness of the important role it has in the City of Calgary:

- **Affordable Housing:** A majority of the research contributors described experiencing housing insecurity. From those who are the chronic homeless to those who find themselves on and off the streets for periods of time. Furthermore, even individuals who are housed utilize binning as a way to supplement their rent payments. All cite affordable housing as a considerable stress in their lives, and one that, if made available, would help to alleviate

their diminished sense of self worth. Many described a desire to cook their own food and be responsible for caring for their own living space;

- **United We Can Bottle Depot (UWC):** Calgary can potentially benefit from applying a similar model as the Vancouver United We Can Bottle Depot. A non-profit depot developed by informal recyclers for informal recyclers can promote social inclusivity and re-humanize this segment of the Calgary society, while making a positive impact on the environment.

The success of the UWC is due to its focus on promoting awareness in the city of Vancouver regarding the informal recycler livelihood, as part of the "Third Green Wave" (UWC website, accessed September 7, 2010).

- **Panhandling:** With regard to panhandling in the City of Calgary, due to the reduced number of individuals engaging in panhandling there seems little to warrant special attention by the City. Conversely, the City may want to focus its attention on exploring the underlying structural issues that result in an individual's choice to employ panhandling, such as affordable, secure housing. Moreover, perceptions that panhandling is a problem in the City could be addressed by educating the public about the true nature of this economic activity and the people employing it.
- **Participatory Research:** Future research should be developed within a participatory research framework, based on working with informal recyclers to develop research/projects. To better involve this segment of society in policy decision making, and promote positive outcome results.

Research participation in this context should extend to cooperation between all homeless servicing agencies in the City of Calgary. The researcher found that requests for information from a number of organizations were not responded to or fulfilled. The information from these other resources would have further enhanced an overall understanding of the dynamics between homelessness, panhandling, and informal recycling. It is recommended that open lines of communication be fostered to meet the needs of this vulnerable segment of the population in Calgary.

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## **Introduction & Background Information**

The Calgary Homeless Foundation (CHF) funded this research in support of the 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness. As part of Phase 1 of the plan, the CHF considers conducting detailed research a fundamental part of gaining a more complete understanding of homelessness dynamics in the City of Calgary (Calgary Homeless Foundation, 2007: 24). This research falls within this mandate and was conducted to inform a more complete understanding of the informal employment complexities in the City of Calgary, in this instance panhandling and informal recycling (binning) specifically.

### **Informal Employment Defined**

Informal employment ranges from illegal to illegitimate means of making a living, and though there is little consensus on one definition, for the purpose of this project informal employment is defined as employment that escapes taxation or regulation by governments (Wilson, 2006; Williams and Round, 2007).

### **Informal Recycling (Binner) Defined**

"Binner (Bin-ner): Someone who works scavenging through the garbage bins with the prospect of finding reusable and recyclable items that can be exchanged for cash" (UWC website, accessed September 7, 2010). The informal recycling sector involves the act of extracting from mixed waste the recyclable and reusable materials which is conducted by informal recyclers, or bidders (Wilson, 2006).

## **City of Calgary Context**

### **City of Calgary Response to Panhandling & Informal Recycling**

Currently, the City of Calgary responds to panhandling and binning through Bylaw enforcement.

The City of Calgary enforces a panhandling Bylaw (Appendix "A") that restricts the location and time of panhandling activities. The panhandling Bylaw dictates that an individual cannot panhandle at such places as transit stops, bank machines, or pedestrian walkway. It further restricts the hours someone can panhandle, by stipulating it is prohibited between 8:00 p.m. and 8:00 a.m.

The City of Calgary enforces a non-scavenging provision in the Bylaw to Regulate and Manage waste that can incur a \$125 fine (City of Calgary Bylaw Number 20M2001, 2001) for those who collect waste from a bin not their own.

These bylaws effectively place panhandlers and informal recyclers in direct opposition with the City of Calgary, resulting in a targeting of a specific, vulnerable segment of the society, as supported by numerous personal accounts by panhandlers and bidders describing an increase in police and bylaw presence in the downtown and beltline areas resulting in an increase in ticketing and fines.

# Analysis and Discussion

## *Methodology*

This project applied an ethnographic approach to understanding informal employment in Calgary. This method was employed to gain a holistic comprehension of how people make a living in Calgary outside the formal systems of employment. The field researcher engaged in approximately 125 hours in the field participating, observing and conducting in-depth conversations (Appendix "B") with willing participants. Many personal stories were shared and opportunities for participation in daily activities facilitated comparison and has allowed for theoretical abstraction. It should be noted that this research is qualitative, versus quantitative. The focus was on a more nuanced understanding of the phenomenon, and not a statistical survey. We employed hermeneutics as a way of understanding the context that individuals employ informal recycling and panhandling (Mayers, 2001). By adopting hermeneutics, the researcher sought to recognize how their presence impacted the research, both as the primary research tool and the contributor's response to the researcher. An understanding of the interplay between all aspects of the research provides a fuller interpretation of the data. An ethnographic approach should not be considered representative of all informal recyclers, but can promote insight into particular instances.

Participants were contacted through a poster placed at the Uptown Bottle Depot (Appendix "C"), attracting more participants through snow ball sampling, or word of mouth. Further contacts through the Calgary Homeless Foundation assisted in drawing individuals into the research. These methods resulted in twenty-six recorded interviews, several casual conversations, and four tag alongs with informal recyclers. In addition to interviews and conversations, the primary researcher spent time observing panhandling and informal recycling at key locations throughout the city, including downtown, the beltline, Sunnyside/Kensington, Chinook, and Crowfoot. Interviews were conducted in a variety of locations, mostly outside the Uptown Bottle Depot or along various binning routes. These locations provided the researcher optimal exposure to the every-day lives of those who employ binning and panhandling.

