IMPROVING POLICE-HOMELESS RELATIONS, EVIDENCE FROM MONTREAL

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MISSION
OLD BREWERY

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INTRODUCTION & CONTEXT

Founded in 1889, the Old Brewery Mission (OBM) is Montreal's largest homeless-serving organization for men and women, driven by a mission to end homelessness. Their programming ranges from day services, to emergency housing, to transitional housing, to housing first, to social housing, with extensive partnerships with health and social service providers. Since 2017 the Old Brewery Mission and the Service de Police de la Ville de Montréal (SPVM) have maintained a community-police partnership focused on improving the SPVM's relationship with individuals experiencing homelessness and strengthening the link between frontline workers and police officers. In the years preceding the partnership, an increase in the visibly homeless population and the high-profile death of Jimmy Cloutier, a homeless man, outside of OBM in an exchange with police officers laid bare the need to improve service provision to Montreal's homeless population. Cloutier's death spurred questions on how OBM could improve officers' interventions with homeless individuals, and that this work could be done through closer collaboration between the SPVM and community organizations.

SPVM officers are increasingly involved in working with the Montreal homeless community, with specific initiatives such as the Équipe mobile de reference et d'intervention en itinérance (Homelessness reference and intervention mobile team, EMRII) or their co-responder model with the Native Friendship Centre, as well as within regular patrol units. Underlining these changes is the increased expectation that officers engage with individuals experiencing homelessness in less repressive forms of policing and operate more as helping resources. Interventions, as described by the officers, ranged from addressing calls for public disturbances (often accompanied by an arrest), displacing individuals in public or commercial spaces, driving people to homeless-serving organizations, regular check-ins with known street-involved individuals, to coordinating with health and homelessness resources to house individuals. Albeit being increasingly involved in working with people experiencing homelessness, the SPVM continues to face distinct challenges in their interventions, as well as in working with homeless-serving organizations, as articulated by the participants of this study.

The partnership between OBM and the SPVM is unique, as rarely have homeless-serving organizations in Montreal gone beyond frontline work with the SPVM to assist in driving change within the police force. Historically, as is articulated by the participants of this study, homeless-serving organizations in Montreal have often maintained contentious relationships with the police, questioning the SPVM's interventions and strategies for working with individuals experiencing homelessness. In Montreal there remains several homeless-serving organizations who refuse to work with or have police on-site. Recognizing that both the police and homeless-serving organizations work in an important emergency capacity with Montreal's homeless community, it has been crucial to find a means of working together to best serve this group. In turn, the partnership between SPVM and OBM has taken several forms:

- Improving intervention procedures between OBM staff and officers: through ongoing conversations between service directors and nearby SPVM precincts, procedures for bringing individuals to emergency resources have improved to put the interests of the service user first while being mindful of service rules and frontline staff.

- SPVM dinner services at OBM: since 2017 SPVM officers have regularly served dinner to service users at OBM's central pavilion. This initiative has helped destigmatize the image of officer-in-uniform for individuals experiencing homelessness while engaging officers in a convivial environment with individuals experiencing homelessness where they are simply serving them food, rather than interacting in official interventions.

- Regular meetings between partners: as both organizations work to improve their protocols and programming, this has translated to regular meetings to coordinate efforts and to consult with one another.

- OBM-SPVM training sessions: since the beginning of the partnership OBM staff have been delivering trainings to SPVM staff (including recruits) focused on improving SPVM interventions with individuals experiencing homelessness, as well as improving the relationship

between SPVM and frontline service staff. Training sessions took place during a larger "social realities" day where officers spent the day hearing from different community organizations about working with the homeless and other vulnerable groups.

Given the important time commitment from OBM, particularly around training staff, and the partnership's goal of improving police-homeless relations, OBM's research department set out in 2018 to study officers' perceptions of their work with homeless and to evaluate current initiatives in place. A subsequent community-academic partnership was created between OBM and the University of Toronto, with Dr. Ayobami Laniyonu brought on to assist in the project. The objectives of this research project are multiple: to evaluate the current initiatives to improve police-homeless relations, to better understand the perspective of officers working with individuals experiencing homelessness in Montreal and to better characterize the relationship between homeless-serving organizations and the SPVM.

Several distinct themes emerged from the interviews conducted with SPVM officers: relationships with community organizations, working with homeless individuals, morale, training, and ideal world of interventions and structural problems. From these themes the researchers have proposed several recommendations reflecting on current practices, organizational standards, and training for police officers. Recommendations include prevention and early intervention; coordinated access; neighbourhood change and mobility; access to organizations; and the role of police officers in intervening with homeless individuals. Many of the recommendations proposed are suggestions made by officers themselves.

This project has underlined the value of partnership models that build trust and relationships between community, police, and academic partners. Officers spoke candidly and provided much-needed perspective on what continues to be a dire situation for Montreal's homeless community. The researchers would like to extend their gratitude to all participants and SPVM staff who graciously offered their time and energy to contribute to this project and to improving homeless-police relations.

METHODOLOGY

Officers were recruited in partnership with the SPVM. A SPVM liaison agent was allocated to the project and worked with the researchers and station commanders. This liaison agent recruited up to three officers from different neighbourhood stations to ensure a geographically diverse selection of participants. Because the project was interested in examining the trainings conducted by OBM, all officers selected for interviews had received the training. Interviews were scheduled based on officer schedules; rescheduling, cancelations and withdrawal from the study were managed by the researcher conducting interviews. Voluntary, informed, and continuous consent was received from all research participants. One participant independently contacted the researchers following their colleague's interview to participate in the study.

Semi-structured interviews with participants were conducted over the phone from February 2021 to March 2021. Interviewees answered questions whose content ranged from basic inquiries around officers' role in the SPVM, to interactions with homeless individuals, to relationship with community organizations to an evaluation of training measures in place for officers (see Appendix for

questionnaire). Interviews ranged from 15 to 59 minutes. Interviews were coded using Nvivo based on questionnaire themes.

The project was approved by the University of Toronto Office of Research and Innovation (RIS Human Protocol Number 38389) and internally by the SPVM. The researcher conducting interviews underwent the SPVM's security clearance process prior to beginning recruitment. To ensure confidentiality, all participants were allocated a randomly generated three-digit identifier during the recruitment process; any quotes used in this report correspond to the unique identifiers associated with participants. Any identifying information has been struck from the data to further ensure the confidentiality of participants.

SAMPLE

Twenty-four officers (10 women, 14 men) from 9 different neighbourhood stations participated in the study. Of the initial sample recruited, three officers declined. Sampled officers were either patrollers or socio-community agents and the length of time that participants worked for the SPVM ranged from a year and half to 25 years. When asked about the nature of their work with homeless individuals, officers mostly described instances of responding to calls or interacting with this group on patrol, as well doing safety checks in well-known areas where homeless individuals gather. Officers indicated a range of contact with homeless populations from several times a day (with some officers indicating it was the bulk of their job) to a handful of times a year (with a minority of officers struggling to remember the last time they encountered a homeless person).

FINDINGS

The following findings have been organized according to themes presented in the interviews. We propose the following findings not as an exhaustive analysis of all the content presented in the interviews, but rather as a concise and thematic presentation of officers' views on the working with individuals experiencing homelessness as we saw pertinent to the study. Subsequent and more in-depth analyses will follow this report in 2022.

