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Building Community: The Story of Supportive Housing for Young Mothers (SHYM)



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Building Community: The Story of Supportive Housing for Young Mothers (SHYM)

FINAL REPORT

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Building Community: The Story of Supportive Housing for Young Mothers (SHYM)

INTRODUCTION

At a time in their lives when they need a strong support system to develop a stable identity and to become productive and autonomous adults, an increasing number of adolescents face an extremely challenging test of independence—that of homelessness.

Young lone mothers are a group that often faces housing and support challenges. Teen mothers have a distinct set of developmental needs and, in many cases, significant mental health problems. While little is known about this population, existing data suggest that teen mothers are often marginalized by society and are not well supported by the social service sector.

Supportive Housing for Young Mothers (SHYM), in Halifax, Nova Scotia, is a non-profit, community-based supportive housing complex for young mothers who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. Founded in 2001 by a group of concerned community members, academics and service providers, SHYM opened its doors to young mothers and their children in late fall 2007. Programs such as that provided by Supportive Housing for Young Mothers aim to do more than just provide a safe and affordable place to live *for the present*. They also strive to develop skills, education, awareness, confidence, resources and social support networks—in the belief that these attributes (sometimes referred to as human and social capital assets) will prevent or buffer homelessness in the future and promote overall health, safety and stability for each young family. The primary mission of this housing structure is therefore to provide a

supportive and caring environment to young mothers in order for them to build/rebuild their sense of self, develop/redevelop social and human capital for their futures and acquire life management and parenting skills.

Using Supportive Housing for Young Mothers (SHYM) as a case-study, this research examined the supportive housing model that underlies such programs and the experience of young mothers served by the program to determine if supportive housing can be effective in achieving these goals.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

The objectives on which the research focused were to:

- explore the experiences of SHYM tenants with regard to homelessness, the trajectory to being homeless and the transition to SHYM;
- study the experience of living at SHYM and how it affects sense of self, health and social needs;
- inform other non-profit organizations of the strengths and limitations in developing supportive models for young mothers;
- inform government and community stakeholders regarding the sustainability and effectiveness of various models; and
- advance the knowledge of community development practice.

The research employed a case-study approach to develop a rich contextual understanding of the experience of young mothers living at SHYM. Two sets of semi-structured, one-on-one interviews were conducted with tenants at a six-month interval. All interviews took place at SHYM, either in the interviewee's apartment or elsewhere on the premises. Ten tenants participated in the first round of interviews in the fall of 2008, representing 100 per cent of the tenants who resided at SHYM at the time of these interviews. Seven of the original ten tenants participated in the second round of interviews six months later. The remaining three tenants had left SHYM by the time of the second round of interviews and did not provide information that could be used to contact them. By interviewing tenants a second time six months after the first set of interviews, the researchers sought to understand how the tenants' experience at SHYM and their perceptions of SHYM changed within this time period, and how SHYM impacted their lives over time. To complement this qualitative inquiry, the study also included a quantitative assessment of the young mothers' quality of life using the World Health Organization Quality of Life (WHOQOL-BREF) tool—a 26-item survey that provides a quality of life profile.

Further, four SHYM staff members were interviewed in the first round of interviews. Two of these four staff members—those most central to SHYM's operations—were interviewed again in the second round of interviews. By conducting second interviews with two key staff members six months after the first interviews, the research team was able to examine operational changes that had occurred at SHYM in the intervening months, and why and how these changes had occurred.

Finally, and within the broader context of case-study methodology, a local history of SHYM was developed using relevant documents (Executive Director reports, financial statements and other official SHYM documents) and discussions with staff and Board members.

The research tools were designed to address a number of different research questions underlying the research objectives: What are the pathways through which young mothers become homeless and housed? How do young mothers experience SHYM? What are the strengths and limitations of this housing structure as a home and support system for young mothers? How do these young mothers view their sense of self, health and social needs in relation to supportive housing? How did SHYM evolve into its current housing form? What supports are needed to ensure that SHYM is sustainable and effective in the long term?

Data collection and analysis were conducted over a nine-month period from August 2008 until April 2009 in an iterative manner congruent with grounded theory processes. Data from the short quality of life survey were analyzed as outlined in the WHOQOL-BREF manual. Compilation of analysis and writing took place from April to June 2009.

FINDINGS

SHYM served as a short-term reprieve for young mothers who found themselves homeless in response to family trauma (for example, family violence or relational conflicts with parents) and poverty. Pregnancy was the trigger point to homelessness for some mothers; for others, it was merely an added stressor. Most of the tenants at SHYM were under the age of 19 and had to live in supervised accommodation, and they preferred SHYM as an alternative to group homes.

The findings of this study suggest that building a supportive housing structure is a complex process that involves many compromises and negotiations but that is ultimately rewarding and successful. Mothers and staff agreed that SHYM is making progress in its ability to help tenants develop skills, education, awareness, confidence, resources and social support networks, and that it is succeeding in promoting overall health, safety and stability for each young family.

Yet staff and tenant interviews contained diverse opinions about the best ways to support adolescent development—fostering healthy independence, responsible behaviour and social inclusion. The research indicates that during a life

stage that is tumultuous and difficult for young people, the tenants experienced a mixture of positive and negative tensions at SHYM. On the one hand, mothers resented the house rules and disliked features of the programming structure—its obligatory nature, obscure relevance and poor scheduling. Mothers felt their independence constrained and wanted behavioural expectations that invited them to voice their opinions and to make choices. They also struggled in their interpersonal relationships with other tenants at SHYM and felt a need to remain connected to their support networks of family and friends, even if the relationships involved were conflicted.

On the other hand, mothers were very appreciative when staff used one-on-one coaching, as opposed to regimented behaviour modification approaches, to assist with critical problem solving and decision making. Over time, they also agreed that some programs really did have relevance and, along with staff, even called for particular types of on-site schooling (such as high school upgrading) and a range of relevant life-skills programs (for example, budgeting, health, parenting, resumé writing) as critical next-step priorities for SHYM.

In the end, regardless of their own experiences, most tenants found SHYM to be a necessary and useful housing resource for young mothers. In addition, most reported a fairly high overall quality of life at both points in time and increasingly positive levels of overall health. Yet at the same time, mothers reported only average physical health scores and their social well-being (personal relationships, social support, and so on) diminished over the course of the study.

Interviews with the staff revealed a deep frustration with the level of funding and support that SHYM is able to obtain. A lack of funding has resulted in a small staff team that is insufficient to support the needs of the tenants, to develop the desired programming and to build additional resources for the project. In the short time that SHYM has been open, the staff team has been restructured to better meet the tenants' needs with limited resources, and the number of families staying at SHYM has been decreased.

CONCLUSIONS

The evolution of SHYM is an example of how organizations shift and change their operations in order to adapt to the external institutional and funding environment. SHYM has successfully navigated funding and regulatory challenges as a result of strategic management that involved flexibility, adaptability and innovativeness. Strategic management has also enabled SHYM to survive a number of significant internal challenges among mothers, staff and Board as they have gradually determined what approaches work best, whom SHYM can help and under what conditions SHYM can achieve its goals. By acknowledging important evolutionary trends in the life of SHYM, this study highlights the need for supportive housing structures to be organic and flexible—transforming the way in which they operate and serve their clients in order to adapt to external constraints and funding requirements.

Research Highlight

Building Community: The Story of Supportive Housing for Young Mothers (SHYM)

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Développement des collectivités : l'histoire de l'organisme Supportive Housing for Young Mothers (logements avec services de soutien pour jeunes mères) [SHYM]

INTRODUCTION

À une époque de leur vie où ils ont besoin d'un solide réseau de soutien pour se forger une personnalité stable et devenir des adultes productifs et autonomes, un nombre croissant d'adolescents se heurtent à une situation extrêmement difficile, celle de l'itinérance.

Les jeunes mères monoparentales forment un groupe souvent exposé à des problèmes de logement et à un manque de soutien. Les mères adolescentes ont des besoins de développement distincts et, dans bien des cas, elles éprouvent de graves problèmes de santé mentale. Bien que nous en sachions peu sur ce segment de la population, les données actuelles indiquent que ces jeunes mères vivent souvent en marge de la société et qu'elles ne sont pas soutenues adéquatement par le secteur des services sociaux.

À Halifax (Nouvelle Écosse), un organisme sans but lucratif appelé Supportive Housing for Young Mothers (SHYM) a réalisé des logements avec services de soutien destiné aux jeunes mères sans abri ou risquant d'être jetées à la rue. Fondé en 2001 par un groupe composé de gens du milieu, d'universitaires et de fournisseurs de services, l'organisme a ouvert les portes de son ensemble aux jeunes mères et à leurs enfants à la fin de l'automne 2007. Non seulement ces

mères y trouvent un endroit sûr et abordable où vivre le moment présent, mais elles peuvent bénéficier de programmes qui ont pour objectifs de développer les compétences, de donner de la formation, de stimuler l'intérêt, de donner confiance, d'offrir des ressources et de créer des réseaux de soutien social. On estime en effet que ces atouts (souvent désignés comme le capital humain et social) permettront de prévenir l'itinérance ou d'en atténuer les conséquences et de promouvoir la santé, la sécurité et la stabilité générales de chacune de ces jeunes familles. La principale mission d'une telle structure de logement consiste à fournir aux jeunes mères un ensemble de soins et de services de soutien de sorte qu'elles puissent bâtir ou rebâtir leur estime de soi, accumuler ou recouvrer du capital social et humain pour leur avenir et maîtriser les aptitudes à la vie quotidienne et les compétences parentales.

Utilisant le SHYM comme étude de cas, les auteurs de la recherche dont il est ici question se sont penchés sur le modèle de logements avec services de soutien sous-jacent à de tels programmes et sur l'expérience des jeunes mères qui en sont bénéficiaires afin de déterminer si ces logements avec services de soutien peuvent être efficaces dans l'atteinte des objectifs visés.

OBJECTIFS ET MÉTHODE DE LA RECHERCHE

La recherche avait pour objectifs :

- d'analyser les expériences des locataires de l'ensemble SHYM eu égard à l'itinérance, au parcours menant à l'itinérance et à la transition vers le SHYM;
- d'étudier l'expérience de la vie au sein du SHYM et les incidences sur l'estime de soi, la santé et les besoins sociaux;
- d'informer d'autres organismes sans but lucratif sur les forces et les limites des modèles de logements avec services de soutien pour les jeunes mères;
- d'informer le gouvernement et les intervenants communautaires relativement à la durabilité et à l'efficacité des divers modèles;
- de faire progresser les connaissances sur les pratiques de développement des collectivités.

La méthode de l'étude de cas a été employée pour la recherche afin d'acquérir une riche compréhension contextuelle de l'expérience qu'ont vécue les jeunes mères au SHYM. Deux séries d'entretiens individuels semi-directifs ont été menées auprès des locataires à six mois d'intervalle. Tous les entretiens ont eu lieu au SHYM, soit dans l'appartement de l'interrogée soit ailleurs dans le bâtiment. Dix locataires ont participé à la première série d'entretiens à l'automne 2008, soit 100 % des locataires qui résidaient au SHYM au moment des entretiens. Six mois plus tard, sept des dix premières femmes interrogées ont pris part à la deuxième série d'entretiens. Les trois autres locataires avaient quitté le SHYM au moment de la deuxième série d'entretiens et n'avaient pas laissé leurs coordonnées. Cette seconde série d'entretiens avait pour but de comprendre comment l'expérience des locataires avait évolué au SHYM et de déterminer quelles avaient été leurs perceptions du SHYM et quelles incidences l'ensemble résidentiel avait eues sur leur vie au cours de cette période. Afin de compléter cet entretien qualitatif, l'étude comptait également une évaluation quantitative de la qualité de vie des jeunes mères réalisée à partir de l'outil sur la qualité de vie de

l'Organisation mondiale de la Santé (WHOQOL-BREF), une enquête fondée sur 26 questions déterminant le profil de la qualité de vie.

De plus, quatre membres du personnel du SHYM ont été interrogés lors de la première série d'entretiens. Deux de ces quatre personnes – qui jouaient un rôle primordial dans les activités du SHYM – ont de nouveau été interrogées six mois plus tard lors de la deuxième série d'entretiens. L'équipe de recherche a ainsi été en mesure d'étudier les changements opérationnels qui étaient survenus au SHYM entretemps, les raisons sous-jacentes aux changements ainsi que la façon dont les changements étaient survenus.

En dernier lieu et à l'intérieur du contexte plus large de l'étude de cas, la petite histoire du SHYM a été reconstituée à partir de documents pertinents (comptes rendus du directeur général, états financiers et autres documents officiels du SHYM) et de discussions avec le personnel et les membres du conseil.

Les outils de recherche ont été conçus de manière à aborder des questions différentes liées à la recherche sous-jacentes aux objectifs de la recherche : Quel chemin suivent les jeunes mères qui aboutissent à la rue et qui trouvent un logement? Comment les jeunes mères vivent-elles leur expérience au SHYM? Quelles sont les forces et les limites de cette structure de logement en tant que maison et système de soutien pour les jeunes mères? Comment ces jeunes mères perçoivent-elles leur estime de soi, leurs besoins sociaux et leurs besoins de soins de santé relativement au logement avec services de soutien? Quel chemin le SHYM a-t-il parcouru avant d'adopter sa structure de logement actuelle? De quelle aide le SHYM a-t-il besoin pour être durable et efficace à long terme?

La collecte et l'analyse des données se sont déroulées sur une période de neuf mois, soit du mois d'août 2008 jusqu'en avril 2009, selon une méthode itérative conforme aux processus théoriques reposant sur les faits. Les données extraites de l'enquête abrégée sur la qualité de vie ont été analysées tel qu'il est décrit dans le manuel WHOQOL-BREF sur les normes de la qualité de vie. La compilation de l'analyse et la rédaction du rapport ont été effectuées d'avril à juin 2009.

CONSTATS

Le SHYM a servi de lieu de répit à court terme pour de jeunes mères qui se retrouvaient sans abri après un traumatisme familial (par exemple, de la violence familiale ou des conflits relationnels avec leurs parents) et en situation de pauvreté. La grossesse était l'élément provocateur de l'itinérance pour certaines des mères; pour d'autres, leur situation était simplement un facteur stressant de plus. La plupart des locataires du SHYM avaient moins de 19 ans et elles devaient vivre dans un logement avec services de soutien. Elles avaient choisi le SHYM comme solution de rechange aux foyers de groupe.

L'étude a permis de constater que la mise en place d'une structure de logements avec services de soutien constitue un processus complexe jalonné de compromis et de négociations, mais qui, au bout du compte, s'avère aussi enrichissant que positif. Les mères et le personnel conviennent que le SHYM s'améliore quant à sa capacité d'aider les locataires à acquérir des compétences, à s'instruire, à diversifier leurs intérêts, à avoir confiance, à trouver des ressources et à se créer des réseaux de soutien social; ils s'entendent aussi à dire que le SHYM parvient à faire la promotion de la santé, de la sécurité et de la stabilité globales pour chacune des jeunes familles.

Néanmoins, les entretiens avec le personnel et les locataires ont suscité des opinions diverses pour ce qui est des meilleures méthodes susceptibles de contribuer au développement des adolescents : privilégier une saine indépendance, un comportement responsable et l'inclusion sociale. Les recherches démontrent que durant cette étape tumultueuse et difficile de leur vie, les jeunes locataires ont connu, au SHYM, une combinaison de tensions positives et négatives. D'une part, les mères étaient irritées par les règles de la maison et avaient en aversion certains concepts du programme : les obligations qui s'y rattachaient, la pertinence douteuse et une mauvaise planification. Les mères sentaient que leur indépendance était limitée et voulaient un modèle de comportement qui les aurait invitées à exprimer leurs opinions et à faire des choix. De plus, elles

sont entrées en conflit interpersonnel avec d'autres locataires du SHYM et elles ressentaient le besoin de rester en contact avec leurs réseaux de soutien (famille et amis), même si ces relations étaient conflictuelles.

D'autre part, les mères étaient très satisfaites lorsque le personnel offrait un accompagnement individualisé, contrairement aux approches embrigadées visant à modifier les comportements, afin de les aider à régler des problèmes sérieux et à prendre des décisions. Après quelque temps, elles ont reconnu que certains programmes étaient effectivement pertinents et, à l'instar de membres du personnel, elles recommandaient de la formation sur place (telle que des formations d'appoint de niveau secondaire) et une gamme de programmes pertinents en dynamique de la vie (par exemple, l'établissement d'un budget, la santé, l'art d'être parent, la rédaction d'un curriculum vitae) en guise de prochaines étapes cruciales que devrait franchir le SHYM.

Finalement, peu importe leurs expériences respectives, la plupart des locataires estiment que le SHYM est un service de logement nécessaire et utile pour les jeunes mères. De plus, la plupart d'entre elles ont mentionné que leur qualité de vie globale était relativement élevée lors des deux séries d'entretiens et que leur santé s'était nettement améliorée. Par ailleurs, les résultats portant sur la santé physique des mères se situaient seulement dans la moyenne et leur bien-être social (relations personnelles, soutien social, etc.) avait diminué au cours de l'étude.

Les entretiens avec le personnel ont révélé une profonde frustration quant au niveau de financement et au soutien accordés au SHYM. Le manque de financement s'est traduit par la création d'une équipe constituée d'un nombre insuffisant d'employés pour répondre aux besoins des locataires, élaborer les programmes souhaités et recueillir des ressources supplémentaires pour l'initiative. Durant la courte période écoulée depuis l'ouverture du SHYM, le personnel a été restructuré de manière à mieux combler les besoins des locataires malgré les ressources limitées, et on a réduit le nombre de familles hébergées au SHYM.

CONCLUSIONS

L'évolution du SHYM montre comment des organisations peuvent changer et modifier leurs activités de manière à s'adapter à l'environnement institutionnel externe et à la situation financière. Le SHYM a su manœuvrer malgré les difficultés financières et réglementaires grâce à une gestion stratégique qui exigeait de la souplesse, de l'adaptabilité et de l'innovation. La gestion stratégique a également permis au SHYM de surmonter des obstacles de taille à l'interne, entre les mères, le personnel et le conseil d'administration du fait qu'on a pu graduellement déterminer les meilleures méthodes à employer, cibler les bénéficiaires du SHYM et établir dans quelles conditions le SHYM peut atteindre ses objectifs. En reconnaissant les grandes tendances qui ont changé le SHYM, l'étude fait ressortir le besoin, pour les structures de logements avec services de soutien, d'être organiques et souples. Ainsi, elles peuvent transformer le mode opérationnel avec lequel elles servent leurs clients afin de s'adapter aux contraintes externes et aux impératifs financiers.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

At a time when youth need a strong support system to face the complex and often troubling developmental tasks of creating a stable identity and becoming productive and autonomous adults (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1995), an increasing number of adolescents find themselves dealing with an unrealistic test of independence – that of homelessness. While we know that youth make up a significant proportion of the homeless/at risk population, their exact prevalence is unclear as many do not sleep in homeless shelters and so are missed by shelter-based counts (Karabanow, 2004; Krauss, Eberle and Serge, 2001). Despite difficulties in locating and counting homeless or at-risk youth, the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) Portrait Study identified an increase in the number of visibly homeless youth as one of the most notable trends from 2003 to 2004 (Halifax Regional Municipality, 2004). Homeless youth represent a unique subset of the homeless population with very specific needs – they face extreme alienation and disadvantage, all during a life-stage that is tumultuous and difficult for even the most fortunate of young people. Homeless youth are at risk of physical and mental health problems because of desperate circumstances and the lack of support and guidance from concerned adults render them highly vulnerable to exploitation and risk (Durham, 2003; Karabanow, 2004; Krauss, Eberle and Serge, 2001). Homeless female youth are more likely to lack education and job skills and to have experienced physical or sexual victimization within their families. The *very limited* research on homeless/at risk women suggests that a considerable proportion suffer from significant mental and emotional health difficulties,

addictions, sexually transmitted infections and pregnancy (Hughes, Broom, Cakmak, Clark, Keeler, LeMoine, MacInness, Pratt, & Wood, B. 2005; Karabanow, Clement, Carson, and Crane, 2005).

Lone parent mothers are a group that often experiences housing and support issues. They have a distinct set of developmental needs (Martin, Sweeney, Visitor, & Cooke, 2007) and, in many cases, significant mental health problems (Tischler, Rademeyer, & Vostanis, 2007). Yet, while little is known about this population, existing data suggest that they are often marginalized by society and are not well supported by the service sector (de Jonge, 2001; Tischler, et al., 2007). Census data show that there are 16,715 single parent households in HRM and 3,335 pay 50% or more of their income on shelter. Ninety four per cent of these households (3,140) are women-headed households. The needs of this vulnerable population in Halifax, coupled with those of the conventional population of homeless and others in need of housing supports, create further demands on service providers struggling to commit to strategic, comprehensive, and creative development of their housing strategies.

Recommendations, or ‘better practices’, for solving the housing crisis are many, although it does not appear as though any one panacea exists – no one model or approach will work in all situations. Comprehensive strategies, which incorporate a variety of approaches to housing (e.g., emergency, supportive, and geared-to-family housing), are required in order to accommodate the needs of diverse populations (e.g., urban aboriginals, refugees, immigrants, single-parent families, etc.). Jackson (2004) makes an argument for more inclusive housing by suggesting that effective and meaningful approaches to building communities, rather than just ‘housing’, can address broader social issues such as isolation, segregation, and resource accessibility. Drummond et al. (2004) add to this argument by suggesting that communities have unique and

distinct needs, and that a comprehensive housing strategy will address community characteristics in a meaningful way. The Community Social Planning Council of Toronto (CSPCT) outlines five dimensions of successful social inclusion – diversity, human development, civic engagement, living conditions, and community services (Community Social Planning Council of Toronto [CSPCT], 2004). The interplay and coordination of these dimensions influence the experience of vulnerable populations as they attempt to secure and maintain adequate housing.

1.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND OBJECTIVES

Supportive housing is one approach to more socially inclusive accommodation as it is designed to address some of the social inequities that contribute to housing insecurity, homelessness, and social exclusion (Golden et al., 1999; Jackson, 2004; Peters, 2004). Golden et al. broadly define supportive housing as existing on a continuum between institutional and independent living, focusing on keeping vulnerable people housed, reducing the burden on emergency services and shelters, and re-establishing individuals' social networks within a community through supportive services that may be live-in (e.g., group home) and available on the housing site, or 'portable' and available within the broader community (Pomeroy & Campsie, 2004). Most of the supportive housing literature focuses on the provision of services to people with mental illness, disabilities, and seniors. Although intuitive, the applicability of these models to diverse populations with different needs and capacities, such as young mothers, is not documented. While numerous scholars have argued for more evaluative research on program efficacy, there continues to be a dearth of analyses focused upon distinguishing the programs that are successful from those that do not meet stated objectives or don't work for young mothers (Benson, 2004; Collins, Lemon and Street, 2000). This research begins to fill the knowledge gap by exploring these issues through in-depth discussions with the young mothers and

workers/board members who are most intimately familiar with the supportive housing program.

The study was guided by the following core questions: *What is the pathway through which young mothers become homeless and housed? How are young mothers experiencing SHYM? What are the strengths and limitations of this housing structure for young mothers? How do these young mothers understand themselves (their hopes, sense of self, health and social needs) in relation to supportive housing? How did SHYM evolve into its current housing form and what supports are needed to ensure that it is sustained and effective?*

1.3 SHYM AS A CASE STUDY

Supportive Housing for Young Mothers (SHYM) is a non-profit, community-based supportive housing complex for young mothers who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. Founded in 2001 by a group of concerned community members, academics and service providers, SHYM opened its doors to young mothers and their children in late fall 2007. The primary mission and vision of the housing structure is to provide a supportive and caring environment to young mothers in order for them to build/rebuild their sense of self and develop/redevelop social and human capital for their futures. The objectives of the program include:

- To reduce the risk of violence, addictions, inadequate prenatal and postnatal nutrition and care, child development delays and social isolation for young mothers and their children.
- To provide safe and secure housing where residents can acquire the life management and parenting skills essential to independent living.
- To provide a safe and nurturing environment for the children involved in the program.
- To provide individually tailored action plans that address the specific needs of

residents.

- To provide a supportive and nurturing environment that includes individual counselling, the development of support networks and access to training and educational supports.

Programs such as Supportive Housing for Young Mothers aim to do more than just provide a safe and affordable place to live *for the present*. They also strive to develop skills, education, awareness, confidence, resources, and social support networks – in the belief that these attributes (sometimes referred to as human and social capital assets) will prevent or buffer homelessness in the future, and promote overall health, safety, and stability for each young family. How effective is SHYM at reaching these goals?

1.4 OUTLINE OF REPORT

This report is framed around in-depth descriptions of young mothers' experiences of living in supportive housing. The following section presents a comprehensive literature review concerning the research surrounding both adolescent motherhood and supportive housing for young mothers. The literature review emphasizes popular and political understandings of teenage motherhood, as well as teenagers' own understanding of themselves as parents.

Following the literature review, the research methodology is presented including the research questions and objectives, the paradigmatic approach and design of the project, ethical approval, sampling and recruitment, data collection and analysis procedures, and a description of our dissemination activities to date and plans for the future.

The following section includes a local history of SHYM. The history and development of SHYM from its conception to its realization is the story of struggle, compromise and triumph. This story incorporates the voices of SHYM's Board of Directors, the people who worked hard

for many years to make SHYM a reality.

The next sections explore the findings and analyses of our data. The voices of the study participants become the primary focus of these sections and guide the reader into the lives of young mothers living in supportive housing. Youth narratives are used to illustrate the lived reality of being a young mother and living within a supportive housing environment. Their lives are filled with both joy and frustration. They are constantly negotiating their identities and, as adolescents, their sense of independence. To add further context to the stories shared by youth, the thoughts and commentaries of the staff are presented alongside the voices of youth – often affirming what the youth have said and sometimes challenging their positions. In this way, the voices of youth and staff are integrated to present a more complete story of life in supportive housing.

The final section discusses the data through an organizational lens. The report concludes that SHYM reflects an organic organizational structure that has consistently negotiated, and at times compromised, its identity in order to survive within a turbulent social service environment.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Past literature on teen motherhood emphasized the negative consequences for both baby and mother that resulted from early childbearing. These consequences included a lack of education and employment potential leading to poverty, poor maternal attachment and schooling, and behavioural problems for children. Research suggests that teen mothers are often perceived to have compromised their human capital by prematurely leaving school or delaying entry into the work force. As a result, household resources and skill sets are limited (Levine, Emery and Pollack 2007). Policies dealing with economic and social supports for teen mothers have always been predicated on this negative portrayal, seeing teen motherhood as a ‘problem’ that needs to be dealt with.

However, more recent scholarship on teen parenting is beginning to examine these issues differently. Rather than viewing teen mothering as “an untimely disaster of relentless risks and losses [it] needs to be reframed as an opportunity to address teen mothers’ strengths, struggles, and adversities” (Smithbattle 2009:123). This new strength-based lens is not intended to suggest that such negative consequences are unlikely for young mothers; obtaining an education and breaking out of the cycle of poverty is a struggle for teenage mothers. Rather, recent research argues that early childbearing is not directly responsible for these negative outcomes:

“It is equally plausible, however, that timing of parenting itself does not cause children's poor outcomes. Instead, background factors such as poverty that select women into early childbearing may also select their children into experiencing negative outcomes. Thus, correlations between early parenting and children's poor outcomes may not be causal”

(Levine, Emery and Pollack 2007:106).

These outcomes could very well be the result of the personal histories of the mothers and the lack of resources and supports available to them when they become parents (Duncan 2007; McDonald, et al 2009).

Melhado (2007:184) argues that research indicates that teen mothers are more likely than their non-parenting counterparts to have been “socially, economically and educationally disadvantaged by eighth grade,” meaning that they were more likely to come from families of lower socioeconomic status, have lower educational aspirations, have experienced behavioural problems and been left back in school. Research also suggests that access to resources was a better indicator of educational attainment than young parenthood, with resource rich teens obtaining 1 to 2 more years of education than resource poor teens - regardless of parenting status (Melhado 2007). However, some longitudinal research indicates that teen mothers are able to catch up “with their peers in education, employment and personal relationships. Their problem was they had had a child out of the usual social sequence” (McDonald et al 2009:46).

Although teen parents face certain disadvantages, research has indicated that young mothers themselves considered parenthood as more of an opportunity than an obstacle, but that their capacity to care for their children was constrained not only by their relatively impoverished circumstances but also by the social stigma they faced (Graham & McDermott & McDermott 2006, McDonald et al 2009). SHYM tenants will speak to this phenomenon.

2.2 EDUCATION

As the research indicates, early motherhood does not necessarily limit or jeopardize future options (Dubow & Luster 1990, Furstenberg 1991, Smithbattle 1994, Hanna 2001).

Adolescents who complete their education generally fair better than those that do not (Furstenberg et al. 1987, Dubow & Luster 1990, Horwitz et al. 1991, Hanna 2001). However, as Graham & McDermott (2006) point out, access to education and employment is often limited by the domestic responsibilities of young mothers: “Having access to child care resources is the most important factor in attaining education” (Melhado 2007:184, see also Meadows-Oliver et al 2007). Without access to child care - whether licensed childcare or childcare provided by members of a support network - a young mother would be unable to attend classes and complete homework. Meadows-Oliver et al (2007) argue that having on-site childcare is of tremendous aid to young mothers who are trying to complete their education. As we will see, SHYM clearly understands this perspective.

Benson (2004) reports that encouraging teen mothers to obtain their education and pursue their aspirations promotes autonomy and resiliency. Obtaining an education also decreases the likelihood of second births. However, Hallman (2007) suggests that traditional educational settings are not always supportive of teen parents. Teen parents have multiple roles and responsibilities which can compromise their ability to attend classes and complete assignments. Schools and teachers need to be sensitive to the additional needs of young parents and adjust their expectations accordingly. However, Hallman (2007) also notes that young parents are often placed in remedial classes on the assumption that they are either poor or under-motivated students, whereas teen parents themselves often want and deserve to be treated as capable and competent students.

2.3 SUPPORT NETWORKS

Along with education, one of the defining factors of the success of teen mothers is their support network (Gee & Rhodes 2008, Martin, Sweeney & Cooke 2005, Graham & McDermott

2006, McDonald et al 2009, Chang & Fine 2007). Support networks can include any number of people from parents, grandparents and siblings, to extended family, family friends and friends, to service providers - though mothers are usually understood to be one of the key supports. The support itself takes many forms: emotional, financial, resources, advocacy, and informational. Support networks help young mothers navigate through a complex system of services and resources, avoid loneliness and isolation, deflect stigma and overcome mental health issues. Without a strong support network, young mothers find it difficult to “surmount the material and social disadvantages of being young and poor“(Graham & McDermott 2006:30). SHYM tenants will support these findings.

Having a strong support network is linked to favourable outcomes for both young mothers and their children (Birch 1998, Benson 2004), and positive maternal well-being (Henly 1997, Benson 2004). Adolescents who have strong support networks fare better (Furstenberg et al. 1987, Dubow & Luster 1990, Horwitz et al. 1991, Hanna 2001). Hanna (2001) and Yardley (2008) argue that social networks work to “normalise early motherhood and hence act as a protective armoury against stigma” (Yardley 2008:674). Emotional and economic support is also associated with less depression and less risk of child abuse (Benson 2004, Shanok & Miller 2007). Other studies suggest that having a support network allows young mothers to adopt the mothering practices of their choice (Mitchell and Green 2002, Graham & McDermott 2006).

Some studies have noted that young mothers who had primarily lived with their babies and their mothers in a home in which there was not excessive family conflict, and who experienced support for parenting the new baby from their extended family, did well, as did their babies (Bunting & McAuley 2004, McDonald et al 2009). However, other studies have suggested that the support network does not have to come from home to be effective. Teen

parents have also benefited from building a strong connection to other teens involved in group interventions. A recent review of teen parenting programs found that “connections with caring adults were the only evidence-based factors that improved outcomes” for teen parents (Cox et al 2008:280). Support systems that are based on continuity and the building of trust are essential to decreasing depression amongst both teen parents and their children (Cox et al 2008).

