

# **Camp Is Home and Church to Me**

## **Understanding the Significance of Camp-Based Connections**

by Erin Beckwell Scriven

### **Background**

This workshop is based on both my experiences with camp and my professional work. From 1999 to 2007, I worked at AIDS Saskatoon, the primary HIV/AIDS service organization serving Central and Northern Saskatchewan. As an organization, AIDS Saskatoon works with people who are often marginalized, judged, and discounted as valued citizens in our community. Part of my work with AIDS Saskatoon involved the development of The House Model of Community Service Delivery, which was designed to help service providers understand that, for many people who accessed their services, the connections that were formed within a supportive community organization were more important, in-depth, and profound than they may have realized.

My camping experience mirrors the experiences of many of the people who access services at AIDS Saskatoon. Camp Shagabec, while in physical terms only a place I visit for a few short days a year (if that), has always fostered a profound sense of belonging in me—something I have struggled to find in other places in my life, whether they are schools, workplaces, social networks, or family structures. It has always intrigued me that this place that represents such a fleeting presence in my life keeps such a grip on my heart and my spirit. I find thoughts of camp soothing me in difficult times, buoying me when I am struggling, and accompanying me as I celebrate the joys of life. It is this persistent sense of connection that has drawn me back to camp after long absences and has spurred me to become more involved in the organizational aspects of camp operations.

### **Workshop Overview**

My recent return to camping life has led me to explore the relationships people have to the people, places, and activities that make up “camp,” and the significance of those connections. For me, Camp Shagabec is one of the only places in my world that truly feels like “home.” I do not live there, and I only go there (physically) for very short periods of time, often with long gaps between visits. However, there is something about the place, the people, and the community there that feels instantly safe, welcoming, and inclusive to me. I began to ask myself, “Could camp be this significant to others who’ve been through this place?” In speaking with others at camp, I found out it was. That led me to ask, “Do we as camp leaders, organizers, and supporters understand and recognize how significant this place is for some of us? Do we acknowledge it as a form of ‘home’ for the campers, counsellors, staff, and volunteers who are part of our camp community?”

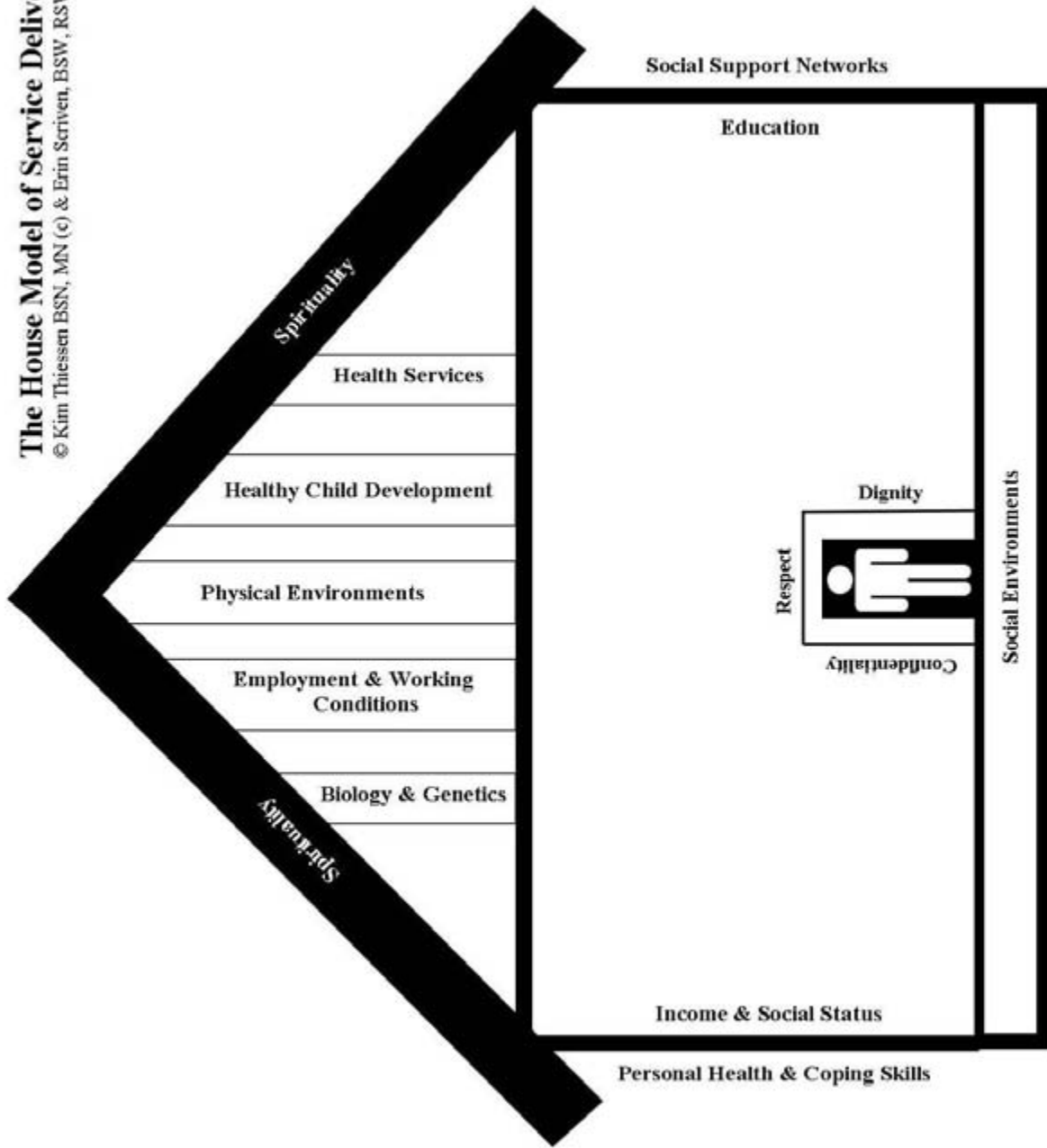
The House Model (see diagram) presents a unique framework for understanding these connections and their role in personal development and support for campers, counsellors, directors, volunteers, and staff. The model represents aspects of an organization (in this case a camp) as components of a house structure. The foundation is the social environment of the camp, such as its values, beliefs, history, and culture. The four load-bearing walls are key elements of health and well-being: personal health and coping skills, social support networks, education, and social status. The roof represents the connection individuals have between their physical and social environments and spirituality, as well as secondary elements of wellness, including physical environments, healthy development, and health services. A person is placed centrally in the doorway of the model and represents our relationships with people. The yard and community, which surround the house, represent the relationship the camp has with the larger community.