RELATIONSHIPS WITH COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

A principal objective of the study was to characterize the nature of police-homeless relations in Montreal. By extension an important theme that emerged from interviews was the relationship between SPVM officers and homeless-serving community organizations. Overarchingly, officers expressed a *self-understanding that their work with the homeless fundamentally depended on the presence and work of community organizations*. Officers did not see community organizations as ancillary to their work but in fact, a central element to their work with homeless individuals. While attitudes and experiences towards community organizations, their staff, and their policies varied across the sample, the importance of community organizations to officer work and duties was articulated by almost every officer in the sample.

DEPENDENCE ON COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

Frequently, when asked about how they manage situations with homeless individuals, officers described referring and directing individuals to community organizations. Officers discussed doing this as routine parts of their shift; where their

intervention as a police officer ended, community organizations stepped in to take over. When it came to specific populations, officers described a particular reliance on organizations that cater to specific populations: notably individuals with addictions and mental health challenges; women; and Indigenous individuals. While officers discussed their dependence on these organizations, they frequently expressed their sense that they did not have adequate training to support these individuals, hence their reliance on the organizations. With this dependence, some participants (15) indicated a need for more community organizations to help them support individuals experiencing homelessness. Adding to this, officers with more experience sometimes described the emergence of community organizations over the years as an alternative to detaining individuals they found hard to manage:

> *"I think that before, personally when I arrived at [police station number], detention was the easiest solution, or that we applied more often. Now, we have, you know, at one point when they created, for example, the resource of the detox centers, well that helped us because we could do something else than giving them a ticket and taking them to the cell. It allowed us to have another option."* (Participant 021)

Some participants characterized their dependence on community organizations in another regard: because homeless individuals often do not trust the police, community organizations regularly provided services and interventions that the police may offer, but individuals typically refuse. While this was explicitly articulated in a handful interviews, the recognition that homeless individuals may prefer interacting with community organizations over the police was implied in many others.

COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS AND INSTITUTIONAL TENSIONS

While officers spoke at length about the positive relationships they maintain with community organizations, they also discussed some tensions. Notably, officers described several instances where their mandate did not conform with that of homeless-serving organizations. For example, tensions arise when police officers must dismantle encampments made of tents distributed to homeless individuals by community organizations. Another example described was being called to homeless-serving organizations to evict or arrest an individual at the organization. Given the dependence that officers described towards services, the officers felt that being called to evict or arrest was inappropriate or simply made the crisis at hand worse. In all of these instances, officers described a high level of frustration with being at odds with frontline workers.

Two officers felt that the presence of new homelessness community organizations negatively impacted their patrol neighbourhoods. To this end, they expressed a tension between community organizations' desire to expand services to new neighbourhoods, and officers' sense that doing so would bring about an unwelcomed increase in visible homelessness in their neighbourhood. Officers described this in relation to the presence of new and additional homeless individuals in their patrol area, which they felt led to increased incivilities.

> *"Well... honestly... I'll be really honest with you, there, when it was closed during covid, there, it was really better. It's sad to say, but for our street corner, the population had decreased, it was just our homeless people that we've known for years who were there, who didn't make any trouble, who pick up after*

themselves, who tried to keep their place clean and not to have any complaints, and then when [name of community organization] reopened, well, there was a whole... a lot of people who joined them and that's it. Now, the more they are, the more incivility they do, the more fights they get into, the more bottles they break, you know? They... that's what's causing the calls. But if it's, when [name of community organization] was closed, there was just a small population that was there and they hold on to their corner, they don't want, you know, they're careful, you know?" (Participant 277)

Several officers (6) also described being met with a distinct resistance or hostility from staff at homelessness organizations. Officers often attributed this to negative perceptions, stereotypes, or experiences frontline workers had with officers. Some officers recognized that this reaction could be the result of complicated and challenging histories with the police or as a means of maintaining the trust of homeless individuals. Others felt that it was an inappropriate and damning reaction from frontline workers.

"I also understand that they don't want to be associated with the police because there are homeless people who are afraid of the police, so they'll always be a little bit on the sidelines with respect to our interventions, and that's also normal because they have to maintain a bond of trust, but there are certain situations where I think they could be more on our side." (Participant 262)

"The prejudice of the police who don't want to do the work, who don't help, who generalize, everything... you know, that everyone has their stereotype, everyone has their prejudices, as much the police who have them on the homeless but there are also as many frontline workers who have them of the police. So it doesn't make us want to work with them. There are places where we're not even allowed to be, there […] we can't go and visit, the police are forbidden, the police are bad. So..." (Participant 043)

ACCESS TO ENOUGH COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

While officers recognized that Montreal has many homeless-serving community organizations, attitudes varied regarding whether the existing services were sufficiently abundant, had sufficient beds for the homeless, were appropriately located, or were properly managed. This heterogeneity of responses was somewhat surprising given that officers generally expressed a consensus around their reliance on community organizations. Speaking to the issue of enough beds, several officers highlighted that this was an issue particularly during the winter. Officers recounted many instances of picking up individuals who were 'roughing it' and being unable to locate an available shelter bed.

"There are organizations but obviously they are all overwhelmed. There aren't enough of them. There should be a way to have more space, because often that's where I find myself frustrated in my work is that I can't find a place for them to be taken care of." (Participant 497)

Beyond the question of enough organizations, several officers, particularly those new to their precinct, indicated often not being aware or familiar with community organizations in their area. This led to several suggestions for refreshed lists of organizations or more contact with local community organizations. Several reflections on the number of organizations came from a neighbourhood or precinct perspective. Officers often articulated that

they recognized an abundance of organizations in Montreal to help the homeless, but certain types of organizations (detox centre, low-barrier, emergency, social housing) were missing, or organizations were altogether missing, for their area. This was particularly true for participants working in heavily residential or suburban areas.

> *"The number of resources, their accessibility, you know, there are far fewer on the island, in the northern sector of the island of Montreal, and, um, basically it would be a little better to have them a little more dispersed. There are many in the downtown area, and I know that homelessness is much more prevalent in the downtown area, but there are some in the northern part of the area where I am in [neighbourhood name], but there are not many resources."* (Participant 907)

ORGANIZATIONS AND STAFF AS INADEQUATELY SUPPORTIVE

Some officers (13) expressed a sense that Montreal had enough service providers, but that the quality of services was not adequate for the level of support they needed, or that the services are outright not available to them, as the police. That said, this point was also varied amongst respondents, with several officers clearly stating that they felt that community organizations were supportive of the SPVM's work. This point of view often went hand in hand with officers expressing a dependence on homeless-serving organizations to do their work with homeless individuals.

> *"I mean there, when we go to resources, all the frontline workers are really friendly and then when we have questions, they answer the questions and then there are no problems."* (Participant 114)

COORDINATED ACCESS

Overwhelmingly, when discussing their relationship with homeless-serving organizations and homeless individuals, officers pointed to a larger issue: the lack of effective, city-level management and coordination of homeless-serving organizations in Montreal. Officers would discuss the lack of city-level coordination in the context of their own unfamiliarity of all the organizations in the city or in the context of struggling to find an available bed or an organization for a homeless individual they picked up. Nearly half of respondents underlined outright a need for a centralized system that could manage available beds and directly refer homeless individuals based on their specific needs. They often suggested this could take the form of an info line, or that community organizations should coordinate their admissions process so that if there were no more available beds, or if an individual is barred or ineligible for service, that they could refer the SPVM officer to another available or more appropriate service.