Although support networks are essential to a young mother’s success, they are not without their own tensions. As Graham & McDermott (2006) note, tensions within support networks can increase as young mothers gain confidence in their parenting ability, and as they begin to crave the independence to live and parent on their own terms (this will be played out in the SHYM tenant narratives). Their ability to become independent may be constrained by their material reality, and, as Graham & McDermott note, by their need to be “good mothers,” which entails having access to resources provided by the support network.

2.4 ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT

While the research indicates that a direct correlation does not exist between early childbearing and educational and economic disadvantage, teen parents may be disadvantaged as a result of their own developmental stage. Scholars have suggested that “responsible parenthood is antithetical to most ‘normal’ teen social activities of exploring peer relationships, ‘spreading one's wings,’ and rebelling against authority and responsibility” (Stiles 2008:415). Meadows-Oliver et al (2007:117) similarly argue that “adolescence is usually a time of forming an identity by experimenting with various roles, the maternal role requires that the adolescent take on specific role of being a mother, a full-time role that leaves little time for interactions with peers.” Stiles (2008) and Meadows-Oliver et al (2007) note that adolescence is a time of individuation and autonomy and that this is compromised for teen mothers because

they have to remain dependent on their family for assistance and support. The young women at SHYM highlight this tension. Researchers have also suggested that “their cognitive immaturity may result in a self-centredness that prevents the teenagers from placing their infants' needs ahead of their own” (Hanna 2001:457).

Other researchers have also suggested that teen mothers are at a higher risk of emotional and mental health issues, such as depression, stress and low self esteem (Stiles 2008; Romo & Nadeem 2007; Chang & Fine 2007). Romo & Nadeem (2007:130) argue that future health and relationships can be adversely affected because teenage mothers may have difficulty continuing “more age appropriate tasks such as emotional and identity development, friendships with their peers, and normal adolescent dating relationships.” Depression rates among postpartum teenagers are significantly higher than those among postpartum adults and non-pregnant teenagers (Romo & Nadeem 2007). Chang & Fine (2007) also note that teenage mothers are more likely to experience maternal role strain as a result of negotiating the tasks of parenting and normal developmental tasks. Both maternal role strain and depression have been found to be “stable predictors of negative parenting and interaction styles and depression among offspring” (Romo & Nadeem 2007:131, see also Chang & Fine 2007; Drummond et al 2008, Cox et al 2008). However, such links need not be permanent, as Hughes & Gottlieb (2004) found - abusive mothers who learned how to demonstrate more effective involvement with their children following a parenting program *felt more satisfied* with their social support, despite having a *heavier burden* of depression, more chronic family problems and fewer actual supports at post-test.

2.5 TEEN PARENTING

Without perpetuating negative stereotypes about teen mothers as “bad” parents, researchers have noted that teen mothers face particular challenges that can result in negative parenting styles. As indicated in the previous section, teen mothers are more likely to experience depression - resulting from a lack of resources and support, stigma and social isolation - and depression is a predictor of negative parenting styles. Cox et al (2008) argue that maternal self esteem is an important indicator of effective parenting and that maternal self esteem is potentially affected by the teen’s own histories of abuse or ineffective parenting, poverty, developmental immaturity, and feelings of loneliness, isolation and depression.

Maternal sensitivity, defined as the “mother's ability to perceive and to accurately interpret the signals and communications implicit in her infant's behaviour and, given this understanding, to respond to infant cues appropriately and promptly,”(Stiles 2008:417) has also been found to be poorer among teen mothers, which, Stiles argues, is possibly due to the many conflicts they are experiencing. Drummond et al (2008:13) similarly argue that “the social stresses of normal development during adolescence, in combination with the transition to parenthood, are likely to interfere with adolescent mothers’ abilities to recognize and contingently respond to their infants’ cues.”

The negative parenting styles outlined by the researchers take many forms. Hanna (2001:457) suggests that teen mothers have a “low tolerance to infant crying, lack of patience with infants, lack of understanding of normal growth and development, preference for physical punishment, lack of nonverbal physical interaction patterns and a less than adequate home learning environment.” Drummond et al (2008:13) suggests that “adolescent mothers are characterized as less sensitive to infant cues, more unrealistic about their expectations for infant

behaviours, less verbal with and responsive toward their infants, more impatient, and more prone to use physical punishment.” Romo & Nadeem (2007:132) argue that the research indicates that “adolescent mothers tend to provide less stimulating home environments than adult mothers, a risk factor for delays in children’s cognitive functioning and preparedness for school... that although adolescent mothers are as warm as older mothers, they are often less sensitive and responsive to their infants’ needs than adult mothers.” In addition, research indicates that teen mothers “may have little knowledge of child development, be less competent language users, be less likely to engage in facilitative play and language behaviour, less likely to use responsive interactive styles and are likely to engage in styles that are more restrictive and controlling” (Deutscher, Fewell & Gross 2006:194). In short, teen mothers are less likely than adult mothers to understand child development and to pursue play and activities that facilitate that development, and they are also more likely to be impatient and engage in physical punishment.

Although researchers have found these negative parenting styles more prevalent amongst teen parents, they also note that parenting styles can be positively affected by educational supports/mentoring. Hughes, Kay-Raining Bird and Sommerfeld (2009) found significant positive effects on mother behaviour, child behaviour, and mother-child interaction, over time, as the result of early intervention programs and supports. Likewise, Romo & Fine (2007) report the positive benefits of educating teen parents about the developmental needs of their children, and the effects of stress on parenting. Drummond et al (2008) also report improved mother-child interactions, and parenting competence and confidence following social support programs.

The quality of the mother–child interactions (Deutscher et al 2006:195) is one of the most consistent predictors of child cognitive and social development with insecure attachments and behavioural problems presenting an increased risk for teen parents. In addition, real change

occurs as a result of a change in the mother's style of interacting, rather than through child-directed interventions. Teen mothers who participate in parenting programs have been found "more sensitive, responsive, attentive, and cognitively stimulating" and they demonstrated more "nurturing behavior in ways that have been found to support children's early language, the foundation of literacy (Deutscher et al 2006:202). Deutscher et al (2006:203) suggest that the strength of these programs in their emphasis on the "how to" engage in more positive ways with children, rather than the "what to do".

2.6 "EMPOWERED MOTHERS"

Amongst policy makers and the general public, teenage parenthood is often understood as "evidence that someone has low expectations," however, teen parents tend not to see themselves in this fashion, rather seeing themselves as having achieved some personal and social fulfilment by having a baby (Duncan 2007, Yardley 2008). SHYM tenants support this finding. Graham & McDermott (2006:26) suggest that criticisms of teen parents are "implicitly normative," taking as the norm the experience commonly found among middle class youth and judging all other trajectories as 'failed'. Yardley (2008) picks up the same argument, suggesting that for young working class women identity is secured through informal rather than formal work. Teen mothers create a positive identity through their belief in themselves as good mothers and stress the advantages they have over older mothers. Through this identity, argue Graham & McDermott (2006), teen mothers can build a sense of moral worth that opposes the stigmatized image of teen mothers. Kirkman et al (2001) make a similar argument, suggesting that although young mothers are aware that they are seen as stigmatized persons, their own image of themselves is of mature and capable parents.

Shanok & Miller (2007:258) found that although most teens had not planned their

pregnancies, they were, nonetheless, pleased to discover that they were pregnant. With this discovery came a “heightened sense of purpose... connected with drastically increased safety-conscious behaviors.” Teens might also use parenthood as a means to transform themselves, change their past and become ‘good mothers’ (Hanna 2001). Research also indicates that teen mothers are motivated to succeed in order to become good examples for their children and through a “rebellious determination to prove she was not doomed to failure” (Romo & Fine 2007:132). Feelings of responsibility and protectiveness over their children also motivate some pregnant and parenting adolescents to avoid risk behaviors, such as alcohol and drug use, and violent (fighting) behavior (Romo & Fine 2007:132). Duncan (2007:308) argues that research shows that teenage mothers describe motherhood as making them feel stronger, marks a change for the better and “provides an impetus to take up education, training and employment. Teenage parenting may be more of an opportunity than a catastrophe, and often makes sense in the life worlds inhabited by young mothers.”

While teen mothers are aware of the difficulties in mothering, such as restrictions on social life and social isolation from friends and limited incomes, Kirkman et al (2001:287) found that teen mothers preferred to emphasize the positives. The teens suggested that “life is enriched by motherhood; young mothers have more energy than older mothers; young mothers will be free in the future when others are tied to children; there are benefits in growing up with one’s children; and the child is a source of pride and pleasure to the extended family as well as a means of bringing the family closer together.” Despite any difficulties resulting from becoming a mother in their youth, adolescent mothers still desire marriage, kids, a home and economic security in the future (Hanna 2001).

2.7 SUPPORTIVE HOUSING

There are a variety of housing solutions for teen mothers, including independent, supported living, supportive housing, foster care and shelters. However, very little scholarship exists pertaining to this topic area. In their research study that explored the perspectives of 25 young parents in a small city in the UK using interviews and focus groups, Martin, Sweeney & Cooke (2005) found that their participants' preference was to live in independent housing with support staff available, with their second choice being supportive housing (like SHYM). The teen mothers also suggested that they preferred housing that was near their support network, had access to benefits, was well maintained and offered them both independence and privacy. The researchers also found that the teens wanted the staff to support them rather than tell them what to do. In their evaluation of social work group interventions within a supportive housing structure, McDonald et al (2009) offer a similar caveat, suggesting that it is important to give teen mothers a voice and support their choice to prioritize motherhood as a defining identity.

Collin, Lane and Stevens (2003) argue for a broad array of comprehensive services as the most effective strategy for helping young mothers based on their exploration of teen living programs (TLPs) in Massachusetts. Through in depth interviews with program directors and staff members, the authors highlight key program services such as education, employment services, child care, health services, and life skills training and parenting skills training. In particular, programming and staff were identified as major components to the TLPs. The long-term nature and comprehensiveness of the services were acknowledged to be critical strengths of the TLPs as well as the relationship between staff and clients. Such findings will resonate with our analysis of SHYM. Philliber, Brooks and Lehrer (2003), in their review of 53 residential programs in New Mexico, similarly argue for a combination of service interventions such as

assisting with educational attainment and/or employment, individualized attention from staff, discussion groups, home visits, peer interaction, ongoing education in birth control choices, counseling, transportation to office visits, and advocacy by staff and health providers.

In a review of the research on the use of qualitative research in exploring issues of supportive housing, Graham & McDermott (2006:28) found that it is the individual attributes that are essential to young mothers' resilience. These individual attributes include "a sense of moral worth, belief in one's maternal capacity, priority setting and idealism," and that these attributes are best delivered through one-on-one support. This support person becomes like another member of the support network, "nurturing the young mother's self confidence and self-esteem, providing a counter-weight to the social disapproval she experiences beyond and sometimes within the family, and working to lessen the poverty and material disadvantages she faces" (Graham & McDermott 2006:31).

In their quasi-experimental evaluation of hospital-based teen tot clinics using a pre-post test design with 168 young mothers, Cox et al (2008:279) similarly argue that persons providing support can also reinforce a young mother's confidence in her parenting ability. What is important here, suggest the researchers, is to "shift from a deficit problem-based approach to one of positive observation ('Look how well you comforted her' or 'Look how well she is developing')." A study of 17 homeless teen mothers who accessed programming found that a 'maternity home environment' was beneficial to the mothers. With on-site schooling, family and life education and day care in place, 74% of the participants had either completed or were pursuing their educational goals at the time of discharge (Meadows-Oliver et al 2007:117). As we will see, SHYM tenants highlight similar experiences of what makes a supportive living space.

3. METHODOLOGY

The study employed a case study approach to develop rich contextual understandings of young mothers' experiences of living in supportive housing, using Supportive Housing for Young Mothers (SHYM) in Halifax, NS, as the case study. Using qualitative methods informed by grounded theory and a quality of life scale, the researchers were able to gain valuable insights into the experiences and expectations of key stakeholders. The research also employed a local history approach, which allowed us to explore the history of the organization and develop a narrative of its evolution. Over a nine month period (August 2008 - April 2009) data collection and analysis were conducted in an iterative manner congruent with grounded theory processes (as described by Strauss and Corbin, 1990), and to ensure new information was forthcoming in subsequent interviews. Compilation of analysis and writing took place from April to June 2009.

The research objectives of this project were to explore the experiences of tenants at SHYM in terms of the trajectory to being homeless and housed, the experience of being homeless and housed, and the experience of SHYM - on hopes, sense of self, health and social needs (of whom and when); to inform other non-profits of the strengths/limitations in developing supportive models for young mothers; to inform government and community stakeholders regarding the sustainability and effectiveness of various models; and to advance the knowledge of community development practice.

3.1 THE CASE STUDY APPROACH

Case studies are empirical inquiries that investigate a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context (Yin 1984:23). They strive for a holistic understanding of cultural systems of

action (i.e., sets of interrelated activities engaged in by the actors in a social situation). Rather than discovering causation or conjunctures between variables, case studies explore a phenomenon through story telling or narrative processes, explaining how something got to be the way it is (Becker, 1992).

Consistent with the naturalistic qualitative approach, case studies provide “thick description” about a specific phenomenon and its surrounding environment. Described as “slices of life” and “snapshots of reality” (Lincoln and Guba, 1985), the goal of case study research is to use the parts that we have uncovered concerning a phenomenon to develop an image or understanding of the entire process or organization. As such, cases “come wrapped in theories” (Walton, 1992) since they embody causal processes operating at the microcosm. The case, in and of itself, acts as a bridge between empirical evidence and theory articulation. According to Ragin (1992:225), “casing” is the process whereby cases are invoked to make a link between ideas and evidence. Within the case study framework, we are interested in how the organization is evolving, growing, developing – how tenants experience the setting, what seems to be working/not working for whom and under what circumstances at this stage of the evolution. We are also interested in young mothers’ quality of life at two distinct periods of time to see whether this form of housing can indeed contribute to more stable, healthier and secure environments for those in need.

Using a case study approach, the research employed in-depth narratives to document participants’ *homeless trajectories* – specifically the multitude of pathways undertaken to arrive at their present situations. Interview questions focused upon etiological factors pushing these young mothers to the street (or inadequate housing) and their *experiences of ‘being homeless’ and ‘being housed’*. In addition, the researchers learned about young mothers’ experiences

within SHYM – their quality of life, *hopes and aspirations* upon entering supportive housing, current perspectives of themselves (i.e., sense of self-esteem, self-identity and personal health/wellness) as they become part of the program, and whether, how and when their *needs* were being met. In other words, the study explored how this supportive housing setting impacts one’s sense of stability, wellness and overall sense of self. A qualitative inquiry is best suited to delve into the complexities and nuances of how young mothers become homeless, remain homeless and/or exit homelessness.

Using a qualitative approach to explore the perceptions and experiences of homeless/at risk young mothers provides a rare opportunity to learn about these adolescents, their strengths and struggles in becoming mothers, their interactions with various services/organizations, and their health/wellness related needs, broadly situated. In addition, such explorations provide detailed understanding of the intricacies of one supportive housing structure. As such, qualitative investigations are useful tools to document “what works”, “what does not work”, “what might work”, “for whom” and “under what circumstances” if it were available in terms of service delivery.

3.2 LOCAL HISTORY

Within the broader context of case study methodology, a local history of SHYM was developed. Local histories contextualize outcomes from settings in which they arise and provide answers as to why certain things are done in specific ways (Higgins, 1985; Prus and Irini, 1980; Rains and Teram, 1992). As noted by Vaughan (1992:179), by identifying the influential factors that make up the local history, “we situate our case.” Local histories make us aware that structures have pasts, and that the present is not permanent. Laura Epstein (1999:7) noted that “...there comes a time when one knows that things have histories, constituted by events, by

ideas, and according to definitions and rules put out in the midst of a tangle of conflicting stories.”

Through a review of relevant documents (Executive Director Reports, financial statements, official SHYM documents), and discussions with staff and Board members, the researchers developed a comprehensive history of SHYM. This history allowed them to explore the motivations that led to the development of SHYM, and to attain a more thorough understanding of the philosophy and goals that have guided SHYM since its inception. Exploring both the past and present offers insight into the challenges of striking the balance between an idealized vision of supportive housing and the realities of achieving these goals in the face of financial constraints, relationships with other service agencies and the expectations of the service users.

3.3 QUALITATIVE INQUIRY

In order to obtain a deeper understanding of young mothers’ experiences of living in supportive housing, the researchers conducted two sets of interviews with research participants. The first interview took place in the summer/fall of 2008 and the second interview was six months later in the spring of 2009. Conducting two interviews with the tenants allowed the researchers to gain some insight into how their experiences of living at SHYM changed (or remained the same) over a period of time. Two key staff members were also interviewed on two separate occasions in order to allow us to understand changes that took place in the structure and management of SHYM. While examining such changes is useful for understanding the evolution of an organization such as SHYM, it also contextualizes some of the changes in the tenants’ experiences of SHYM. As the tenants adjust to living in supportive housing, so too does supportive housing change to accommodate the needs and expectations of the tenants.

3.4 QUANTITATIVE METHODS

To complement this qualitative inquiry, the study also included a quantitative assessment of the quality of life as experienced by these young mothers. Such an assessment provides critical additional information to the stories of participants, given the evidence that maternal health (particularly mental health) is a key factor affecting the quality of parenting and ultimately a child's developmental outcomes, and is often compromised by poverty and housing challenges (Beeber, & Miles, 2003). The World Health Organization Quality of Life (WHOQOL-BREF; 1996) is a 26 item survey that provides a quality of life profile. The profile produces scores reflecting an individual's perception of quality of life in four separate domains (physical health, psychological health, social interactions, and environment). Two additional items provide separate scores for an individual's overall perception of quality of life, and overall perception of health (Appendix I).

3.5 ETHICAL APPROVAL

The research methodology and ethics protocol was vetted through Dalhousie University Social Sciences and Humanities Research Ethics Board; which approved the project in June 2008. All youth, service providers and Board members participating in this study were provided with informed consent (Appendix G and Appendix H, respectively) before participating in interviews. Informed consent included allowing time for asking questions about the project, clarifying what the research was about, and explaining how data would be collected (i.e., audio-recorded, with their permission), handled (i.e., transcribed verbatim by a professional transcriptionist), cleaned (i.e., by the research coordinator; audio-tapes destroyed after interviews

‘cleaned’), and stored (i.e., locked in a filing cabinet in the office of the research coordinator at Dalhousie University).

The analysis procedure was also explained during informed consent to clarify who would be reviewing full transcripts (i.e., only members of the research team) and how long the data would be kept (i.e., five years as per Dalhousie University policies). The participants were told how demographic data would be used in a general way to illustrate the diversity of the sample, but would not be presented in a manner that would identify any one participant. Finally, at the end of the interview, all participants were given an opportunity to reflect on their interview responses and decide if they were comfortable having direct quotes used from their transcripts. Any issues or concerns about data were noted on the consent form and followed during the ‘cleaning’ of transcripts – that is, any piece of the interview data that participants were uncomfortable with having directly quoted were removed and not included as data. The analysis presented here aggregates the data and findings in an effort to maintain the anonymity and confidentiality of participants. No names or identifying markers are mentioned in the presentation of the findings.

3.6 RECRUITMENT

The research coordinator, who is a young mother herself, is familiar with the literature on supportive housing and needs/issues concerning young mothers who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. Before beginning the first set of interviews, she attended a tenant meeting to discuss the study with the tenants of SHYM. Staff were asked to leave the meeting during the research presentation so that the tenants could freely ask question and/or volunteer to participate. The research coordinator emphasized that this research was being conducted by Dalhousie University Professors and independent of SHYM. She also emphasized that the researchers

would take the utmost care to ensure the anonymity of the participants. The research coordinator did not follow a script but used informal language to introduce the tenants to the purpose of the research and the expectations of those who choose to participate. Tenants were given a phone number to contact the research coordinator directly if they chose to participate in the interviews, though all of the mothers at the tenant meeting agreed to participate and gave the research coordinator their contact information. In addition, a poster (Appendix A) describing the study was placed in the common meeting place at SHYM. The tenants that were not at the meeting were introduced to the project by both staff and other tenants.

Before the second set of interviews, the research coordinator contacted SHYM to remind them of the research project. The staff brought the reminder to the tenant meeting and gave the tenants the contact number so they could contact the research coordinator directly. Staff encouraged but did not coerce the tenants to participate in the second interview. With tenant permission, those who had left SHYM were contacted, reminded of the project and asked if they would be interested in participating for a second interview.

To build rapport with the youth participants, the research coordinator dressed in a relaxed fashion, spent time at SHYM discussing the research focus, and respected the right for participants to decide, *without coercion*, whether they wanted to participate. Although recruitment was launched at SHYM and information disseminated through word-of-mouth and posters, staff were not directly involved in the recruiting process. The very fact that SHYM had agreed to this research provided a significant avenue for recruiting, as SHYM had an established relationship with the young mothers they serve.

All staff and Board members were aware of the research project before recruitment began. The research coordinator contacted specific staff and Board members via email and

provided them with a description of study and request for participation.

3.7 DATA COLLECTION

One-on-one interviews were conducted to collect in-depth stories from the young mothers who lived at SHYM, and to elicit an understanding of the challenges and opportunities of supportive housing from staff and Board members. Interview guides (Appendices B, C, E, and F), drafted by the research team, helped shape the discussions around key aspects of supportive housing – including programming, relationships, sense of self and hope for the future.

Tenant Interviews

One-on-one interviews were conducted at a location determined by the youth to be interviewed - most of the interviews took place in the tenants' apartments, with one interview taking place in the program room at SHYM. Most interviews lasted 45 - 60 minutes. Tenants were compensated \$20 for their time. The tenant semi-structured interview guide (Appendices B and E) began with questions related to their experiences of housing/homelessness before moving into SHYM and then moved into a discussion of their experiences living at SHYM and their own sense of self. Interview questions focused on experiences with accessing services and programs, daily routine, relationships with staff and tenants, mothering at SHYM, and so on. In addition, a short quantitative survey tool was completed by the tenants to gather information about their perceptions of their quality of life (Appendix I). Ten tenants (100% of the residents at SHYM) participated in the first round of interviews (Fall 2008). Tenants were asked if they could be contacted for a second interview in within approximately 6 months time – either at SHYM or, if no longer at SHYM, whether we had their permission to obtain their contact information from SHYM. All of the tenants agreed to the second interview.

When the research team contacted SHYM in the spring of 2009 for the second set of

interviews only five of the original 10 tenants were still residing at SHYM. All five tenants agreed to participate in the second interview. Second interviews were conducted with two of the five mothers who had moved, while the remaining three mothers either could not be contacted or chose not to participate. In total, seven of the original 10 tenants participated in the second interview.

In preparation for the second interview with tenants, the research coordinator reviewed the transcripts of the first interview and followed up on many of the themes (Appendix E). The interviews discussed whether and how anything had changed since the first interview six months earlier regarding mothers' experiences while living at SHYM, access to services and programming, and their sense of self. For those tenants who had left SHYM, the interviews also explored where they were currently living and why they had left SHYM.

Table 1**Tenant/Interview Information**

Tenant	Mother Age at T1	Baby Age at T1	Length of Time at SHYM at T1	Time between T1 and T2	Length of Time at SHYM at T2
1	17yr.	4 months	8 months	8 months	Left SHYM at 10 months
2	18yr.	5 months	3 months	No T2 interview	No T2 interview
3	18 yr.	5 months	8 months	9 months	Left SHYM at 12 months
4	18 yr.	13 months	7 months	8 months	15 months
5	18 yr.	2 years	1 week	No T2 interview	No T2 interview
6	19 yr.	1 year	10 months	7 months	17 months
7	18 yr.	5 months	1 month	8 months	9 months
8	17 yr.	18 months	2 months	No T2 interview	No T2 interview
9	18 yr.	7 months	1 month	5 months	6 months
10	22 yr.	1 year	2 weeks	4 months	4.5 months

Staff Interviews

Purposive sampling was used to recruit SHYM staff from among those who had been at SHYM long enough to understand its history and development. Four staff members were interviewed in the first round of interviews (December 2008). Two of those staff members - those most central to the clinical workings of SHYM - participated in a second interview (April 2009). Second interviews concentrated on what had changed, what had stayed the same at SHYM in the intervening months, and why and how these changes occurred.

Staff interviews ranged in length from 45 to 60 minutes and inquired about SHYM's history, philosophy and goals, the effectiveness of SHYM, and its most significant challenges, successes and opportunities. A semi-structured interview guide directed interviews with staff (Appendix C). Participating staff members offered insights about the complexities of providing

supportive housing to young mothers.

Board Member Interviews

SHYM's Board of Directors has been in existence for over seven years and as such has seen much turn-over. Board members were chosen via purposive sampling with particular attention to those who had been on the Board the longest - several from its inception. Five Board members were invited to participate and all agreed. The Board interviews ranged in length from 45 to 60 minutes and explored SHYM's history and development, major challenges and successes over the years, and their hopes and aspirations for the future. A semi-structured interview guide directed interviews with Board members (Appendix D). Board members offered important information about building and funding supportive housing, and contributed significantly to the development of a local history of SHYM.

3.8 DATA ANALYSIS

In-depth interviews were analyzed using a grounded theory approach (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). This approach is best suited to examine naturally occurring behaviour during social interactions to illuminate shared meaning held by participants. Grounded theory is conducted in an iterative manner, allowing for data collection and analysis to occur in successive waves until no new information is forthcoming. Analysis involved the research team reading and rereading interview transcripts and locating common and dissimilar themes to build conceptual narratives from the data through open, axial and selective coding structures (Strauss and Corbin, 1990).

Coding structures were developed through research team discussions where the team explored the direction of the interviews, emerging themes, and potential options for further investigation. These discussions enhanced the connection of the research team to the data as they

provided a forum for deliberating potential meanings of interview data and an opportunity to build consensus around what the team was learning and what it wanted to explore more in-depth in subsequent interviews. The research team is well versed in this style of analysis.

All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Transcripts were reviewed ('cleaned') for any errors or omissions, and any inaccuracies were corrected. During the review of transcripts, the research team removed all identifying information (such as names of cities, friends, programs, illnesses or other potentially identifying characteristics) to assist in maintaining anonymity. After a preliminary review of transcripts, the research team agreed on an initial coding structure to apply to the transcripts. These codes were used to structure and group the data. The research team read and reread transcripts to identify common themes and sub-themes, which were then compared, discussed, argued, and reshaped as necessary as Strauss and Corbin (1990) outline in their analysis process. This process continued until the main themes and concepts were captured within one grand narrative (major story-line).

Data from the short quality of life survey (Appendix I) were analyzed as outlined in the WHO QOL BREF manual.

The analysis presents the voices of young mothers as they share their experiences and reflections with respect to living in supportive housing. To add further context to the youth participants' voices, staff and Board members' commentaries and reflections are integrated and interwoven among the voices of youth.

3.9 DISSEMINATION

Initial findings from this study have been disseminated through presentations at two invited conferences/workshops: *Partners Solving Youth Homelessness National Conference*, (Toronto, Ontario, February 2009) and *The Street Youth Health Interventions Workshop*, (Victoria, BC. Nov. 2008). In addition, we have shared findings at a CIHR-funded *Café Scientifique* in Halifax on June 10, 2009. A knowledge translation forum will be held in the Fall of 2009 (with Community Action on Homelessness) to discuss the study findings and their implications for service-delivery and policy-development. Study findings will also be reported in scientific publications. A final report will be available to any participant in the study. SHYM will be provided several copies of the final report.

4. LOCAL HISTORY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

There was a recognition from a number of people who were working with this group that young women were losing their babies for the simple fact of not having a safe place to live and not necessarily because of their capacity and that, with the proper support, and the research existed already that said with the proper supports moms could do very well.

In December 2000 Maura Donovan, in her capacity in Parent Services at the IWK Hospital, met a young woman (with two small children) who was a strong and capable mother, but who was unable to find adequate housing and support. As a young, homeless woman with no children, she could have accessed housing at Phoenix Youth Programs, but with the children she was left with no options.

It really weighed on me that, her question was, why can't I go live there? I have two kids and there's no place for me to go. And her point was basically that there was a place for teenagers who were homeless who didn't have kids, but there was no place for her and she had a lot more responsibilities and it put her in a very difficult situation.

For about eight months Maura quietly probed the community to determine which organizations might be amenable to working on this issue, and in August of 2001 she approached the Single Parent Centre in Spryfield. The staff at the Single Parent Centre had seen many young mothers come through their doors with few options for housing, and they agreed that this was an important issue that needed to be addressed. As the community group that would become SHYM began to take form, young mothers' circumstances became even more complicated. In 2001 Social Assistance changed its rules so that anyone under the age of nineteen was required to live at home or with an appropriate guardian if they wanted to access Social Assistance.

Social Services had stopped supporting anybody under the age of nineteen. So the support for minors would actually come from Child Tax Benefit instead of from Social Assistance. So that left young women who were under nineteen having children without any opportunity to receive financial assistance. So if they didn't already have a support system in place with their own family and friends then they were left without any alternatives, any options to go to a landlord and sign a lease on their own and had no way to receive income.

For many young mothers, living at home is not an option, and living with “an appropriate guardian” often means living in less than ideal circumstances. This change in legislation severely narrowed the options available to teenage mothers, and no new supportive housing options or sources of funding had appeared to mitigate these new challenges. For many young mothers, the reality of these changes has meant homelessness, couch surfing, living in difficult or dangerous circumstances, and living on the small income obtained through the Child Tax Credit.

But they're couch surfing and some of them end up in shelters but it's a small percentage. But they're staying in unsuitable environments and they're environments with abuse and violence and tension and where they're not welcome or where, the only reason they are welcome is because they are handing over a part of their precious few dollars to a family member. They're flying below the radar and they're trying to stay out of anybody noticing them because they're terrified their baby's going to be taken by Child Welfare.

Maura and The Single Parent Centre joined forces to offer young mothers another option. Over the next couple of months they brought together a group of people, including young mothers, members of other community organizations, and academics. In January of 2002, this consortium became the working group to form SHYM.

4.2 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

After receiving an HRDC *Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative (SCPI)* program development fund from May to September 2003, the working group became a Board of Directors and incorporated as a non-profit organization. This funding, along with an

organizational development grant in 2004 from the HRM Community Grants Program, allowed them to hire a staff person who developed a plan of action and a program manual. During this time, they conducted several focus groups with young mothers to determine their needs for housing and support. These focus groups allowed the Board to hear the voices of young mothers themselves. It gave board members important insights into many of the important issues related to supportive housing, including, for example, programming needs, rules, staffing support, and safety. At the same time, members of the Board visited other supportive housing organizations in Canada and the United States to determine housing options and to gain valuable insights into the difficult process of obtaining permissions and funding from appropriate sources.

The programs in Massachusetts seemed to be the right kind of model, which was where either two families shared an apartment or each family had their own apartment and there was a live-in in the building but that it wasn't a group home, it was independent living and we knew that that would appeal more to young women. And we did a whole bunch of focus groups with young mothers. We did a whole bunch in 2001 and we did a whole bunch again later on, in 2005. So we kept going back and asking people what would work, what would you like, that kind of thing. So the model that we chose was a model that's well utilized elsewhere, they were opening up a similar program in Montreal, Elizabeth House had run a group home for a long time in Montreal and they were just opening up an apartment program and there's a couple in Toronto and so we just, we knew that this was a model that had been used in lots of other places and we felt like it would be the best option.

Through this extensive research, Board members were able to narrow their focus and come to a clear understanding of both the type of housing they wanted to offer and the clientele they wanted to serve.