## *Contributors*

The contributors are as follows:

- **21 Informal Recyclers:** 5 housed, 2 Retirees, 5 Aboriginal, 4 Woman, 2 French-Canadian;
- **6 Panhandlers:** None housed, 3 Aboriginal, 2 were confined to wheelchairs, all were between 50 and 60 years old;

- **Non-Binning/Panhandling Public:** 2 City Transit C-train Station Cleaners, 1 Cash Corner participant, 1 DTBA Outreach Worker, 2 Liquor Store Owners/Managers, Several Family & Friends.
- Individuals range from 20 years to 9 months employing informal recycling, and 4 years to 2 years employing panhandling, and all were within the age range 35 - 65

## ***Research Findings***

Overall, the research found that people are actively engaged in making a living for themselves. Despite socio-economic and bureaucratic barriers, individuals display their ability to use ingenuity and their personal labour to improve their lives or provide for their needs. The following sub areas support this premise:

### **Panhandling:**

Panhandling is decreasing in the city of Calgary. There appears to be only a few chronic panhandlers remaining (confirmed by a Downtown Business Association Outreach worker).

I don't have a problem talking to people. If you have a problem talking to people, you won't make a very good panhandler...I give people information about Calgary. People are wondering where they are. I know a lot about Calgary...I tell them to go five blocks that way...(Panhandler #4).

Employing panhandling seems to cross a social barrier and be outside many informal recycler's comfort level. It requires a certain outgoing personality to be an effective panhandler (Lankenau, 1999), but if an individual is comfortable asking for money, it can be much more lucrative than binning. One veteran notes he can make up to \$80 per day or more during special events like sports or concerts. Alternatively, another individual notes that he usually makes between \$10-\$20 per half day panhandling, amounting to approximately \$2.50 to \$5.00 per hour for an estimated four hours (by way of comparison, the Alberta minimum hourly wage is currently \$8.80 (Province of Alberta, 14/1997:12)). Research conducted in Toronto corroborates the finding that, unlike the popular myth, panhandlers do not make a substantial income from asking for donations (Bose and Hwang, 2002).

Panhandlers have established corners, and if someone attempts to move in on it, confrontation can result. One individual described how he was almost forced off his corner by another panhandling individual, but construction workers came to his aid, scarring the interloper off.

Those who predominantly bin do not usually panhandle, but the opposite is true. Many panhandlers will bin to supplement their income. The research showed predominantly physically disadvantaged individuals engaging in most of the panhandling, those in wheelchairs or over 60 years of age who may find binning outside their physical capability.

Downtown remains the epicentre of panhandling activity, although significantly reduced from previous years. The researcher observed thirty panhandlers throughout the city, and actively sought evidence of panhandling outside the downtown core by riding the C-train routes to the northeast, southwest, and northwest. As well as walking the areas around Market Mall in the northwest and Sunridge Mall in the northeast. All these areas are considered "hotspots" and have a history of public complaints about panhandling. The repeated trips to these areas revealed no panhandling activity at the time the researcher visited.

This research found no direct correlation between a decrease in panhandling and an increase in binning (binning increase is discussed below).

### **Binning is hard work:**

An average day of binning begins between 5:00 and 7:00 a.m. (provided the informal recycler has not been collecting all night), and consists of up to two runs per day along a particular route or a switch between routes. An all-night binning session can reduce some of the competition, allow an informal recycler to keep recyclables with him and reduce the risk of theft, as well as reduce the exposure to the non-binning public and the embarrassment some informal recyclers feel with regard to their livelihood.

A single day of binning can involve twenty-five kilometres of foot travel and earn an informal recycler between \$25 and \$40, which translates, at seven hours of binning, to between \$3.57 to \$5.71 per hour (by way of comparison, the Alberta minimum hourly wage is currently \$8.80 (Province of Alberta, 14/1997:12)). Extent of route and number of times it is covered depends on the needs for the day, who else is collecting, and the weather.

The oft repeated phrase "picking is hard work", is confirmed by the researcher's participation. Calgary can experience extreme fluctuations in weather and topography, and those who make their living in its back allies and lanes, can be exposed to a variety of circumstances in a particular day.

### **Why Bin?**

Those that stay at the Calgary Drop In Centre, a local shelter, note that binning/panhandling are ways to resist the "stagnation" that results from staying there. Everything is provided for you (although at low quality and with little privacy) which can reduce an individual's desire to improve their situation. Homeless individuals who employ informal recycling see their activities as maintaining a vital position in society, reducing their dependence on homeless servicing agencies. Those that bin/pan see themselves as engaged in making a living for themselves and staying active in the community. Furthermore, some contributors saw binning as a temporary solution, one that is a reliable daily source of a small income. "Depots are open every day and there are always bottles to be found" (Binner outside Uptown Depot). Other non-homeless individuals, such as

retirees, are drawn to binning as a way to stay active. For these people, binning is more a social activity.

### **Street Families:**

Similar to the Edmonton context (Tanasescu, 2001), there exists street family phenomenon in Calgary. Individuals who have been binning and living on the street for extended periods develop close ties with similar like minded individuals, resulting in a fictive kin relationship. Long term individuals note they have "street" fathers, mothers, brothers, and sisters. They all express "respect" for each other as imperative to survival. "We look out for one another" and "if one of us needs something, we know we can get it from our group" are common expressions indicating the solidarity of the group. Furthermore, new individuals to the area are not initially trusted, but need to show their "respect" for others before they will be considered one of the family. Respect is shown through sharing of information and resources. These practices solidify relationships among individuals, and appear to provide much needed moral and physical support.