> *"Of course, when we absolutely have to evict a person, it rarely ends well because they don't necessarily want to accept the resources that we offer them and, um, when we look for resources, it's really difficult for us. I don't know if one day it will exist, you know a type of 8-1-1, or 3-1-1 that we call and then they dispatch because it's happened to me often, let's say a gentleman who is outside, he wants a resource. It's 10 o'clock in the evening, I've called 10 resources and not one of them can take him. At a certain point, I'm not a telephone directory, so it's up to me to find the resource, be their taxi driver, to... it's very heavy, there."* (Participant 043)

This comment points to a known gap in Montreal's homeless organization network. In recent years, Canadian homeless advocacy has highlighted co-ordinated access as an essential facet of municipal strategies to end homelessness (Nichols and Doberstein 2016). As officers frequently noted, coordinated access can help homeless-serving organizations and emergency services work together to streamline the process of finding appropriate services for homeless individuals. Without generally being aware of co-ordinated access as a concept, officers described needing coordinated access in Montreal. In absence of this centralized system, officers described driving around with homeless individuals for hours looking for an organization, or at times entirely giving up being able to place the person.

> *"One place centralizes, and then that place does the seven, eight calls that I make to try to get her a place. You know what I mean? That discourages the police. It discourages them from trying to place the person because I tell you, I've already spent an hour and a half, two hours trying to find a place and I wasn't able to do it. I had to take him to a friend's house who probably went and opened the door for him during the evening. […] It's also motivation because there's nothing stopping us from saying to the person «get out of here» and then as soon as they turn a corner, goodnight, we close the call and move on. But then we don't solve the problem of the man or woman. Then there are police officers who, because of the difficulty of finding a place for him, drop it, they just patch the hole and do something else."* (Participant 497)

WORKING WITH HOMELESS INDIVIDUALS

Participants were asked at length about the nature of their work with homeless individuals: their personal experiences, challenges they faced, how work with homeless individuals has changed over time and the positive elements of this work. As with most questions, responses varied considerably amongst participants. The following is a thematic presentation of the more prominent elements that emerged in discussing work with homeless individuals in Montreal.

CHALLENGES: HOMELESSNESS, MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTION

Nearly all participants discussed some difficult interactions with homeless individuals within the context of their work at the SPVM. Among the more prevalent themes that emerged, officers signaled mental health, addictions, and an inability to place homeless individuals as the more challenging elements associated with their work in this context.

Officers often described circumstances where interactions with homeless individuals were rendered difficult because of mental health challenges and addictions, where intervening with them may otherwise be more straightforward.

> *"Uh, there are some of our homeless people who suffer from mental health problems, or when they use certain drugs, their behaviour becomes totally opposite to what they normally are and they are very aggressive, and that is also a problem with them because they live on the street, and the people they live with are drug users, that was one thing."* *(Participant 149)*

A small number of officers described relying on use of force (or "repressive tactics"), particularly in circumstances of mental health or addiction crises, when they would have otherwise have not. This use of force did not necessary produce the hoped-for outcomes.

> *"Basically he turned around to hit me too. So I threw him to the ground with one hand, because I still had my handcuffs in the other hand, so I couldn't control his fall very well, and then he hit his head, and since he was also very intoxicated, it looks like the fall was even more severe."* (Participant 262)

In addition to the challenges associated with mental health, addiction, and available beds, officers pointed more broadly to a lack of adequate organizations for homeless individuals with more chronic and complex conditions. Generally, officers themselves often did not feel like they could adequately support people with complex mental health needs. This was often accompanied with a certain exasperation with this work.

> *"Mental health, there are a lot of gaps. In the downtown that's all we have. […] I don't know how to interact with them. To get a different perspective... I, I wish I knew how to work with them."*
> (Participant 043)

WORKING WITH INDIGENOUS INDIVIDUALS

Although it was not part of the questions asked, nearly half of the officers discussed specifically intervening with Indigenous[1] communities within their work with homeless individuals. The question of interventions with homeless Indigenous individuals often emerged in neighbourhood-specific circumstances or in discussing training. Several respondents felt that the presence of homeless Indigenous individuals had become prevalent in recent years and changed the nature of their work.

> *"When I started, there were hardly any homeless people. They were, they were more users, drug addicts who were wandering the streets a little bit and now, it's really a large homeless population, especially in our area, it's mostly Indigenous."*
> (Participant 277)

Some officers (8) shared a particular unease in their work with this group, sensing that there were added challenges working with the Indigenous community.

> *"So with our indigenous community, it's really hard because with our indigenous community you tell them something the day before, the next day they don't remember it. You tell them again the next day, they don't remember. […] because, we've been with them for six years now."* (Participant 277)

Notably, several officers with experience working in more Western precincts on the island indicated having extensive interactions with Inuit individuals (sometimes referred to more broadly as Indigenous) accessing the Ullivik centre[2].

1 The researchers recognize that in the case of Montreal Indigenous may over-generalize the communities typically found in the area including Métis, First Nations and Inuit peoples. Unless otherwise specified, Indigenous is meant to reflect the general label that was applied by officers.

2 The Ullivik centre "provides accommodation, transport and the services of nurses and interpreters in order to plan the stay of the Inuits receiving health care in Montreal." (Centre de santé Inuulitisivik 2019)

> *"The homeless people we deal with the most are the Indigenous clientele. We have an indigenous clientele in the sector and it's them, usually, who are the most, it's that they come here for care but after that they don't leave because they stay in the sector and after that they go downtown."* (Participant 476)

A handful of officers struggled to categorize the recurring Ullivik patient incidents, given that the individuals were experiencing more transitional homelessness.

> *"It's more like Inuit people who aren't homeless, there are Inuit in the downtown area of the Cabot Square and everything that are homeless but in Pointe-Claire it's often Inuit that live or stay temporarily at the Ullivik center or in hotels nearby while waiting to receive care from the hospitals and then often when they are intoxicated, but at that time the Ullivik center doesn't want to take them back, you know, they are sometimes aggressive and they are not equipped to manage intoxicated individuals whether it's by alcohol or drugs so there we end up with people that we have to take care of but not really anywhere to take them. Just enough time to sober up for the evening."* (Participant 897)

PERCEPTION OF SELF AND WORK AS A POLICE OFFICER

Officers were asked several questions throughout the interview that prompted them to reflect on their role as police officers and their perception of their work with homeless populations. As with many other categories of questions, though answers varied widely, certain themes emerged: the role of police officers, expectations of being a police officer and working with the homeless, and exposure to homeless populations before entering the police force.

Within the interview, officers would often comment on the perceived appropriateness (or not) of their role with homeless individuals; that is, *whether they felt they should be the ones to do this kind of work with this group*. Some indicated a malaise with this part of their work, indicating that they did not feel like it was appropriate to their role as a police officer, or that they simply did not have the capacity or tools to do this kind of work.

> *"I'm getting tired of it because of the lack of resources. I'm leaving [area] because of that. It takes a lot of energy and, uh, a lot of times we help them and then it seems like there's not enough follow-up. I know there are limitations in everything, but it's the same ones that come up all the time and then we lack resources."* (Participant 043)

> *"Because it's not just the police, I mean, before, we should be the last person to intervene in the background, […] there should be community resources, government resources in the department that could intervene with them, where these people wouldn't have to deal with the police."* (Participant 997)

A handful of participants explained that they felt that working with homeless individuals took away from what they perceived as actual police work. They further highlighted that this work would be better suited for other workers.

> *"For me, there is, yes, we have to manage homelessness, but we still have to be available for calls when there is really a danger to life, a risk, so if you spend your time doing the helping relation, it makes you less available for the calls that are more important in the sense that the person who is beaten up on a street corner, uh, well whatever, or a person who's home is broken into, a person who is caught in a*

hostage, that's more the police for me. It's more about that than it is about trying to solve homelessness. There are other organizations for me than the police that are there for that." (Participant 262)

Some participants expressed that they enjoyed this part of their work, but further questioned the appropriateness of their interventions.