4.3 THE CLIENTELE

SHYM's Board of Directors determined that it wanted to offer housing to young mothers who were between the ages of 16 and 21, with the possibility of bringing in mothers who were

up to 24 years of age. These young women would have basic skills so that they were capable of taking care of their day to day needs, such as cooking, cleaning, budgeting, and they would be willing to make the effort to learn to live independently. The youth would also be homeless, or under threat of being homeless, and would not be under direct threat of losing their children. The anticipated clients of SHYM would not be faced with significant mental health or behavioural difficulties, as these populations have other sources of support. The intention was to serve a population of young mothers who were relatively healthy, who were capable and willing to make an effort to improve their lives, but who for reasons beyond their control were unable to find adequate housing for themselves and their child(ren).

What we were seeing was that these young women really had all the motivation and a lot of the skills that they needed but simply didn't have that safe housing structure in place for them. So we didn't want to go and rescue really, really needy people, like the people who have all kinds of outside problems. Just the ones that are sort of mediocre, they just need that extra stepping stone into making it on their own and jumping out of the cycle of poverty, because young women who are left in that situation without any alternatives end up turning where they have to turn to and basically will most often remain in a cycle poverty forever because they just never have that stepping stone outside of it. So it's kind of like nipping the cycle of poverty in the bud for a lot of these young families.

We felt that there was already services in place for people who had other issues, like if they were under sixteen, well they're out of our care. People with addictions or extremely abusive situations, there's Bryony House and Adsum House and there's already other places in place for those but these ones that DCS didn't care about because they weren't that bad of a problem were being left with nowhere to turn.

4.4 THE HOUSE

SHYM was never intended to be a group home, and after determining its clientele, it was decided that SHYM would not require 24 hour staffing. The mothers would be capable enough to

take care of themselves and their children in their own apartments with the available support of a live-in. Instead, SHYM would take the form of a supervised apartment program. This meant that the tenants would live in their own apartments, have access to support staff during the day and a live-in at night, and attend programs developed and offered by SHYM. The Board decided that a building with 6-8 apartments, with one family in each apartment, and a small complementary staff team of an Executive Director, Family Support Worker, Child Development Coordinator and two live-ins, as well as office and child care support would be the ideal.

They really wanted to make sure that the supervision was going to be adequate for these young women because they were not comfortable saying that a sixteen year old could move into an apartment on her own and live life, so the program was key. We had to make sure that our building was going to have a community room and program room and an office, staff there twenty-four hours a day. So we have office staff there on site all day and a family support worker. And we've also got a live-in, who provides a sort of emergency support or crisis support for the young women who are there, outside of office hours, all the time. So there's always somebody there but at the same time, satisfying the needs of the mother to be able to live independently and go for help when they need it.

4.5 PROGRAMMING

Within the philosophy of supportive housing, SHYM would also offer specific programming for young mothers. Through focus groups with young mothers, the programming committee (a sub-committee of the Board) and the Child Development Coordinator developed a loose plan for programming. The actual details of the programs would emerge later, with the input of tenants and based on funding. However, the focus group participants suggested that having a skeleton of the mandatory programming in place at the time SHYM opened would be essential in order to have tenant compliance. The programs that would be offered at SHYM fell into two categories: parenting and life skills. Parenting programs provide time for the mothers to

learn about child development, literacy and play. Life skills programming includes cooking, budgeting and other skills needed for running a household. Additional programs would include a weekly tenant meeting to which tenants bring any concerns or issues related to SHYM, and another weekly program that is devoted to the mothers, for example, self-esteem workshops, exercise classes or free time. Child minding services were to be available in SHYM's playroom during these programs to allow mothers the opportunity to concentrate on themselves for a short time.

4.6 FUNDING

During the first few years of its existence, the working group, which later became the steering committee and then the Board of Directors, had managed to acquire several small but important sources of funding that allowed the group to conduct some initial needs assessments, develop a formal plan for the housing, clientele and programming, and build some significant relationships within the community:

Getting the IWK Foundation funding, which made the child development piece happen, that was amazing because then we had this beautiful child development room and we had staff who were totally committed to making SHYM a great place for the babies and that's been one of SHYM's biggest successes, is the experience the babies have at SHYM and all of the TLC that they get, all the attention. It's amazing. It's just amazing to see how much attention the kids get and what great role modeling the staff provide and the lovely environment that the children have.

What they did not have, however, was a building, a steady source of funding and buy-in from the government. Overcoming these enormous obstacles would take more time and more compromises than the Board imagined. That the Board persevered over many years of struggle is a testament to their commitment to this vulnerable population. Their eventual successes in these three areas emerge as the most memorable accomplishments for both Board and staff members.

Finding a building for SHYM, and the funding to purchase the building, was a complicated process that involved coordinating several levels of funding and support. The Board applied for capital funding from the National Homelessness Initiative offered by the Federal Government several times and were denied each time because they did not have the operational funds needed to run SHYM. They were informed that they needed to have a building before they could be awarded the funds. However, without any funds, purchasing a building would be impossible.

The Board had one of its first major successes in 2005 when the United Way of Halifax Region agreed to provide SHYM with operational funding for three years. Although the United Way did not give SHYM the full amount they had requested, this steady income made the vision of SHYM viable for the first time. With this funding, the support of the municipal government, and the support of a local community group, Community Action on Homelessness, the Board made another application to the Federal Government for capital funding and was finally successful.

While obtaining the funding was an enormous success, the search for an appropriate home was far from over. But after several years of searching, the Halifax Regional Municipality sold SHYM an old schoolhouse for the price of only \$1. The capital grant was used to complete the renovations that turned this old schoolhouse into an apartment building.

So thank God this piece of property came up. I don't know what would have happened to SHYM without it because everything on the market was so expensive and we were finding stuff in neighbourhoods that had a lot of drugs and prostitution and we wanted to stay away from those blocks and we weren't finding much in other areas and the real estate market in Halifax, for investment properties is very quiet. Things don't get posted on MLS, they don't have a "for sale" sign out front, generally. There's some kind of way that properties change hands without it being very public. So we weren't privy to that and we even had a realtor helping us at one point but we still weren't in

on where the action was and able to see, oh here's an apartment building, there's an apartment building, let's look at these. So it made it very hard to find properties and then the prices were so high that we were sceptical. It seemed like we might not ever be able to find anything that we could afford because we'd look at a property that was like six hundred thousand dollars to buy it and it needed tons of work, so then it's like, how much is this going to be in the end. So anyway, we were very lucky to get the place that we got and it has a wonderful history and it was ready to be redesigned and remodelled and you know, it was a welcoming community. So in the end we were very fortunate.

4.7 DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY SERVICES

Although the Board had acquired the capital funding and building as well as some basic operational funding, they were still faced with a major obstacle: the Provincial Government. The Board entered into conversation with the Department of Community Services (DCS) in order to negotiate both operational funding and referrals. These negotiations took longer and were more complicated than the Board had anticipated, and they led to many unexpected compromises.

DCS Compromise: Per Diem

The Department of Community Services has a policy which states that they will not fund new organizations. By requiring the tenants to be on Income Assistance, and have their rent paid directly through Income Assistance, the Board was able to be considered by DCS as a partner organization rather than a new system to be funded. Their hope was that DCS would supply SHYM with significant operational funds through a per diem rate for the tenants. DCS did eventually agree to fund SHYM on a per diem basis, but the rate was substantially less than the Board had requested. A Board member noted: "*Because Nova Scotia doesn't have a transparent process and policy around funding*", SHYM was not given the per diem rate that is usually awarded to shelters, but instead was given the same rate as a YWCA independent living

program,

which isn't adequate for what the YWCA needs and it's not as intense a program as SHYM. It's independent living, the women are living on their own, they don't have children and the per diem covers a staff member who is not on site, in the same place as the women.... So it's not as intensive, the stakes aren't as high because there's no babies involved and there's not as much work for the staff because there's no babies involved. And they're older. Most of the women in the YWCA program are not between sixteen and eighteen, so they presumably do have more independence and yet the per diem is the same.

Although being underfunded by DCS was a major blow to the Board, this was balanced by the fact that they **were** funded by DCS, which meant that SHYM would come to exist in some form.

DCS Compromise: Number of Tenants

The next major compromise that resulted from the negotiations between the Board and DCS was the number of tenants that would be accepted into the building. The Board had originally planned to house 6-8 families in the building. The architect had drawn up a plan for the building with 6-8 apartments, along with shared space, child care space and the staff offices. The Board felt that 6-8 families were an optimum number given the staffing that had been planned. The DCS did not agree. DCS argued that the income from 6-8 families would not be sufficient and that SHYM could only be financially viable if it housed 10-12 families. The Board took this to the architect and the space was redesigned, allowing for 12 apartments. Although the Board had little choice but to accept this compromise if they wanted to receive the funding that DCS was offering, it was a costly compromise. Redesigning the living spaces of the building meant taking that space away from the shared spaces and staff offices. As a result, the childcare space would be too small to accommodate all of the babies; there would not be enough office space for all of the staff; and the kitchen and common room areas became much smaller than originally intended. Furthermore, though DCS demanded more tenants in SHYM, they did not approve additional staffing. The same number of staff would have to look after the needs of

twice the number of tenants. This issue became even more complicated when the Board began negotiating with DCS over who would be referred to SHYM.

DCS Compromise: Referrals

As noted above, the Board had determined that the clientele best suited for the site would ideally be motivated, 'low- needs' young mothers who were capable of taking care of themselves and their child(ren). They hoped to have women of a variety of ages so that some of the mothers could act as mentors to others. This clientele would require only minimal supervision, and would benefit from the support offered by a small staff structure. However, when it came time to negotiate with DCS, their hopes were dashed.

Because the young women had to be on Income Assistance in order to live at SHYM, they needed to be referred to SHYM. These referrals would most often come through DCS. DCS dictated from the beginning that wards of the state, or anyone with a file open with Children's Aid would not be referred to SHYM. Although the Board does not fully understand these restrictions, they were left feeling that DCS is *"determining now who we can get referred and who can come and live at SHYM because they're saying we'll fund these young women and not these young women."*

DCS also argued that there were only six teenage mothers currently receiving Income Assistance in Halifax according to the Department's records, and that SHYM would therefore not receive any clients below the age of nineteen. The Board's anecdotal experiences with the youth population of Halifax provided a very different picture and led it to believe that there were a much higher number of teen mothers receiving Income Assistance in Halifax. However, the Board was unable to argue with the official records. Arguing that only women in their late teens and early twenties who need very little support would be referred allowed DCS to justify the

increased number of tenants, the minimal number of staff and the small per diem rates. But despite the details of the agreement that were forged with DCS, the tenants that have come through SHYM have been almost exclusively under the age of nineteen, and many of them were experiencing mental health and behavioural issues that have challenged the small staff, thus leading to staff re-structuring and several tenant evictions: *“They were at times a little more than what we were equipped to deal with, so there was a lot of that serious crisis issues going on in their lives that we didn’t have the staff to cope with.”*

Unfortunately, the reality of these compromises with DCS has meant that SHYM has never had a full complement of tenants. The size of the staff combined with the ‘higher-needs’ tenants have meant that SHYM has been unable to offer the necessary support to 12 families. This also has an adverse effect on their already limited funds, as fewer tenants mean less rental income and less per diem monies from DCS. The Board is now trying to renegotiate their agreement with DCS to adjust the referral process so that they might accept clientele that are more appropriate to the level of support that SHYM is able to offer. In addition, the organization is currently in dialogue with DCS to eliminate the peculiar directive that disallows prospective tenants who possess open files with Children's Aid.

4.8 DONATIONS

Recognizing that the potential tenants at SHYM might be entering SHYM after a period of homelessness or couch surfing, the Board wanted to offer them more than just an apartment; they wanted to supply some of the basic necessities for mother and baby. Purchasing furniture and dishes for 12 apartments was not an option with the limited funding available, so the Board set out to find appropriate donations. They were fortunate to benefit from the generosity of many local businesses and caring individuals. Donations of toys, furniture, dishes, yard tools, and personal care products flowed into SHYM before its opening, and continue to flow today:

Although they're responsible for paying their own bills out of their money that they get, they know that they'll never go without because there's a donation room where people can take from when they need. I think it's a real asset for these young women to know that. If you're on your own and alone, with nobody to turn to, you run out of diapers, you're out of diapers. There's nothing you can do about it. So that's [the donation room] definitely a huge benefit.

The donation room continues to provide a supply of diapers, basic groceries, and personal care products. Substantial donations of furniture and toys are handed out on a needs basis or through a lottery process.

SHYM staff has also successfully applied for a breakfast program through Halifax Assistance Fund, which allows them to offer healthy breakfast foods in the common kitchen. Through this fund, the staff can ensure that the tenants and their children always have at least one healthy meal a day.

Further, SHYM had a major success when the Malinomy Daycare, on the Nova Scotia Community College campus directly across the street from SHYM, agreed to prioritize SHYM residents on their waiting list. With daycare spaces at a premium, receiving priority at a daycare across the street from their home has the potential to ease a great burden for tenants. With their

children in daycare, these young mothers could be free to pursue their schooling or job preparations.

4.9 THE OPENING

After the negotiations with funders were complete, the building purchased and renovated and several tenants accepted, SHYM was ready to open its doors. Although it had hoped to open in the spring of 2007, delays with construction meant that SHYM would not open until October of 2007. Nevertheless, when the doors finally opened, nine young mothers and their children were provided with a safe and secure living arrangement. With clear symbolism, SHYM opened on Mother's Day 2008, and celebrated its grand opening with a full afternoon of events, including testimonials from some of the tenants.

Since opening its doors, SHYM has undergone several important changes. Particular changes, such as revisions and re-evaluations concerning rules and regulations, were anticipated. These changes occur as landlord and tenant negotiate living together and respecting one another's needs and expectations. For example, when SHYM opened, they expected all guests to sign in and out of the building. This rule was intended as a safety measure, so that the staff could have a sense of who was in the building. In reality, however, the tenants felt that this was an invasion of their privacy. But there were other changes, such as the restructuring of staff, which were not envisioned, yet necessary. In order to better support the higher than anticipated needs of tenants, the staff team decided to eliminate one of their live-in positions and hire more part-time evening clinical staff. This meant that there was only one person on staff over night, but there was more staff support during the evening hours, which better reflected the needs of tenants. Eliminating one of the live-ins also opened up one of the apartments to be used as staff offices, meeting one of their space requirements.

During its first year and a half of service, SHYM has experienced a high tenant turnover rate. Several tenants have been evicted, either due to violations of the tenant agreement or because Children's Aid became involved with the families. In addition, several others decided to leave on their own. A number of tenants have successfully graduated from SHYM, and several others are in line to do the same. Although the turnover rate has been higher than expected (and inevitably placed some strain on the organization and other tenants), the staff and Board continue to be optimistic and hopeful that they will be able to work through these “growing pains” (not unexpected from a young organization) and will be able to collaborate with DCS to refine the referral process in order to maintain more tenant housing stability and to see more tenants graduate successfully.

5. THE FINDINGS: VOICES FROM TENANTS AND STAFF

5.1 THE PHILOSOPHY AND GOALS OF SHYM

According to SHYM's official documents, the Mission Statement, Objectives and Values are as follows:

MISSION STATEMENT

SHYM is committed to providing supportive and safe housing for young mothers and their children who are homeless or at risk of being homeless. We will provide the necessary tools and access to community supports and educational systems so that our residents move forward confidently on the path to independent living.

PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

- To reduce the incidence of homelessness in vulnerable young mothers and their children.
- To reduce the risk of violence, addictions, inadequate prenatal and postnatal nutrition and care, child development delays and social isolation for young mothers and their children.
- To provide safe and secure housing where residents can acquire the life management and parenting skills essential to independent living.
- To provide a safe and nurturing environment for the children involved in the program.
- To provide individually tailored action plans that address the specific needs of resident residents.
- To provide a supportive and nurturing environment that includes individual counseling, the development of support networks and access to training and educational supports.

VALUES

The organization adheres to the following core values:

- We believe that young mothers and their children deserve access to safe and secure housing, as only then can they develop the self-worth and dignity essential to independent living.
- We believe that through supportive services and the development of a sense of community our residents will experience the enhancement of self-esteem essential to healthy parenting and personal empowerment.
- We believe in providing residents with an opportunity to develop their skills through access to educational programs, counseling and community resources.
- We believe in creating an environment that is participatory, non-discriminatory and that

nurtures respect and trust.

When asked to explain their own understanding of the philosophy that guides SHYM, the staff emphasized the issues of safe housing, parenting skills, independent living as well as support for the children:

I think that in our Mission Statement it says something to the effect of helping them gain new skills so that they can move confidently forward on the path to independent living and I think that's that, I see that the programs that we offer really do reflect that, that we always have that in mind when we're deciding who's going to come in to talk about what and the sorts of programs that are going to be offered. We can really see that it is specifically focused on those very necessary skills that they'll need to have to move out on their own.

I think we believe that young women have every ability to be successful parents and with the proper support, they can be quite successful that way and that the lack of their own family support doesn't mean that they shouldn't be able to still make the change necessary to raise children. The other important thing is that, this is really, it's a prevention model you know, we're working with the babies as well and they're distinct clients here and some of the challenges that may have happened in a given situation, where moms had issues of attachment in her own early years, can be changed just by the value of teaching her tricks to create attachment now. So there's a big focus on the babies too.

I guess it would be, it's really like an inclusive model. Like the programs are necessary, you must attend but moms are able to contribute you know, ideas and you know changes in the calendar but that they are necessary. It's really child guided, it's child focused so it's following the lead of the kids. Honestly, at this point, we're providing child care in the evenings, I don't feel like we're able to practice that approach in a way that we could if we had you know, more child development staff, more time with the kids. You would be able to explore that to a greater degree. At this point we're just really providing child care and you know, and you can compare it to the authoritative parent as well. So you know, it's ability to make, allowing tenants opportunities to make appropriate choices but it's really well, like the choices, the parameters are really well defined.

The staff were also asked if they believed this philosophy was successful in the reality of day-to-day life at SHYM. Although the overwhelming belief is that the philosophy is successful, there

was some recognition that they are still learning and growing and that the philosophy has to grow with them:

I've only been there for a few months and you can see how some of the moms have grown and matured in even that time, in just a little segment sort of thing and you can see how, and you wonder where they would be if they weren't living at SHYM. Like would they be able to take care of their child or that sort of thing, like where would they be?

Absolutely. Absolutely because you see them coming back and giving us feedback. You see that they take things away from the program. For example, we have something called Cooking with Bonnie, where once a month someone comes in and prepares a big meal with them and ... we point out the nutritional benefits that you get from certain foods and then you see them trying new things that they wouldn't necessarily have tried before and sometimes they'll ask to borrow, you know some of the kitchen supplies that we have and things like that, so that they can prepare meals. And I think that there's, each individual program does that for them, there's something they can take away from it that they can then go home and practice themselves or think about and learn about.

Yes I do, ultimately I do think it's successful. I think that there are lots of growing pains and that in that first year, you know, we've seen things we need to change and build on...and I think that in order for the program to work they need to believe that it's theirs and so I think philosophically we'll stay where we are. How we get there, you know, I think that over time we'll have more and more people who have graduated from here and who can continue to be a part of our Board in other ways that we can persist with this.

I think that we're slow to respond to the moms' needs in some cases. Like having like the school program on site, I think that we're slow to respond to that and it's not lack of trying, it's just the reality is the day to day needs of this building, like any day that I come to work, have like a list of long term goals that I'm working on that are interrupted constantly by the day to day needs of the tenants. So it's finding a way to manage that. I think it happens that the, like at higher levels as well, but it's hard to keep working on that when you just don't have enough staff and it's the same with the high school completion program, like it would be great to work on that but again, the day to day needs are, they just, they take over. So we just don't have enough people to work on all the projects, so it's constantly a challenge.

The staff were also asked to outline SHYM's goals. The goals were understood to be similar to the philosophy, reflecting a desire to provide safe housing and to help the tenants prepare for living and parenting independently:

I think one of the goals is to have everything organized, sometimes their lives are fairly chaotic in the way, because they haven't had a stable sort of background. So the goals to keep the common areas and the staff, we have an apartment for staff to use and the goal is to keep that very organized, so that it's clean, calm and stable environment sort of thing.

I think it's to help them, from my perspective, it's that they want to see them be able to be independent and the goal is to help them get into education or, not the immediate goal but so that they can learn to cope with being a mom and kind of look beyond and plan for the future.

Yeah, that's a really important part, is that they're prepared when it is time for them to go. They can stay for up to two years, they can come in when they're seven months pregnant and we hope that within that two year span, that they're going to pick up a lot of basic household maintenance, parenting skills, just basic life skills and also learn about some of the tools and other community resources that there are for them, so that they're able to move on from here and help themselves and already have some skills in place so that they're off to a good start.

To provide a safe and supportive environment for these young mothers to live, and again to help them learn the skills that they're going to need.

The need for there to be a safe place for a young mother to go with her child or her children if there is, if there is no other alternative for her. A place where she can be safe and have support and learn some skills to live independently and then have a successful life. Just a good, happy life like everybody wants and to break some of the cycles, poverty for example. A lot of the young moms here came from families that lived in poverty and that's something that has been proven can easily repeat itself and we're hoping that by having this support, that we can be a help in breaking that cycle, we can make some small difference there.

We have a written goal. To provide housing for homelessness and ensure a safe and healthy start but that's not a quote of what it

actually says. But I think that it is to ensure that children are safely housed and that the young moms have all of the tools necessary to be the best parents they can be, really.

I think that the goals of SHYM are oh, in a really simple way it's that when a mom moves in here to the building, that when she leaves her life is improved in some way. So, and that could be in any way, it's according to the need of that family but that you know, that she's better off when she leaves than when she arrived, I think in a really simple way.

I think SHYM's hoping to keep moms and children together where possible and to help to increase moms' capacity to parent in the healthiest way possible and increase positive outcomes for the children by providing those supports in their early years.

When asked if these goals were being reached, there was a mixed response from the staff. There was a general sense that SHYM was able to achieve small goals, but that success in achieving goals varied considerably from tenant to tenant. In addition, several staff felt as if the House had “let tenants down” by not being able to provide particular elements of support, especially in terms of in-house education and more comprehensive child care. This will be a recurring finding throughout the text.

I think it is and it is on an individual basis too. Like you're not going to have all of the girls moving towards that but definitely I can see a few of them that have been in the program for a while that really have benefited from it. And then are moving towards that sort of maturity and seeing the future.

You see them having a good time and sharing that time with their children and sharing that time with each other and there's this sense of community where they're all getting to know each other and being there for one another, they help each other out. They take turns going outside for breaks, some of them stay inside to watch the children, some of them go outside for a break and you see that happening during programs as well, and so I think that that's how you see that it's successful, is by reflecting back on it and then seeing the differences that it's made. Like I said, like asking for kitchen supplies so they can cook their own meals, that's a big thing. It's something that a lot of teenagers don't need to worry about or think about, that these teenagers are here and they're doing it and having their own

kitchen is fantastic for them to be able to do that. And you see a lot of the feedback from the parenting programs as well. Like you'll see them using the skills that they've learned in those programs, which I love, I love seeing that. I love that they're there and they're absorbing the information, they're actually listening, they're paying attention and then they're using that to do the right thing.

Absolutely, I think the more staffing we have and the more that we can offer particularly from an educational place, the more that we'll be able to meet those goals. There's recent research that was talking about, that being a teen parent isn't really a barrier in the long term, in terms of outcomes for young moms but not finishing their education is and so we feel like, you know, what's really important is to be able to figure out ways to support them if they want to go back to school.

I think from the first place, that there are some moms who are preparing to move on and feel more independent and ready to do that. And I think that, you know in some ways there are some longer term goals and I don't know yet, I think we're kind of trying to evaluate that as we go, do some specific program evaluation that we did for the United Way, so it's given us a little bit of an idea but I think that, for the short term goals, which really were to get the program up and going, to start to offer the programming to, you know do the things we said that we were going to do, that goal is met for sure. And the other ones I think will take a little bit longer to know. You know, which ones will be modified as we go.

I think that, I do sincerely see them, changes in the moms but I feel badly that, I don't think the program has been able to meet their needs in the way that we would have liked it to. So I feel like there's more that could have been done for them. Yeah, than we were able to provide but you know, the moms who have left, like given their notice and left, like definitely more confident and I think that they're aware of resources in the community and they're more confident in, like maybe more in their abilities to advocate for themselves. Those would be, you know the things that I see. What I wish for is that they had access to child care, better access to child care and that they had a better plan when they're leaving, like either finishing education, pursuing some volunteer work or looking for employment. Well, really it's finishing school, that's what I really wish for them. Yeah and that's not always in place. Having said that, a couple of moms have given their notice so that they can go back to their, like to a community to finish school because we're not able to do that for them here.

Yes I do, I really do. I think that those are the, you know that those

are the things we want to increase and build on and grow but I think that that's what's the kind of glue that holds us together, is that we all have a similar focus. We're trying to do it and, right now it's in baby steps and in a few years hopefully we'll be toddlers at it.

5.2 THE TENANTS

As it is in the philosophy of SHYM to house tenants who are homeless or living with the threat of homelessness, it should come as no surprise that the mothers' personal histories are narratives that involve couch surfing, living on the streets and staying in shelters. A great variety of experiences with housing both before and after they became pregnant is found within these stories. Most of these stories begin with tumultuous relationships with their parents:

My mom, we just fought all the time, all the time, all the time and it was more than just physical or more than just verbal and stuff like that. So that was some reason. My dad, I'd never really lived with my dad and like, I moved there after I had all the problems that I did, so he kind of didn't know how to handle the attitude and that kind of stuff. So I was rebelling a lot in them years, a lot.

Me and my mother used to get in a lot of fights so I would always either be kicked out of my house or I would like just get so sick and tired of fighting with her that I would leave.

She kicked me out, she couldn't control me. I didn't want to listen to her rules, she said you won't live in my house.

I was living, my mom moved down to [city in NS] for a year and I was living with her, it wasn't a good place to be in. Her boyfriend was really abusive since like she was with him and I recently just told her and she didn't exactly believe me. So we got in a big fight about that and he just kept coming around and stuff, so I couldn't deal with it anymore, I was way too stressed that like, when I was like seven months pregnant he got arrested for trying, like threatening to kill me and everything. It was just way too much stress, I didn't want the baby around him or nothing like that so I had to get out of there.

Some of these difficult relationships resulted in the teens leaving home to live with other relatives:

I lived with my dad until I was about 15 or 16 and I moved out and went and lived with my mom for a little bit, when she got her own place. I had to live with a friend for two months until she could get accepted for an apartment and then my mom couldn't handle me because I was out of control, so I went back to live with my dad. Before I lived here I lived with my aunt and my uncle... I decided to keep her and my dad kicked me out. So I had nowhere to go and she was still in foster care, so my aunt and uncle took me in and then they took her in and I stayed there until I got accepted to here.

I was living with my grandmother since I was fifteen. [before that I lived] with my mom but that didn't work out so I moved in with my Nan for about two years.

My parents split up when I was twelve, my mom moved [to another province] and my dad kicked me out because I didn't get along with his girlfriend. I was living with my grandmother. Yeah, I was in a group home for a couple of months but then my grandmother, she moved so I could live with her and then when she found out that I was just going to do it on my own, she was like okay, I'm just going to get my own place then.

A few of the teens were removed from their homes and placed in group homes:

I was thirteen... from November until March and... They say I refused treatment, so they sent me to the lock down facility in [a city in NS] and then after I got out of there, they didn't want to put me back in the city. So they sent me to my dad's house in [a city in NS] and I got care with my dad and then it just didn't work out at my dad's, so I went back to the city to live with a friend and her guardian.

I grew up, until I was basically thirteen, in the [area of NS] and then I lived in group homes from thirteen to eighteen.

A couple of these mothers found themselves couch surfing and living in less than ideal housing after leaving group homes:

I started staying with friends and then I moved to [another province]... we lived in a shelter for about a month and we got a place in a crack building, sorry to say. It wasn't really good, the landlord wasn't good, didn't help us out. Our stove didn't work, so we had

like, and that was like my very first apartment, so I had like really bad experiences with that and stuff like that. Too, there was a fire in the building and stuff like that, somebody died in the building, took them a month to sit there and clean out the place where buddy's house caught on fire, it took them a month. So we were like walking through and we would smell soot every day and then the smell of death in the other apartment. So it was a really bad experience, my first place. Um, then I moved and we uh, started, we had got a roommate with a person that we knew from home, from here. Got a roommate, that seemed to be working out pretty good but then he ended up screwing us over with the landlord situation. He was telling us one thing and we found out that it was a totally different thing from the landlord, so then we were back in the shelters and on the streets. And then I broke up with him, I got a place on my own and then that went by, also I didn't have anything, but I didn't have no, nothing bad about that and then I came back home.

Some of the mothers were couch surfing or living on the street:

I used to stay at like friends' houses and then if like, they got sick of me staying there, I would like leave. Most of the time I was living there for a short period of time, things like that and um, Assistance got involved and, well like I was on Assistance but they said if I don't find like a permanent place to stay for like a nice chunk of time, that they were going to get Children's Aid involved and take my child.

Yeah, I was in and out of my house. I got kicked out and back in and it just went on and on for like two years. Yeah, like before, like the couple of times I got kicked out and everything, I'd stay on the streets but I couldn't do that anymore. There was no way I was ever going to do that, so yeah, I found a friend that would let us stay for a bit.

I lived on the street, in [area of NS] for two years, on and off and I went back with my mom.

A few of the teens had good relationships with their parents and only left home when they became pregnant:

Before I came to SHYM I was living with my parents and I got pregnant and then my parents decided that it would be best if I had my own apartment, just so that it wouldn't cause any more problems within the family. So I moved into an apartment and me and my mom were both trying to afford it. When [my child] was three weeks old I went back at work, working full time, morning and night and money just got extremely tight and it didn't work out as well as we thought it

would. So we had to cancel the lease just because bills were getting way too high...

I lived with my parents up to the point that I was seven months pregnant.

Well I lived with my mom, this is actually my first time out on my own.

The transition from living with their parents to living at SHYM was not smooth for all of these young women. One of the tenants lived in her own apartment briefly until financial problems forced her to leave, at which point she couch surfed and accessed a women's shelter until she was able to move into SHYM:

...and then I was going from a couple of my friends' houses and then I ended up at [shelter]... I still had some contact with my family and I did stay a couple nights at my parents' house and whatnot but it was just like, I'd stay with my friends and then I'd go to my parents' house and just like, my friends couldn't take me in kind of thing. So my parents and I decided that we would go to the [shelter] and I stayed there for a month and a half and then when I heard about SHYM, me and my family thought it was a great opportunity so I moved in.

Another mother left home when she became pregnant and lived with her boyfriend. When that relationship turned sour, she stayed with his family until moving into SHYM:

So at seven months pregnant I moved out with my boyfriend. We lived together until July of this summer and then we had our own apartment and then everything started going downhill and so I moved in with his aunt for about two months and then I moved into here.

The majority of these young mothers come from high levels of family dysfunction:

I've been hurt a lot and I had a pretty rough childhood growing up with alcoholics and drug users and my mom had lots of boyfriends coming and going, left alone, neglected, just stuff like that and I just don't feel that I can trust anymore because I've never really been taught to be able to trust somebody. My childhood, I was always taught to lie.... So I don't trust very many people.

While there was some diversity in terms of home life/street life prior to becoming pregnant, SHYM staff note the one commonality all tenants share is that they became mothers at a young

age:

Well they're just regular teenagers really. They don't have necessarily a lot of similarities to one another, except for the fact that they were young when they got pregnant and that they've got children. But I certainly wouldn't point out any other specific similarities between them.

It's hard to describe them because there are a lot of individual people here but in a general sense, we accept people between 16 and 24 years of age and they are women who are either currently parenting, who have had children and who may be involved with Child Welfare where the children are intended to be returned to them or women in their last trimester who are expecting to parent after the birth of their child.

Some of them came from like a, you know, pretty middle class homes. Some of them, and some have more support than others from extended family in the building. So it's kind of all across the board, like there's not one, they're all different. What they have in common is that they're young parents, that's pretty much it. But beyond that you can't, there are no, like guarantees.