One example, recounted by a group in the Chinook area who refer to themselves as the Chinook Boys, highlights the familial solidarity. A couple who recently arrived in the area became more concerned with acquiring crack, leading them to possibly "sell-out" those long time residents of the area by showing a reporter and police where the group's secret drinking and camping locations were. This led to the campsites being destroyed. Several of the group mentioned that the couple are now gone, and it seemed they were a good riddance. This couple displayed a lack of loyalty to the group. The Chinook group consists of approximately 10-15 members, whose membership fluctuates depending on the season. Some members leave in the spring to pick fruit in British Columbia and return in the fall. The street family structure is further supported by the panhandlers I have spoken with.

The social aspect is a strong feature of their lives. Friends draw them back to the street culture, but sometimes just as "visitors". Some individuals note that even though they are in secure housing, they still visit with friends or "family" they have made while living the street life. This aspect should be considered when designing programs to assist people in finding secure housing. Being separated from ones social/familial network can be traumatic and as one participant notes, being separated from her friends while in a detoxification centre was too much to handle, resulting her leaving the program early to return to her street family.

There exists a mentor/novice relationship between new informal recyclers and established ones. In response to the question "how did you come to learn about binning?" many respond that it was first through observing someone doing it, and then that individual showing the novice how to bin effectively. Many long term informal recyclers give freely of their expertise, although there seems to be a particular dynamic involved with who chooses to help others, and why. Similarly, like the Edmonton example, there appears to be a process of adoption in which a novice is brought into a group and taught the skills

necessary to be a productive informal recycler with the expectation of resource sharing (Tanasescu, 2001:7).

### **Informal Recycler Types:**

Various types of informal recyclers are categorized differently. The difference lies in the degree of labour one employs in acquiring the recyclables. "Cherry" or "Layer" pickers, target the bottles outside the bins or on top of the bins. They are often criticised by the veterans or "prospectors" (so called because of their grizzled appearance) for not picking the hard to get bottles in the bin. Some long-term pickers, veterans, may see themselves as the top of the hierarchy, but their expertise may not be recognized by all pickers.

Informal recyclers are also distinguished by the aids they use. Some use shopping carts and bikes. A number of participants note they do not use carts, because they announce their presence and restricted how far out from the bottle depot they can collect. Many would tie their bags of bottles in "saddlebags", and hang them over their shoulders. Some were observed carrying up to eight bags at one time.

### **Binning and Social Ethics:**

Several participants noted that theft was an issue on the streets, "homeless stealing from homeless" is viewed with disdain, and considered the "ultimate low". The increased competition described above, has led to an increase in physical conflict between informal recyclers. One individual showed me his stitches needed as a result of another informal recycler hitting him in the head with a bike chain and lock. Moreover, older informal recyclers are targeted by roving gangs of thugs for their recyclables. Forming a group helps to reduce vulnerability, as does having someone physically intimidating in your group. One participant, being of larger stature, told me how he tried to look out for the older binners, and would confront those looking to victimize his friends. This problem seems to occur more often in the downtown core. It is quieter in the Chinook area. Time spent by the researcher in both areas confirms this.

### **Increase in Binning:**

The more "hard-core" contributors recount tales of conflict between the non-homeless informal recyclers and themselves. Many voiced the opinion that, if you do not need to bin to survive, recyclables should be left for those that need them. Weekend warriors and those who bin from automobiles are viewed as taking from those who need the recyclables most. Of those who constitute the non-homeless informal recyclers, the researcher spoke with four individuals who were housed. Of the four, one was a retired woman who, after being a teacher for many years, retired in Calgary. She noticed a fellow retiree in her retirement apartment complex was setting out early each morning and checking the garbage bins as she left the complex. This retiree was curious about what her fellow resident was doing, so asked her about it, to which the woman recounted how she had used to collect bottles in Bowness after she was widowed and found comfort in

continuing the practice. The retired woman the researcher spoke with thought her friends activities looked like an enjoyable way to spend time outdoors, and so took up informal recycling herself. Interestingly, the retired woman described how she was assisted by a long time informal recycler, who instructed her in the best practices for binning, supporting the mentor/novice phenomenon described above.

One participant noted that binning in Calgary has become the “Amazing Race for homeless people” (Informal Recycler #1). During tag along sessions, the researcher observed many instances of the "race" to get ahead of other individuals by bypassing an occupied alley and hurrying on to the next. The pressure of competition seemed to be greater in the downtown and beltline areas, where the highest concentration of binning occurs.

When asked, informal recyclers were not certain what the specific cause for the increase would be, but it could be speculated that it is due in part to the recent economic downturn and lack of available formal employment in the city of Calgary. Moreover, they stated that currently there are thousands employing binning as a livelihood in the city. The researcher cannot confirm this number, but has recorded observing two hundred forty-four individuals employing informal recycling in the City of Calgary this summer.

### **Perceived Targeting Phenomenon:**

Contributors tell of an increase in attention from Bylaw and Police Services. In some instances there is repeated contact with the authorities resulting in jail time and high fines. Often, individuals cite a two tier system with regard to how the authorities handle minor offences like open liquor, or unlawful use of a public park.

One individual described how he was sitting in a park with a well-dressed friend consuming beer, when an officer walked up and in a friendly manner simply asked them to quickly consume their beverages and enjoy their evening. This same individual described a recent experience in which he was ticketed for simply dozing sitting up on a park bench, in his view because he clearly looked homeless.

The researcher was present for only one incidence of contact by police, which involved a long-time panhandler that they spoke with frequently. The interaction appeared to go smoothly, with the officers permitting the researcher to continue her interview. At which point, the panhandler was required to move along. It is not know how much impact the researcher's presence had on this interaction. Interestingly, a number of participants noted that they experienced less contact with Bylaw and police officer's when the researcher was present.

### **Underpayment for Recyclables:**

A certain level of exploitation may be taking place at the point of exchanging the recyclables for the refund at the depot. Several informal recyclers noted they were being undercut by some sorters at three of the depots the researcher spent time at. It was noted

that providing a small tip could influence the count accuracy, while others attempted to avoid being served by known inaccurate sorters. Furthermore, one participant reported that when he complained that he was being shorted, he was banned from the depot. Although, it should be noted, the researcher did not directly observe this phenomenon.