"Look, as a police officer, I certainly enjoy working with the homeless. But the problem is that we don't often have the time and the experience to take care of these people and to go from one end of the file to the other, so we are part of the chain and it's the end that I don't like as much, that I see the beginning, or that I often find myself in the middle where the person has already had all sorts of help and all sorts of alternatives that they haven't taken, I find that a little difficult, because I don't see the end of my intervention often but no, generally I like it." (Participant 497)

Expectations around their work with homeless populations often revolved around previous experiences with this group before becoming an officer. While it was not a question outright asked, officers brought up on several occasions (9) whether they had grown up encountering visible homelessness. For those who mentioned it, they often perceived their contact (or lack of) with homelessness as a defining part of their perception of this group. Notably, the type of area (rural, urban, suburban) that officers came from and the kind of contact they had with the homeless before becoming an officer appeared to have an important bearing on how officers interpreted homeless individuals' behaviour.

"I'm from a suburb, so homelessness wasn't something that I was-, that I've been around since I was a kid I would say. So I, I (sigh) we had a homeless man who was, uh, particularly neglected from a hygiene point of view, I would say, and then... I just couldn't understand why, why he didn't want us to take him to a shelter." (Participant 122)

"Since I grew up in Montreal, from my high school we once went on an outing downtown and we had to go eat with two homeless people. We offered them our food and then with our class we discussed with them, we had an interview, well not an interview, but we talked to them, we discussed with them while we ate, everyone ate and then we asked them questions. You know, it's certain that since it happened when I was in high school, it changed my vision of the homeless because you know, I knew that 70% of the homeless, for example, it's their choice to be on the street, it's often not necessarily a victim, it's really their choice." (Participant 262)

"I come from far away, I come from [rural area], and when they talked to us about the homeless in Montreal, I was like 'oh my God, poor them, it must not be easy' and all that, and then I realized with time, you know I already spoke with one, and it's certain that it's perhaps not the same mentality, I still think it's sad that they're on the street, I don't think it's right that they're there, but I tell myself that at least if they want help, if they want to be able to sleep and eat and have a roof over their heads, there are several resources downtown that are there to help them." (Participant 476)

"I come from [suburb] so it's not my everyday reality, managing homeless people or people who hate us. In [suburb], people are super nice, they are happy to see the police and they appreciate our services, so I remember that I was a little surprised to see how much just the uniform, despite the fact that we had a lot of good intentions, and I tried to reason with

> *them, I am super patient, quiet, and there was nothing to do. They hated the police."* (Participant 897)

MORALE

To group some of the more personal challenges and successes reported by officers regarding their interventions with homeless individuals, the researchers identified a common thread of morale. While many participants recognized that interactions with individuals experiencing homelessness were an important part of their job, they described the emotional consequences of these interactions and subsequent effects on their motivation to work. The following content speaks to how officers saw different facets of their work improving or diminishing morale with reflections on homelessness as a larger and systemic issue, positive interactions with homeless individuals, and affirming dynamics with community organizations.

FAILURE OF INDIVIDUAL INTERVENTIONS TOWARDS SYSTEMIC PROBLEMS

The greatest factor reducing morale amongst officers working with homeless populations was the sense that they were up against systemic problems that made resolving situations impossible. Systemic problems, as described by officers, could be interpreted as poverty, poor mental health problems, colonialism, or addiction. Implied in this reflection is that officers have confidence in their interventions with crime but are less certain of how to sustainably address social challenges, like homelessness. For one participant, acquiring perspective and experience with homeless individuals meant recognizing that the issue of homelessness was a complex systemic problem and went above and beyond their role is as a police officer to solve.

> *"Like in the beginning, I would say when we were on 9-1-1 calls it was more, we were trying to solve the problem that was there. So that's it, I would say that since we've been on foot patrol for six years, at the beginning we said «OK, we'll try to find a solution to the homelessness» (laughs). Then, well, we realized that there is no solution to homelessness. It's more of a societal problem and it's, we have to find more... […] It was more a matter of finding a solution to a call that we received, well we tried to find a solution to our calls every day, but now it's more a matter of trying to go according to the needs and the resources that we have, to try to bring the two together."* (Participant 045)

Echoing this sense that the problem of homelessness is too big and structural for police interventions to resolve, one officer described the role that policing itself plays in raising public and political awareness about homelessness and directing resources to the issue. As frontline workers, this officer noted that the police 'make visible' what the broader public may ignore or be unable to see:

> *"When there is a problem, we make it visible and by making it really visible, there are budgets that follow, when the budgets follow there are more resources, when there are more resources, we communicate with the police to inform them, so I think that you know, I don't know, I don't know the statistics, I don't know if it's because there is more homelessness, but it's above all more seen."* (Participant 359)

Throughout the interviews, officers described the "Groundhog Day" effect (specifically naming it as such): the sense that every day was the same intervention with the same people, with no resolution. The consequences appear poor for morale: officers

expressed frustration that that they were unable to "resolve" issues with chronically homeless individuals, particularly in instances where addictions and mental health issues were clearly present.

> *"What I find difficult sometimes is the recurrence, you know? The impression that it's a bit like Groundhog Day. You know? I have the impression that there are days when I'm going to put on band-aids but the next day the band-aid is already gone. That... in terms of homelessness what I find difficult is that, that a person that I'm going to interact with one day, that I feel like you know, I've done a good intervention, but the next day, it's to be done again. […] It's really more the fact that at some point, it seems like we're not getting out of the, the poverty, the misery, the homelessness, the addiction... you know?"* (Participant 130)

This frustration could be particularly acute in neighbourhoods that had seen a recent influx of visibly homeless people. Some officers (12) described a collective "Groundhog Day" where they felt that that whole groups of homeless individuals, or neighbourhoods, behaved the same every day. Interestingly, officers suggested that a key component of their frustration was that the nature of their work did not allow them to understand individuals' individual trajectories: they did not know what people had been through before arriving to the area or what resources they had tried to access, and they had no idea what happened to the person after the SPVM brought them to a homeless-serving resource. Several officers felt that they were only intervening at a peak moment of crisis or conflict but had no way of ensuring that the crisis did not repeat itself.

> *"To have a follow-up with each person at a given time would be like impossible but we don't necessarily know what happens afterwards and then often, well unfortunately these people we're going to see them again on the street. You know? It's sad to say, but sometimes you have the impression that it's a wheel that turns, and it's sad, but it's also part of the reality. These people have to help each other, and if they don't help each other, we'll see them again, and that's often the case."* (Participant 326)

This perceived unsustainability and repetition of interventions diminished morale to the extent that some participants question their role as police officers working with homeless individuals. One respondent felt that if interventions with homeless individuals involved more prevention or early intervention, the role of the police would be minimal with these cases.