5.2.1 Accessing SHYM

Finding themselves homeless or couch surfing was challenge enough for most of these teens, but getting pregnant complicated this even further:

It was very, very hard because I was pregnant with a big old belly, sleeping on couches is not that fun.

Unable to stay at home or return home, unable to access shelters designated for women or teens with a baby in tow, and unable, due to new regulations, to rent their own apartment, these young women had only one option available to them: SHYM.

Most of the young mothers found out about SHYM through a community support worker. Two of the mothers found out about SHYM through their Income Assistance worker, and two

found out through their Youth Employability Project workers. Other workers who introduced the young mothers to SHYM include an Extra Support for Families worker, a Community Justice worker, and a Home of the Guardian Angel worker. One teen heard about SHYM through Community Services. Several of the young moms learned about SHYM through friends:

When I was going through the adoption process, the girl from the [NS organization], she told me a lot about all of the different options I had and one of them was SHYM and I did some research on it and I was told by one of my friends that, a girl I went to school with, one of my sister's old friends lives here. So I started contacting her and got information from her.

My friend lived here. I actually went into labour in here. In this apartment.

I just, my mom was leaving and we couldn't live together anymore, it was just not happening. I wasn't going to be homeless with [my child] or move with a friend or something, so I was on, I went to two girls, I went to high school with two girls who lived here and the one I actually get along with, I was on her Facebook and she had SHYM up there so I like clicked on it and went and everything and called.

The young mothers all found the process of applying to SHYM easy and fast. The average turnaround time – from the time they applied and interviewed to the time they moved in – was a couple of weeks.

Although accessing SHYM was a relatively straightforward process, several of the young moms felt that they were “forced” into living at SHYM. The regulation which makes parents responsible for teens until they are 19 years of age, and which denies them access to their own apartment, meant that SHYM was the last and only resort for these teen mothers. Some of the tenants resented their lack of options and the sense of being ‘mandated’ to live at SHYM:

Well, for me, because I have no choice. I have to be here until I'm nineteen, once I turn nineteen I'm moving as quickly as I can. Because I'm only a minor and I'm not allowed to have my own place, I have to be in a supervised environment and that's either a) in a place like here or b) with a family friend and I don't have any family friends who will

take me in. I don't have anybody who will take me in, like the people that I do have to take me in, my worker says are not qualified to, for me to still be on Assistance and live with them. So I'm kind of stuck here or else I'd have to forget about going back to school and go and get a job and work to pay somebody rent and just still pay for all my kid's stuff and my kid's formula is like \$50 a case and I need to buy four of them a month. So that's like \$200 alone on formula and I don't have to pay for formula while I'm on Assistance. My worker has it done so I can go to the pharmacy and pick up the cases and they bill them right upstairs and it helps so much, like so, so much. Same with her [child's] prescriptions, my prescriptions. Like it helps a lot. So right now, as much as I don't like it and I've already have tried to see if there was some place else that I could go, I actually did that like two weeks ago but there's not so I'm just going to have to find a way to get around it, my issues in the building. So that way I'm not completely miserable.

Well I called them to see if they could get me in my own place because things weren't working out and I needed to just get away from everybody and clear my head and they told me that my mom's responsible for me financially until I'm nineteen, so they gave me the option to come here or deal with it. It took me a few months before I made the decision to actually come here and I just called them and told them I was interested, got a hold of a social worker and they set me up. Within two to three weeks I was in here.

Or I think it's not fair that I should have to live here when I know other people that are my age with a baby, who are on their own. And believe me, I did not choose to live here, I was forced to live here. [By] Income Assistance. They, well I had no choice but to leave my mom's. So I called Social Assistance for some help and they told me that my mother's financially responsible for me until I'm nineteen and the only way they could help me is if they put me in supervised housing. I said no, I said frig that, I'd rather stay with my mom and then, because I thought that SHYM was like a group home... But then I called them back when I realized that I really had to get out because it was just getting more unsafe as the days went on. I was really excited at first because I knew I was going, like I thought I was going to have a lot more freedom. I have more freedom being here, like not, I can lock my door and not have to worry about people being around but it's not the same as being on my own.

The staff recognize that living at SHYM is not necessarily these young mothers' first choice and that this may affect their acceptance of the program:

I think it's a complicated question because one of the shortcomings of this situation is that young women who are on Assistance, under nineteen, have to live in a supervised environment and because of that stipulation, the moms who are coming here don't have a safe supervised place to live in that's already given. Their family's not able to do that or they wouldn't be here but what it makes is, it makes them feel mandated to live here. And it doesn't feel like it's free will in the same kind of way, even though it is and there's at least one other program around for them but that program is actually even less independent. You're living with other people and that kind of stuff. So it puts us in a kind of funny position where, you know, there's a lot of resistance and people don't necessarily feel like this is their choice.

Some of the tenants regret that living at SHYM means that they have to live far away from their families – taking them away from important support networks:

Yeah. I'll always call that home, it's in [city in NS] so it's quite the bus adventure. I take four buses to get there.

Well, I wish I was closer to my family but ... Yeah. Sometimes it takes like an hour and a half just to go see them on the bus.

The staff agreed that the distance to family and other supports is a barrier for some of these young mothers:

And then the location of the building, it's far. Like a lot of families have come from [another area in NS], it's really far. So if they have family, friends or you know, their doctors are in that area, it's just far, it's really far away. So that can be hard for them.

However, for the majority of these young moms, moving into SHYM was a great relief - allowing them to feel safe and secure and providing their babies with a healthy place to live:

I was so happy, I was so excited to have my own place and finally, not have to worry about where I'm going to lay my head or where my kid's going to sleep and just like a big relief.

Happy, excited (laughter) relieved more like because now I know I have a place for me and my son. Oh I like it. I like it a lot. The stress is gone.

5.2.2 Life at SHYM

The tenants at SHYM live in their own two-bedroom apartments, with shared laundry, outdoor space and other common rooms (such as the program room, a common kitchen and a childcare space). Although the tenants expressed some minor issues with the apartments (such as particular design elements), the majority were very pleased with their individual living quarters:

Aside from the whole hospital looking feel you get, or like, it almost feels like, you're living in residence at a like, for college. I actually like them, like it's, the in floor heating is perfect for [my child] and like, the doors, you notice how it's open here and the windows in the kitchen are my favourite because I have a tendency to check on [my child] all the time, like even though he's almost two, it's the whole fact of that SIDS thing but I just check on him all the time and it's perfect.

I hate the high ceilings (laughter), but we can't change them because like, the windows. Just because like it's too high... I'm used to something more cozy, like the ceiling being down more and it's not very cozy, it's like huge. And I hate the way the island is right smack dab in the middle of my kitchen. I hate it, like I cannot stand that. It's frustrating because like, I know I like the space because there's cupboards but I hate the way that it is. Like I wish there was a different way you could put it, like and I don't think they'll change it. Um, and I hate the way [my child], like the babies' rooms in mostly all of the apartments don't have closets. I wish that they did.

It's nice and big. There's two rooms for me and him because before, I was staying in one little tiny room and he had to sleep with me in the bed and everything like that. So yeah.

I love my apartment. I have a two bedroom, my bedroom and his bedroom are not much different size. I see other people's apartments and I'm like, I love this layout but I still like my apartment just because I like low ceilings, I like the island, I like my rooms, I like the washroom, I like my closets. I have a lot of closet space, which I like.

I like that it's extremely spacious, there's lots of room for the baby to crawl around. I don't like the floors, they get dirty extremely fast, dust build up. It's hard. So like when she tumbles over, she doesn't have a very safe fall. Other than that, I love it here. It gets a little warm sometimes but I just open my windows.

Most of the tenants reported that they were comfortable and safe at SHYM, and they also noted the community experience at the House:

I've been less stressed. I've been around abuse, [my child]'s been actually a lot less stressed too. Like even for a newborn, he was really stressed and you could just tell and he's just been a lot easier, I can sleep better at night. Yeah, and that it's safe and I'm not going to run into anybody or anything.

I feel like I am [part of a community] in this building, like with everyone but I don't know. I feel like this is more of a home than your own place and stuff. Like even, I just don't like the fact that it's by the hospital pretty much. But like, there's not really many apartment buildings around here anyway, so it's like this place, it feels like, I don't know how to explain it but yeah.

I feel great. I like it, I like being, I like having freedom and not having to follow rules and like I can do my own thing when I'm ready. Besides programs and stuff like that, that we have to follow.

A few of the tenants spoke specifically to the stigma of being a teen mother, and suggested that living at SHYM allowed them relief from being viewed as the “other.” Being in a building with other teen mothers meant not being so judged:

And at least, being here, I know people aren't looking at me funny because I'm eighteen and I have a kid and that I'm not with the father and that the father's not coming around.

And they're all your age, it's not like they're looking down on you saying, you don't know what you're doing.

That's why I like it here too because it's other, the girls realize what it's like to have a baby and stuff and you can't go doing that stuff.

It's not embarrassing when people ask me where I live because I know, like certain people, the people that would be like proud that I'm here, doing good for myself, but when I tell people where I live, that I live in Supportive Housing for Young Mothers, they ask me questions. Oh, what's that, a group home? Like they make me feel like low because I'm not, I don't know, I just, it kind of makes me think that I'm not good enough to live on my own like they can.

While the tenants felt safe at SHYM, there were mixed emotions about the neighbourhood. Some of the tenants felt comfortable there, while others found it a difficult adjustment to move into this particular environment:

No, I don't like the city, even though I'm not even in like the middle of the city or anything like that, I'm just outside but the NS[hospital] is across the street and there's a lot of people walking around at night, like at four o'clock in the morning. I can see people walking around at night out here and back at my house, there's no cars driving on the road at four o'clock in the morning. Scared. Sometimes. When I first came here I was terrified, especially if I went outside by myself to have a smoke but I've gotten used to it now. Most of the stuff that I do here, chains on a fence or anything like that because out where I lived, the wind blows, you hear the trees and here, you hear a lot of garbage floating around. A lot of stuff plays tricks with your mind and it startles me a lot.

At the same time, tenants appreciated the services that are available in the area, from the hospital across the street and nearby police and fire departments, to the proximity to a grocery store and public transportation:

Well, before I was here I heard a lot of like different things, like there's the crazy house right across the street and like, oh it's Woodside, there's gangsters at night or something along that line. But now that I've lived here for the seven months it's honestly not that bad as people say. You're right on the bus route, so you can get to wherever you want, there's a grocery store right up the street, there's a hospital right next to you, there's a convenience store right there. So it's pretty, in a good area. So, like I've taken [my child] to the General Hospital plenty of times, just for like fever ... so I think the location's actually pretty good, just the fact that, well the crazy house is across the street, so if you go to the bus stop there might be someone there, like hi, trying to be your friend, like that's it.

Yeah and I like that the hospital is right there and stuff too, I like that. I like that a lot.

Yeah. I like the place, I like the fact that it's so close to everything. Police station and whatnot, like we've had, I had an incident where somebody came with a stolen vehicle and whatnot and they were trying to get into the building and I called the cops and they were here in like two minutes with a truck, two cars, a van. So it's really safe.

Yeah, there's a grocery store down, just down the road a bit, Sobeys.... and it's just one bus away from the bridge terminal and they have everything down there. The hospitals are convenient for me, not baby. Um, there's churches.

A minority of tenants felt that SHYM was located in a “bad part of town,” and expressed reservations about being so close to the hospital:

When I first came out here, I was in a bad mood about where I was living and it was really making it a lot harder to get comfortable here because like, I don't like Dartmouth. I'm not in a bad part of Dartmouth either but I thought all Dartmouth was bad. I really did. I was terrified, I thought I'd get shot walking down the road.

Well, the NS Hospital is right there and people kind of freak me out, the things that they say and I just, it's not like [city in NS]. It doesn't seem like a very friendly area sometimes, there's a lot of, I don't want to be rude but weird people. Yeah. Because they're not all there, I guess, they're ill or whatever. Sometimes they'll like say sexual things to me and just being not normal.

I don't know, I just, I don't like that it's right by the NS because if, I don't walk at night here, I've tried a couple of times and there's been a little conflict with like people from there and coming out and stuff. Yeah, I don't really like this part of town.

The only thing that really creeps me out about living here is living across the street from the Nova Scotia Hospital because there's always people from there, that live there, like patients, roaming the streets at all hours of the night. We've actually had a few incidents of people coming and ringing buzzers, trying to get in the building at night-time. Yeah, so that's a little freaky.

In contrast to feeling part of a community *within* SHYM, most of the tenants felt somewhat alienated from the larger neighbourhood. This is in large part due to SHYM's non-residential setting, but may also reflect the moms' desire to maintain ties to their own communities: “*Not really a community in this area. There's not too many like apartments or anything around either.*” However, during the second interviews, one tenant suggested that she did feel that she had become part of a larger community setting:

I find that it's really convenient where you've got the fire station right there, you've got the hospital right there and you've got the police station right there. So I like where that is. The area itself is actually really peaceful. A lot of people have stereotypes and think that because we're across from the NS then there's all kinds of crazies running around or something along that line but it's, like a community. Like we're connected to the community and we all, well I know with myself, when I get off the bus from school there's a few people from the NS that are always sitting at the bus stop and every day they'll sit there and say, so how was your day and how was school and like they're, like it's a community, like we're all connected in a way.

When asked to describe their day-to-day lives, the tenants all reported leading quite “boring” lives – attending to their babies’ needs, cleaning their apartments, attending programs and visiting with friends:

I get up and get us ready and then clean, maybe go to a program, go in and out for smokes (laughter), watch TV, eat, hang out. That's pretty much it, nothing exciting.

It's nothing, like a typical day, I just sit around, do laundry, clean up, that sort of thing. Do whatever I have to do and then at night-time me and [another tenant] sit here and watch movies.

Usually get up in the morning, it depends like, on certain days the programs are early in the morning, so I'll get up, get him dressed and stuff, feed him and then I'll go down but, and then after that I'll just like hang around or go out and do something. But if it's at night-time then like we get up and feed and stuff and then he goes for a nap and I just do random things around the house and then we go to the thing at night-time, pretty much.

5.2.3 SHYM Programs

Attending health and social programming is a requirement of living at SHYM. The programs are intended to not only teach the tenants specific skills, but also more generally to give tenants a routine. According to the organization, this routine is not only important for the babies, but also important for the mothers. Having routine programming might alleviate the

boredom of being home all day with a baby, but it can also help prepare the teens for a return to school or work:

I told one of the girls the other day, I said, because she was complaining about having program only a couple of times a week or put them all in one day and I said to her, I said, well if your child was in daycare and you're trying to go back to school, well then this is a good motive. Like to get you on schedule, that you're doing something. And that's why I like programs, because it's like, it's getting you motivated to go back to school. Like not exactly with the schoolwork and all that stuff but it still gives you a certain time that you have to be somewhere and its responsibility and that's the way I look at it. (tenant's second interview)

Although the tenants knew before moving in, or learned quickly thereafter, that program attendance is mandatory in order to live at SHYM, they expressed a great deal of resentment about attending programs, particularly about the time and frequency of programs and the seemingly disappointing or pointless nature of the programs:

I don't have a problem attending programs. I think they're good but when we first moved into the building, when I first moved into the building I was told that we only had to apply, or we only had to go to programs that we thought applied to us. But we had to go to tenants' meeting every week because that was for the people in the building to sit down and discuss issues, repairs, stuff like that. And now it's, you have to attend every program and you cannot miss any of them unless you give a twenty-four hour notice and if you miss three in a month, you get, or if you miss three without an excuse, I guess it's in any time period, I really don't know, they give you a letter. And then, if you miss, I think they said three more, you get evicted, which I think is ridiculous... Like I don't mind going to the tenants' meeting and I don't mind going to programs that I'm actually learning something, like learning how to cook or learning how to do better with her or to learn stuff that I don't already know. Like I'm not saying I know everything and I'm so smart about taking care of kids but there are some things that I do know that is just common sense, on how to take care of a kid and I don't feel like I need to go to programs that don't apply to me.

Most of the tenants resented the number of programs that they are required to attend, suggesting that they found the programs to be an “imposition on their lives,” leaving them with little free

time to spend with friends or family, or even to complete necessary tasks:

And then sometimes they cut into my other plans I have like going out to visit my friends, like her godparents or her, my cousins and my aunts and uncles and like I really want to go to [another province] but I don't think that's going to happen because I've got to spend so much time here. But if I had my own apartment, I could come and go as I want.

Well, I kind of can't leave during the week because I have to be here for programs. So I can't go to [city in NS] with my family or go out with my friends, I've got to be here so I only have the weekends to go and do something.

One of the tenants, however, suggested that if the programs were not mandatory, most likely no one would attend:

I don't know, it's hard to say because there's a lot of very immature people that live in the building and like, I'd say something like to make the programs not mandatory but you have to follow a certain amount of them a month or something like that. But there's a lot of girls in here that would just say whatever and not go ever, at all.... Because I know if they weren't mandatory and the staff said that we didn't have to attend them, nobody would go, barely anybody goes now and it's supposed to be mandatory. I get frustrated when I go down there sometimes and there's only one or two other girls there and I'm like, I have things to do too right now, why do I have to be here making play dough, for instance, when I have more important things to do like a doctor's appointment and I have to go pay bills or whatnot, when this other girl is out just hanging out with her friends or upstairs sitting on the computer? Like it frustrates me and then when I'm down there I get all upset because I want to leave, because everybody else is gone and I get right in a cranky mood and won't talk to anybody. I just want to leave. I think that other people's attendance to the programs affects me in a big way because it's not fair that I should be expected to do something that nobody else has to do.

Most of the tenants also expressed dissatisfaction with the content of the programs. Many of the programs were considered “fluffy” or “meaningless:”

I wouldn't mind learning about stuff like that and not just going out for walks and going to picnics and swimming and stuff like that. Like I actually want to learn stuff that's useful, that I'm going to need in

this world.

I don't see what they're for, except for like mom and baby group and stuff like that, it gives time to interact with children but I don't know. I don't really see what, well actually no, now that I'm looking at it, yeah okay, I see it's probably just broadening, trying to broaden their minds on what we can do with our children, I guess. I don't know, like arts and stuff like that. Um, but for people who already do that stuff with their children, I don't, like I don't see how that helps.

Some programs were considered fun, but the tenants didn't see the larger purpose of the program, feeling that it was simply filling time:

All of them are time consuming I find. Like the, it's a waste of my time. I could be going and doing something else, something useful. I don't mean hanging out with friends, I mean I could be upstairs cleaning my apartment or I could be going to the grocery store or I could be going to see my dad in the hospital. Don't tell me I have to go to these programs when like, technically I'm not learning nothing from them because none of them are like a teaching program right now.

So we haven't done anything really big except for arts and crafts and making play dough, making baby food and stuff like that. I mean, it's all fun stuff to do but I mean, other than that...

Well, what I was explained to about the program, I was told that they were going to have programs like budgeting and life skills things but since I've been here, they've pretty much, they do things like arts and crafts with the babies and yoga, like swimming. I think it's more like physical fitness than actually like life skills stuff I guess. Because I thought that they were, what they were supposed to be doing was preparing us to, for when we are on our own, like when we don't have support staff there all the time but I guess we need to know about yoga and swimming and making play dough, like we did this morning. (laughter)

Several tenants felt that some of the programs were not relevant to them or their babies. For example, programs are occasionally targeted at a specific developmental stage, but some of the babies may have passed or not yet reached that stage:

But the thing is, with the programs, is that they have all of these things but they're making people go to them when it doesn't really

apply to them. Like there's a program that was "How to Talk so Kids Will Listen". I think it's a really great idea, like a lot of people have had problems talking to their kids, to get them to actually listen but me, my kid's only four months old. She can't communicate back with me, like she can but she can't. When she actually starts crawling and making more noises and stuff like that, I wouldn't mind going to a program like that but right now I don't want to learn about something like that.

The tenants also felt that some of the programs were at inconvenient times – interfering with either their or their child's schedule:

Like maybe put the programs closer together in like one day so that we could have a couple of days, you know, to go out and do stuff and not make them like at ten o'clock in the morning, because sometimes I don't get up and if I want to sleep in, I can't.

This Walk and Roll thing you have to do on Mondays, you have to walk just like, for an hour. It's useless, like yeah okay, we should get out and walk more but I would rather walk at night-time. I hate getting up in the morning and having to go then because like I have no energy in the morning, every single morning I feel like I can't do anything until I eat and if [my child] sleeps in, obviously I'm going to take the opportunity to sleep in and then a half an hour later we have to go out. But like, I don't know, we have to be out at ten o'clock in the morning, like half the kids in here sleep late and [my child] sleeps in between eight-thirty and nine-thirty, after going to bed at nine o'clock, so like it's just weird like that.

I don't think they should have programs at ten o'clock in the morning because me and my child do not wake up until like ten-thirty, most of the time. And it's extremely frustrating because I can't just run and get me ready, run and get my child ready and then run downstairs real quick. Like I like to be able to feed my child when he wakes up, let him watch a little bit of TV or play or whatever he wants to do kind of thing and it's like, I have to be on their schedule. Like I can't have a life of my own kind of thing and it's very frustrating.

Just, well some of them are a little too early. Like I know ten o'clock is probably not early but he doesn't go to sleep for the night until twelve and he'll sleep until eleven the next day and then I have to wake him up and I have to get up, we'll get in trouble if we don't. So, and sometimes like, yeah, I like him to sleep longer because he gets really cranky and stuff.

There was also a perception among several of the young mothers that some tenants are favoured by staff. This favouritism is demonstrated in program attendance, meaning that some of the mothers are allowed to miss a program, while others are threatened with eviction if they demonstrate similar behaviours:

The tenants aren't treated equally. And it's mostly like around the programs and stuff like that, mostly every problem in the building runs somewhere around the programs and so it's like certain tenants can miss programs. It's like oh you have a headache, oh that's okay, you can go back and sleep. Someone else has a headache or is sick or has a doctor's appointment and wants to go miss a program to do whatever, not okay, end of the road.

I was trying to tell her about how she does treat a lot of the girls differently than, and just, and [another tenant] and like how some girls can go away for vacations for two weeks at a time and that's fine, if they give notice. And I understand that but my dad is sick in the hospital and I told them I couldn't come back and they told me I had to come back or I'd be kicked out. My dad's dying, but these girls can go away on vacation and she said it was nothing like that, she denied everything.

The way that they treat some people, like some people get more slack than other people or that they'll tell us that we have to be, you know, we can't know about anything but they can know about everything. Like it's just not a fair situation.

One of the things that we brought up was how it's not fair that some of the other girls in the building don't show up to these programs and don't attend them and don't get, don't have to face any consequences for it but if I miss a program or if I have to go get blood work or a doctor's appointment or something like that, they tell me that if I leave to go do these things, I could be evicted from the building, which I don't think is fair. Like I feel that other people are being, not babied but like they get away with more than some of the other tenants.

When asked why the staff might favour some tenants over others, most of the mothers had no explanation. One mom suggested that the staff favoured tenants who “didn't cause trouble” or “didn't question staff authority:”

I really don't know. Me, I think it's because it's the girls who don't

have anything to say, who don't stick up for when they think something's wrong. Like they just keep to themselves and when something is done in the building that they don't like, they do bitch about it but they won't bitch to the people who can actually change it, they bitch to other tenants in the building or their friends, something like that. And me, I don't know, my mother always taught me that if you have a problem you deal with it. If you have a problem and you can address it properly to address it.

Interestingly, one of the staff members made reference to this perceived favouritism, suggesting that they would occasionally 'bend rules' in order to provide a particular tenant with a second chance:

So you're always trying to balance out, like the needs of the family and like respect the policies to live in the building because the reality is, if some of these moms can't live here, they're really vulnerable to losing their kids. So it's a fine line and sometimes it's a gray area, so that can cause some confusion for families. So you know, you're really working with them individually but there are times that tenants will raise those issues... So I feel like, when possible, we exhaust everything we can to try and help the moms stay here but sometimes it just doesn't work out.

Although tenants expressed a great deal of negativity concerning the programs, there were particular programs that were perceived as enjoyable. Programming that involved food and eating were warmly received, as was the Worth program (a self-esteem and relationship program):

Fun with Moms is always good, I love going on picnics with everybody. Like not more so because I get to go with her but I like to eat. I love eating.

I like the Meet and Dine. Because I like food. (laughter)

So when I moved in I actually found the programs really useful. There was one that they have like every month to, so that you don't forget it, CPR and First Aid and I actually had an incident where [my child] was choking and if I didn't have that CPR course then I don't think that I would have been able to do what I did. So I find all the programs very useful and honestly, they can help you be a better parent if you're mature enough to actually take the information and

not just sit there like, okay they want us to go, like in school. But if you're mature enough and you want to be a better parent and you want to try and have a better future, then these programs are amazing.

Well, a lot of them can make you, they literally help you if you actually are interested in the program, they help you become a better parent because you know what to expect and you know how to help out with your child. One of the programs I forgot to mention is every Thursday we have How to Talk to Kids so that They'll Listen and How to Listen to Kids so that they Talk and that program, we had like different situations, like if your kid was misbehaving or hitting another kid then they taught you how to help discipline them in the right way, not in the wrong way and in a way so that they will still like be able to communicate with you. Like even though they're still young, it's good to start early so that when they get older they can still have that great relationship with you. I find it really good.

There's a Worth program going on right now and that's for healthy relationships. I just like how you'll learn things about yourself that you didn't acknowledge before and you'll understand why you do things and why you don't and then, like, we were talking about boundaries last night and it's like healthy boundaries that you have in place and I, like we were talking about how I didn't even acknowledge it as a boundary, it was just something that you just didn't do or something like that. So they point out things and help you understand things and everybody's there without the kids, because they're in child care, so you can actually participate and like hear everybody's stories and whatnot.[second interview]

Worth Group, it's based on like healthy relationships and unhealthy relationships and we've been learning about boundaries and signs of abuse and stuff like that. And I found that really interesting because I was in an abusive relationship just recently and from doing that program, it started to make me see that, like it showed me all the signs and I let it go because I realized that it wasn't worth it and me and my daughter deserve better than that. I didn't like the program at first when it first started because everybody was talking about things that I could relate to and it really, like it upset me and bothered me to know that this was going on and I didn't have the courage to do something about it. But like a few weeks into the program I started to, I changed my opinion on it and I started to get into it more. I enjoy it now. [second interview]

Many of the tenants enjoyed various social activities and exercise programs:

Like fun programs, like scrapbooking and, actually they did do scrapbooking. That was fun. I like craft stuff. Or do like, handprints and feet, like with paint and then on paper, that was cool too.

But like, this week we're having a barbeque, last week we went to the Dartmouth Commons, like you just go somewhere fun with the kids, which is fun because you want to do something fun at least sometimes and then Sundays are breakfasts.

The fitness one, that's awesome. That's an awesome program because you often hear about young mothers, or any mother at that, saying they want their pre-baby weight, they want their pre-baby shape, they want their stomach flat, they want that. So I think that's a good program.

When asked to offer suggestions for programming that they would find meaningful and worthwhile, the tenants had several suggestions. Programs around budgeting, first aid and health issues were the most commonly cited, along with high school completion activities:

A budgeting, a debt program or something like that. Have like a debt counsellor come in. The literacy, I just did the literacy program at [NS organization], I think that would be a good thing here. Um, have like a baby reading group. Because I know babies love to read.

Like time management too, like how to budget my money and how to save money and stuff like that. Like not even just stuff about the baby, like stuff for me. Like how to, ways to relieve stress.

I haven't really learned like what, you know what I mean, like this is the best way to get out of debt, this is the best way to pay all your bills, this is the best way to do this, this is the best way to deal with a temper tantrum, this is the best thing to feed your child. Like we don't really learn that kind of stuff, we just learn how to like, how to cook things and stuff but I already really know that.

More programs on nutrition, dental, like just actual stuff that we're going to actually need to learn about kids. I want to learn about her teeth, like different sicknesses and stuff that she can catch, like signs of colds, signs of viruses, signs of different stuff like that.

I think that they should have programs here that are like say if the child gets sick or like there's a common illness throughout like the summer or like any of the seasons that kids usually get, they should have somebody like a nurse or something, that comes in and tells us

about those, so if the child gets sick or something we don't have to rush right down to the emergency.

Like if somebody over from the college came over, like if we did a tour or something at the college, and then did like up the application for, you had to finish the Adult Learning Program or whatnot. Because I tried to fill it out before and there was a lot of stuff, like I did not understand. So it would be like a great help if somebody was there, like from the college, that would be able to, like explain it more easier, so we'd be able to, yeah.

I think that they should do some sort of program where like, they already did ones about resumes and whatnot but maybe on, see I don't know because of like, they did something about jobs and like careers. Like if they had someone come in from like a college or university and then they could voluntarily ask questions about um, what they would need in high school to get to a certain career that they want, I think that would be really helpful, even for me.

I'd like for them to get like not tutors but people to come in so you can actually prepare for your GED through this program, just so, and like have all day child care so you don't have to worry about going and dropping off the baby somewhere and travelling a far distance. It would be convenient if they could set something up like that here. I know one of the staff was talking about it but nothing else was every brought up.

Well they were thinking about having schooling in the building, because like most of, all the moms didn't have their Grade 12. So they were saying, and like I was waiting on that, so I wasn't going to move and stuff like that, so I could do that there. But they kept like putting it off and putting it off and then we'd keep asking and then it just never happened, it still didn't happen.

Someone that would come in and watch the kids and we could do our schooling because I know, like a lot of people here only have their Grade 9 and don't have their Grade 12 and a lot of people want to go to school and there's problems because like, they don't have a babysitter or they don't feel comfortable bringing them to a babysitter but if they were like, babysitters were right there with us and we were doing our school at the same time, that would be very, very convenient. I think they're trying to do that but I don't know if it's working.

The tenants also suggested that they would like parenting classes that explored the various stages

of baby and toddlerhood, and classes that were more individualized to their own needs would be better received:

Like I guess, they have places like this out in Ontario for mothers and stuff like that, but from what I hear, they're nothing like this. They're so, like they're actually there for what you need. Like you get to say what programs you want to go to. Like you say, you come up to them and say, I want to learn about this and this and this and they'll help you find the programs to go and learn them and stuff like that. Like I think that's what it should be like.

Have some better parenting programs, even on the growth of your child, so it's not just if they're staying on one stage, like infants before they're crawling or crawling or walking or potty training or anything like that. Just so we could generalize all the one group, so if you have questions about one stage, they'll be able to answer them but be able to go back to whatever one you were on.

Like when their teeth should start growing, when's the proper time for them to start foods and like, crying through the night and like discipline when they get older and stuff like that.

Like ideas to make crafts and activities with your kid, especially when they're this age too, like games and stuff like that other than peek-a-boo and stuff like that, to play with your kid. Like what kind of toys could you buy for her at this age where it's going to help her develop her actual motor skills, like her fingers and her eyes and stuff like that. Like that's the kind of stuff I want to know, that's the kind of stuff I want to learn about. Like what can I do for my kid to help her develop the way she's supposed to besides just being there and comforting her, like what kind of toys are good to buy for her to help her with her touch and her sight and her hearing, stuff like that.

Like if we got, if SHYM found the funding to get like a membership for like say Mom and Tot swims. If we did that every week or something and like, or swimming lessons for, like the younger ones do the Mom and Tots swims... Like even if they have to meet in the common room and say we do finger painting, something stupid like that, like crafts with the kids, like it's something that you're excited to do.

Perhaps most important for the tenants was the belief that they were not being heard by the organization. Several of the tenants felt that they had expressed their opinions about the programs or requested specific programs but that the staff had failed to take these suggestions

seriously:

I'm constantly being threatened to be kicked out because of it, because I have mood swings or because I'm having an off day or because I say something about something that I don't agree with or I don't like, trying to voice my opinion. I just don't feel like it's heard. It's just brushed off and told to stop acting like a little girl and grow up.

Yeah and mostly I feel like I'm not allowed to be myself. Like I have to hide who I am to make sure that I don't say things that will offend other people or that somebody else will take the wrong way because nobody takes the time to actually listen about the stuff I say, to realize that I'm not just ranting and raving and bitching and bitching.