Conversely, one individual did request that the researcher take his bottles into the depot for the cash-out because he was banned from this depot for complaining about a miss-count. The researcher agreed, and when she returned with the cash, the binner noted that he was shorted, possibly due to the researcher appearing to the depot worker as someone not very clear on how much money was due her. The binners will sometimes count their bottles outside the depot where there is a camera attached to the depot aimed at the spot. They believe this may prompt depot workers to make their counts more accurate, because they know the binners are counting for themselves.

### **Drug of Choice:**

Of the participants who contributed some noted crack is how some people wind up employing informal recycling/panhandling, but does not remain the reason. Many individuals described previous addictions to crack, but at the moment the researcher had contact with them many noted that beer was their primary means of escape from the difficulties of life, and a way to "get through a day". But, by the time they were in a position to free themselves from their addiction to crack, they had devolved to a point where they lost all support networks and resources, placing them in a vulnerable position on the streets. Other individuals note a variety of catalysts. From the high cost of housing, to job loss, and increase in drinking, all contribute to their need to find a quick income to pay their bills and meet personal needs. Often this downward spiral resulted in stays at the Calgary Drop In Centre (DI).

Moreover, Drug of choice dictates to a certain extent binning versus panhandling activity. One participant noted that crack addicts lack the commitment needed to be successful, consistent informal recyclers. They may bin in a small area to get what they need for the moment, to score drugs, but they do not view binning as employment. Beer drinkers are more committed to binning, and employ strategies, such as using carts, bikes, or establishing "clients" (clients are those, individuals or businesses, who leave donations for the binners in exchange for light clean-up around their property).

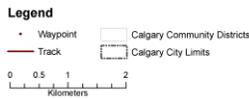
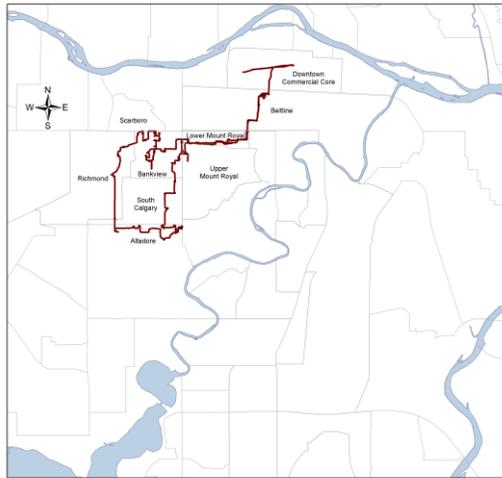
### **Urban Land Use:**

With the exception of GIS mapping as part of a Winnipeg project on panhandling (Carter et al., 2007), GIS as a research method in this context is fairly new. With this in mind, this project set out to document the urban informal recycler's use of the city of Calgary.

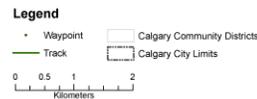
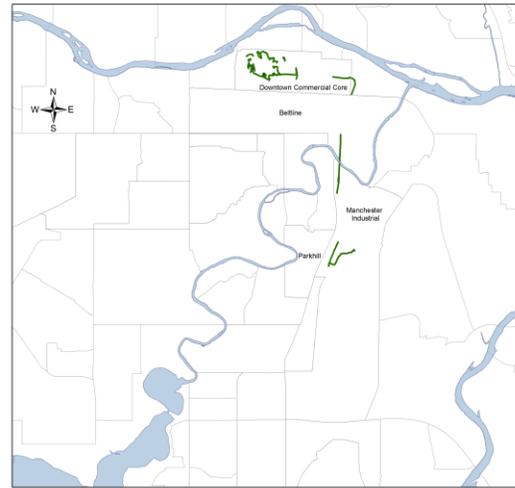
The maps below represent the routes of the four informal recyclers the researcher accompanied, and are based on GPS coordinates collected at that time. Routes can be

designated by downtown/Mount Royal/Marda Loop (Binner #1), downtown (Binner #2), and Chinook (Binnings #3 & 4).

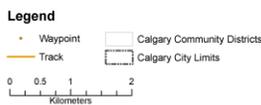
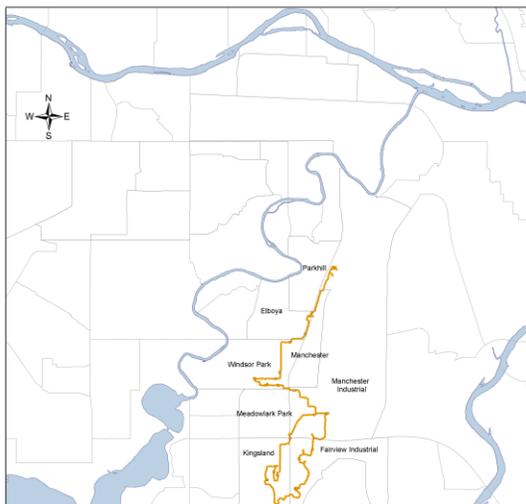
**Calgary Binner #1: Route taken July 19, 2010**



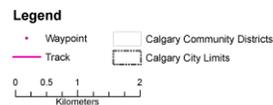
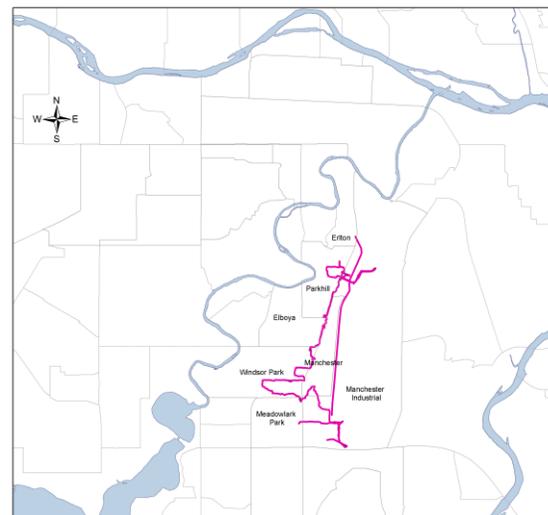
**Calgary Binner #2: Route taken July 1, 2010**