> *"Often, we are called to intervene in a lot of particular cases and often it's because these people were not helped before and they are where they are now. Whereas if we could help them in advance, if we could give them more resources, more help, accompany them on their journey, we wouldn't be called to do this, we would be called less often. We could never have the... how would I put it? We could never not have to deal with the police in these cases because there will always be cases that will require our intervention, our interventions and I don't think we will always be able to have resources available 24 hours a day. No. But it's certain that if we had more, we would probably have fewer interventions, that we would have fewer problems as such."*
> (Participant 997)

POSITIVE INTERACTIONS WITH HOMELESS INDIVIDUALS

Not to be overshadowed by the often-challenging nature of working with homeless individuals, officers also spoke about the positive elements associated with their work with this population, which for many sustained their morale in otherwise difficult circumstances. Officers typically discussed bonding with individuals, the helping relationship, and often discussed the satisfaction of offering harm reduction-based interventions. What struck the researchers about officers' responses here was that when officers described the affirming elements associated with their work with homeless individuals, they were engaged in roles and behaviors that community organizations engage in. While participants described a heavy reliance on community organizations for psychosocial interventions with homeless individuals, these were also the kinds of interventions that officers recognized collectively as the more worthwhile in their own work. As echoed in other responses, this confused the line between where a police officer's role ended and where the role of a psychosocial professional—such as a social worker, street worker, or counsellor—began. The majority (19) of participants indicated at some point developing a bond with individuals experiencing homelessness. For this participant, creating a bond and a link of trust with familiar individuals made what often felt like a challenging work environment more worthwhile.

> *"She has, like, a small disability, she has major drug problems, she turns tricks, she's on the street, but the fact remains that when she sees me, we're able to have contact and if I know she has a problem, she can come and see me, and that, for me, is like, that's what keeps me here and I like this job because I know that sometimes it can be five interventions and it becomes heavy and then you have one at a time that creates a link that could make a difference."* (Participant 130)

Officers shared that close connections with familiar individuals facilitated their work. Links with trusted individuals could facilitate better outcomes when officers intervened with a group of homeless individuals our could provide an extra set of eyes and ears on their patrol area.

> *"We know the people who collaborate more, who are able to influence others a little bit, and we try to use that too so that we can, you know, keep, you know, when there is incivility, well, we're going to go and get someone and say, 'this isn't going to work, we're going to get calls, can you try to calm people down a little bit? Talk to him, you know because we're going to get calls, you're going to get kicked out of here. If you want to keep your spot, there, well...', so we kind of know who to go get since we know them, to help us."* (Participant 045)

> *"We often tried to have contact with them because they are also people who have, they are our peers in fact, they can see a lot of the problems in the sector, they can notice if there is something abnormal, uh, so we saw them more as people we could help, or who could help us in return so it was really-, we tried to develop a nice relationship with them in fact. It was more often that than calls or incivilities."* (Participant 270)

Nineteen officers explicitly described creating bonds with homeless individuals as an aspect of their job. Similarly, seventeen participants described how their ability to help as being strong positive elements associated with their work with homeless individuals.

> *"So this person we went to meet, we offered her alternatives, we told her that maybe we could find her a place to stay more permanently because winter was coming. That was last summer. This woman is not someone who has problems with drugs or alcohol, it's more a mental health problem. But we had such a good relationship with her, and she had the immediate assistance of the police officers who work with us, specifically the ÉMRII, and finally the woman ended up leaving the church, the church grounds, found herself a place to live, and as of late, as far as I know, she is still in her apartment."*
> (Participant 497)

Officers tended to characterize interactions that involved a harm reduction approach—where officers were able to intervene without repressive tactics and simply ensuring an individual's immediate wellbeing--as positive. References to positive interactions tended to involve interventions when officers referred individuals directly to community organizations or calling on other organizations to intervene.

AFFIRMING DYNAMICS WITH COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

Some officers also described positive relationships they established with homeless-serving organizations as an important morale boost: many participants (20) described rich and meaningful partnerships with community organizations in their patrol neighbourhoods. These relationships were accompanied by active work together and coordination, often around chronically homeless individuals.

> *"I find that the frontline resource workers, I personally find that they help a lot. Because they have a connection that we don't have with people. So I would say that the resources help a lot."*
> *(participant 262)*

Of special mention, two officers also described appreciating their relationship with community organizations because it gave them the opportunity to discuss their intervention style with frontline workers. They felt that working with homeless organizations was an important opportunity for feedback on their work. In the same spirit, police officers expressed that they often learnt a great deal from working with community organizations and enjoyed this facet of their job.

TRAINING

Given that the training sessions led by OBM staff are an important component of the SPVM-OBM partnership, this part of the research focused on officers' reflections and appraisal of the training. Most participants, at the time of the interview, had had their training close to two years earlier. Ultimately, 10 of the 24 respondents thought they did not receive the training (this, despite that fact that in the recruitment process, officers and the police liaison confirmed that all participants had received the training) or that they did not remember the training at all. Several participants conflated the Indigenous realities training, received on the same day, for the homelessness training. *Reflections on this training were more abundant than the homelessness training*. Beyond the OBM training, officers were encouraged to reflect on training and continuing education for officers, generally. With few exceptions, officers overwhelmingly expressed a desire for more continuous training and education.

One officer took this reflection further and suggested that training officers was something of a band aid solution and that solving large problems or issues requires more sustainable solutions and commitments.

> *"I found this training very good, particularly. The only downside that I have is that it always seems that the SPVM is catching up... we have a particular case or a particular problem and then we go and do training to solve that case. I have the impression that sometimes the SPVM gives training to close the doors and say «well, the police officers have been trained and then we move on to something else». But the problem continues to exist, and we could focus on it if we said to ourselves, «For the next two or three years, we're going to take care of homelessness in Montreal, or for the next five years, we're going to take care of homelessness.» So continuing education, projects, money, once things are going well, then we've tackled it well, we continue to deal with it, and then we could add something else, like pedestrian accidents. Then we go back-, but no. At the SPVM, what I find is that we pull on all the problems to say that we have touched on everything, but we never concentrate on a problem as such to work on it and then solve it."* (Participant 997)

Several officers felt that not only was it essential to be receiving more training but that they felt that this training should be coming from community organizations.

> *"I'd like to have more ongoing training. Not one every five years. You know, because you're talking about this training, but I'm not even sure that's what we're talking about. And you know, training is also good, it's nice to learn, the history, let's say of the indigenous people, OK it's good, it's good, we learn to know why you know they have certain behaviours, or certain mentalities, but uh, you know, to learn on the street, what do they need? What could we do for them then, or not do? That more. And I think that it's you, the Old Brewery Mission and the street workers, who should be providing this training, plus this perspective."* (Participant 045)

Speaking specifically to training for working with homeless individuals, when officers were asked if they felt that they had received enough training throughout their career to work with this population the answers varied. Perceptions of whether or not they had been adequately trained for this work was divided, with nine officers indicating they had, and seven indicating they had not (the remaining officers had no opinion on this).

A handful of officers specified that they had received training more recently but having been part of the SPVM for several decades, they had not received training earlier when they needed it.

> *"In the last few years, yes, because we talk about it a lot and then society decided to focus on these problems. So today, I am more trained than I was 20 years ago when I left the police academy."* (997)

Although the sense of adequate training varied among participants, the majority (15) felt that they were still well-equipped to do the work they do with homeless individuals. This suggests that for several participants their perception of being well-positioned to this work related less having the training to do it, but more related to field experience, tools available, or an innate ability to do the work.

> *"You know it's more information that we should have on these people than trainings."* (Participant 114)

> *"I think they are well equipped, we have, you know, we have all that in our notebook, we have the resources, they have us as a resource as well. Then... you know, we always have the 2-1-1 that can help, but I don't know if it's used that much, but I think they're well equipped."* (Participant 277)

INDIGENOUS REALITIES TRAINING

While respondents often could not remember the actual homelessness training, half of the sample spoke about the Indigenous realities training they received on the same day. For several, they conflated the Indigenous realities training for the homelessness training, assuming that they were one in the same. Officers had extensive reflections about this training and indicated that it had positively impacted their interventions with homeless Indigenous individuals. Of particular interest, officers felt that this training helped explain the complicated relationship between Indigenous communities and the police.