Maybe giving programs to both babies and us, that are ages that we have. Maybe ask us what we want to do, what we would like. They did that like once, I don't think they ever did it again though since.

Yeah we should have a meeting and talk to you, okay, two adults, this is how I feel and they should let us say how we feel instead of just saying, whatever, you have to obey SHYM's rules or you're out. Like we should be able to give our input.

I think that they have like a meeting once a month or once every couple of months where they decide what programs and stuff, I think they should have the moms in with it, so that everyone can decide and choose, you know, something that we'd all be interested in and stuff. I think they should have the moms there to decide or help decide or put their opinions in type thing, instead of them just picking it.

The staff are very aware of the problematic nature of some of these programs. They know that the tenants did not always want to attend programs, that they didn't necessarily find the programs helpful, and that they weren't bringing in everything that the tenants asked for. The staff are in a difficult position of negotiating several issues in regards to programming and thus attempt to find a balance between the types of programs that they want to bring in for the tenants and the type of programs the tenants would like to see. This is further complicated by the nature of SHYM's funding structure, which makes it necessary for the staff to acquire funding for individual programs. So staff must decide which program to offer, determine how to bring in

people or resources to offer programs and then obtain necessary funding. This is a complicated process, particularly as they are in the process of building their program base, which involves compromise. The tenants, largely (but not entirely) unaware of the realities of building supportive housing, see only the end result: a program that doesn't speak to their needs. Although many tenants emphasized that they felt that they were not acknowledged, the staff frequently mentioned valuing the tenants input in programming decisions:

Unfortunately, the core money we receive from the Department of Community Services and the United Way, those are our two biggest funders and that money is like core operation, that pays for, it really doesn't pay for much other than the building itself, like the operation, like heat, lights, things like that to keep the building warm and open. And the United Way, it's really just core staff, so we rely heavily on these small grants to run the individual programs, which is why we have so few.

But you know, the programs, although they're required to attend, I feel like we're able to collaborate on the content and when they're offered but bottom line is that they do have to attend. So that I think is a challenge for a lot of them and I think in the first year a lot of times we would defer decisions to the Executive Director and so that the power struggles would more often take place between the Executive Director and the moms. What we've, like we're better now in that we refer decisions to the staff team and so it's not going to one person. So it's to a unified staff.

So I think that there's resentment because they're mandated to go to programs and we, it would be really nice if our program calendar was more full and that there was more flexibility, that they could choose out of the variety of programs. Maybe it would be like that one day but it's just not right now. So there's a lot of push back from the tenants to attend programs and I don't know if it's that they like just to get engaged in that kind of power struggle or if they really don't like going to the programs because it could be, like a bit of both, I never know.

I think there could be better balance, yeah. So it seems like the moms who are here full time, our programs, we have about one a day and they're pretty short. So the morning programs are early in the day, so the rest of the day is free and the evening programs are kind of middle of the evening, so there's lots of free time. And then the moms who go

to school, they're gone all the time so there's no balance. I think that what would be better, I think in an ideal situation there would be more programs though the day but it would be part time, so you'd still have, maybe like Monday, Wednesday, Friday, from nine until three or nine until two, like kind of a chunk of time. In that you still have, you know Tuesdays and Thursdays and weekends are free, relatively unstructured, maybe we still would have evening programs but that, if there could be more daytime programs and programs that were meaningful to them, so that they're willing participants, they're engaged and they want to go and it's relevant to them and then the children would be in a really quality, like child care program so that you have child development staff with the kids for more hours during the week, so that they are getting all of those, like that high play value you know and really good interaction.

Well, I mean it's all based on, it's all based on what our more experienced staff know is going to be required knowledge for them, what's going to be just really beneficial things for them to know about and learn about and it's a mixture between that expertise that we have, thankfully, in our Executive Director and Child Development Coordinator and the Family Support Worker as well, and then we take that and combine it with the feedback that we get from the tenants and just try to come to a place where they're learning things that they want to learn about and that they're also learning things that they need to learn about.

Well we in part look at what is out there that we can access because of the funding limitations, we do look at a lot of partnerships. So that's you know, kind of, the first thing is what programs are there available that we can put on and then to kind of look at accommodation of what kind of things are the moms asking for, what kind of things are they saying that they don't want and what kind of things, regardless of either of those two, do we think are, we're seeing that are important. You know, so for example, we talked in the meeting at one point about kind of structure and routines and you know, it wasn't a sexy topic, nobody was really all that interested but at the same time, we really felt like if they had a little bit more schedule in their lives and they understood the concept, they would feel way more in control. They'd get a chance to sleep and all those kind of things and that, without that, and with, you know in a more chaotic environment, the babies aren't going to have the best kind of outcome in a way too. So sometimes it's just based on kind of what we're seeing as a theme and then trying to put something in place to respond to it.

And what moms are saying strongly they don't want, you know, like

there are programs that, we had a program How to Talk so Kids Will Listen and the group didn't, at the end of the day really, really didn't like it. So not that we would never offer it again but we would be careful to do a lot of preliminary stuff to explain what they were doing and that kind of stuff. So we try and look at, and we're not going to offer it in a big hurry because, you know, a lot of them will have taken it anyway. But to take the feedback and think how do we modify it.

There is some also recognition among the staff that the tenants' age and developmental stage might contribute to their reluctance to attend programs:

They may not have as many skills in taking care of themselves or even intellectually, they aren't as fully matured. So they can't always see the long term benefits of things, because they are, you know, seventeen and eighteen, a lot of them, so I think that's probably a bit difference and it affects how they want to participate in the programs as well. Meaning like, they don't see what the point of the programs are and also, there tends to be probably more drama between the girls and just different rumours and bickering that often happen to teenage girls, like there's probably more of that as well.

And one of the things that stood out in my mind at the time was that, at one point they were talking about, you know well when your kid gets into school, like seven or eight and how do you talk about whatever situation and from the mom's perspective, that was ridiculous. Like they don't have a seven year old and they're not developmentally, themselves, at an age where they're really, seven years is so far away that they can't even imagine that they need it. So to them, it was pointless learning, they're never going to use it. Of course they would have used it, but you know, it's something to hear that they don't have that kind of long term vision yet and how do we then try and give some of the same information that feels like it's useful to them and they can make use of it and understand it.

The staff expressed some concern that the tenants' mixed experiences with programming were creating a negative image of SHYM amongst other young mothers:

Sometimes I worry that in the community, that moms thinking about moving in here and their opinion of the place is kind of negative, I think because when moms leave they talk about the restrictive, like how restricted they felt living here. That it's almost like some of them feel like we kind of tricked them. Like oh yeah, you live on your own, have your own apartment, you live independently but not really. Like almost like we fooled them into thinking that because we have these

expectations of them that they attend programs. Even though, even if you say, yeah like attendance at programs is really important and it's required, but you can you know, it's okay to miss programs if you have a valid reason and adequate notice is given, and to remind them that it's only really one program a day and it's not in the middle of the day.

The staff recognize that encouraging tenants to attend programs is frequently a struggle. Yet it is their desire to offer more rather than less programming. The hope, on the part of the staff, is to be able to offer programming that is more fulfilling for the tenants. Ideally this would include educational programming:

I just think that the programs are really fluff. So the moms like fight us on it, they don't want to attend, they don't see that it's relevant or valuable. I think they appreciate the company that they have in staff, like because the days are largely unstructured and it can be boring to be with a young child on a daily basis, like it's just, I think that they need more stimulation than they're getting but I wish that we could offer programs that were more, you know that they thought were more relevant. But the big one is really school, that's what they want to do and if we had a school program here, we would be able to build in all those other things around it and there would be less resistance, and when they leave they would be further along in their education, hopefully have identified maybe like a career path.

And I think if I could, again like an ideal situation, I think it would be best to have a high school completion program because the moms, they really do want to return, like there's a desire to return to school, to finish school.... And so if it could be done here, it eliminates a lot of the barriers. So the physical barriers, like not having to leave the building, the moms come downstairs, if we had child care on site it eliminates having to find child care in the community and to leave and come back. So it's an easier schedule for them to maintain and manage and having those moms attend school together, it might help build a sense of community. It's something that they're doing together. I think in a lot of ways, it would, it could make some good improvements in the building, like overall morale and sense of camaraderie. Yeah.

Like they were really ready, they want to go back to school and I think that, like another, an added bonus to having a school program at SHYM is that it allows it to be more part time than it would be out in the community. I think that it's difficult for moms to return to a

standard high school because they don't fit in as well and I think it's hard too if you see people around you not using their time as well as they could and also, they have a lot of time on their hands, a lot of social time. So it's hard for them, I think it can be really difficult. So they, I think they can feel isolated. And the other, if we were to have a program at SHYM, we could tailor it more to their needs in a way that you don't get in a standard high school. So we could have supplements so that program like, acquiring certificates like First Aid, WHMIS, you know maybe a food safety sticker, so to start to put together a portfolio... We could also do some great parenting programs but in a more strategic way so it's not so, it doesn't feel so like didactic, I guess, or yeah like imposed on them in a way that it's more meaningful to them. So it could be in the form of time management or you know making the most of the time that you have with your child if your days are really full. So you know learning more about the value of play and new ways to play together.

School. Some sort of part time educational program that in fact allows them to get real credits, not GED and not job development credits. It would be lovely also to do some sort of bridging to get there but you know, what I'd really like to see is for them to get a credit, it's way more tangible than new skill or a piece of paper or whatever.

In the longer term, with a more established funding and tenant base, the hope would be to offer more individualized programming. This would involve offering more age-appropriate programs in-house, as well as finding relevant resources outside of SHYM:

Yeah. But that would have to be managed by the family support staff so that some programs would be here and then, so if a mom doesn't, for example doesn't have her child in child care, you know if she's attending our programs here, still there's a ton of downtime, that on our calendar are programs at the library or the Dartmouth Family Centre, at the Literacy Network, most of them, like it makes sense if she doesn't have child care that they would really be parent/child interactive programs, which is mostly like the library and the family centres. But she would work that out with the family support worker, so part of her program plan would be to also attend these programs. Yeah, so it's the best program for her.

5.2.4 SHYM House Rules

Along with the mandatory attendance at programs there are many rules/procedures in place at SHYM. According to the organization, these rules (which range from the amount of time tenants can spend in the building to guest visits to wearing pyjamas outside one's apartment) are designed to keep tenants safe, maintain a clean/comfortable/respectful building and support the building of healthy relationships.

Within any type of living arrangement, and especially within supportive housing structures, a balance needs to be struck between allowing tenants autonomy and independence and maintaining rules that allow for the safe and smooth functioning of the organizational system. The tenants seemed to understand that some of the rules are in place to ensure their safety and comfort, but there was also some resentment about the rules.

The tenants felt that some of the rules are arbitrary, that they don't seem to serve a particular purpose or they are directly interfering with their right to parent on their own terms:

Technically I'm not allowed to have my kid gone away from my care more than three nights a week and I understand that some of that is with Assistance and some of that's with here but that's my kid. I should be able to decide who and when my kid goes out. That should be fully my decision. I'm her guardian, I'm her parent. It shouldn't be anybody else's decision. It's the same with babysitters. I'm not allowed to have somebody come into my house and stay the night or stay for a couple of days and watch my kid while I'm not here, which I think is ridiculous because when you have a babysitter anywhere else, the babysitter comes to your house and babysits and you go out.... That's not their call, that's not their call, at least in my eyes and I don't see where they have any authority to do something like that. They're not Children's Aid, they're not the police.

Because I kind of feel like people here, like I'm living at home again. Like I've got to call and say I'm not going to be home tonight or I'm not going to be here, like I'm old enough now, I have my own daughter to like do that with, I don't need someone else being there telling me, okay you have to be home now.

Like we were supposed to be able, like now there's another rule that you're not allowed to have anyone in the building watch your kid. Well me and [another tenant] have been friends for a while, why is it a problem that she watches my child? But that's a big problem too.

Because when I smoked, like they would tell you, there's a glass window right beside the door, telling you that you couldn't leave your kid out there, like I'm watching through the glass or they were telling me about how you couldn't go downstairs in the kitchen and leave your baby monitor with you or you had to wear certain things, you had to wear certain things on, like your kid, like when you brought them down to programs and stuff. Stuff like that.

But some of the rules they have are so pathetic, like um, there's one rule, you can't wear your housecoat out of your apartment. I have a very pretty housecoat, you probably can't see it, right there on the floor (laughter). And when I wake up in the morning and I go out for my morning cigarette, I'm not going to get dressed. I put my housecoat on, like I don't smoke in my apartment, you're not allowed to smoke in your apartment. So like, I should be obligated to just jump out of bed and run outside with whatever I'm wearing, as long as I'm decent, to have a cigarette. But they made a big deal out of it. Um, you can't take your garbage to the trash can with a housecoat on or any pyjamas at that. It looks too much like a group home, they said. Or a hospital. But it's our home, we should be able to wear what we want, when we want to.

Tenants also noted that there was some inconsistency regarding these rules, which were continually changing throughout their stay:

Well they keep, there's the contract or the lease that we signed, they keep changing that. So what I signed for my lease isn't what is there now.

Like on the website, What to Expect When Living at SHYM, it does not say half the stuff that we have to live up to.

I find so far it feels like things have been changing. Just like little things have been like, oh this is this, this is that and then it's like next week, now this is this and this is that. And I'm like, so keep it all the same, have a list of rules, don't add new ones as we go along.

There was some recognition that rules occasionally changed as a result of some problems occurring within the house. However, there was also the sense that all of the tenants were being

punished for the actions of one or two tenants:

Like I said, probably just because of the way the girls acted in the past but, like I remember one girl that lived in here, that's probably the biggest reason why all the problems occurred but still, they should like, I don't know, everyone's different so she should, like at our tenant meeting we should be able to talk about all of this stuff, not you know, have a quick tenant meeting and then be out. Like these things should be addressed. Yeah, all of us suffer. Yeah. Because there's a girl here that I knew that she got kicked out and I guess, most of the problems were on her.

The staff recognized that these changing rules can be confusing for tenants, but felt that this is an inevitable process of building and growing an organization:

Well we're still new right, like we've only been open for just over a year now and so there was a bunch of rules and policies written up before we opened and then I'm sure that probably before I got here, quite a few of those were you know, moved around to be more effective and beneficial and easier and so that's really kind of, I guess how it goes. It's part of growing as an organization, it's constantly keeping up with what the immediate needs of the tenants here are and what restrictions need to be placed just in order to maintain that sort of environment, where everybody is safe and everyone is supported and everyone is supportive and that things are just kind of happening in an organized fashion and that's the same anywhere.

Overall, there is a strong sense amongst tenants and some staff that SHYM stands on the brink of becoming (or is already) a group home. Several of the tenants stated outright that they feel that SHYM resembles a group home structure, dictating who can visit, when tenants can leave and what they can do in their own apartments and with their spare time:

It just doesn't feel, it feels like we're in a group home, the only difference is we have children. But I even got treated better than this in a group home. I never had people in the group home telling me I had to do this and I had to do that. It was, if you didn't want to do this then this is what is going to happen but if you did do it then that's good. Like they were, they made us aware of our consequences and the pros and the cons but it was still our decision, we still got to learn from our mistakes, whether they were bad or not.

I just find it's like living in a group home, in your own apartment,

which really sucks but I don't know, I'm just going to live with it right now so I can go to school and it's something one of my workers said that it would be good for me, that I could try and do school and I'm never going to be home anyways.

Kind of like a group home, a lot like a group home. Yeah you get spoken to about everything.

Hmm, when I first moved in there was a lot of negative people here, so I really felt negative about it. Like it's a prison, there's no rights, you can't do anything, you can't speak your mind. You have to go to all these programs, people tell you what to do with your baby. It seemed like a pretty horrible place.

The tenants felt that they are mature enough to live on their own, that they desire that independence, and that, as mothers, they have earned the right to take care of themselves and their children on their own terms:

How can I grow up when I'm constantly having people dictate to me what to do and what not to do and this and that and this and that. And it's just, it's ridiculous in my eyes. I really think it's ridiculous, like you look at people who are older with a husband and a wife and have kids, they don't go through this stuff with their kids. Why do we have to go through this stuff with our kids? They get to make the decision if they want to go to a Lamaze class or to a cooking class or something like that. Why don't we get that option? Some of them people didn't finish high school, some of them people didn't go to college but they're still adults, working, have their own place, have a family. Why are we treated differently because we're younger?

It was just all the time, the whole time was too much drama, they expected too much. Like I wasn't, like if we go somewhere, yeah tell them I'll be home this time or I won't be home at this time or, it was just like, I was moving away from that, like I wasn't, didn't want to have my parents there. Like I'm an adult now, I don't need that.

One of the goals of SHYM is to provide young mothers with the skills necessary to live independently. These skills include cooking, cleaning and budgeting, as well as skills related to raising a baby. There are mixed feelings about SHYM's success in this matter. Some tenants believe that they are learning important lessons for independent living. Some believe that SHYM

is not successful at imparting these skills, and still others believe that there is nothing that they need to learn because lived alone before coming to SHYM:

A lot more independent and a lot, I have to rely on myself, literally now, to keep myself occupied and I'm starting to get into the routine of making sure my dishes are always washed, my laundry is always done and not letting it build up and not letting it pile on the floor. I'm trying to get in the habit here to do it and that's, being by myself has really helped. It's really helped me kind of get organized, figure out what my priorities are, what I need to do first while she's taking a nap or what I can do while she's sitting in her exersaucer.

I'm more independent, have to do things by myself and like cook my own, well I did that anyways at my Nan's but, clean and I have my own space to take care of.

No, in SHYM you live on your own, it's a very independent kind of living area. You raise your child on your own, you have your own apartment to keep clean, well I'm (laughter), but you have your own apartment, you pay your own bills and you just have, just like if you were living on your own in any other apartment. The only difference is that you have support here, you have programs to help you be a better parent and like SHYM... Yeah, no they'll make suggestions if needed but they don't tell you, okay this is how you should be, they don't do anything like that. They make suggestions only if needed.

Well in my circumstance, I already knew how to do most of those things because I was living on my own before I moved in here. So I knew how to do, well I knew how to cook before I even got pregnant. Budgeting is what I was trying to afford the other apartment, working full time and then I had to live off \$450 for me and my son for a few months.

Not exactly because they don't give us any budgeting classes. They don't teach you about like paying your bills, things like that. Like we have to do it, like all by ourselves and things like that. Like me, I learned like how to budget, so that's how I get all my stuff paid but some of the other girls have problems with it and SHYM's just like, oh well you better do this or something's going to happen. Like if you don't pay your bill, well that's going to get cut off and if your phone gets cut off, then you can't live here anymore. So they kind of like, it's not like they encourage you to pay it, it's like they like hound you to pay it because if you don't have a phone, you can't live here anymore, kind of thing. So yeah.

No because seeing that I know how it is to live on my own, like it's more stressful here, the girls that are all here that don't appreciate the fact that there's free living and they don't appreciate anything about it because most of them came out of living with their moms, came out from living with their dads and moms and just came into here and they expect free stuff, expect free housing, free rent, free water, free heat, free everything and then nothing is free when you get out on your own and then these girls are like, well I'm going to find a job that's fifteen dollars an hour and I'm going to go out and I'm going to get myself a car and I'm going to get myself a lifestyle. I'm like, do you know what comes with the car, do you know what comes with a house? You don't understand all of the fees, you know what I mean? They just don't understand the fees and whatnot that come with the lifestyle that they want because everything's always been given to them here. If they need any diapers, you go down the hall. When you live on your own, you've got to get in your car, get your child dressed, go to the store, get your child out, go in the store, buy the diapers. You don't have the money to buy the diapers? You've got to put underwear on your child, every time he pees or poops, you have to, you know what I mean, clean it up. That's just how life is.

Yeah, but no, they encourage independent living, if you need help you know where they are and it's up to you to be able to ask for help and if you can't then that's something you need to work on really. It just makes you stronger and I don't know, I'm happy.

I do and I don't. Well, not really just because this isn't, like this won't prepare us for moving out on our own but this isn't like a real apartment building, like we have tons of rules, it's just like living at home, kind of. Like we have restrictions on people coming over and all that stuff. So I don't like it too much. It's for everyone, it's individual, like for what they're doing and stuff. For me, they're helping me like get prepared financially and all that stuff but at the same time it's still like living at home. Like there's way too many rules.

A tenant who had left SHYM reflected back on what she had learned at SHYM and whether or not she had taken away important lessons about living on her own:

Yes and no because like I didn't realize, well I did realize but at the same time I didn't, how hard it was to actually do what I'm doing now and not what I was doing at SHYM. They do shelter you a lot in that place, so you don't really like get to see the struggles. Like you really don't. You'd see the struggles within that building and within your own life but actual money managing wise, you really don't see the

stress. Because they could lend you a few diapers until whenever, you could get it. If you needed a couple of scoops of formula until you needed it, you could get it, couple jars of baby food, whatever, whatever you could get. It doesn't work like that out here. If you need it, you've got to go get it yourself. (second interview)

5.2.5 Relationships at SHYM

Along with the programming, one of the most significant issues raised by the tenants had to do with their relationships within SHYM. Relationships between tenants as well as with the staff were significant sources of both comfort and conflict.

Every tenant referred to the “drama” of living in a building with a group of teenage girls. The gossip, the backstabbing, the sharing of boyfriends, conflicts which occasionally turned into bullying, the drama is a significant part of their lives:

It's nice to have friends with babies but sometimes, there's a lot of drama too. People say something, it goes around, spreads. You get to know, like what to say, what not to say and what not to do.

Weird because there was like all these girls, I don't get along with the girls personally and when I come here, I was like this is going to be hard. Because there's all these girls, there's like a bunch of girls and a bunch of babies and it's like, a house full of estrogen and it's bad.

I find that some mothers take it for granted for living here and they, you only have two years to live here and they're using the two years to just hang out, have a free place to live. Like not to the point where they're actually trying to do something while they have, like it's an advantage to them and I think that there are other people that, who deserve and actually appreciate moving in here.

I would think it's absolutely crazy that they put females, like that have babies, in one big place because most of the time, like I think if they were to make more of these kinds of buildings, I think they should make it a little bit smaller so there's not as many units because the amount of girls, if you put moms or even girls all in one big space like this one, um, I find they're very irritable and they're constantly just wanting to argue with somebody else.

There's a lot of drama though, like between the girls. Living with nine or ten other girls, it's pretty dramatic.

What I dislike is the childish acts, I'd say, that go on, like someone says that if a bunch of girls are in one room, 24/7 and you hear all the freaking gossip and the drama and the childish crap. Well my first week here I knew who was having sex with who. Like I don't need to know all that. Like I know one guy has went through four girls I guess. So, and like I've been here for two weeks. I've got the drama on everything, so it's like, it's nonsense for sitting here, we're supposed to be adults in a way. Like we took the responsibility of this, we're going to sit there and be a mother, so okay, that means you're not a child anymore, you're an adult. So let the children be children and let the adults be adults. They're having a hard time but oh well, they've got to learn.

Some tenants prefer to keep to themselves in the building, rather than participating in the drama:

I stay here, if not then I'm out with friends at the beach or something like that. I try to stay away from here as much as possible and if I am here, then I stay in my house or go on the computer, that's about it. Because the building's full of young teenage girls, there's so much drama, there's so much of our own problems, I'd just rather stay away. I have my own, I don't want to mix with other people's and get into other people's business and have arguments like I'm in high school. I just prefer to do my own thing whenever I can.

So we're going to do the morning program and then usually I try to get out of here as fast as I can because it's a lot of drama. You don't want to be just sitting out there too long, it's a lot of people out here and you're just trying to keep to yourself, clean my apartment, do my dishes, clean the house, do his bottles up, do his baby bed up, call my friends up and I'm gone. Go about our business and then come back around like nine or ten-thirty usually it's to bed.

Some of the young moms have suggested that they prefer to limit their relationships with the other tenants, referring to them as acquaintances rather than friends:

The tenants, some of them are very immature and just, I don't agree with some of the things that they do so sometimes we do not get along. So I do have a few friends in here and we get along and then there's the other ones where we don't fight or anything, we just don't talk to each other or something along that line.

I just try to keep to myself. Like there's another girl in the building, X and that's probably like the only one I hang out with anymore because everybody else is just way too much drama in the place and they try and like get you involved in their problems, which none of the moms in here need because they have babies now, they've got to take care of their own stuff before they worry about somebody else's.

I try to avoid it and mind my business. I don't really, I'm not really friends, like close friends with anybody in the building but I talk to them here and there and we get the babies together and stuff like that.

I get along with everybody but I don't actually have like a close friend. I consider them acquaintances just so that I don't get mixed up with anything. When we're in programs together, we all laugh and carry on together, when we're outside, like wherever we are, if we see each other at the bus stop we'll hang out and stuff like that but other than that, I don't see the need for me to tell them my whole life story and be best friends with them. So I do have my friends and stuff, outside of this building but in here, I would rather play it safe, like not that as enemies or anything like that but like I said, everybody's maturity levels are different and everybody sees things different ways and you can't not like stop that, it's just like the way things are. So I just, I tell everybody I stick to my cubby hole. (laughter)

The staff also noted that this drama between the tenants was a significant source of conflict within the building:

Having a young group of women, all within the same age range, many of whom who have had contact in the world before, creates sometimes interpersonal issues but we certainly anticipate it but they can be significant. I think sometimes the moms find that hard, you know, their relationships with each other.

I think the hard parts would probably be some of the interpersonal issues that can happen when eight girls of the same age all live together. And the idea that there's, you know program expectations that they resist and sometimes, particularly if there's interpersonal stuff going on, it's hard to be wanting to be in a group of girls that you're having issues with.

I think that, for me there were two issues. It was interpersonal but the interpersonal issues were, they escalated because at that time there was inadequate staffing. So I think, new staff had just come on but still it wasn't so the staff was no effective early enough. So in part because of a small staff team and um, I think that's why. And so the

interpersonal stuff escalated to the point where they couldn't continue living here anymore.

Yeah. So at that time, there had been like since July of last year there was, we were low in staff and there was like interruptions in the core staffing team, which was small to begin with and then you know, so some moms who had been living here, there was always the potential for that to happen. It's almost like the perfect storm, you always, you know these elements but a new mom moved in in the fall and it just created the right conditions for these interpersonal issues to really escalate and like I think it was really bullying, is what it was for me, so the mix would be staffing issues, the interpersonal stuff really took front stage and it was really too late to address it. Like there were two really serious incidents and it was too late to, like those moms couldn't continue living here. So I think, so it wasn't the fault of the moms in any way. I mean they have to take responsibility for their actions but I do feel like that whole scenario may have been mitigated if we'd had a more effective staff team at that time. And since then, moms have, there haven't been no moms moving out. So you know, for six months we've had a really stable tenant base, which is, that's good.

I like to think that living in a group like this, with you know, other moms in their same, somewhat circumstance that you know, it helps, that they get some support but I don't always think that's the case. I think that it's really difficult to live with other young moms, I don't always get the sense that there's real support and camaraderie. Maybe if the moms were out in the community, I would see there's some more solidarity between them but I guess I don't always see that. That's one expectation that I think I had when I first started working here, that I just abandoned.

However, some of the tenants also suggested that they have developed good friendships at SHYM. Some mothers had found themselves lonely as pregnant teenagers in their hometowns, but have found friends at SHYM who understand what they are going through:

Because none of my friends would hang out with me when I was pregnant

I can relate to them. My friend just had a kid the other day and I was saying that to her, to her mom, that's the only thing I really do like about this place is I'm not alone anymore. Like when I was pregnant, I really felt alone and I was the only person going through this and nobody knew what it was like and then I come here and all these girls are saying the exact same story as I said. I wish I had have known

that before, I wish I had decided that keeping her was the right thing to do and moved in here when I was pregnant, that way I would have gotten to know all of them sooner.

I don't have a lot of friends, just because, well I was going to the mall with like friends and hanging out and everything and then once I got pregnant I couldn't do that anymore so I wouldn't actually say they were friends, they were just kind of like hang out buddies. So, I don't really have a lot of friends, I have the couple of people here that I hang out with but it's basically just [my child].

But like I was living with a guy for two years, so it's really different but like here, it's more time with me and [my child] and it's not that I've got to spend time with him all the time, it's me and [my child] and it's just, there's always someone to talk to, so it's not like you're sitting here by yourself in a depressed mood. Like there's always people here, so my mood hasn't really been down since I've moved in here because like, there's always something to do or someone to talk to.

Some of the mothers suggested that they enjoyed being able to chat with other mothers over a cigarette outside, or getting together and watching a movie after the babies went to bed:

But [another tenant], I knew her from when my friend X lived here, so me and her have been hanging out every day, we sit here and watch movies all the time.

I put him down and then I go out and I probably socialize with either [tenant] and [tenant], those are my friends. So I'll go see them and we'll just chill for like the night. Like last night, we all went out on the picnic table and we were just talking because it was such a nice night right, we had a DVD player, just listening to music, kind of talking like moms and we just do that kind of stuff, like it's really nice to have your friends around.

I find it's great. Like, all the moms, at the end of the night when the babies are like sleeping, we all go to one of the mom's houses and we play a card game and just sit down and talk and watch a movie or whatnot. Like I think it's awesome, I think it really is.... Yeah, because before I was very anti-social, I would not go over to anybody's house, I'd stay in my house with my baby.... Just because there's a good vibe in the building now, like everybody gets along, nobody's arguing, nobody's fighting, like all that stuff and I don't feel a need to lock myself in my house. (second interview)

Although the drama is a significant source of tension in the house, the camaraderie between tenants is also an important part of their lives:

Three of us, myself and two other girls in this building all went to the same high school. That's one thing, everybody can relate in at least one way, we all have a kid. We all were raised with different backgrounds and had our own problems and lived our own lives but one thing we all can agree on is we all love our children and we're trying to do our best for them and their selves, just trying to be happy.

Like there's this girl here that she just moved in and she's 22, like she's really awesome to talk to, I know she's not going to tell on me and whatever. So I talk to her, she helps me out. She's really cool. Like she's the kind of person I can go to and talk to about everything and she's really upfront with me, yeah. If she likes something, she doesn't like something, she wants me to do something, like she's really upfront and she's not like, she doesn't play around with my mind. Like telling me, like she, you know what I mean? Like she'll listen to me and not go tell another tenant right, like she doesn't do that so I kind of appreciate that, especially in the building.

Sometimes I find it can be fun, like talking to them, like just relaxing. Like we can sit here, like I'll have a couple of girls over and stuff like that and we'll sit in here and relax and talk and stuff like that. So I like that. Support for moms, like I don't know, I think that can go good if they worked with each other. Like I'm willing to so it would be pretty cool if they, if we all could do it and stuff like that.

Equally significant as both a source of conflict and a source of comfort in tenants' lives is their relationship with staff. All of the tenants found staff members who were supportive and trustworthy:

The thing that I like about SHYM is that the workers are here, so you can talk to them about anything. So if I get to the point where I feel I'm going to have a breakdown, or even before that, I just go down and talk to [staff members], whoever's in and then, well I just feel better because I get to talk.

The workers are supportive, like I talk to them about anything, I like how, like, I was pregnant again and I had to get rid of it just because it wasn't the right time and I had to focus on my child at the time and where I was living off Income Assistance, I didn't want to put both of them through it. So it was a tough decision but I was able to make it

and they supported me and they helped me through it all and they didn't like judge me or anything. So that was really helpful. So the workers are great.

But for [staff], she has a way of brightening up your day when you're extremely down. I don't know how she does it but she'll just say something completely random or something and then you're just laughing and then she'll like give you her advice. And then with [staff], you can talk to her about, well I've been talking to her lately about school and how I'm stressed out and everything and she tells me about her own experiences and tries to, she doesn't like relate but she does it in a way so that I understand that things will be alright kind of thing. Um, with [staff], she actually took me to the appointment for the abortion and she picked me up afterwards and helped me out and made sure that I was okay and everything. So she's very supportive and she's driven me to a few doctors' appointments, me and [my child], she's very helpful and like there for you kind of thing. And [staff], well she was just like, I could, like I had a routine where me and [my child] would wake up at nine, then we'd go downstairs and see her right away and then we'd talk for like hours, just sitting there and talk and listen. It was great. And then like if something happened, like the snow globe, then I'd just run down to her and she'd know what to do. It's just like everybody had their own spot, me and [my child] liked to help out (laughter).