**Calgary Binner #3: Route taken July 11, 2010**



**Calgary Binner #4: Route taken July 13, 2010**



These four binning routes coincide with proximity to bottle depots and abundance of apartment complexes. There are three bottle depots available to the above informal recyclers. The Uptown Bottle Depot located on the south side of downtown in the beltline. One located in Manchester Industrial and the third slightly farther south near the Chinook C-train station. A focus on apartment buildings was due largely to the lack of recycling

blue bins at these locations. Informal recyclers are able to collect from the large garbage bins with reduced risk of incurring a \$125 fine. Interestingly, many thought they would be fined up to \$400 for collecting from a Blue bin, although no one reported to the researcher receiving a fine that high. Proximity to transit was also a factor for some contributors. Those who utilize bicycles were less likely to utilize transit to get to depots, but those on foot were more likely to, at which point bus passes become a sought after resource.

Time spent in both the downtown and Chinook areas confirmed a distinction between downtown and other areas frequented by certain individuals. Interestingly, this does not mean that individuals stick strictly to a certain region, but will venture into other areas as they see fit. It is still "first come, first served" outside of downtown, the difference being that members of a group will pass information between each other regarding where they are picking and share their finds, whereas, the downtown pickers are viewed as less "friendly".

### **Impact of City Blue Recycling Bins program:**

The residential recycling program has impacted the number of recyclables informal recyclers have access to. Many contributors mentioned the Blue recycling bins have become another way to restrict their livelihood. Fines can be \$125 for collecting recyclables from a Blue bin not your own (City of Calgary Bylaw, 20M2001), and has produced yet another area of confrontation between residents, Bylaw officers and binners.

### **Binning and panhandling as entrepreneurial enterprises:**

Some individuals self-identified as entrepreneurs. They viewed their engagement with informal recycling as a self-started business that allowed them freedom from formal employment restrictions, such as a boss overseeing their activities. The autonomy and flexibility inherent in binning draws those individuals who may function less effectively in the formal employment sector (Tremblay, 2007).

### **Employable Skills:**

Several contributors listed previous training/education (some at the post-secondary level) and employment within the formal sector, as well as continued search for formal employment. Job searches consisted mostly of waiting in line at the local temporary employment agency for work opportunities, posting resumes on-line, or frequent checks for job postings on websites such as Kijiji or Craig's List, which might result in short term employment, usually in construction or other physical labour oriented jobs.

### **Health Issues:**

Informal recyclers mentioned suffering a variety of health issues. From Hepatitis to imbedded objects in feet, it is clear that binning causes a great deal of physical stress on the body. When one adds in physical confrontation with others, the potential for harm is greater. One participant noted that you try to avoid injury. If you are injured, it reduces

your ability to make money, and meet your needs. Moreover, many individuals suffer from diminished sense of self-worth due to and increase in contact by authorities and the public.

## Analytical Frameworks

Many people employ informal ways of making a living to supplement other sources of income, such as temporary labour, and social programs (e.g. social assistance, trust funds). Informal employment contributes to their acquisition of personal needs, such as costs relating to housing, personal hygiene, transportation (bus passes), tobacco, and alcohol. Moreover, informal recycling meets social needs and facilitates engagement with the society around them.

The research findings support the idea that poor people are not culturally removed from society, and in fact form an integral part of society. Furthermore, they employ strategies to overcome their situation, but face barriers to inclusivity (Goode, 2005; Gutberlet, 2009; NAPO, 1999; Tremblay, 2007). The following frameworks seek to re-humanize individuals in society, by recognizing their assets and contributions. The collected data lends itself to a socio-economic interpretation through an application of the following models:

**Sustainable Livelihood Framework Model (SLF):** This model is used by Gutberlet et al. (2009) in their project exploring informal recycling in Victoria. SLF is a:

tool to organise the information about people's assets and about the institutions, strategies, outcomes, and interactions involved in people's livelihoods. This framework is helpful, particularly when the study involves basic human rights issues such as access to food and shelter, as is the case among the Informal recyclers and homeless people (2005:735-736).

It highlights asset such as social/cultural capital and personal ingenuity people use to assist themselves during periods of reduced means. This model recognizes five assets individuals draw on, such as human or personal skills, knowledge or ability to perform labour; social, or the networks one can draw on to further their livelihood; physical, the basic tools or equipment one possesses; financial, ones cash and assets; and finally, natural, or the land forest, marine, water and air resources one has access to. Individuals employing informal recycling as a means to subsist in Calgary have certain assets that contribute to their livelihoods. These multiple strategies aid in sustaining the livelihood, but when one or more fails, poverty may result. By focusing on these assets policy can foster more sustained communities for all citizens. The SLF shows the potential movement from a state of vulnerability to security, producing a stronger community in the process (Figure 1).

Vulnerability	Assets	Processes to overcome current situation of exclusion	Expected outcomes	Long term goal
No Shelter Harassment Exclusion Prohibitive by-laws Underpayment for recyclables at depots Lack of access to recyclables Weak Health	Human Social Physical Financial Natural	Affordable Housing Social/cultural recognition Government support (Housing, Environment, etc.) Inclusive by-laws Co-operatives Inclusive recycling programs Access to resources	Respected/empowered recyclers Improved quality of life Shelter Improved health Increased income More and better access to resources	More sustainable communities

Figure 1. Binnars livelihood from vulnerability to sustainability – Calgary context (Gutberlet et al., 2009:736)

The preceding research findings can be understood through an application of the SLF in the Calgary context. Informal recyclers face vulnerability regarding affordable housing, harassment, exclusion, reduced incomes through underpayment of and access to recyclables, as well as a variety of health issues. Notwithstanding these vulnerabilities, informal recyclers consistently utilize human, social, physical, financial, and natural assets to assist them in their livelihood. By utilizing their ability to perform labour, combined with access to resources such as recyclables, contact with individuals that form a family, they are able to sustain their livelihoods and make a living in Calgary.