> *"The training sessions with the indigenous community really helped us a lot because we got to know them […] how they lived in the past, what they experienced, what, why they don't like the police, why they don't like authority, why all that, so that, that helped us understand many things."* (Participant 277)

Several participants, as demonstrated, retained a particular emphasis on the importance of the historical context of colonization when working with Indigenous individuals.

> *"Well I really learned a lot about, especially with the indigenous people. All the explanation of their way of life, why these people, what they had lived in the past, the reserves, how it worked and all that, that marked me. I learned, I understood many things, indeed. The way I interact with them now is different. I think I've understood a lot of things that can explain why they are, uh, how would I put it? It seems like they're fundamentally having a harder time getting by."* (Participant 997)

As mentioned, officers regularly shared feeling that they were negatively perceived by community organization staff. In one instance, while reflecting on the Indigenous realities training, a participant reflected on the facilitator for the training, indicating that this person's perceived negative attitude influenced the quality of the training.

> *"Then I remember there was another woman who spoke to us about the situation of Aboriginal people, especially in the area, in station [number removed], and she seemed to have a very, very negative prejudice towards the police, and that tainted her intervention. You know... it tainted the training that she gave us. She didn't seem to be that happy to be there."* (Participant 021)

IDEAL WORLD OF INTERVENTIONS AND STRUCTURAL PROBLEMS

Among the questions, officers were asked to describe their ideal world of interventions with homeless individuals. Answers typically revolved around the accessibility of certain organizations. Once officers described this, they were asked what they felt prevented that ideal from being a reality. Officers offered three prominent categories of answers for addressing structural barriers to better homeless-police interventions: lack of monetary resources, a sense of being profiled as a police officer, and society defining their role. A certain level of macro reflection was attributed to how the SPVM has changed their organizational practices.

In discussing what an ideal world of interventions with homeless people would look like, officers emphasized more housing, adequate community

organizations and beds for the homeless, as well as more specialized services for homeless individuals with particular circumstances (notably addictions).

> *"You know, to have more supportive housing to allow these people not to be outside, and you know, not all homeless people are happy and comfortable staying in a shelter either, you know? In an ideal world, these people would like to have, even if it would be a small two and a half, well you know, it's... to feel good, and that there are more services to help these people."* (Participant 248)

> *"There would be more places for them to go, where they could be referred to based on their needs. That, you know, having less of them on the street, that they're better off in certain places than on the street corner, or that the resources are not there for them. That would be more of the ideal world I think."* (Participant 045)

> *"I would say that it would be that when we offer care that people accept it and then we have places too for them to sleep, to get warm, that we have more and for all categories of people, whether it's people who are intoxicated, or people who are women with children or violent men, that we have places, more places in the back where we, it's easier to be able to find them a place at least to sleep for the night because it's not always easy depending on their condition, to find a place." (Participant 997)*

Another theme that emerged in officer's perceptions of ideal circumstances revolved around the idea that homelessness would be handled by other entities, or that homeless individuals would more willingly accept help and exit homelessness.

> *"In my opinion, it would take people who are not in the police force […] I think that often the police officers who are sent by the SPVM are sent preventively to counteract incivilities but it takes people who have the time and it's their job to be totally attentive to their needs. You know? To be able to take the time to listen to someone who has a big problem."* (Participant 021)

> *"If I had a magic wand, yes, there would be fewer of them and then they would accept that we help them and then if they don't want our help for x reason, that's up to them."* (Participant 897)

Speaking to some of the structural issues officers flagged throughout the interview, as mentioned, one answer that overwhelmingly emerged in this questioning was the need for coordinated access. Other officers spoke at length about the role of the public in defining and shaping their work as police officers; many perceived that the framing of their work with homeless individuals as a barrier to conditions improving for this population. Several officers felt a tension between what they were being asked of by citizens when it came to calls for homeless individuals and what they felt were appropriate interventions with this group.

> *"There's also a connection with the demands of the citizens. You know, indirectly, the citizens call us, or they have fears, or whatever, if we say no, this is not repression, I won't do it, well afterwards, in the long term, the citizens will just stop calling us and then, uh, it will... it will have a breach of trust, you know?"* (Participant 130)

To this end, some officers (14) struggled with the negative perception members of the public hold against police officers.

> *"Even if we change the way we interact with them, we are still seen by a certain population as not doing our job."* (Participant 045)

This negative perception of the police force was seen by one participant as particularly insidious, negatively affecting police interventions in a sort of vicious cycle.

> *"A police officer who does something wrong damages the reputation of the 200 officers around him. Then, it will always be like that and the fact that this police officer acted like that, well there, the population will have a different response towards the police, so that it enters a vicious circle. The more the population is a little rougher with us, well we become a little rougher, and then since we are a little rougher, well they also become a little rougher... it just makes everything rough."* (Participant 262)

Several officers described societal reactions towards the police's work with homeless populations that brought about cycles or "chain" reactions. This theme emerged often as officers recognized their role in a large system working with this population.

> *"The whole wheel, the chain, that is to say, of resources, of everyone in the health system, everyone has to help each other, work together for things to really change in the long term. That's what I believe."* (Participant 527)

This cycle of reactions or events led some to question how police officers are tasked with intervening with the homeless; once again putting into question the appropriateness of the police's role in this work.

> *"I also find that the SPVM receives a lot of problems that should not necessarily, uh, we are limited in our actions. I still come back to the fact that it's more of a societal problem. It is society, the city, the government that should decide to really tackle something and we are a partner among others. We contribute. Rather than always putting it on us and then saying, 'it's the police who will solve the problems'. Unfortunately, we are not necessarily equipped to do it. We are not doctors, we are not psychologists, we do not have centers to house them, we do not have the resources to do it."* (Participant 997)

Related to the issue of societal constraints, many of the officers felt that one of the greatest barriers to better interventions with homeless individuals was access to monetary resources.

> *"I think that it takes money, it takes land, it takes someone who is willing to invest in it. I think municipalities are becoming more and more open to putting money into it... but I think it takes the willingness of several partners."* (Participant 122)

> *"There's a monetary side to it. There's the availability of resources, the availability of people to do it. There are already many resources available, but can these resources do more? Would they like to do more? Surely. Can they? I don't necessarily think they are capable of doing it right now. I think that's pretty much it."* (Participant 149)

Finally, officers shared how the SPVM and its practices had changed over the years, often to reflect societal expectations towards the police. Several officers felt that interventions and attitudes had changed within the SPVM in an important way with more empathy for homeless individuals, as well as a radical reconsideration of the effectiveness of oppressive tactics such as ticketing and arrests.

"I find that there is a lot more lassitude. It means that we tolerate a lot more, but still, each work team is different, each position is different. So, for example, on my team, we are not people who are very repressive. We have more empathy towards the homeless. We create a work atmosphere like that." (Participant 262)

"I don't know if it was just at the SPVM or everywhere else but it was like you get a call, OK he's using, fine, regulations, we'll give him a ticket. Now, you know me and [NAME], we've had people drinking on, let's say, [public space] and then... you get the beer can emptied, you talk to them, you try to help them but at some point, it doesn't help them, like even if we gave them a ticket, ticket, ticket, it won't help them any more. It's just going to put him in more trouble. […] That's perhaps where it changed, and I would say that, in my opinion, it must be quite widespread throughout the SPVM because at some point, as I'm telling you, it gives absolutely nothing. You won't get anywhere by doing that. You know, I'm not telling you that we can't still do it because there are people, yes, you won't have a choice because there's an offence, you have to do it, but if we have other methods and other means, it's certainly better for the person." (Participant 615)

To this end, one officer also recognized that the police had changed their approach to working with homeless individuals, but this was somewhat hampered by the perception of the police as being more aggressive, as was the case in the past.