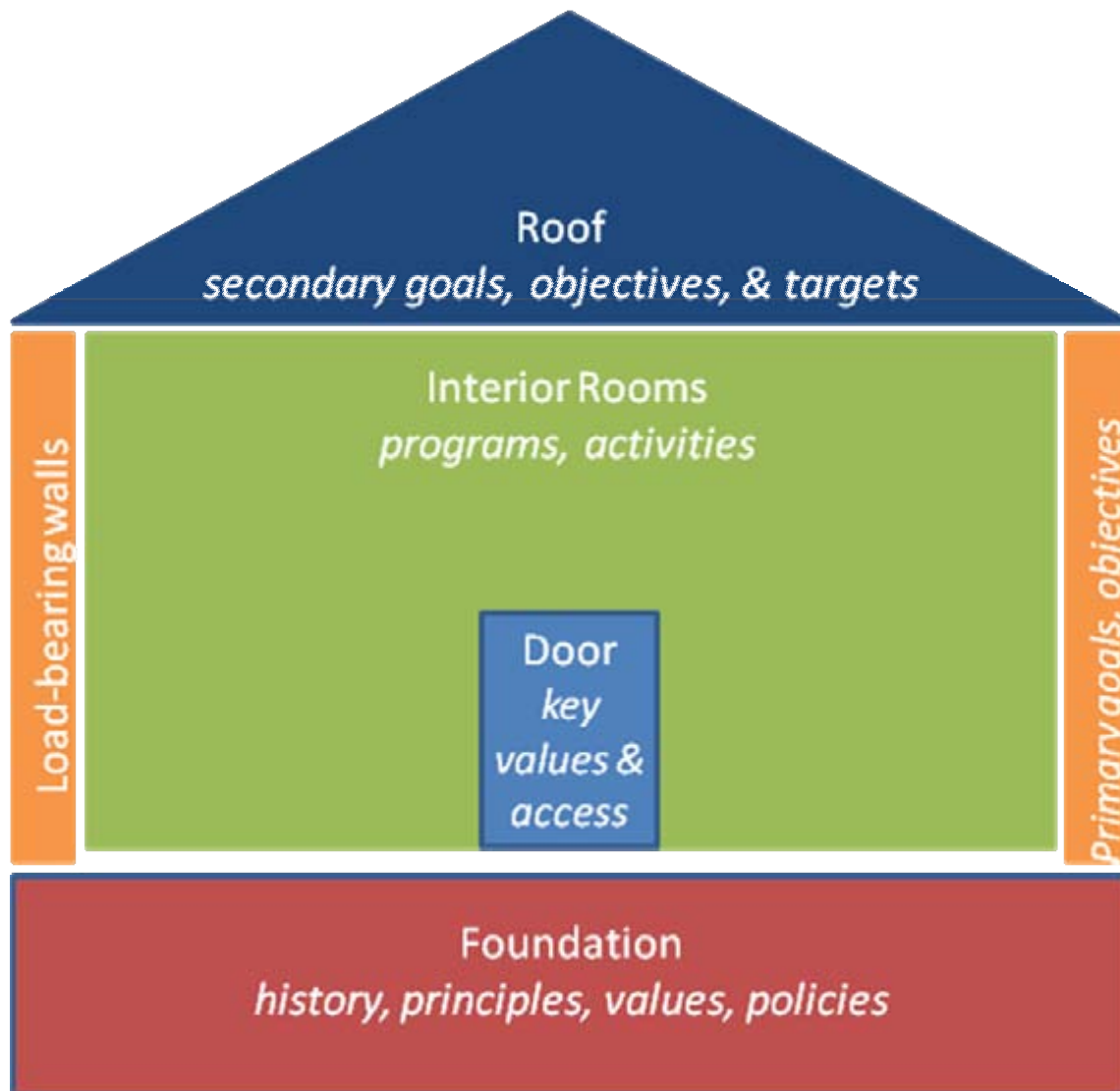
In order to provide a safe, welcoming, and inclusive camp experience, we need to understand and maintain all of the various elements of our camp “home.” By doing this, we can honour, celebrate, and nurture campers, camp leaders, staff, and volunteers—and the camp itself.

### **Objectives**

Participants will gain new ways of understanding the significance of camp connections, relationships, and settings in the personal development and support networks of campers, camp leaders, volunteers, and staff. Participants will also be given a model through which they will learn tools to adapt and reproduce for their own camps and communities.

**The House Model of Service Delivery**  
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