Furthermore, informal recyclers contribute to society by providing an important environmental service. By recognizing this contribution, society places value on the informal recycler livelihood.

**Waste Resource Cooperative-Management:** The co-management model draws on resource management paradigms employed within First Nation and state relationships. Crystal Tremblay's (2007) research among informal recyclers in Vancouver applies a co-management understanding to informal recycling in an urban context. Co-management recognizes the important contribution those outside the state can make to resource management, and draws on the cultural assets of various groups to better manage resources. Literature further notes that, if managed in a balanced fashion, co-

management regimes can foster inclusivity, and has more to do with managing relationships than resources (Natcher et al., 2005). This model can highlight how informal recycling benefits Society, and promote social cohesion.

The benefits of applying a co-management scheme to waste resources through a focus on informal recycling have been documented by a number of researchers (Gutberlet, 2009, Tremblay, 2007, Wilson, 2006 & 2009). The creation of informal recycling cooperatives places more control of their livelihood with the informal recyclers. They would be less likely to be paid unfairly for their recyclables, and could legitimise their activities fostering a less harmful relationship with the city. Wilson makes the following observation with regard to less developed nations, but which has relevance in the Calgary context

There are also social benefits associated with informal recycling. It provides employment and a livelihood for impoverished, marginalised and vulnerable individuals or social groups (Medina, 2000). Despite the particularly adverse working conditions associated with informal recyclers, it is important to recognise that it does allow those involved to survive and be employed in regions that often have high unemployment. Many scavengers may not be able to enter formal sector employment because of poor education or physical disability. This inability to enter more conventional occupations and the resulting absence of real choice needs to be recognised by interventions that attempt to change the role and working practices associated with informal recycling. If waste pickers do find alternative employment in the formal sector, other individuals are highly likely to replace them as long as poverty continues and waste remains accessible (Wilson, 2006:802-803)

In order to produce effective public policy relating to informal recycling in the City of Calgary, policy makers need to be aware of the underlying structural issues giving rise to this socio-economic phenomenon. It would be inaccurate to state that there is a binning "problem", but clearly as indicated by the recent increase in binning activity, there is an issue resulting in an inability for some to sustain a livelihood without the aid of binning.

**Panhandling:** Regarding analysis of panhandling in the City of Calgary, despite the reduced numbers of those employing panhandling, there appears to be a misconception of its prevalence among the public, Provincial and Municipal Governments, and service agencies.

Jessica F. Leech explores the notion of panhandlers as "Strangers within our Midst" in her 2002 Master's thesis. Her field work conducted in the City of Calgary among panhandlers produced a thesis that argues:

the current approach to the issue of panhandling treats panhandlers as 'strangers within our midst'. By exacerbating the social distance between panhandlers and the public this approach undermines the panhandlers' citizenship and heightens tensions within the community more so than would

an approach that emphasizes their commonality with the larger society and their rights within civic space. (Leech, 2002: 6).

Furthermore, Leech describes the failure of the 2000 campaign "Make Real Change with your Spare Change" designed to urge the public to give their spare change to the service providers.

This program promoted panhandling as counter-productive for the panhandling individual and the public. This implies that by giving to a panhandler, the citizen was perpetuating the problem that the panhandler represented. Conversely, this same program encouraged the public to engage a panhandler by acknowledging them, but to "politely say 'no'" (Leech, 2002:166). While this program promotes recognition, opening communication between the panhandler and the public, it also fostered dependence on service agencies and "the system" (Leech, 2002: 167). It portrayed panhandlers as misguided and incapable of looking after themselves, further reducing personal agency and autonomy. This program was criticised by both panhandlers and the public. Panhandlers felt demeaned, while the public took offence to being told how to spend their money (Leech, 2002: 168).

As the above research highlights, informal employment in Calgary is complex. Those employing informal recycling and panhandling come from diverse backgrounds and draw on a variety of assets to maintain a living in the city.

## ***Limitations***

This summer's project missed certain segments of the population that employ informal recycling, such as the Asian population. Due to a language barrier the researcher was restricted regarding the potential to interview this particular group. As well, the short period spent in the field, due to the part-time nature of the project, may have missed a more nuanced understanding of the phenomenon.

Moreover, certain stakeholders were not incorporated into the research due to time constraints. There were no interviews of Bylaw and police services, which would be required to more fully understand some of the phenomenon described by participants.

It is not within the scope of this project to explore the discussion concerning whether to formalize informal employment, or alternatively focus support on alleviating insecurity within the informal context, but this is certainly a discussion worth exploring as it pertains to public policy. For further discussions relating to this debate see Temkin (2009); Williams and Round (2007), and Kucera and Roncaloto (2008).

## **Recommendations**

The research contributors made several pertinent suggestions relating to improving living conditions for poor people, informal recyclers, and panhandlers in Calgary. They describe the current response to homeless people as "warehousing of the poor", and

would like to see more of the resources shelters receive spent directly on programs that can assist individuals. Many were not aware of, or had limited understanding, of the Calgary Homeless Foundation and the 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness. The CHF and the plan would benefit from increased awareness within this segment of the Calgary society, potentially reaching a broader demographic of those in need.