"It would take a magic wand but to rebuild some kind of trust from them [homeless populations] towards us because you know, the police have changed a lot over the years, I find that we're more in a relationship of help compared to what we did in the past. So police were more action-oriented and if you didn't understand, well before it was more rough-now it's more of a helping relationship."
(Participant 476)

RECOMMENDATIONS

Most of the recommendations are aimed at the SPVM. However, some of them concern the different levels of government and are therefore addressed to the appropriate authorities.

PREVENTION AND EARLY INTERVENTION

A recurring theme that emerged from interviews was the unsuitability and unsustainability of police interventions with homeless individuals. Certain officers (12) often expressed frustration around recurring issues ("Groundhog Day") and the sense that by the time they were intervening it was "too late" for the individual. Of this group, some questioned the appropriateness of police interventions with this population, suggesting that they may not be the right professionals to be doing the kind of psychosocial work required for many individuals found on patrol or as the subject of calls received. In this regard, the officers' comments echo those made by police officers in many other jurisdictions studied by researchers who question the utility of police response of people experiencing homelessness and other vulnerable populations (Warner and Kramer 2009; Hartmann McNamara, Crawford, & Burns, 2013).

With these reflections, we recommend that the SPVM adapt and strengthen their initiatives, to the best of their ability, to limit their participation in the systemic nature of homelessness in Montreal. As participants noted, the SPVM has historically

reacted to changes in rates and the visibility of homelessness. Organizations and initiatives for preventing homelessness, such as those that ensure individuals exiting institutional settings are housed, that increase investment in social housing, that increase housing affordability, or intervene early for individuals who are at risk of falling into homelessness, are necessary to improve police-homeless interactions as they address the root causes of homelessness. It is our recommendation that the SPVM continue to prioritize approaches for preventing homelessness that align with the objectives of these organizations and initiatives, as opposed to purely reactionary interventions with homeless individuals.

Although the SPVM and police officers themselves cannot tackle issues related to the supply or affordability of housing in Montreal, they can communicate to policy makers and stake holders their understanding of the systemic roots of homelessness. Such strategies have been pioneered in contexts like Eugene, Oregon, where police leaders have collaborated with local prosecutors, departments of correction, local drug treatment centers, and other service providers to champion a highly successful pre-arrest diversion program (Beckett, 2014; Collins et al., 2015). These programs reduce police contact with 'high use' individuals, reduce costs for local law enforcement, and satisfy local community member, and may pay for themselves. A key police role in such programs, however, has been advocacy and coordination. Accordingly, we recommend that:

- All levels of government and SPVM endorse and advocate for systemic solutions to problems of housing affordability. Specifically, we recommend advocacy for law enforcement assisted, pre-arrest diversion to housing-oriented and prevention-based programming for individuals experiencing homelessness.

- SPVM should coordinate with homeless service providers to identify high-risk and high-need individuals who should be made a priority for placement into supportive housing. Research suggests that great improvements in public satisfaction with the police can be gained when police departments, working in coordination with local businesses and welfare providers, identify unhoused persons with the most interventions and coordinate access to housing (ideally, working in a harm reduction strategy). Such strategies, may also be useful for improving officer morale as well (Beckett et al., 2016; Beckett 2016)

- SPVM should advocate for greater public acceptance and inclusion of people experiencing homelessness who are not committing crimes in public spaces. For example, if they receive a 911 call about a 'disorderly person' who is homeless, they should inform callers and neighborhood residents of the rights of homeless persons to occupy public space.

COORDINATED ACCESS

Overwhelmingly, participants described the need for a coordinated access system in Montreal that could provide officers with real time information about services available to individuals experiencing homelessness. Research demonstrates that coordinated access is among the more important tools municipalities need to implement to best

serve individuals experiencing homelessness (Nichols & Doberstein, 2016). In our discussions, officers frequently described instances where they could not bring individuals to homelessness services because they could not find an appropriate or available beds. In extreme cases, officers described driving around with homeless individuals for several hours or instances where the individual gave up and asked to be let out of the car. These instances not only offer a challenging aspect to police offers' work but also pose concerns for the individual spending several hours in a police car or eventually sleeping outside. Beyond an emphasis on the need for available and low barrier services, these reflections drive a recommendation for the development of a coordinated access system in Montreal.

We recommend that:

- The SPVM support the creation of a municipally funded system that provides officers, other service providers, and members of the public accessible and up-to-date information on resources currently available in the city of Montreal for individuals experiencing homelessness.

- Police should be prepared to hire, staff, train, and implement protocols for standardizing coordinated access.

NEIGHBOURHOOD CHANGE AND MOBILITY

In describing the specific realities to working in their neighbourhood or precinct, some participants (4) indicated an emerging issue of large groups of homeless individuals newly arriving to their neighbourhood. This shift was often attributed to either the opening and closure of certain homeless organizations (notably day centres) or, to the mobility of the homeless community after a major change in the urban environment. For example, two officers described an influx of individuals to more peripheral residential neighbourhoods following the closure of Viger Square in the Old Port. These officers did not feel equipped to accommodate the large number of homeless individuals entering the area, while long-term residents are not used to their presence. Research suggests that long-term residents and business owners may call police on homeless individuals in such situations, regardless of actual public safety concerns. Furthermore, these more peripheral areas are not equipped with the same homelessness organizations traditionally found in the downtown area. It is the researchers' recommendation that:

- Better impact assessment be conducted by the responsible governments prior to a major displacement like that of Viger Square.

- Police officers, particularly those in neighbourhoods with more modest homeless populations, should not necessarily see an influx of homeless persons into a neighborhood, absent of other factors such as crime, as a 'problem' in and of itself.

- If/when police officers see a rapid influx of homeless persons, they should communicate to long-term residents the rights of homeless people in public space.

- Police evaluate and study, through the data that they make available to the public, the

types of interactions, tickets, and arrests involving people experiencing homelessness.

ACCESS TO ORGANIZATIONS

Beyond some participants (15) indicating a need for more organizations or beds for the homeless in Montreal, several officers commented on the need for more organizations in certain areas and for certain groups. Notably, participants working in more suburban areas felt that it was challenging to find organizations (or to know which ones were available) for homeless individuals. Across precincts, officers generally stated that they struggled to find appropriate organizations for individuals who were intoxicated. To this end, the researchers recommend federal, provincial and municipal governments ensure a wider geographic distribution of homeless-serving organizations. They also recommend the SPVM continue the ongoing development of harm-reduction based services.

ROLE OF POLICE OFFICERS IN INTERVENING WITH HOMELESS INDIVIDUALS

INTERVENTION STYLE

As mentioned, officers often described tension around their interventions with individuals experiencing homelessness. This came in the form of disagreements between officers' mandates around homelessness and those of community organizations; an uncertainty about the appropriateness of their role in psychosocial interventions; and a broader tension surrounding following protocol and doing interventions that are of benefit to homeless individuals. A common denominator to these tensions is the expectation of society towards the police's role in managing visibly homeless individuals. The researchers recommend the SPVM continue to refine and adapt their intervention practices to:

- Continue towards solutions reducing criminalization, notably by employing less ticketing and enforcement of tickets necessitated by living outside (sleeping outdoors, urinating outdoors, etc.).