Like I always said, like staff is very friendly. Like they're very, they can help you with problems with parenting and what not, they have a lot of good advice. Like not for my personal problems but other problems, they have good advice. I mean, I love [staff], that was that girl with you but I can't trust her for the fact that she has to go back and tell [staff].

Yeah, there's a lot of support from the staff, they're always there, asking questions and trying to help out the best that they can.

The staff are awesome. I like the staff so far. They even help me when I'm getting ready to go on a date. (laughter) So yeah. No, I like them, yeah, they're supportive.

Yeah. Uh, the support. They helped me, like it's a good way to like begin to be on your own and they helped me with a lot of stuff, like even when I left there, I wasn't there for Christmas and they still like gave me like all the Christmas support and like the people that donated stuff. Me and [my child] got so much stuff, like unbelievable amounts. (laughter)

Staff earned trust by helping tenants with their babies or helping mothers deal with their past:

The live in is really helpful. Like he woke up with a cold chill, I think it was last week and he had a fever and he would not, he wouldn't stop crying or nothing and I didn't know what to do and I didn't want to bang on the other girls' doors because it was like three in the morning, so I went up to the live in's and we took his temperature and stuff, so that was a big help. Instead of rushing over to the hospital, because I had really bad anxiety at first where I called an ambulance four times and stuff. So this time I was like, oh calm down. I was more calm because I knew everyone was here and stuff like that.

I've made a million suggestions about programs that we could have and an example, like even when I first moved in, my child, like we first moved in so we had stuff everywhere and whatnot but he ended up choking on a piece of plastic and I was freaked out about it of course, and I told the staff, I was like okay, I didn't like how I felt, I was scared, I wasn't prepared, I don't know, like I need to know CPR and First Aid and stuff. The next week we had someone come in to do CPR and First Aid and that's where the whole, like trust came in. Like when they started listening to me and like I was able to get more comfortable with them and then I was able to tell them more about myself and they were able to understand me and it was like a process. Like you don't just move in and say, okay so help me. You have to have the trust, you need to talk and everything else, so that's why I'm happy.

I find what brought me closer to the staff is that, when my child had an asthma attack, I didn't know what to do and I just freaked and they drove me to the hospital. So I think that's one of the reasons why it brought me so much closer to staff because my child's life was at risk. It just made me think more, like appreciate, like sometimes I get really frustrated and like I just say, oh well I need a break from my child but like, it makes me think, well why am I saying them things, whatever and like it makes me appreciate my child a lot more. Like I could have lost him and all that stuff. So it makes me appreciate him a lot more, like little things, well not little things like that but things like that can happen and you don't know when, like yeah.

It was, like I said, a work in progress because when I first moved in, like I literally just got out of a shelter, I was going from house to house, it was horrible but, so when I first moved in I didn't want to accept help, I didn't want to talk to anybody, my problem's my problem. So with like having, developing the trust and everything and talking to staff, I don't know, it kind of opened my eyes. Like okay, this is what's going on and it's going to be okay, you're not going

back, it's over and done with, new chapter in your life and yeah, just like, I don't know how to explain it.

They also earned trust by helping the tenants negotiate particularly difficult conflicts with other tenants:

It's been up and down. I went through some problems here a little while ago but that's all done with now and back to being... Two of the people that lived here, I don't know, decided to victimize me or something. They called Children's Aid as a joke, they broke into my place, everything else. They were evicted because of all that stuff but that was a hard time. They made up all kinds of lies, Children's Aid had came and they realized there was absolutely nothing wrong. We explained, the staff even explained what had happened and what they were doing and everything else and they said they weren't going to come back. Yeah, the staff helped out with that a lot. They met with everyone in the building to see what was going on, because I was ready to move out. I had bags packed and everything, I was looking for places. But yeah, they had a meeting with everyone in the building and then they realized what was going on and made them leave.

Although tenants found particular staff members supportive, most of the tenants also clashed with staff at one time or another. Several of the tenants expressed some discomfort with particular staff members, while appreciating others. However, this became further complicated when the staff decided to present a new unified front to the tenants. In order to deal with conflicts head on, and avoid power struggles between staff and tenants, the staff team decided that all tenant-staff conversations would be shared with the rest of the staff team. Tenants could no longer speak to one staff member in confidence. Although the tenants clearly struggled with this because of trust issues with particular staff members, they seemed to continue to seek support from trusted staff:

Like there's some staff members that do [listen], they really do. Like [staff], she listens really well but her problem is, she'll listen and then she'll go back and tell [staff]. And sometimes it's good because it finally gives somebody, like it finally gives me a way to get [staff] to actually listen to what I'm saying but in other times it doesn't because then she's coming back and saying stuff and it feels like she's rubbing

it in my face or like she's saying it, I don't know what the word is, I don't want to say delinquent because that's not the word. I don't know.

Like they try and give us our privacy but still sometimes, they come and knock at our door, can I come in and talk to you for a minute. You just don't want to hear it some days, like especially with a one and a half year old, like some of the girls, a lot of their kids sleep more, like I'm up and on the go all day long until 8:30 right, so it's like, I don't want to talk you about my problems. If I have a problem then I'll come to you. Because I don't trust them, I don't trust them anymore. Because of privacy issues. Yeah because any staff that we tell something to have to go back to her and tell her, [staff], because she's God Almighty, she needs to know everything in this building right. I mean, you can ask all the other girls, nobody trusts anybody of the staff, like there's no trust.

Although staff recognized significant benefits in presenting this new unified front, they were also aware of the trust issues that emerged:

And I think another thing that moms struggle with is if they feel really comfortable with one or two staff members and they share information, that they become, they feel hurt and betrayed if those confidences are divulged to the rest of the staff, even though it's made clear that you know, if you tell me something, I always say pretend that everyone is like, everyone's around me, like you're in the middle of the circle and the rest of the staff team is around you and if you still want to tell me, go ahead but if you don't want everyone else to know, then just don't say it. So I think that that's probably hard for them as well.

Although many of the staff members were able to gain the trust of most of the tenants, there were still some trust issues between the tenants and staff. Staff were occasionally accused of lacking respect for the tenants' privacy and for interfering with their parenting:

Because I don't, I feel that she doesn't like me because I'm too opinionated and because I'm independent in a way that she doesn't want me to be independent. I'm the type of person who is very, very open to take suggestions, advice, stuff like that, especially when it comes to helping me be better with her. But when there's somebody telling me, you have to do this, you have to do that, that's not a doctor or like a Children's Aid officer or something like that, I don't take too well to direct orders saying I have to do this. So that's another thing,

because she likes to, I don't know, it seems like they have it stuck in their head that they have like a perfect picture of what the parenting should be and it has to be that way and no other way. When, for one, every parent has different parenting skills, there's always different ways to raise their kids.

I'm not purposely ever disrespectful towards any of them but sometimes they can be real, real rude to us and it's really not fair. Oh, [staff] telling me to give my child up. I couldn't even believe she said that to me, that I'm not ready to be a mom.

So I just, I don't care, I just tell them how it is and if I don't like it, if I don't like something, I tell them. But like [staff], she's just going to be like you're kicked out. You tell someone else, you feel that way, that's too bad. She does it to all the girls. I don't really understand. You want people to explain to you how they feel, you want people to explain something so if it's possible you can change it, but she doesn't look at it like that.

[staff] is, and I don't even know where to begin in telling you what [staff], like she's just, she's so rude and she's rude in a nice way, or she tries to be. Like there's no way she should threaten girls and other girls don't have a place to go because they didn't attend their meeting or like, she gets right in your business. Like who watches videos every single day just to pick out faults about what everyone else does?

It's just stupid stuff like that and then how extremely rude [staff] can get and how she's always in your business and wants to know everything. Like she's so nosy. And it just drives us nuts. Like she picks all the girls out for like stupid reasons and then she threatens you all the time to get kicked out and I just think that it's rude to do that.

you know, [staff] was watching me one day in the playroom... and she's like, you should talk to [staff] because your parenting skills are really bad. Like the stuff that she'll say to us, she doesn't think about it before she says it to us. It's like, the way I seen that, it made me like, I'm like what do you mean? You're telling a seventeen year old mother with a one and a half year old that she has bad parenting skills. Like what do you think I'm going to do? You know. I'm going to go get drunk tonight, try to forget about what you just said. That's how seventeen year olds do it and she's like, she's not understanding that, she's not understanding that like the high level, what she says to us, like it comes off really badly for us and the way to dealing with our problems is not always the best. So maybe she should have just

kept it to herself and be like, oh do you want some help with [staff] because of the temper tantrums?

That stuff kind of happens every day and [staff] doesn't know how to come across in a way that doesn't hurt our feelings or that doesn't kind of make us feel down and she doesn't know, she doesn't ask, like she doesn't know like that day I might have broken up with my boyfriend, I'm really down, I haven't had a shower in five days, he hasn't slept in two weeks and he's sick off his face, he won't go down and she comes up to me and, you're a liar, you're this, you're that, you know what I mean? She goes home to a quiet little household, we stay here 24/7, this is our domain and she comes in and attacks us in our domain. She doesn't understand that when she comes in and insults us like that, how we feel like more shit. Like, we already feel like we're shit because oh, our baby's father won't talk to me, oh my boyfriend thinks I'm a slut.

For example, the little boy downstairs, he was in the playroom the other day and his mother had given him a cookie and the woman, the staff that was in there took the cookie from him and told him that he couldn't have that cookie unless he got in the high chair and I didn't think that was right because his mom gave him that cookie and it should have been his mom's decision on whether he had to sit down and eat his cookie or not. Like I don't think that they should step in when it comes to things like that. Like they should be there for your support when you have questions and stuff like that, not telling you what to do and what not to do.

5.2.6 Relationships Outside of SHYM

Although relationships within SHYM with staff and other tenants were central to the lives of tenants, relationships outside of SHYM, with friends and family, also played significant roles. When asked about their support networks, all but one of the tenants suggested that they had a strong support network consisting of various family members and friends.

The most commonly cited support are the tenants' mothers. Despite the fact that most of the tenants had tumultuous relationships with their parents growing up, most of the tenants had been able to establish somewhat positive relationships with their mothers after the birth of their

baby. For some, this was a result of moving out of their family home. For others, the relationship changed because of the baby:

Well my mom has helped me through every single thing possible.

My mom. Like I know she cares about me. And I know she like understands what I'm going through because my mom was a single mom of two kids.

I'd have to say my mom because she's really the only one that, my whole family doesn't talk to me or anything and I don't talk to my father, so I'd have to say my mom is the only other one.

My mom is my like backbone.

My mom. She is one, if I need somebody to talk to, she'd let me call her up and I can talk to her.

But she [mom] does help, she does and I do appreciate it for all the help she does give. I do, even as fucked up as our relationship is sometimes.

Grandmothers were also frequently mentioned as important sources of support:

Well, the person who helps me out the most is my Nan. Just helps me out, like she's the one who babysits for me, she usually helps me out if I need something.... Well I know my Nan cares about me because she helps me out a lot. Like ever since I was born she's been like a second mother pretty much and now she's helping me with [my child], she gives me breaks sometimes and gives me everything I need.

My grandmother's so, she's like my mom, she like pays for everything for [my child] and gets me my school supplies and stuff

My grandmother is the biggest support.

Fathers were occasionally considered supportive, though their role seemed less defined than that of the mothers:

I do like talking to my dad about my problems because...[he offers advice].

But now that I'm living here, my dad helps me every day because he's heard so much good things about SHYM.

My dad is my best friend.

And my dad too, I can't forget about my dad. My dad will send me a few dollars when he can. If I tell him, look dad I'm kind of hurting right now, can you lend me \$20 or can you swing me \$20, he'll swing me the \$20 if he's got it. He buys the baby stuff. He loves the baby to death and that's cool too. I can go over there and like talk to him about a lot of stuff, like can't really talk to him, I don't really feel comfortable talking to him about boys and whatever but like plans for my future and stuff like that, like that's something that I can really, really talk to him and get really good feedback.

Though several of the tenants mentioned having boyfriends, only a few of them were considered an important source of support. Even fewer “baby daddies” were a part of the support network:

And my ex-boyfriend, we're still like really good friends and he does everything in his power that he can do for me and [my child]. It's not his real father... But [my child] calls him dad because he's always around. So he doesn't really know his real father.

My boyfriend is my crutch

I actually have a boyfriend that came into my life... and here we are a year later and he is the most amazing father ever. He loves that little girl and it must be hard for him, like knowing that that's not his real baby. Everybody tells me how much, like how great of a guy he is to step in and take care of another man's baby.

No. He [the baby's father], maybe he's seen her like a month and a half ago maybe and if he calls like every two months he thinks that he's doing his part as a father I guess. He hasn't supported her since the day she's been born so he doesn't plan on starting now.

[My child]'s father's around. He just came, like he moved down in January and we stopped talking for a bit but the last two, well today's the third day, he's been staying around and all that stuff and [my child] just loves him. Like he's so happy and it just broke my heart before because he'd see all the kids playing with their daddies and he didn't have one and then [baby's father] finally moved down and he's like excited. But yeah, that's like the best situation, like out of all of them that's the best situation, how that's changed.... I don't know. He just smartened up, he got all, like back to being normal again and then he moved down here and yeah. (second interview)

Friends, both old and new, were also an important source of support:

Well, my friend x, he was there when [my child] was born and he was the only one who called me during my whole pregnancy and asked me about it and all that stuff and he calls like a couple of times a week and asks about [my child] and comes down and stuff like that. He's making an effort, he doesn't do anything bad around him or he's really good with him and stuff like that. Calls just to talk.

A couple of friends. Just basically if I need someone to talk to, and that's basically all I really ever want. If I need to vent, they're always there to listen to me vent

But my biggest like support for me is [my friend]. That's probably my biggest supporter. Like [my friend's] like, she really is my life. Like we've done a lot, we haven't been friends for very, very long but it feels like we've been friends forever and we're really close and we tell each other pretty much everything. At least I feel that way, I hope she feels the same way.

A couple of tenants spoke to how their support networks had changed as a result of their personal growth after having a baby:

Yeah. I felt like, it wasn't a good relationship either. But when I had the baby I felt like my child does deserve to know her relatives and as much as I didn't like my sister at the time, she did deserve to see her niece. So I decided to be the bigger person and do the right thing and just squash the beef and tell her like, look, I'm not the same little kid I was back then, I've got a baby now, I'm trying to live my life, I don't have time for what you have to say or what anybody else has to say. Like I'm just doing, she said that's cool, I agree, whatever, we'll see what happens.

My sister, I haven't really had contact with her in a long time but over the last couple of months we've grown a lot closer. Because I've grown up. I did a lot of things. My sister has two kids of her own and when she had her first kid, I was still young and obnoxious and I just wanted to get in trouble and she didn't like that and I used to take her son and like get in trouble. When he was a baby I'd take him with me and she didn't like that so she kind of said, grow up, I don't want to see you until you do. So yeah, I moved in here and contacted her, told her my situation, told her I had a baby and whatever, whatever and me and her have been, she just lives down the street, she's moving though. But she comes and she visits every couple of days, she'll take us out and keep us company.

Friends and relatives demonstrated their support in a great variety of ways: by babysitting, and by providing financial support, car rides, as well as emotional support:

I can call them for anything and like, if I ever need somebody to talk to, whenever I just need to cry to somebody, if I need them to come out and help me out and whether it's with watching her or I need groceries or something like that, they're always willing to help. Well anybody in our family is willing to help but those are the two I feel most comfortable asking.

Listen mostly. Like my grandmother, I tell her everything. Like if I was to go out and do a whole bag of mushrooms, something stupid like that, I'd call my grandmother and tell her that. She'd be upset with me but I could tell her that. And like if I need, say I'm really low on money this month, she'll help me out until the next month or if I need a drive to my doctor's appointment, she'll come all the way from [town in NS] to come in and do that. Like, she's just like, she's always there if I need her and the same with [ex-boyfriend], he does the exact same thing. And he like always gets [my child] what he needs and spends time with [my child]. Sometimes if I'm like really frustrated and I just need to like either take a nap, do my own thing, [ex-boyfriend] comes over and he'll take [my child] for a couple of hours, just go out and do something with him.

A few of the tenants suggested that they received strong support when it came to their babies, but didn't always get the support they needed for themselves:

She takes the baby for me, she picks me and the baby up in the morning and she drives me to the babysitter's and then to work and she buys diapers and clothes and stuff like that, and food for the baby. She bought me formula a couple of times, diapers, medicine. Like my mom really does help, she really does. When it comes to [my child], my mom's there but sometimes when it comes to stuff that I need or that I just you know, whatever, it's not there. That's okay. Like just as long as my kid has what she needs, I can get what I need.

One tenant suggested that she did not have any support at all:

I don't have any support at all. Like, I do it all by myself. But I don't get breaks from my child at all. It's sometimes very frustrating, but I can cope with it... I don't think any of these girls in here understand what its like to be a single mom that doesn't have any help, because everybody else has help like either from their friends or from their

baby's fathers or things like that. I don't have any help with it. It's just like right out there, nobody helps me. Nobody at all. I have to do everything all on my own, it's very hard.

5.2.7 Personal Self Worth

When asked how they felt about themselves the tenants suggested that, in general, they like themselves:

Yeah, I'm pretty pleased with the person that I am.

I feel more like independent and strong living on my own. It makes you, it gives you a whole different outlook when you've done everything on your own for so long.

Actually yeah, I've been doing pretty good so I'm quite proud of myself.

I love myself. I have a very high self-esteem. I just had to break him out of my life so I can have, get my self-esteem back and feel better about myself.

I'm happy with myself. I'm proud of myself for not giving up when it would have been very easy to do so.

The most notable exception to this is their feelings about their own bodies. Most of the tenants suggested that since having a baby they had gained weight and stretch marks and that this affected their sense of self:

Some days are better than others. My body got destroyed when I had her, I've got stretch marks galore. But I definitely don't hate myself.

Before I got pregnant, I was very, very skinny, I had a flat stomach and so the only thing that I don't like about myself is just the weight.

The fact that I've gained a thousand pounds since I had my child.

I barely even eat and I still have packed on pounds and I feel

absolutely horrible about myself, like in that kind of way.

I don't like my appearance, that's for sure. I gained almost a hundred pounds when I was pregnant. Yeah my appearance pretty much, like with the abuse that I went through, like my teeth have been knocked out and broken and everything else like that and stuff.

Because I'm like a hundred pounds bigger than I was before the baby. I'm bigger than I was when I was nine months pregnant. That's not good, that's not good at all.

Just because ever since I had my child and I stopped breastfeeding, I gained a lot of weight and I've been desperately trying to lose it and it makes me feel horrible because like, the way people used to look at me is very different from the way they look at me now and I don't get the compliments I used to and all that stuff. So it hurts.

Most of the tenants felt that they were relatively healthy, except for their weight, though many of them did suggest that they don't eat properly nor do enough exercise. All of the tenants smoke:

I feel healthy. The only thing is that I smoke and I only, it sounds stupid but I only do that when I have a lot of stuff going on, but I actually have a goal that when I go back to school I'm going to quit.

Yeah, I try to eat healthy but it's really hard. Especially when we're having a cooking class out here and they're having pizza. I'm like, ohhh, I want some too.

I definitely, I feel kind of healthy. I don't eat the best. I eat a lot but it's not healthy food. So I bought an exercising ball and some weights and stuff and I'm starting to walk, get like in better shape I guess. And I quit smoking.... If I could [eat healthy], like you know, we don't get that much money being on Welfare so you get what you get.

Several of the tenants also complained of suffering from depression. Some of the mothers discussed experiencing postpartum depression, but most of them have struggled with depression for much of their lives. Several of the tenants are on anti-depressant medications:

Yeah, when I first came here I had baby blues. I definitely had depression, but I've had depression my whole life. Like ever since I was really little I've always had problems with it but it's been getting a lot easier. Like I definitely don't have the baby blues, not anymore.

I've been on anti-depressant pills because I've just been so frustrated, I feel like I can't cope and there's a time when I wasn't getting, like I didn't have any help, like I don't have any help with my child, so I was getting very frustrated with hi...and I went on anti-depressants and like I've been very snippy, like moving in here and things like that. Like I'm constantly on edge, I have extremely bad anxiety from like all the stress level in here but other than that, like I think it's fine.

I have depression and anxiety too so I'm on medication for that but when I don't take my medication I find myself slipping.

I just said, I went through this phase where I was like, you know what, drugs are not helping my problem and I didn't like how the anti-depressants, I had no feelings. Like I was just one blob and like I was not happy, not sad, not mad, like I was just a blob. I didn't have any emotion to me whatsoever and like, I couldn't even be in like a nice relationship with somebody because it was so bad. Like it was horrible. No, I just, you can't expect your life to work and be around a child when you just are blah, like no emotion at all. So I stopped taking them because they weren't really working at all.

When asked how they feel about themselves, many of the tenants expressed a personal transformation that occurred with the birth of their child. They also talked about being a mother and the pride they took in themselves for doing whatever it took to be a 'good mom'.

Tenants suggested that they have matured as a result of having a baby:

Things have changed for me in a big, big way. Like for me, myself and like my attitude wise and like fixing myself to make myself more presentable and part of the community, instead of looking like just some wild teenager. I've done actually quite a lot, I've done a lot of growing up since I got pregnant and especially since I've actually had her. And it makes me feel good to say that because, yeah.

Yeah. I'd say I'm more pleased with the person I am now than what I was before I had her.

I've given up a lot of stuff in my life, I've made a lot of sacrifices for her and I've lost a lot of friends while I was pregnant with her and I don't blame any of it on her, she's not a burden to me, it's not her fault. It's just bad timing, that's all. Because I enjoy being with her. Some days are better than others but the overall outcome will be worth it, it will be worth every second of it.

Well, being a mom definitely made me a better person and definitely gave me a lot better outlook on life because in order for her to be happy, I have to be happy. And I know when my parents were fighting or upset, I was upset and I don't want her to have that lifestyle. I don't want her to be in a hostile environment and always be angry and, like my parents were. It's for her, it's all for her. I used to be a very angry person, I used to hate life. Well some days I do but really, it's getting better, it's going to take time obviously but baby steps. I grow with her, learning things that she does.

I find that my maturity level has risen quite a bit. I find that well my mom keeps saying that she's really proud of me and that she thinks that I've changed completely into an adult now, and not just like a teenager with a baby kind of thing. Like become like a mom, like not that I wasn't a mom before but I'm more of a mom than I ever was.

I'd say that I have a more positive attitude towards things, not always like, like before I had [my child] I would say that I would have a very, not very but I had like a short temper kind of thing, I had an attitude but now... I think maturity level is like a huge part to everything that's going on right now. But yeah just like seeing different people, their circumstances and how they're dealing with it and then looking at me and [my child]. I think that that's helping me. Like not that I'm comparing myself but I just know that I'm going somewhere in life kind of thing.

But then I think about it and I'm like, there are mothers who are thirty years old and don't care about their child. They're out partying every night or out doing drugs or something, or they don't spend time with their child and here I am, eighteen, well seventeen when I had him, and I'm doing the best I can. I'm going to school and everything. So I just feel like I'm doing something right, like that people don't need to compare, like they need to like just keep their opinions to themselves kind of thing.

Well before I had someone, I always needed someone to tell me what to do and then I'd just do it. But now I'm actually making choices and stuff and doing it myself.

I was a bad kid, I never wanted to go to school, I never wanted to do anything, I just wanted to do my own thing. It's so different now. Very different, yes. Being a mom and having responsibilities and not being able to just take my last five dollars and go buy candy at the corner store. I've had twenty dollars in my bank now for a week and a half and I've got to keep it, I can't spend it because it's for milk. So it's a lot different.

While there is a sense of growth that has occurred as a result of becoming a mother, tenants continue to see themselves as teenagers, recognizing that their behaviours (particularly behaviours surrounding conflict) betray their age and developmental stage:

I'll admit, I do have a little bit of an attitude problem and... It's always like, every time me and [staff] get into it, it's always her telling me, why do I always feel like I'm fighting with a teenager, da, da, da. I am a teenager. I'm going to have attitude problems, I'm going to make mistakes, I'm going to like, I'm going to have these things. I'm seventeen years old with a four month old, with my own problems outside of that. So like obviously I'm going to have some stuff in my head, I'm going to have a little bit of attitude, I'm going to have a little bit of a hate on for certain people some days and that's normal stuff, and it just seems like the end of the world when it happens.

When I'm with the baby I'll be this mature 17 year old trying to make it on her own. When I'm not with my baby, it's when I lash out right, it's when I have my 17 year old moments, when I'm really stupid, I'm really, but I still keep myself responsible, like I won't get arrested or anything like that. I'll just say stupid, 17 year old things or I'll, you know, just argue with my boyfriend just to argue because that's what 17 year olds do but that's not, a 17 year old mother wouldn't do that. When I'm with my baby, I don't argue with him.

A few of the tenants stated that their child had “saved their life.” Before having a baby these tenants believed they were on the “wrong path”, but having a baby and being responsible for another life forced them to change their life trajectory:

I knew, well it's definitely something that opened my eyes, because I was going down the wrong path in life, because I wanted to give her up so I could go back and drink and do drugs and party with my friends, because none of my friends would hang out with me when I was pregnant and then, after I had her, it just didn't matter about all the partying and stuff like that. I figured it was time to slow down on life and smarten up, I guess.

I was doing like really bad pills, I had gotten arrested and locked up and I was living on the streets and everything else and this little man saved mommy's life. Because if I hadn't have gotten pregnant, I would have still been doing nothing, I would have ended up like

overdose or God only knows. And as soon as I got pregnant, I knew I couldn't ever do that stuff and being pregnant and stuff. Yeah.

It's awesome, like he's really like the only thing that makes me happy and he made sure, because I was on the wrong path. Like everybody was on the wrong path but I was really on the wrong path and I hadn't quite started it but I was on the wrong path and I knew I was heading down there, so I'm glad that he kind of caught me before I fell down. Like drugs, like alcohol, guns, fighting, not going to school, moving away to Toronto, stripping, whatever. You know what I mean? Like I was heading down there because I was just on the wrong path. Like I couldn't get on the right path because it wasn't cool and I wanted to be cool.

Some tenants also suggested that they would like to develop and grow more in order to provide a better life for their child:

Like it wasn't just, oh okay I got a little baby, I have my own apartment, it's the fact that you actually have to work your way up so that you can actually have a good life for your child.

I just want to be able to have my schooling because I don't want [my child] to grow up saying oh my mom was on welfare and didn't have to do anything and she was lazy. Like, I know he won't say that, I know he'll look up to me. I just want something better for him, I don't want him to think all that other stuff. I want him to look at me, like look up to me.

How to be a better person for my daughter, be the person that I want to be, just more steps to help myself be a better person.

Yeah. I'm not, there's only one path to take for him to have a good life, for me to be happy and to have a good life. Just get my education and get everything done, you know.

Although many of the tenants see this change happening as the result of becoming a mother, a few of the tenants noted that SHYM itself has contributed to their growth:

Yeah. It's just, I don't know, I just feel better. Like I'm feeling good about myself and about being a mother here, because now I'm not putting him in any bad, like he wasn't in any bad situations before but he was in a stressed out situation and just everything like that and now that we're here[SHYM] I feel like I can concentrate more on him and like be there and stuff with him.

I believe that because living with my mom, with I think all the people coming and going and stuff like that, I was extremely stressed out and overwhelmed with my life. I didn't even want to wake up in the morning and take care of my daughter because I was just a mess and now that I'm here [SHYM], 7:30, 8:00 comes and I hear her making a peep, I jump right up out of bed and I go in, grab her, give her a bottle, play with her for a little bit. Like before, it was just, I didn't even want to look at her in the morning.

It's [SHYM] made me mature more, made me realize how things should be, made me, I don't know, just like, life isn't a game, it's not just like a joy ride, it's nothing like that and I don't know. You can compare yourself, well not compare but you can look at other people and see where they're at or see what they're doing with their lives and when, I don't know, make me feel good about myself, make me feel better. When I know that I'm tired and exhausted and I just had a busy, busy day, I know that's because I went to school, I had an appointment, I did this, did that and that's why I'm tired or exhausted. I'm not tired or exhausted from going out and partying the night before. So that makes me feel happy too. Even though it's kind of depressing. (laughter) They're out partying or whatever and I'm home.

Many of the tenants also expressed pride in themselves for being “good mothers.” They demonstrated this through their connection with their babies, through meeting their babies’ needs, and by making sure that their child had everything he/she could need. Some of the tenants also suggested that they were proud of themselves for doing a better job than their own parents:

Like I have the hospitals telling me I'm a great mother, that I'm doing exactly what I'm supposed to be, like they're very surprised to see how attached I am with my child, how good my child is with me, how happy she is and stuff like that.

I think for my child, if people were to just look at him, they could tell that he's very happy. I think that if people really wanted to know how I'm doing, they could just look at [my child] and see that he's perfectly healthy, perfectly fine and I know that he's going to have a great future.

Um, [my child]. Knowing that I can't be, like my mom doesn't have, she doesn't have higher than a Grade 8. I'm way smarter than my mother, like my IQ is way higher than my mom's but I don't want [my child] to have to sit there and spell everything for me, you know what

I mean? And I want to be able to help [my child] when he's in school. My mom could never do that for me, I had to do everything on my own.

I bath my child every night, I try and feed him as much as he wants to eat, like I don't have any limits to that. I don't have him on a strict schedule for eating. Like I have him on a strict schedule for night time but like, I feel like I'm a really good mom. Like I change his diaper when it needs to be changed, like not every single time he pees but like if he pees twice or whatnot, like I feel like I'm a really, really good mom.

Like I've been, I've like, since he's been born it's been, I've been doing everything on my own, I never got any help with that. So sort of but yeah, I feel like a good mother. I think I'm a good mother and I've felt like that since he was born though because I've been doing it all on my own.

Like, she is my life so that makes me super happy, it's like, I look at my parenting so far and it's like, I'm doing such a wonderful job so that makes me happy, that makes me proud of myself.

And like the doctors [at the hospital] are really good with my daughter and they're really helpful of me and supportive of me. They tell me all the time that I'm doing a good job or think that maybe I should try this or try that and like they don't do it in a way that seems demanding or like not doing something right or, but they're really good.

I like the fact that I'm such a good mommy. Like that's my big thing, I'm an awesome mommy.

The staff also recognized the desire of tenants to be responsible and caring mothers:

I think something else I've learned about the moms since working here is that if you were to ask any of them it's really important to them that they feel like they're good moms. They like to hear that, it's really, their kids are really important to them, they like that kind of feedback and for much as I want them to do more with their kids, like the simple stuff like go to the library, sing a song, read a book, play with them, I think if you asked any of them they'd say that they're doing a much better job than what they had.

The tenants spoke to their desire to be responsible parents. They planned their future goals around building a good life for their child, and also felt that their child is their motivation for

achieving these goals:

By well basically just looking at [my child] and knowing that he's going to be okay and I know that, now that I've realized like time is short kind of thing and you want to have, like live every day to its fullest kind of thing, it's just a matter of, well not even a matter, I'm just going to finish school, I'm going to go to university, I'm going to get a career, I'm going to get off of Income Assistance and me and [my child] are going to like live happy. He's going to go to school, he's going to have a great education, just everything, like it's not perfect, life is never perfect but I'm going to make it as perfect as I can for [my child].

I want to go back to a high school because um, I know FLEX and everything like that. I just want to look good on a college application because I want to go to college and I want to do something with my life so I can put her in a good life. Not that this is bad, where I'm at right now but I'd like for her to have a similar life that I had when I was younger.