Moreover, individuals would like to see less specific targeting of the binning population by Bylaw and Police services. For obvious reasons it could be argued that this group is consistently in opposition with Bylaw and Police services due to their consumption of alcohol in public and complaints from the non-binning public, but from a policy perspective, the city should address the underlying structural issues that places one segment of the population in opposition to another. It would be worth investigating the social dynamics involved in this phenomenon, and further insight can be gained from a reading of Leech (2002), who explores the tensions between panhandlers and non-panhandlers in the city of Calgary.

As noted above, many individuals consider themselves part of a street family. Any future programs designed to meet the needs of homeless informal recyclers or panhandlers should address the social needs of the participants. These networks have assisted in sustaining these people, and are an important, supportive asset as noted in the SLF framework. These suggestions made by contributors should be considered in combination with the ones listed below:

### **Affordable Housing:**

A majority of the research contributors described experiencing housing insecurity, from those who are the chronic homeless to those who find themselves on and off the streets for brief periods of time. Furthermore, even individuals who are housed utilize binning as a way to supplement their rent payments. The high cost of rent means that many supplement their other formal employment, support payments, or other program incomes with informal recycling in order to meet their housing costs. Most were renting rooms in segmented homes. None commented on the safety of their homes. Of the homeless participants stated that even just having a room to rent would help. All cite affordable housing as a considerable stress in their lives, and one that, if made available, would help to alleviate their diminished sense of self worth. Many described a desire to cook their own food and be responsible for caring for their own living space.

### **United We Can Bottle Depot (UWC):**

Calgary can potentially benefit from applying a similar model as the Vancouver United We Can bottle depot developed fifteen years ago. A non-profit depot developed by informal recyclers for informal recyclers can promote social inclusivity and re-humanize this segment of the Calgary society.

The success of the UWC is due to its focus on promoting awareness in the city of Vancouver regarding the informal recycler livelihood, as part of the "Third Green Wave".

The UWC takes an environmentalism and social equity approach to poverty, and fosters sustainable economic activity to alleviate poverty. By providing recycling services to businesses, apartment complexes and special events, they create employment opportunities for the marginalized and less fortunate in Vancouver (UWC website, accessed September 7, 2010).

### **Recognition of Social Aspects:**

It should be acknowledged that informal recycling is not just a homeless phenomenon, but involves participants from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds. As noted above, there can be conflict between those who bin to meet daily needs, and those who do so for purely social or vitality reasons. It is recommended that further research be conducted to evaluate the dynamic relationships between those who bin as a livelihood and those who do not potentially fostering more positive relations between these diverse segments in the City of Calgary.

### **Panhandling:**

As noted above, even though the number of individuals panhandling have reduced, the City of Calgary could benefit from exploring alternative ways of re-humanizing those who panhandle and employ public education as a means to alleviate misperceptions of panhandling.

Further drawing on Leech's research, and echoed by the research participants in this project, panhandler's do not necessarily request more programs and services, they would prefer to be recognized as fellow citizens and contributors to society. The City of Calgary would benefit from promoting dialogue between those engaged in panhandling and the public, creating greater understanding of those we share the City with.

### **Participatory Research:**

Future research should be developed within a participatory research framework, based on working with informal recyclers to develop research/projects. To better involve this segment of society in policy decision making, and promote positive outcome results.

This process requires informal recycler involvement from planning to implementation stages, and has proven to produce more sustainable research, which is important for public policy related work (Gutberlet, 2009).

Research participation in this context should extend to cooperation between all homeless servicing agencies in the City of Calgary. The researcher found that requests for information from a number of organizations were not responded to or fulfilled. The information from these other resources would have further enhanced an overall understanding of the dynamics between homelessness, panhandling, and informal recycling. It is recommended that open lines of communication be fostered to meet the needs of this vulnerable segment of the population in Calgary.

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# Appendix "A"

OFFICE CONSOLIDATION

BYLAW NUMBER 3M99

**BEING A BYLAW OF THE CITY OF CALGARY TO  
REGULATE PANHANDLING**

(Amended by Bylaw number 6M2004, 40M2008)

WHEREAS the practice of panhandling has been identified as a significant social and safety concern;

AND WHEREAS public awareness and outreach programs to promote alternative income generating or support options are available for panhandlers;

AND WHEREAS a bylaw regulating panhandling is a required part of this coordinated approach to ameliorate the negative impact of panhandling activities;

NOW, THEREFORE, THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF CALGARY ENACTS AS FOLLOWS:

1. This Bylaw may be cited as the "Panhandling Bylaw"
2. In this Bylaw:
  - (a) "panhandling" means the personal, verbal and direct solicitation by a person of gratuitous donations of money, food or goods of any kind from any member of the public, but does not include a solicitation allowed or authorized pursuant to the *Charitable Fund-raising Act*, R.S.A. 2000, c.C-9.
  - (b) "pedestrian walkway", means an elevated space which is enclosed and designed for the passage of pedestrians between buildings or open spaces, including any direct stairway from grade thereto, and also includes the sidewalk portion of any underpass;
  - (c) "transit stop" means the portion of a street signed by the City of Calgary for loading and unloading of Calgary Transit buses, including any shelter thereon, and station structures designed for the loading and unloading of passengers using the light rail transit system.
  - (d) "verbal" means spoken, written or gestural. (B/L 40M2008, 2008 July 28)
3. No person shall engage in panhandling within 10 metres of the following:
  - (a) the entrance to a bank, credit union, trust company or other financial institution where cash can be withdrawn, or