- Maintain and strengthen already existing co-response models (like the one currently maintained with the Native Friendship Centre) that pair police officers and mental health experts/nurses to calls involving persons with substance abuse disorders or who are in mental health crises, while ensuring that officers are very familiar with these models.

To limit inappropriate calls to the SPVM surrounding the presence of individuals experiencing homelessness to displace them, the researchers recommend that all responsible levels of government, notably the Service de la diversité et de l'inclusion sociale from the City of Montréal, take measures to refine public information on the presence and rights of homeless individuals. Where the SPVM would not intervene, consideration of access to emergency mental health resources would typically be more appropriate.

TRAINING

One of the defining factors to how officers perceived homeless individuals, from their own account, was the level of interaction officers had had with this population before entering the SPVM. While certainly the level of exposure that officers

have to homelessness in their personal lives cannot be controlled, the researchers recommend that officers receive a more immersive training with homeless individuals earlier in their careers, notably during their police tech education and subsequently at the École nationale de police de Québec. This could also involve training directly with homeless-serving organizations, prior to entering their roles at the SPVM. Further to this, several officers flagged that they felt like they did not have adequate mental health training. Should the SPVM continue to expect officers to make psychosocial interventions with homeless individuals (or others), it is the researchers' opinion that officers should be thoroughly trained to do so, or that this intervention work should not be performed by SPVM agents. Broadly, the majority of officers agreed that there should be more continuing education in the SPVM. The researchers echo this reflection; given the especially lengthy service many officers commit to the SPVM it is essential that staff continue to have educational refreshers on their work.

"UNIFORM"

Seven officers described their uniform as a barrier in their interventions with homeless individuals. Because of the stigma associated with the uniform for many, officers felt that either adjusting their uniform to be less imposing or destigmatizing the uniform would be an important element in improving police-homeless interactions. In our view, these comments concerning the uniform reflect officers' awareness of low trust and confidence in officers, and an association between officer uniforms and an aggressive, disciplinary, or coercive intervention style. Generally, we would recommend:

- Given that the nature of this work requires no use of force, for work involving psychosocial interventions with individuals experiencing homelessness, officers should not wear a uniform typically associated with coercive interventions or use of force.

- In the application of a co-responder model where SPVM officers work with a psychosocial professional during patrol, both individuals should avoid formal uniforms as to not associate the interventions with a particular uniform.

OFFICER RECOMMENDATIONS

While asking officers about their experience receiving training, they offered several recommendations on how to improve the training offered, from OBM and more generally. One recommendation that emerged repeatedly was the importance of lived experience and testimonies in trainings about homelessness. Several officers commented that they felt the more personal aspect from the training was missing and without a personal testimony they struggled to remember or resonate with the content.

> *"You know, courses are fine, but bring me a homeless person who will be able to do a program with the SPVM who will come and talk to us about what it means to be homeless. Because that's what we don't have."* (Participant 021)

> *"Then with a testimony honestly it speaks to us more. You know, when it's the frontline workers, the meeting is good but it's not-, it's better when it's someone who gives a testimony. It's not impactful enough, otherwise."* (Participant 043)

> *"I've had many training sessions where I've had testimonials. You don't remember everything, but you remember how you felt, how you can put yourself in the shoes of that person who is going through bad things, and often that's when you make the extra effort."* (Participant 124)

Other officers appeared particularly sensitive to a trainer's demeanor and suggested that individuals with negative biases towards the police should not be training them.

> *"She seemed to have a very, very negative prejudice towards the police, and that tainted her intervention. You know... it tainted the training that she gave us. She didn't seem to be that happy to be there."* (Participant 130)

A handful of officers commented that the format of the social realities training day was not ideal and suggested have shorter, focused and more frequent trainings.

> *"I think we don't even have enough training. It would be fun if we had that almost every month, small trainings like that. Not big one-day trainings, but you know like this one, I think it was 30 minutes."* (Participant 114)

A handful of officers felt that the trainings would be more appropriate at a neighbourhood or regional scale so that officers could become more familiar to the realities and organizations of their respective precinct.

> *"The speaker can be great, a good presenter, everything, but you don't feel concerned because in your area, let's say you don't know what the speaker is going to talk about. Well that's when you become a little less attentive because you're like 'yeah, that doesn't really affect me'. So I'm telling you, when it's a bit more of a northern region, we're in the same situation, the east, the west... it would be easier to do it in four regions."* (Participant 615)

INDIGENOUS TRAINING

While participants struggled to retain content from OBM's homelessness training, they spoke at length about the value of their training on working with Indigenous communities. Beyond finding them impactful, officers found the trainings concretely and positively changed their interventions with Indigenous individuals. The researchers recommend ongoing and regular training to staff on Indigenous realities with an emphasis on providing training to officers upon entry at SPVM, before they are on duty and interacting with the public.

CONCLUSION

Within the context of the Old Brewery Mission-SPVM partnership there has been an important opportunity to not only improve police-homeless relations, but also to better understand the realities of working with homeless individuals from the perspectives of police officers themselves. From the content explored in interviews with 24 current SPVM officers working across Montreal, we discovered the themes of relationships with community organizations, working with homeless individuals, perception of self and work as a police officer, training, and ideal world of interventions and structural problems. The content generously provided by officers went above and beyond the partnership and provided a necessary depth to the pressing question of police-homeless interventions in Montreal. With this, officers both drove and inspired extensive recommendations for improving this work and ultimately for imagining ending homelessness in

Montreal. It is in the ongoing reflection and efforts we provide in our partnerships that we can make this a reality.

LIMITATIONS

We note some limitations associated with the project. Since officers were recruited for the study internally by the SPVM, findings cannot be generalized broadly to the department. Officers with particular attitudes or experiences with homeless persons or OBM may have self-selected into the study. Additionally, many of the officers who participated have roles that relate directly to working with homeless individuals: this may have contributed to more informed or positive perspectives on working with this population. Finally, the researcher conducting the interviews is a staff member of OBM; this could have affected officer responses to be more favorable towards community organizations.

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APPENDIX

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. How long have you worked with the SPVM?
2. What's your experience working with homeless populations, in general?
3. Over the course of a month, how often do you interact with homeless people?
4. In general, what are the reasons for your contact with homeless people?
5. Thinking about what working with homeless people was like when you started this job, what was considered best practice?
6. Give me an example of a time you had a difficult interaction with a homeless person when you started.
7. Thinking about how you work with homeless individuals now, what's changed?
    a. How has your perspective of homeless people changed over time?
8. Can you tell me about a time recently when you had a difficult interaction with a homeless person?
9. Can you tell me about a time recently when you had a positive interaction with a homeless person?
10. When you became a police officer did you imagine yourself having these sorts of interactions with homeless people?
    a. Is it something you enjoy?
11. In an ideal world, what would your work with homeless people look like?
    a. What do you think is keeping that ideal from being a reality?
12. When did you have the training with Mission Old Brewery?
13. Did this training change your interventions with homeless people? If yes, how so?
14. What are some of the things you remember taking away from the workshop?
15. How do you feel about these kinds of trainings and, more largely, reform for practices with homeless individuals?
16. What could make the training better?
17. What has helped your work with homeless people in the past?
18. Do you feel like you're better supported by community organizations for working with homeless people?
19. Do you feel like you've been adequately trained to work with homeless populations?
20. Do you feel well-equipped to work with homeless populations?
21. Do you think there's enough resources available in Montreal to help the SPVM work with the homeless?
22. Do you have anything else to add?

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