Yeah, it's a work in progress. You need to be determined, you need to have motivation and like, like it's not just a game, well I have someone depending on me now. Like I'm not going to sit back at home and watch TV all day, knowing that, like what is he going to do? Like I want him to have a good life, I don't want me to be the reason as to why he didn't get to join a sport when he was in high school. I don't want, I'm thinking of negatives now. (laughter) I want [my child] and I to have a healthy and bright and beautiful future and I am willing to go to school, I'm willing to do whatever it takes to make sure that that happens. Which is why I said [my child] keeps me motivated because he is, well when I told you, it would have been easier to give up or something like that, I can say in a sense that my child is the reason I'm still here. So he is my little angel and I hope to be his role model and when I have bad days or I have a problem where I'm freaking out, I know that once I go pick up my son from daycare and I see his smile, then I know things will be okay. So he keeps me stable.

The baby. She's my biggest motivation, she's the reason I live. And pretty much everything I do, I do it for her and that's what keeps me positive.

5.2.8 The Future

The tenants all expressed a great deal of hope about their futures. They spoke to their goals of completing their high school, attending college or university and finding stable employment:

When you move in here, you have to, one of the agreements was that you have to have a goal and they want mothers that move in to have a goal and actually accomplish something while living here, not just to live here and, I told them my goal was to finish high school and actually get off Income Assistance so I could support my child on my own. So my goal is to finish my high school, which I'm going to do and then I want to go to Mount St. Vincent University and I'm going to be, I'm going to study for a Family Support Worker and then I'm going to be downstairs working with them. (laughter) Yeah I told them to save a spot for me.

Well I'm finishing up my school, I'm studying for my GED and stuff like that, so I'm doing that. I want to apply to NSCC and take their ALP program and then after that, go into their Child and Youth Studies. So I have that to look forward to, like I want to get off of Welfare, I want to have a house, I want to have my car, I want to live in the country. I can't do that on Welfare so that's my main thing, and I want her to have the best life possible. So that gives me a lot of motivation and I'm very determined to do it and finish it.

I'm just a lot happier of a person, I don't try and put things down on myself and yeah, like I just try and keep my head up. I don't let people bring me down like I used to. When I had post partum depression, I always let everybody drag me down to the lowest and it was horrible but now, I'm really getting up there. Like I'm proud of myself that I'm trying to go back to school and I'm proud of myself for [my child] going into daycare.

A lot more hopeful than what I was. Well now I know, like I'll be in school and I'll be working towards something. So probably like a hundred times more hopeful.

The young mothers also spoke of mainstream middle class ideals such as getting married, buying a house and car, and one day having more children:

I hope that I'll be able to finish school, go to college, have my own

place, get married one day, have more kids.

I'm going to have my house with my white picket fence and everything. (laughter) I'm determined. I want to be married before I have any more children, yes. But I do, I want the family life.

Most of the tenants made a point of saying that they would not be a “statistic” - an undereducated teen mother on welfare – but would complete their education and find gainful employment:

So that's one thing that makes me happy because I do want to go back to school, I do want to get my education and I do want, I don't want to be another statistic for Nova Scotia. A single teen mother who has a kid, who is on Welfare, who will be on Welfare for the rest of her life. Because she won't go back to school, she won't do this, she won't do that, I don't want to be her. I want to be the exact opposite. I want to go to school, I want to get a good job, I only want to use Assistance until I get out of school and find a good job and save up enough money to at least get on my feet and then once I'm on my feet, get off Assistance and continue from there. I'm a little nervous about it but I mean, wouldn't everybody be, being that young and trying to do it all on your own?

Well, I need to get a job and I need to get off Welfare because I don't want to be on Welfare all of my life.

I'm just going to go back to school because I'm only eighteen, so I might as well get it done now because if I'm like thirty and forty, I want to be on Assistance for the rest of my life? No, I don't want that.

I'm not being on Assistance for the rest of my life, screw that. (laughter)

I'm very hopeful actually. I always think about it. I don't think I'm going to be another girl with like five kids, on Welfare until she can't have kids anymore and then she just gets her kids to take care of her. I would never do that. I want to have my own thing and I'm not going to waste my life. I only have one to live so why not do it right.

When asked to talk about how hopeful they are about their futures, two of the young mothers suggested that they don't like the term “hopeful” because hope does not automatically lead to success. What is necessary are “action and hard work”:

It's going to take some time but I know I'm going to, I can achieve anything that I, if I actually put forth a bit of effort, I could achieve anything. Like when I was swimming I would train, the eight times a week that I was supposed to train, when the swim meet was coming up. The same with a test at school. If you were not studying and then all of a sudden you have to write an exam, you think you're going to pass your exam? You didn't try, you weren't doing any short term goals to achieve your long term goals.

Well, hopeful, it sounds funny because anybody in here can be hopeful that they're going to have a good future but it's if they're actually going to get up off the couch and go out the door and do something about it. Like I can be as hopeful as anything and be home all day. I could skip school and be hopeful that I'm going to have a good future. I don't like the word hopeful. So if you want to have a good future then you need to be able to do that, you need to go to school, you need to get an education, you need to apply for things and whatnot. It's not just hoping things will go good. It's a long process, it's a battle, you need to do it.

Some of the young mothers noted that living at SHYM is what is allowing them to achieve their goals. Without the safe housing, the support of the staff and the programming, they would be considerably less stable and less focused:

The thing about SHYM is that when I was living at [shelter] and at the other apartment and whatnot, well not to sound drastic or anything, but survive kind of thing and now that I'm in SHYM, I can actually think about starting a future for my child and me. So I'm like, I'm happily going to school and he's going to daycare, so I'm going to achieve things in life. So SHYM has given me the opportunity to reach my goals. So I think that when I do move out, I know that I'll be better prepared for the real world.

I think that, well I know for a fact, like I said, if I, because I am living here and am able to reach my goals. If I wasn't living here I know that I'd try and reach my goals but it wouldn't happen as quick, it might take a few years. But I know that I would, like I wouldn't let that affect me, I'd be the best parent as I could anyway. So that's where the no comes from, like I don't have to live here to be a good parent to my child but living here helps me be even better where I'm trying to get in the future.

I'm hopeful now, very more, a lot more hopeful. I don't know, I guess I'm in a lot better mood here. So I'll wake up and I'll just, some days

I get really cranky but I'll wake up and just think of going back to school soon and getting that done and probably going to community college and stuff like that, and making a life for me and him. I wouldn't be able to do that if I wasn't here.

I guess I just kind of know that like being here and having all of the support and stuff, it makes me, like it makes my head think straighter and more confident that I can do it, like that I can do it pretty much.

I'm more confident about things that I can do. Like when I first moved in, I didn't ever think that I would be, like I knew that I wanted to but I didn't think I'd actually take the steps and go back to high school, I didn't think that I would even like, at that point in time, consider college or university and so now I'm in high school, I'm a Board member, I'm the ambassador of SHYM, I had a job interview yesterday, I got accepted at NSCC, I'm applying for colleges and scholarships. Like I'm getting up to where I need to be. So that's, yeah since I've moved into SHYM I've been able to focus on the future rather than the day by day survival.

When I lived with my mom, like I lived with my mom for the first six months of [my child's] life, I didn't do anything. Like I took care of the baby but financially, my mom did everything. My mom paid the bills, she bought the baby food, she bought the groceries, she bought the diapers, the toys, the chairs, the bath stuff, everything that she needed my mother paid for. So when I left there and came here, I had everything I needed and the stuff that I didn't have I got from donations and stuff here. If I would have moved out of my mom's house into my own apartment and not have come here to SHYM, I would have been lost. I wouldn't have had anything, I wouldn't have had any experience like as far as paying bills and stuff like that goes. Like, I learned a lot in the last seven months since I've been here.

5.3 TENANTS' FEELINGS ABOUT SHYM

Throughout the course of the interviews, and despite the many complaints the tenants have about programs, staff and other tenants, described above, the young mothers made many positive comments about SHYM. The tenants were by and large proud of themselves for “making a go” of being a single parent and grateful to have safe, affordable housing available to

help them do this:

Living here, I feel positive about myself because for one, I'm seventeen years old with my own place, whether the government pays for it or not. I still have my own place and that's bomb. The fact that I'm finally not stressing about where I'm going to lay my head or how my child's going to eat, or being broke, like yeah living on Assistance, it's not cool. It's really not being, waiting until the end of the month, every month to get \$200 is ridiculous, it really is.

Hmm, I think that they've got everything that they need, they've just hired new staff to come in certain times, to help out around. They've got like a beautiful backyard for the kids to play in, they've got, everybody's got their own apartment, I couldn't say that they need to improve at all but if they want to add things then go right ahead but I think it's fine the way it is.

It might sound a bit weird but I'm actually quite proud to be [living here], like before, I wasn't ashamed but I was, I'd be scared to go in public because a lot of people would sit there and be like, oh babies having babies and they'd be really rude to you.

Yeah. Like I know some of the girls here are saying they want to move out right away and they hate it here and stuff, I don't understand that. Like I really don't. I'm like grateful to be here and I'm definitely not going any time soon.

Hmm, at the time it was better than where I was living then, because I was living with my Nan and it was kind of stressful there but the moving there, I felt more independent because I had to like do my own bills, the groceries, the cleaning my own house and raising my daughter. So I felt, I guess, grown up. (laughter) Yeah.

I felt kind of privileged that I got to be in that kind of a program with the help and some of my friends had children and they had to live at home with their parents and deal with that, but I got to have my own apartment and have my own responsibilities

I think it is an amazing program, it's just they need to let tenants speak to and actually do something like, you know what I mean?

I have to appreciate the fact that I don't need to worry about paying all my bills, paying all that stuff. Like you know, all the money that I have, I can budget money really good. So I'm, it's like I have to worry about nothing anymore because I don't have to worry, oh what if something comes up with the car or something comes up with this or

blah, blah, blah? I don't have to worry about all of that.

Many of the tenants spoke to how much they appreciated having access to the resources available at SHYM, such as donations, free laundry and diapers and milk for their babies:

It's good for, like if there's something you need. Like when I was living on my own, like well when me and [ex-boyfriend] owned a house, we couldn't go upstairs and be like hey, I need something or do you think you could lend me milk until tomorrow. You're living in a house, you've got to go down the street to ask. When I was living in my apartment, there's not someone there all the time. So, but here there's like a live in, there's night staff, there's daytime staff. If you need someone to talk to when you're upset, you can go to them and right now is the hardest part in my life right now, trying to go back to school and get things organized, so you need that.

Well, I'm like, laundry is free, the only thing you have to pay for is soap. So that's a plus and that's a lot of saving money because that's three dollars a load when I was living in my old apartment and if [my child] has the flu, that is like so much more stuff that I have to wash and it's just good that it's free. And then, the fact that like, if you need anything, like they have the kitchen if you need juice or something for the next day but, and then if all the girls are here, or like if I don't have any juice, I just run up to her and be like, do you have a bottle of juice I can borrow until tomorrow, yeah no problem and we return it or whatever but it's just good that we got support like that.

I like the fact of living here, like you can get some benefits out of it, like Christmastime they have an awesome Christmastime here. Like for other holidays, like Mother's Day and things like that like it's awesome, like to stay here for them kind of things but like, just other things like the ... Because last year for Christmas, it was their first Christmas being opened and they had so much stuff, like for the kids and everything. They brought in a Santa, like Mother's Day it was, I think the Grand Opening was a couple of days before, so they ended up buying all the moms um, a pot of mums, they gave us roses and things like that, just for Mother's Day and it was really nice.

I went down the other day actually because I was running low on everything and they gave me diapers and shampoo and stuff for myself and they have a lot of donations, like if they didn't have donations then I wouldn't have like pretty much anything in here.

Well, they'll help out like, they have a thing with donations, like if you run out of something. If you do like a little chore around the building then they'll give it to you, so they'll help out with that stuff. If you're having a really bad day or are really upset or something, you can go and talk to them or like, if you just need a five minute break from your child, then they'll like watch your kid for you and stuff like that. They'll help out with getting you into school, they'll help out with all that stuff.

Christmas, they helped me out a lot for Christmas. Like the presents that they supplied to me and the baby was unbelievable. Like half of my living room was piled with presents. I was overwhelmed with the amount of presents, like I had to open. It took me like three days of opening presents, it was awesome. And I got everything I needed for my apartment to get me ready for when I leave.

I just like the support that, like I like the fact that I can go downstairs when I need help with budgeting my money or if, like if I was on my own and I needed, and I ran out of money and I needed a little bit of milk or I needed a bus ticket to pick [my child] up from daycare or if I needed anything, I can go downstairs and ask and chances are I'll get it. But on my own, I don't have that. That's one of the best things I like about living here.

Some of the tenants also talked about the invaluable support that they receive from the staff:

I like that I have a place now for me and my child and it's supportive, like if I have any questions, like before, I had gotten, Social Services was involved because I had really bad anxiety and I called the ambulance about four times, thinking that he wasn't breathing but he was. I was just really nervous and everything. And here, like if something's wrong I can ask someone and I don't have to freak out or anything. And dislikes, I don't really know. Um, just like, yeah, I don't think I really have any. I'm just happy to be here.

I think it's good for, like for me, like I moved into here and I'm kind of moved into heaven right because I got people there to just take the baby whenever I feel down, two hours and a half on my own, like I can just go clean. Like when you know what it's like not to have that two and a half hours, five hours a week, you know that you want that. It's not fun, it's really hard.

So there's a difference between a safe home and then a safe, supportive home for where I'm at now. I don't know how to explain it, like if I was over here then I'd be like, okay now I got to pay bills, I got to worry about my child and I need to figure out what I'm doing

and stuff like that. I'd be doing it alone. And then with SHYM, you've got your safe environment, I'm still paying bills but not as much as I would be over here, I've got the support systems and the information that I need to be able to further anything and like, there's two different kinds of safe environments. So with SHYM you've got a safe environment plus more, with the same environment, I could be in an apartment somewhere or living with a cousin or something.

Hmm, well there's the programs for one, that have people from everywhere coming in to talk about whatever the program's about. There is always the ears everywhere, like staff members to listen to anything, like if you've got a problem. They always have all kinds of suggestions and advice and different options for you. Just like, even when they have people to come in, those people have their suggestions and their options or papers or whatever too, so it's like this (laughter), it's like a big old tree with branches and leaves, so there's like, everywhere you go, like either way, like whatever branch you go up there's always all these different options that you have to take. (laughter)

Because if I'm here then they know that if I miss school, they're going to nag at me until I go back and like continue to follow through with my goals. Because when I moved in here my goals were to get my GED, take a course and like better myself for my child's sake. So far I've got her in daycare, I've applied at a few different schools and I've gotten everything straightened away with, like I've got my bills are paid, I get groceries and I make sure I have what I need.

During the second interviews some of the tenants suggested that the positive changes in their lives, in terms of greater stability and wellness, were the direct results of living at SHYM:

I know for a fact that if I wasn't in SHYM then I wouldn't be where I am today. I know that I would be more concerned about finding a place to live or just little things like that. Well not little but I'd be more concerned about kind of, in a way surviving every day but where I'm in SHYM and I have people to talk to and I have a place to live and the support system and whatnot, I'm able to focus on my future rather than taking it day by day.

Well, like I said before, the school, now he's in daycare. I would not have been able to get all my paperwork and stuff done if I wasn't here. They found a dentist and everything, that's going to fix all my teeth and stuff. I wouldn't have been able to pay for it if they didn't find him... it's a big thing.

Yeah, I wouldn't be able to, if I was still living with my mom on my own, I wouldn't be into any of that stuff.... I probably wouldn't know how to get those things done and I love my mom and stuff but she wasn't the best support for that kind of stuff.

Before I moved in here I was in a really crappy situation, so I felt crappy about myself and about my life and everything else. Now that I'm like in a different situation, like here, I feel a lot better. It's just a completely different environment than what I was before.

Because I have more support here than I did living with my mom and I've always got somebody telling me what I should be doing to better myself. I do when it comes to certain things but when I want my alone time with the baby or when I'm not ready to do something I find that they push, they push me to do things that I don't feel ready or comfortable to do but I always end up doing them and in the end, I see that the reason that they got me to do it was to benefit me and in the end, I realize that it did.

Yes. Yeah, without SHYM I don't know where I'd be right now. There's a lot of ups and downs living here but overall it's a really good place to be if you need it. If you don't need it and you can do it on your own then do it on your own, but if you need the support, it's here.

I feel more hopeful now because I've grown an attachment to the people, like to the staff and stuff now. So I feel more hopeful because I know that they're there for me and they're not going anywhere unless I do. Like I know the support's there for good, even if I move out, I still have them there to call and talk to if I need them. I feel more positive now, living here, than I did living with my mom because when I lived with my mom, like for the first six months, I didn't think that I was going to go anywhere. I thought that I was just going to be one of those young mothers on Welfare for the, until she's 25 or 30 or whatever and I felt that I wasn't going anywhere in life. But when I moved in here I started talking to people and everything changed. I think it's because I got away from the old pattern. Like I know if I would have stayed with my mom, I probably would have done, like I probably would have raised [my child] the same way that she raised me, which was extremely unhealthy and unsafe. I guess it was just getting away from my old habits and realizing that I have something more important in my life than what I did have.

Even tenants who did not have many positive experiences at SHYM suggested that SHYM serves a useful purpose and might be a place that can provide emotional and physical support for

other teen mothers:

It's just all in how you look at it I guess though, like to somebody who maybe isn't as outspoken as I am and is more easier to deal with rules and that kind of stuff would do good at that place. I don't know but I know from watching around too that most teenage girls who are having kids are the type of people who don't want to listen to other people's rules. So it's all about compromise and actually listening. It's really important.

The Worth program. Like it's a self-esteem booster, it gives people confidence. I have it but other people may not have it. So it could work for them and basically, probably all of the programs are helpful for other people. Like me and my child, we interact awesome, we have an awesome interaction, we have an awesome connection and so, like the baby groups and all that stuff, like it shows other people how to have better interaction and have that connection with their child. So it helps other people.

All of the tenants agreed that SHYM offers an important housing service and has the potential to be an essential resource for teen mothers:

What the building is supposed to be made for is a useful purpose because there's so many girls out there who are young and don't have any place to go, who have kids and don't feel safe and stuff like that. So the actual, what the building is supposed to be is useful but what the building actually is, isn't.

Definitely because there's a lot of teen moms out there, young moms that can't get an apartment by themselves and this really, really helps a lot of them. Because if there wasn't this place, then I don't know where half of the girls here would be, because they're not old enough to get their own apartment.

Definitely, for people that don't have nobody or can't be on Assistance because of their age, like if I wasn't nineteen I wouldn't be able to live here. So people that do have children and can't, like if their family doesn't help them or their friends can't help them, SHYM can only help them if they're there, so I think yeah it's awesome for people that need it.

When asked what needs to change at SHYM in order to achieve even more success with young mothers, the tenants noted two specific elements: programs which better reflect their

needs and having their voices better heard and respected:

I think that the staff members should be more open to actually listen, like to what the actual girls go through, what they've been through before they came in here, what they go through other than just being in the building. Like what they go through in their personal lives and stuff like that and not be so judgemental about it and just be open about it and if they say that they, we need help with the counsellor or something like that, give them the options to go find that kind of stuff.

So I felt, like a lot of the time I felt like my opinion and my voice wasn't heard.

I think they really just need to start listening to what the mothers feel. Like I think that a lot of them girls that are still in their house, are still "cat got their tongue" because they don't want anything to happen to them, the way they've seen the other girls coming in and out of the building so quickly for having something to say. So I really think that that would probably be a big thing for SHYM, is to actually sit back and listen to what these girls want, need, hurt, desire, goals, values. Like you need to know this stuff about somebody before you can try and help them. Not everybody's the same, you need to know where that person stands in their life to be able to make them progress more and I feel like they don't take the time to do that the proper way.

You could but they, everyone always said that you could tell them what you wanted or what you needed to be changed and maybe they'd have programs for that but they never really listened. Like they never, it was always in the end still their way.

Let people be more independent and I know that they need the programs and stuff, but just I don't know, find some way to make it better. Like listen to the tenants and what they want, what they need.

5.4 QUALITY OF LIFE SURVEY: TIME 1

Just as the tenants' stories reflected a tension between positive and negative, so too the scores on the WHOQOL-BREF survey reflected both strength and limitation. On a Likert scale (scale 1-5), tenants scored their *overall quality of life* as good (\underline{M} = 4.2, range 2-5), but were neutral (neither *satisfied nor dissatisfied*) about their ratings of *overall health* (\underline{M} = 3, range 1-4).

Likewise, in terms of specific profiles (scale 1-100), tenants gave positive scores to their *social* domain (personal relationships, social support, sexual activity) (\underline{M} = 69, range 31-100), and *psychological* domain (body image/appearance, negative/positive feelings, self-esteem, spirituality, thinking/memory/concentration/learning) (\underline{M} = 65, range 44-88). However, they gave mediocre ratings to their *environment* (financial resources, freedom/safety/security, home environment, opportunities for acquiring new information/skills, recreation/leisure, transport) (\underline{M} = 59, range 44-81), and less than average ratings to their *physical* domain (activities of daily living, dependence on medicinal/medical aids, energy/fatigue, mobility, pain/discomfort, sleep/rest, work capacity) (\underline{M} = 48, range 25-63). Clearly, mothers' scores were consistent with their discussion during interviews.

5.5 STAFF FEELINGS ABOUT SHYM

Staff were asked to reflect upon the successes, challenges and opportunities at SHYM. They had many comments and suggestions, seeing many successes and challenges along the way, but also feeling hopeful about the opportunities that were available.

The staff noted many successes at SHYM, from minor incidents to major accomplishments. They also spoke to why they believe SHYM is beneficial to these young mothers:

...Successes are measured in little tiny steps and huge leaps. So we've really developed more, I guess a wider profile. I feel like people know who we are and that's starting to kind of come back in terms of supports and volunteers and all that kind of stuff. I think that you know, there's a young mom who was you know, pretty much, she's been pretty much taking care of herself since she was 12 and she's you know, had a very tumultuous childhood, she's been in and out of group homes and she's had a really, really tough go of it and

there are still lots and lots of challenges ahead of her. But you know, one day I heard her in her unit singing “yo my sexy baby, oh my sexy mama”, and I felt like it was a huge success that there was, you know, connection and love and all those things that we want to see happening and it was behind closed doors, there was nobody you know, I just happened to be lucky enough to overhear it. And so those are those little steps, successes that feel actually like the really huge ones and other than that, we’ve had a couple of parents who have graduated. You know, we, I guess in honesty feel like they were encouraged to move on because they hit also an age, so their workers I think were encouraging them, and that they certainly could have benefitted by staying the full two years but that being said, you know, for at least two of them, they made huge change and growth here and their babies really you know, socialized and connected and had all of those really important supports in their first year. And so it seems like, that they’re leaving here feeling much more confident and able and that’s a success... Well as I said before, for the tenants it would definitely be seeing them be able to see the future and even in their parenting, like seeing them develop and move into a more positive, supportive role.

I think I sat there for ten minutes, like she wanted to tell me something that had gone on that day that I had asked her about, was encouraging her about. I think that was really rewarding, to see that she does, you know, want that support and does, so that was really, even though I was off and was leaving, she came over to my car and wanted to chat kind of thing. Just knowing that that support is important is kind of nice.

I think girls that have let it be, kind of let the program be a support to them have really benefitted. Just seeing the changes in the girls and hearing stories about girls who have been there and have already moved out and how well they’re doing. Like the kind of evidence that it is definitely beneficial for some people. That they are, you know, living independently and they are financially stable and they’ve either gone back to school or they’re working and their kids are developing well and you know, they’re just doing well in that sense. And that they have kind of, their life has kind of evened out a little bit and is more stable.

As I said before, just support that they need to kind of get to their normalcy, whatever that is. Like being stable, like it’s going to be different for everyone and whether that means going back to school or just being able to clean their house regularly, you know. Like I think that’s what SHYM wants to do, whatever support they need and that’s rational for them. I think it is to the best of its ability. Like as you

asked earlier about programs that could, you know that would be beneficial, I mean it could do a lot more but I think it's doing a really good job at what it is set up to do right now.

I don't know but I believe that SHYM is beneficial because these moms have babies with them and they might not otherwise. So for that reason in and of itself, without adequate housing they likely wouldn't have their children with them. So I think that, you know I believe from that perspective that it's beneficial and I think that we're able to offer moms concrete support that's beneficial, it's clearly beneficial and the other piece is that, you know, from my understanding and kind of knowledge about issues like attachment, by training moms and actually training them with kind of a tool set, the things that they can do to increase and develop attachment with babies, I believe that what we're doing is beneficial for those children because it will make a difference for them.

Successes, uh expanding the staff team has been a huge success. We've had tenants move on from SHYM, who are doing well, which I would consider an enormous success. Being able to provide programs as frequently as we do, I would also say that's a big success for us. Being able to get little things like our office renovations done, might not seem like a big thing to other people but for us it's fantastic. And also, the grants that we apply for. We do actually, you know, get them. (laughter) Not all of them but some of them and that's a huge success for us, you know, like really important things like the Halifax Assistance fund being able to provide that healthy meal for them, at the beginning of their day. That's a huge success for us to be able to do things like that. It means that they're now living with their children in other independent housing situations and that they're making it. They're making a go of it, you know, they've got their basic needs filled and they're living and hopefully using a lot of the skills that they learned here.

When asked to reflect on what the tenants might appreciate most about SHYM, the staff emphasized the emotional and financial support that tenants receive:

I think that it's nice for them to have their own sort of independent living space and I think that they appreciate a lot of the supports that we offer and you see that appreciation when they come asking for those kinds of supports and so you see things working and occasionally you see things not working and that's why we're always, constantly making changes and from month to month, deciding what kind of programs are going to be offered based on what they're asking for, their input.

So I think that, you know, and given that part, I think that they value those pieces. They certainly value the extra financial supports. And being able to get diapers or donations or those kind of things. And when we have a family support worker, I think a number of them feel really supported, without it, it really makes it very hard. And they don't get that individual time that they need so much.

I think the idea that they're actually getting support, that there's a kind of safety net and if something happens with their baby or if they just don't know what to do or if they're totally out of food, you know, there is help there and I think that's probably what they find most helpful.

When asked to reflect on the challenges of building and operating SHYM, the staff described many challenges, most of which revolved around the challenges of accruing adequate and secure funding. Having a small staff team (due to limited funding) was also a significant challenge:

Challenges, definitely financial, that's definitely a challenge. And budgeting is a challenge for the tenants and for SHYM as a whole, I think because it is a non profit. So that's hard but also for the tenants to learn that, to figure out budgeting and everything else is hard.

A challenge is funding of course, with any non-profit organization I think that's the case. And we're doing well and I think that we're doing exceptionally well at allocating the funds that we do have and making the most of them. At the same time there are always obstacles to having limited funding, there are often things that we would like to purchase for the building that we're not currently able to afford and so that's something that we're just really active about. We're really active about making sure that we're always applying for new grants and keeping our eyes and ears open for money that we can apply for to better the organization. Another challenge is staffing, which is again related to funding. We do feel at times as though we could certainly make use of a few more staff members but as funding allows, we are expanding the staff team.

I think that there's growing pains in any organization and so some of that's really just about responding to what we may not have understood when we first saw it or things that came to light that we didn't expect but for me the biggest challenge is inadequate financial resources that mostly results in inadequate staffing. And that, you

know that feels like it's a huge hindrance to us, to be able to do the real work that we think is important, which is to be able to provide the level of support all the time to the moms and we're not able to do it at really even half the time right now. So I think that that's a challenge.

Other challenges included the conflicts between the tenants, the physical limitations of the building and the emotional demands of the job:

That there's back and forth between the girls, I find that challenging, it puts up a lot of barriers. Yeah. That's definitely hard and I think it affects the program too because they're not as willing to participate because of the drama that happens between them. Yeah, and I mean at other times it works in the opposite way whereas because they do have relationships, some of them have great relationships that it encourages them to participate but I think that would just definitely be a challenge for sure.

It's just that it's the physical limitations of the building itself. So I would say the admin and shared areas are small to accommodate the building, especially if it were at full capacity. So the kitchen area, it's a galley style, so it makes it challenging to have programs there. Also, the program room is used, it's sometimes hard to use in all those different ways. So it's like a, it's a place to relax and use the computer and just to hang out but then it's also used as shared meal space. And for serious programs, so sometimes like meetings with moms and you know, outside agencies and for tenant meetings, so it's a really, it's a room that's heavily used and so it's hard for it to be arranged so that it's welcoming for all those different scenarios. It's just weird and it has those curved walls. Also, the playroom is small when all the babies are in it, it's really small. And we have, like there's an overall lack of storage, which is hard. So that would be another challenge. If it was a perfect world, I'd probably renovate so that that common, the apartment I think the moms are happy with the apartments, they're spacious enough, they don't require a ton of furnishing, so I think they're okay but if I had, if I could like pick money off the trees, I would probably renovate so that those common areas could be a bit larger.

It can be challenging, it can be a difficult place to work, so we've had a little bit of a turnover with the staff in the first year and it's not, it can be a difficult place to work because it really requires people who are fairly ambitious, able to work independently and take initiative. Those are probably the most important, and also kind of creative thinkers. So that you're able to solve problems, like we have limited resources, a small staff team, we work with a high need population

and I mean, logistically we share office spaces, we don't have enough computers for the number of staff that work here. So overtime is almost built into the position, so it's a way to manage that and I do find that it's, you have to find ways to like, to avoid burning out honestly.

One of the staff also noted that SHYM's relationship with their funders and the restrictions placed on them within this relationship is a significant challenge:

Having the kind of engagement in the community so that DCS will refer other young adults who are able to be here, is a real challenge and we've also struggled with, in that original kind of negotiating process that I told you about, one of the stipulations that DCS made was that no client here could themselves be a ward of Child Welfare or involved with Child Welfare. So it's been a really big challenge around being able to you know, the frustration of not being able to provide support to them and we get lots of calls both from workers and individuals and it feels to me like it's a huge, I don't even still understand it...

When asked what kind of opportunities they saw available at SHYM, the staff's answers touched on all aspects of SHYM's work, from assisting in the day-to-day lives of the tenants, to improving their support and services, to developing and building more extended and expanded supportive housing:

And opportunities would definitely be, as I said before, like the housing and just having a safe place and having support if you need it. Any new mom is at times overwhelmed, like even when, if they have a spouse and lots of family and friends, but if you don't have any of that then you know, definitely having that support is important.

I think that you know, opportunity is the biggest thing that comes from SHYM and it's, that's for the clients but that opportunity to be able to parent, the opportunity to have a break, to have somebody to support you, to have a little bit of rest. I also think that there's an opportunity to get themselves really settled and be able to kind of take off from here in terms of moving forward.

There's opportunities every day, like to take the feedback of our tenants and actually use it to decide what toys to buy for the play room or to decide which books to buy for our resource library. I think that those are all little opportunities that are kind of, I guess

overlooked if you take a glance at the big picture but when you're here every day, there's all kinds of little opportunities just to make a connection with them and help design the program specifically to suit their needs.

Another opportunity would be for us to have some sort of educational program on site, something where they could actually take high school credits or GED or something like that, so that you know, their need to travel is, again, reduced, making their life just that much easier and I think that it would be fantastic for us to be able to offer a program like that, that would really help them get a head start if they were returning to school or help them get the last few credits that they need. That's a really important thing today and I think that that's a definite opportunity, something that we're looking into.

I see opportunities for other organizations like ours in the area. I think that since it's doing so well here that hopefully we will see other similar organizations pop up around, not only the region but the country hopefully.

Unlike the tenants, staff had a very clear picture of what changes need to happen in order for SHYM to be more effective and to provide more focused support for the tenants. First and foremost is a more secure funding base. This funding would allow for more staffing, more defined programming and more resources in the community to assist other teen moms:

I think that more child care, the more child care we could provide here, the better. And I think that they need, I think they need more support than they're getting right now, mostly in their family. I mean like staffing support, you know that kind of individual work. We have a lot of belief and philosophy around the importance and value of group and peers and being able to talk with others that understand you from the same place but realistically, a lot of the work and the change happens in light of the relationship building and that means having you know, enough staff available to really support them doing what they're doing, in their units and that kind of stuff and we're just not able to provide enough right now. I think that a lot of the times that's a challenge for them. You know, there's all this kind of expectation yet at the same time there's a fair bit of, you know, spotty support because we don't have consistent staff.