Page 2 of Bylaw Number 3M99

- (b) an automated teller machine or other device from which cash can be electronically accessed, or
- (c) a transit stop,
- (d) any pedestrian walkway.
4. No person shall engage in panhandling between the hours of 8:00 p.m. and 8:00 a.m.
5. No person shall engage in panhandling from any person who, at the time, is an occupant of a motor vehicle.
6. No person shall continue to engage in panhandling, otherwise permitted by this Bylaw, with a person who has refused or declined the solicitation.
7. No person shall, while engaging in panhandling, move to obstruct the passage of, walk next to, or follow the person being solicited.
8. Any person who contravenes any provision of this Bylaw is guilty of an offence and liable on summary conviction to a fine of not more than Ten Thousand (\$10,000) Dollars and in default of payment to imprisonment for a term not exceeding one (1) year.
- 8.1 The specified penalty for a contravention of any provision of this Bylaw is \$50.00. (B/L 6M2004, 2004 January 26)
- 8.2 Section 8.1 shall not prevent any enforcement officer from issuing a violation ticket requiring a court appearance of the defendant, pursuant to the provisions of the *Provincial Offences Procedures Act*, R.S.A. 2000 c. P-24, or from laying an information in lieu of issuing a violation ticket. (B/L 6M2004, 2004 January 26)
- 8.3 Notwithstanding the specified penalty set out in Section 8.1, if a person is convicted twice or more times of the same provision of this Bylaw within a 24 month period, the specified penalty for the second and subsequent convictions shall be \$100.00. (B/L 6M2004, 2004 January 26)
9. Section 16 of Bylaw 52M87, the Stephen Avenue Mall Bylaw is repealed.
10. Section 8 (5) of Bylaw 17M84, the Barclay Mall Bylaw is repealed.

11. This Bylaw comes into force on the day it is passed.

READ A FIRST TIME THIS 8<sup>th</sup> DAY OF MARCH, 1999

READ A SECOND TIME, AS AMENDED, THIS 8<sup>th</sup> DAY OF MARCH, 1999

READ A THIRD TIME, AS AMENDED, THIS 8<sup>th</sup> DAY OF MARCH, 1999

(Sgd.) A. Durr  
MAYOR

(Sgd.) D. Garner  
CITY CLERK

UNCERTIFIED COPY

## Appendix "B"

### Interview Guide – Informal Employment (Individual Employing)

#### Background Participant Information

- Can you tell us about yourself? (Probes: ethnicity-race, religion, marital status, children, disability, sexual orientation, migration (ie. New to Calgary?))
- How would you describe your way of making a living? (Probes: any specific terms or typologies you would use? Probe for government supports, formal and informal sources of income, including family and friends. Do they rely on soup kitchens for food (cash and non-cash income))
- What brought you to this type of work? (Probes: formal, informal, panhandling, binning, day labour, combinations, supplementing)
- Tell us about your profession or what training, education you've had. (Probes: secondary, post-secondary, employment agencies?)
- Tell me about your housing situation.
  - If homeless – tell me about your experience with homelessness (ie. Long term, episodic, first time, etc.)
  - Does homelessness factor into your employment activities? If so, how? (Probes: specific examples)

#### Routine Activities/Informal Employment

- Can you walk us through your daily routine? (Probes: Where activities start/end, routes)
- How much would you say you earn from you informal employment? (Probes: amount per day on average, if enough to live on - how much is enough?)
- Would you describe yourself as one who uses informal ways of making a living permanently, or as someone who uses them temporarily? (Probes: give examples of times frames)
- How much effort would you say is involved in doing what you do? (Probes: hard work, or easy etc., describe mental, emotional & physical strain, is weather a factor)
- Is formal employment an option for you? If so, why don't you do it? If not, what are the barriers? (Probes: Any disadvantages, preference of employment, any other options)
- What are your experiences with bylaw and police officers?
- What would be an attractive alternative to panhandling/binning/cash labour for you? What would you need to be successful?

#### Cultural Identification/Self-Reference

- How do you think the public perceives you? (Probes: interactions with others, their responses to you)
- How do you perceive the public? (Probes: how do people treat you?)
- Does your work help you contribute to an addiction? (Probes: alcohol, drugs)

**[Note: probe for mental illness as well – but once you have rapport.]**

- Would you say there is such a thing as 'street culture' in Calgary? For example, in Edmonton people identify with a street culture that is apart from the mainstream. If so, tell me about it (probe values, rules, how you get 'in', internal factions, perceptions of mainstream, rituals, symbols, leadership and politics internally, boundary marking, etc.).
- Do you identify with a particular group of people? (Probes: fictive kinship, familial relationships).
- Do you identify with a particular territory? If so, how do you determine it? (Probes: neighbourhoods? How do you demarcate?)
- How many people would you say are out panhandling? Tell me about them. Do they form a distinct group – or is binning/panhandling something they do to make some money at times? Are there different types of panhandlers? How so?
- Would you allow me to spend a day or two with you tagging along on your daily route/routine?

## Appendix "C"



### RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS NEEDED

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The Calgary Homeless Foundation is seeking participants to take part in a study concerning informal employment in Calgary.

#### **Description of the Study:**

You are being asked to participate in a study about informal labour strategies in Calgary. The purpose of the study is to understand the experiences of people who use informal employment, like **panhandling and informal recycling (binning)** as a way to make a living in Calgary.

#### **What Will I Be Asked To Do?**

Your participation in the study will involve taking part in an interview in which you will be asked questions related to your experiences with using informal employment strategies, both past and present. In particular we are interested in the characteristics of your life that resulted in your being informally employed, and how you use informal employment to survive in Calgary. The interview will take between 1.5 and 2 hours and, if permitted, we will record what is being said.

#### **Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Your decision to take part in the study is voluntary, and completely confidential.

**You will receive a \$5 gift card to Tim Hortons** for your participation in this study. Your answers and the answers of others will be summarized and used to help us understand some of the challenges people in Calgary face making a living. The results of the study will be written in a report and will be shared with local service agencies to inform their policies, as well as other public policies. We may also share the results of the study with local media and other researchers.

#### **Please contact the following individuals if you would like to take part:**

**Cori Bender**  
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**Alina Tanasescu, VP, Research & Public Policy**  
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