I think one thing that would help it kind of grow is to have more relationships with community people, like people to do the sort of maintenance or you know an electrician we were actually talking

about in a meeting. So like we need, you know, someone that we can call that's not going to charge us an arm and a leg to do things.

I think that you know restructuring, again the biggest way would be to you know, create a staff team that is, there are enough staff that they can be responsive to the various needs.

We would have more staff, we would have the opportunity for moms to go to school. We would be doing some outreach and some programming for young parents in the community who may have housing but really don't have any peer support and that they could connect that way. We would be providing some support and programming to dads who want to be, or partners, who want to be involved in doing stuff. And I think that we would have a little bit more of a, like I would like to eventually see where we have an Advisory Council who does really inform the programs that we choose and has a much bigger involvement. So I guess you know, I think we base ourselves on a youth inclusion principle, I'd like to get to a point where we are more youth inclusive and I think that as we have a kind of more senior group that will help as well.

The staff also talked about some of the changes that have been implemented within the House (especially concerning intake, networking, and formalization of staff) and how such restructurings have resulted in a positive change to the program as a whole:

We recently just started, we've implemented an actual staff meeting day, so every Wednesday the staff, for a change, you know, all gets together and talks about things like this and so you know, that's a change, that's a big change. It's something that we didn't have before that we've started to have now because we saw that there was a need for it and we've found it enormously beneficial. So little things like that, little things tend to turn into big things before you even realize that it's happening, especially with an organization like this, that's growing like it is.

And so we used those grants to kind of create more formalized positions for some of the part time staff. The Board agreed that we would need to figure out a way to financially afford it, [staff] to work half time with children because it was a really important part of, I mean they are kind of a group in and of themselves and we just didn't feel like it was adequately addressed. We've been able to get some kind of office support so that my time's not spend on office stuff. And then most significantly, by changing around the structure of the live in situation and her role somewhat, we now only have one live in instead

of two. But with the second position, we took some of that money and then some of the grant money and we've hired four part time staff and they work evenings or afternoon to do programming. It provides us with, you know pretty much coverage from 8:30 in the morning to 8:30 at night, every day and that's the difference that's made, which is astronomical. Both in the moms feeling you know, more connected, there's somebody they can go and ask, the shape of the building and making their house better because people are actually keeping it tidy and working and then also, some of the big problems we had in the first year were more related to guests than they were to the moms. You know some were not but the majority of them were guests not kind of respecting the building and you know, breaking rules in general, all sorts of stuff and having the increased staff presence has removed that as a problem, so I think it makes everybody feel safer. So those have been the huge changes.

I think the biggest, like I said the two biggest changes were the screening process is a little more rigorous to, yeah to get more information about the moms, their mental health, any behavioural issues or addiction problems. And also, like in that is, like if a mom's been living on the street or it's almost like to help determine their level of involvement in their like street life or connections to their street community. Because it can be hard, like a mom when she comes here, she can sit on the fence, she could go either way kind of. So it's to help like learn information about that and then the other one is, we have a Program Committee that some Board members participate on but it's also, it's just a monthly committee meeting we have and it's comprised of uh, I think there is one Board member on it, but everybody serves on, like they work in different organizations that serve youth or families in some capacity. So we've got a representation from...it's really great just to, if we're troubleshooting different things, it's a place to get ideas and ways to manage those problems... I guess the third one would be just that the staff team as a whole is one united front. So that to try to reduce the kind of splintering or targeting by moms, like of individual staff members. So I guess those are the three, that would be it.

5.6 CHANGES OBSERVED IN SECOND INTERVIEWS

Second interviews were conducted with seven of the ten tenants who were originally interviewed. Of these, five were still at SHYM and two had left. The lag time between interviews

ranged from four to nine months ($M = 5.8$ months).

Four of the five tenants still housed at SHYM at the time of the second interview spoke highly of their experiences living at SHYM and expressed greater physical and emotional stability in their lives. Two of these tenants had been positive about SHYM during the first interview, and this positive experience continued. Two of the tenants who originally expressed negativity about SHYM viewed their situation differently with the passage of time, especially with regard to the House environment and meaningfulness of programs:

I feel like very homey, like I feel like I know a lot of the girls and since I'm the one that's been here the longest, I know how things go about and all that stuff and I feel almost happy because I never had the feeling that, like if somebody didn't know what was going on they'd ask me and now I do, because I've been here the longest and I know how everything works and all that stuff. It's very cool. To tell you the truth, I actually do like it more than like, more than when we did the last interview. A lot has changed and the girls in the building actually get along now, they're not like ripping each other's hair out of their heads. (laughter) Well, not literally but, it's a lot better than it used to be and, like the programs, some of them are more meaningful now. Like we had a Will program and we had to make up our wills, we got to do them for free and it was a really awesome program. So I'm starting to like a lot of the stuff that they're doing lately.

Several of the tenants found daycare for their babies and had started or were about to start school:

I went to school, I'm still in school. I'll be graduating in June and I got accepted at NSCC for September 2009. Yeah, my child's in daycare and yeah, just a lot of different things. I'm fighting for sole custody of my child.

She helped me get [my child] into daycare and everything else, and apply to Dartmouth Work... I'm taking a food services course and upgrading to get my GED... I know after that school is done and everything, I'm going to apply to some community colleges and stuff.

I'm starting school next week, [my child's] in daycare. I'm going to attend Dartmouth Work Activity Program until September. I'm still waiting to hear back from NSCC, the ALP (Adult Learning Program).

A couple of the young mothers suggested that they were taking full advantage of SHYM and benefitting from their services:

I plan on living here as long as possible because of, some people look at you like, oh you're just using it as like an apartment, free building, something stupid like that. But with me, I'm actually doing something with my life, I'm actually like using the program and my ability, not taking it for granted. Like I'm appreciating it, I'm doing basically what the program was made for. So I plan on staying as long as possible to get everything that I can gain from it and I know that if I was to like move out next month, I wouldn't be ready for it, I wouldn't be prepared for it. Like even though I'm doing really good right now, I know that I still have like the support systems and stuff, so it's not my time to go.

And just about like it's, I know [staff] she's bringing me a long way because she pushes and she's like, go do this, go do that and then we'll sit in her office and she'll be like, you have this, this, this and this to do and we're going to get this, this, this phone calls done and boom, and I come out of her office and I'm like, oh my goodness I feel like I accomplished like the world. (laughter) She makes me do it all. So it's pretty good. Like I do get a good, yeah this place, like they help me out like besides if you need help, like in the most needy, you know what I mean. But yeah, besides that, but other than that I feel like it's awesome being here. Yeah.

[I'll stay]until I'm done school, I know that for sure and then I'm going to figure out what I'm going to do after that. So I might stay the whole two years.

5.7 QUALITY OF LIFE SURVEY: TIME 2

Just as the tenants' stories reflected change, so too their scores on the WHOQOL-BREF survey also reflected a shift in perception (Table 2). In terms of their overall ratings (scale 1-5), tenants continued to score their *quality of life* as good (\underline{M} = 4.1, range 4-5), and were now satisfied with their *overall health* (\underline{M} = 4, range 3-5). Likewise, in terms of specific profiles (scale 1-100), tenants continued to give above average scores to their *psychological* domain

(body image/appearance, negative/positive feelings, self-esteem, spirituality, thinking/memory/concentration/learning) (\underline{M} = 69.1, range 63-88) and, marginally, improved their ratings for their *environment* (financial resources, freedom/safety/security, home environment, opportunities for acquiring new information/skills, recreation/leisure, transport) (\underline{M} = 62.5, range 56-88), and *physical* domain (activities of daily living, dependence on medicinal/medical aids, energy/fatigue, mobility, pain/discomfort, sleep/rest, work capacity) (\underline{M} = 51.2, range 38-69). At the same time, while still positive, tenants dropped their scores somewhat for the *social* domain (personal relationships, social support, sexual activity) (\underline{M} = 63, range 44-100) very much in keeping with their stories. Every tenant reported some change in scores from Time 1 to Time 2. Further, while five tenants reported at least some positive movement, only two tenants reported negative change alone. Interestingly, of the two mothers who participated in the Time 2 interview after leaving SHYM, one mother, who left voluntarily, reported improved scores in overall health and three domains (physical, psychological and social) while the other mother, who was asked to leave, reported reduced scores in the same three domains. Not known is whether the three other mothers who left SHYM and did not participate in Time 2 interviews would have reported scores similar to those reported by mothers who participated in both interviews.

Table 2**Quality of Life Responses (WHOQOL-BREF): Time 1 and Time 2 (Mean Score)**

	Time 1	Time 2
Overall Ratings (1-5)		
Quality of Life	4.2	4.1
Health	3	4
Specific Ratings (1-100)		
Psychological	65	69
Social	69	63
Environmental	59	62.5
Physical	48	51.2

5.8 STAFF SECOND INTERVIEWS

The staff who participated in second interviews also expressed more positivity and hope about SHYM and the opportunities for further growth. Although they still struggle to find adequate funding to allow SHYM to function and grow, they feel that they have made significant changes that have had a positive effect on the House's functioning:

Yeah, so there are all these different factors that have contributed to you know, where we are right now. So things that we have not been able to change, like increase in like stable core funding, that's not changed but I do feel better that, you know it's not only about funding. You know, it has to do with staffing and partnerships as well, they go a long way to improving like the daily, the day to day operations of this place. So that's been really good.

So we're much, I feel like we're much more responsive than we were,

at first we were just filling space, you know trying to make sure that they had a routine and now we're actually, there's more intention to it all.

That we recognize that the needs for young women particularly in that kind of 16 to 18 year old developmental place, are that they do need a level of kind of supportive, even parenting. And so you can't give them all the control for things, you have to be able to do a balance of providing support and providing parental expectations and that's really, yeah I think that really has changed.

I feel like we're better able to meet, I feel like we're doing a better job with it now and again, the two factors is like the additional staff, the new staff and our ability to work well together and having access to child care. It's been those two things, yeah.

The staff also found that the changes have resulted in the creation of a more positive attitude amongst the tenants. The culture at SHYM has changed as a result of the eviction of some difficult tenants, changes to staffing and more explicit outlining of expectations to new tenants:

And right now we've been kind of limiting our numbers, we're trying to organize ourselves around you know, ensuring that we have enough staffing. So we have, while we can take 12, we only have 8 and we're being very slow about taking extras because it seems like after 8 we need more staff than we actually have and we don't want to be in a position of not properly, you know, supervising. So that's a little bit different. And it's much there's a different level of buy-in in the client group now than five months ago. I think that what we found was that there were, you know for some young women, they're not ready for this level of independence and so there were, while we still haven't created a tool to you know, bar people and monitor who comes or whatever, we're quite careful about explaining what their responsibilities are now and unfortunately we had an incident in December.... So the people involved were evicted pretty quickly and it was very difficult at the time for both the staff, because we don't want to do it, and for the moms because I think it was a little bit scary but it also changed things practically immediately and I think the fact that now we have like a level of staffing, pretty much all the time and there's the recognition that some things just will not be tolerated, um, it really changed the kind of, it's not just buy in, it's really their own pride in their program, how they want it to be.

We have something called SHYM dollars now, so moms can actually get kind of paid to do extra jobs around here, to you know, participate in programs that aren't expectations. There's a couple they have to go to. And so that's created a different feel as well.

Despite their ongoing concerns with funding and staffing, the staff expressed a lot of hope for SHYM's future:

I guess I would say that we're certainly in a more hopeful place than I was but that that would all go away (laughter) if we're not able to keep the staff that we have. Like I mean, even it's more important for me to keep [staff] than it is to get money for school, for example. So I feel like, for like in our immediate, because I feel like all the stability that we have right now, it would walk out the door with them, if we're not able to find money just, or find a way to keep them. So that's like, for me that's the biggest priority and I worry, like I do, you know thinking back to last year, like oh man I was stressed. I was really stressed, I was really worried and I felt like, you know the mood was really volatile and so, it's not to say that we haven't had challenging personalities, because we certainly have but we're just so much, we're so better able to respond to that and it's pretty amazing actually. So I think that's it.

I hope that we can get to a point where we can provide, you know, the educational supports that we think are important, whether it's in-house or somewhere else, that those can happen. And I hope that we get to a place where our funding is more sustainable. And I really, you know, I guess what's changed is that I feel like when we met last time I was in a little bit more of a, I don't know how this is going to get better place, it was really, it felt like it was a challenging time and it's been followed by many challenging months and I feel very differently now because we're building on you know, successes rather than having a history of challenges and that, and in all parts. Whether it's with the tenants and their program and their buy in or it's with the staff team or it's with the Board that there's kind of this, change around. Where are we going, where do we want to get and how we're helping to get there that doesn't feel so, you know, like oh we had this whole picture and it's not turning out that way, it's so much harder than anybody realized. I'm starting to see that, ah it's actually turning out that way, it's just taking a little longer than we realized.

6. UNDERSTANDING THE DATA

6.1 ORGANIC SYSTEMS WITHIN AN INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

Organizations are most often understood as organic creatures - composed of internal apparatuses and external environments. All organizations are dependent upon their environments and embedded within larger systems of relations. As illuminated by its local history, SHYM did not remain an isolated entity. Rather, it functioned within various networks consisting of child welfare organizations, shelters, other non-government service providers, the Department of Community Services, school systems, day cares, and neighborhoods.

The life story of SHYM reflects how an organization's internal operations shift and adapt in order to fit with external environment requirements. SHYM survived tumultuous external (political and economic) landscapes as a result of strategic management that involved being flexible, adaptive and innovative. By acknowledging important evolutionary trends in the life of SHYM, this study has highlighted the organic and flexible style of supportive housing structures - transforming the way in which they look and act in order to meet external realities.

As organic systems, organizations depend on their environment for two resource types - legitimacy and power; and productive resources (Handler, 1996). Legitimacy is gained by conforming to the dominant value system in the environment. Power refers to authority and influence within an organization. Productive resources include staff, clients and money (Hasenfeld, 1992). All organizations desire autonomy and a steady flow of resources; however, most environments are characterized by resource dependency. As such, organizations adopt strategies (e.g., cooperation or competition) to manage their environments (Hasenfeld, 1992). In

the case of SHYM , managing its environment meant restructuring its delivery model and accepting a particular client base. At first, SHYM envisioned their clientele being older adolescents, high functioning and able to live independently with minimal supports. Instead, the tenants SHYM accepted were young, had minimal education, and suffered from a plethora of emotional and health issues. As such, the internal House environment became more complex than the Board had imagined.

Conformity to dominant cultural norms and belief systems becomes an essential characteristic of organizational behavior. According to Meyer and Rowan (1977, p. 340): “Organizations are driven to incorporate the practices and procedures defined by prevailing rationalized concepts of organizational work...Organizations that do so increase their legitimacy and their survival prospects...” Since social service agencies are engaged in moral work - conveying a judgment as to the moral worth of the client in terms of how he or she is treated, selected, processed and changed - they are consistently searching out moral legitimacy by adopting the dominant moral, cultural and belief symbols (Handler, 1996; Hasenfeld, 1992). The institutional perspective, which has been particularly salient in the study of human service organizations, argues that organizations mimic successful organizations in their sector through the adoption of rules, values, beliefs and cultural symbols. Strong forces of institutionalization work to reduce organizational diversity (Romanelli, 1991). In SHYM’s case, the gradual emergence of a group home environment, with more defined rules and structures, exemplifies such conformity.

Within the culture of contracting, institutionalization explains the way by which organizations accrue legitimacy and thus obtain resources. Institutional mimicry is clearly evident in the world of SHYM (and the ‘youth-in-trouble’ network in general) in terms of

bureaucratization (e.g., adopting standard accounting procedures) and professionalization (e.g., hiring fund-raisers, grant-writers, professional case managers and executive directors who are management-focused).

Organizations also develop institutional mindsets - commonly held assumptions as to how an organization should look and how its work should be performed (Handler, 1996, p. 98). For example, SHYM originally developed its identity as an independence-based, almost cooperative style living arrangement with less clinical/case management foundations. At present, the organization is beginning to frame its work in professional terms such as counseling and case management which resemble formal child welfare practices. The organization has also adopted technologies that are sanctioned by the institutional environment. For instance, SHYM has developed a plethora of programming outlets for its tenants and has restructured the House with more rules/regulations to create structure for these young mothers. In addition, it has made more advances to build collaborative networks/ventures with formal systems such as Children's Aid Society (CAS) and the Department of Community Services.

At the same time, organizations are by no means passive actors; rather, they help shape their environments. Blau and Scott (1962, p. 195) referred to organizations acting and reacting to their environments as "feedback processes." Organizations generally have the opportunity to choose various symbolic and cultural systems. According to Hasenfeld (1992, p. 11), organizations are "moral entrepreneurs" - seeking to influence the moral conception of their environments. Organizations are propelled by symbols - rituals, ceremonies, myths, stories and heroes. Hence, SHYM has constructed the way in which it is perceived by other agencies, tenants, and community members. SHYM, quite accurately, has defined itself as a unique service – a "one of a kind" offering throughout the province that is filling a significant gap in

young mother services. In doing so, the supportive housing complex has begun to redefine its niche. As such, SHYM has developed more detailed criteria for tenant intakes – highlighting the clear expectations of the house; delving more deeply into an individual’s street experiences; and investigating mental health/addiction and behavioral factors/needs.

As evidenced in this analysis, SHYM wishes to resume its original mandate of working with a less problematic (“higher functioning”) group of young mothers – those with minimal mental health, addiction and behavioral issues and street/homelessness involvement. In other words, as they become somewhat more professional and formalized (and carve out their ‘space’ within the network of organizations working with young mothers), SHYM is in a better position to ‘select’ its client base and as such would like more formal system populations – those who are currently part of Child Welfare who are deemed more mature, more settled, more stable and more inclined to long term housing. The fact that SHYM would now like to attract “formal system kids” can be viewed as a success story (i.e., this population is prevented from falling onto the streets and thus becoming homeless street kids). Nevertheless, this raises the question of who will work with these younger and less stable populations who are far more complex, traumatized and vulnerable.

The literature regarding inter-organizational relations describes the need for organizations to be seen as open systems, interacting with their environments (comprised of other organizational actors) in order to survive (Morgan, 1997). Most organizations depend upon scarce resources, and interactions between organizations pose risks and gains for all actors involved (Hasenfeld, 1992). However, it is naive to assume that the relationship between supportive housing structures and formal child welfare agencies stems simply from resource dependency, for both actors also share a common vision - protecting society’s

children/adolescents emotionally, physically, and mentally. While both systems approach their mandates in quite different ways, both are performed in the “name of the child” – and in this context, the ‘child’ refers to **both** mother and baby. Supportive housing structures and formal child welfare systems operate concurrently, with overlap in their respective clientele.

Disadvantaged youth are the linking and binding factors between systems.

Economic factors play an important role in the relationship between both systems. Government (at the provincial level) contracts with SHYM to house those in need, and provides supportive housing structures with a per diem allowance. While gaining some funds and a clientele, this arrangement has led to unequal power dynamics for SHYM. Within the ‘youth-in-trouble’ network, supportive housing provides a significant function, yet maintains a low status. Murray Milner’s (1980) concept of “symbiotic inequality” - an unequal yet necessary partnership between “rich” and “poor” systems, describes the present day partnership between supportive housing and formal child welfare organizations. Supportive housing, the smaller and less powerful of the two systems, performs essential tasks for the formal child welfare system- acting as a fresh (and cheap) resource where referrals can be placed.

While Nova Scotia’s Government follows the trend of governments across the world (moving away from direct delivery of social services), organizations like SHYM are “picking up the pieces” by housing diverse populations and providing auxiliary programs (e.g., long-term housing, education and life skills training). As the formal child welfare system is unable, for a myriad of reasons, to meet these demands, it is eager to capitalize on resources like SHYM. However, unequal power dynamics characterize this partnership, with supportive housing structures shelters giving more and gaining less. Voluntary structures (like SHYM) undoubtedly lose more of their autonomy in this dynamic, including their originally envisioned philosophy

and purpose.

SHYM's vision of a small tenant group of various ages, supported by a strong staff team and interesting and educational programming, was developed early due to the necessary negotiations with the Department of Community Services (DCS). DCS refused to support SHYM's plan for a six to eight tenants program and instead demanded that the number be increased to twelve. At the same time, DCS offered SHYM a per diem rate that was considerably smaller than the financing received by similar youth organizations. These compromises meant a larger client base and fewer funds to serve those clients. Fewer funds mean fewer staff, fewer resources and less programming. Since support and programs are essential to supportive housing, the Board and staff have had to make important compromises in order to make ends meet. The staff regularly applies for additional funding in order to offer programming to the tenants. However, this means that important programming time is spent in the acquisition of additional funds. It also means that SHYM is unable to offer the variety and quality of programming that it would like to offer. This has led to a further difficulty- conflict with tenants over program participation.

The staff and Board also made the decision to change the staffing structure in order to better accommodate the needs of the more challenging tenants and to address the issue of a staff team that was insufficient with regard to its size and the types of support it was able to provide. Perhaps most significantly, the Board has made the decision to limit the number of families in SHYM. Although SHYM is built for twelve families, they have never had more than eight families at any one time. This number is optimal for the size and expertise of the staff team. However, as SHYM relies on the rent money collected from tenants, having fewer tenants means less income. And so, once again, SHYM finds itself operating on an insufficient budget. As one

staff member pointed out, this means that SHYM is “always struggling to keep its head above water” and is never able to pursue some of its bigger dreams, such as in-house education. A small staff team and an insecure funding base means that SHYM is always compromised - operating on a day-to-day survival basis without having the opportunity to commit funds or people-power to building the programs and significant services originally envisioned.

SHYM is thus a product of its changing environments, shifting and transforming internal and external operations in order to adapt to its settings and to provide the best services to those most in need. From an organizational point of view, SHYM is beginning to take measures to control who it accepts as tenants, with its eyes on young people in the formal system— those in child welfare. This shift in focus has everything to do with organizational survival.

Social service practice consists of both the passion of its front-line army and the rationality of the structures which house such work. In order to understand the mechanisms of social service delivery, the ambiguity and complexity of these elements need to be explored. The case study of SHYM acts as a microcosm for the struggles of human service organizations in general. It is important for those entering the field to be aware of such dynamics - perhaps then mitigating the ever-increasing levels of frustration, burnout, and value dissonance amongst social service practitioners. It is also important to be aware that there are serious limits to the resources which human service organizations that assist those parents and children most vulnerable and in need are able to access.

7. CONCLUSION

What do the findings tell us about the core questions of the study? How did Supportive Housing for Young Mothers (SHYM) evolve into its current housing form and what supports are needed for sustainability? How are young mothers experiencing SHYM and what are its strengths and limitations? How do the young mothers at SHYM understand themselves in relation to supportive housing?

Evolution of SHYM: Supportive Housing for Young Mothers was designed to achieve three goals: provide a **safe and affordable place to live** for the present; **develop capacity** (skills, education, awareness, confidence, resources, and social support networks); and **promote overall health, safety, and stability** for each young family. In many ways, SHYM's story is the story of most small, non-government and alternative organizational structures, attempting to survive within very turbulent economic and political environments. SHYM's evolution is characterized by its growing pains. Its genesis was built by a group of very committed and passionate community members who identified, quite accurately, a glaring gap in long term housing for young mothers. This housing structure would offer a safe and secure place for both mother and baby to live, and would also help them attain their educational or employment goals, provide basic life skills, and assist in building parenting proficiency. Such supports would be designed to provide young women and their babies with a chance to break free from poverty and marginalization.

Eight years later, this dream has become a reality; but it is not quite the reality that the founders of SHYM imagined. The Board's visions have been challenged along the way by the stresses and strains connected to mandate, funding, programming and staffing. As an organic

system, SHYM has had to reinvent itself and to compromise on some of its ideals in order to adapt to internal and external realities. SHYM adjusted some of its internal and external workings in order to access funding and build relations with players from the formal system. As such, SHYM continues to struggle to build its lasting niche within the social service environment. Yet it has succeeded in delivering a unique service in a thoughtful and meaningful manner. Regardless of compromises and strains, the organization has consistently resisted and fought to maintain its vision and mandate.

The SHYM Experience: SHYM served as a short term reprieve for young mothers who found themselves homeless in response to family trauma (e.g., family violence, relational conflicts with parents) and poverty. For some mothers, their pregnancy served as the trigger point to homelessness, while for others, it was merely an added stressor. SHYM became the preferred housing alternative for these mothers (as opposed to a group home), given that they were under age (19 years) and, therefore, had to be in supervised accommodation.

Tenant voices consistently emphasized that, despite the day to day living struggles, SHYM indeed provided committed supports to both mothers and their children. With few exceptions, tenants and staff alike voiced appreciation for the housing design and its amenities, and all agreed that the accommodation was safe and secure. Indeed, it is important to note that SHYM was able to provide safe, secure housing despite the fact that a number of the residents carried far greater needs than SHYM was designed, or resourced, to accommodate. However, it became increasingly clear over time that staff faced a constant challenge to find adequate funds for the unanticipated needs. In order not to do disservice to its intended clientele, SHYM then reverted to its original mandate. Those with more challenging needs than SHYM was designed to address had to leave.

Mothers and staff agreed that SHYM was making progress in its ability to **develop capacity** (skills, education, awareness, confidence, resources, and social support networks), and **promote overall health, safety, and stability** for each young family. Yet both staff and tenant interviews contained diverse opinions about the best ways for supporting adolescent development - fostering healthy independence, responsible behavior, and social inclusion (Meadows-Oliver, et al., 2007; Stiles, 2008). Mothers wanted the freedom to choose (e.g., whether to take programs), and complained that they were given little independence or respect for their opinions. Further, they complained that SHYM felt like a group home and that some house rules, for example those regarding visitors and use of babysitters, kept them socially isolated. Indeed, while many mothers reported high levels of conflict with their own parents, many also identified a parent (usually their mother) as a source of support.

In turn, staff worried that tenants would not attend programming if it were optional, and that mothers lacked the critical skills needed to live independently and to choose friends and babysitters wisely. As a result, staff established a set of living conditions (rules, policies) and a system of rewards (SHYM dollars) and consequences (extra duties, eviction) to promote compliance. For some mothers, particularly those with higher needs, the structure proved unmanageable. However, other mothers agreed, particularly after being at SHYM for awhile, that some programs (e.g., *How to Talk so Kids will Listen* - a step-by-step approach to improving parent-child relationships, appropriate for kids of all ages) and skill-building sessions (e.g., establishing daily routines) really did have relevance.

Indeed, as time progressed, most young mothers came to better understand and appreciate the workings of SHYM and its philosophy. They came to recognize the importance of particular program activities and the care and support of staff. At the same time, staff agreed with tenants

that other relevant on-site programs (e.g., budgeting, health, parenting, resume writing) and linkages with formal schooling (high-school upgrade) were critical next step priorities for SHYM. In addition, while the system of reward and consequences remained in place, staff and tenants alike recounted a number of individual stories in which staff supported mothers in building problem-solving skills around life decisions using alternate mentoring/coaching and collaborative strengths-base approaches. Mothers appreciated that such approaches assisted them in developing a sense of trust and purpose which, in turn, enabled them to move them beyond basic survival objectives.

The findings are consistent with those of the few other studies on the housing needs of teen mothers. The research reinforces the finding that homeless lone parent families often have reduced options in finding accommodations and, therefore, an increased likelihood of social exclusion (Martin et al., 2005). Such exclusion, many argue (Furstenberg et al. 1987, Dubow & Luster 1990, Horwitz et al. 1991, Hanna 2001, McLeod, Baker, & Black, 2006, Yardley, 2008), has negative implications for the health of young mothers and their children (Birch, 1998, Benson, 2004). Likewise, as others have found (Pawson, & Kintrea, 2002), most mothers in our research felt a great need to remain close to their original family/friend support networks, even if the relationships involved were conflicted. Further, their family/friend social network seemed to play a different role than that played by peers living at SHYM. Given that social inclusion is one of the most important factors influencing wellbeing after becoming pregnant (McVeigh & Smith 2000), finding best ways to foster healthy connections among these networks is another challenge for SHYM to address.

The findings also underscore the influence of the adolescent developmental stage on the views and behaviour of both tenants and staff. They highlight the need to find positive ways to

establish behavioural expectations while respecting the need for youth *voice* and *choice* (Martin et al., 2005). Like other studies (Cox, et al.; Graham & McDermott, 2006), mothers in this study were very appreciative of the staff's use of one-on-one coaching, as opposed to regimented behaviour modification approaches around critical life decisions. In addition, like other studies (Meadows-Oliver, et al., 2007), both mothers and staff underscored the need for on-site schooling and a range of relevant life-skills programs.

SHYM's evolution has involved the development of a firmer identity and a more sustainable presence. As other ventures have found (Hinton, & Gorton, 2001), both mothers and staff agreed that no one housing model fits all needs – SHYM was not equipped to support mothers who were highly challenged. However, for most of the young mothers, their evolution has entailed building a sense of community and a more empowered sense of self. In general, all tenants felt better off at SHYM – they felt safe, healthy and cared for, despite the normal adolescent dislikes of rules/regulations (which challenge independence) and internal house relationship dramas at play. Most tenants were able to sort through a number of the typical developmental tasks of adolescence within a safe and supportive, yet structured, environment that served as a proxy for the family unit. Like most youth, despite their initial complaints, the majority of tenants eventually came to appreciate that SHYM's supportive structures had facilitated an improved quality of life. Similarly, while staff felt a need to create a system of rewards and punishment to regulate behaviour, it is interesting to note as others have (Tebes, et al., 2007) that mothers felt more confident about overcoming life challenges when staff engaged with them using strengths-based, mentoring techniques that built interpersonal negotiation skills (Black, et al., 2006).

In sum, the life story of SHYM reflects the organization's shift and adaptation in its

internal operations in order to fit with external environment requirements. SHYM has survived tumultuous external landscapes as a result of strategic management that involved being flexible, adaptive and innovative. By acknowledging important evolutionary trends in the life of SHYM, this study highlights the organic and flexible style of supportive housing structures - transforming the way in which they look and act in order to meet internal and external realities. While SHYM's evolution has involved the development of a clear mandate and a sustainable presence, the young mothers' evolution has entailed building a sense of community and, for most, a more empowered sense of self.

Like most housing organizations, SHYM's journey has not been straightforward or smooth. It has involved a number of significant challenges for mothers and staff alike - each holding legitimate, but often conflicting, perspectives – about what works best, for whom, and under what conditions. What was so encouraging about this research was that staff and mothers alike did not remain fixed in their views but, instead with time and reflection, were open to a shift in thinking. Such behaviour augurs well for the next phase in SHYM's journey.

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APPENDIX A
Recruitment Poster

SHYM TENANTS: WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU

**A RESEARCH TEAM DIRECTED BY
JEFF KARABANOW, PhD
OF THE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK
JEAN HUGHES, PhD
OF THE SCHOOL OF NURSING
AT DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY**

**IS STUDYING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SHYM
AS A HOUSING SOLUTION FOR YOUNG MOTHERS**

**WE WOULD LIKE TO INTERVIEW YOU TWICE ABOUT
YOUR EXPERIENCES WITH LIVING AT SHYM.**

**THE INTERVIEWS WILL TAKE APPROXIMATELY
45-60 MINUTES.**

**YOU WILL BE PAID \$20.00 FOR YOUR TIME FOR EACH INTERVIEW.
CHILDCARE ARRANGEMENTS WILL BE PROVIDED.**

**WE WILL BE HAVING AN INFORMATION SESSION ABOUT THIS
PROJECT AT YOUR TENANT MEETING ON [INSERT DATE AND
TIME].**

IF YOU ARE INTERESTED, PLEASE JOIN US!

Funding for the project is provided by



APPENDIX B

Tenants Semi-structured Interview Guide (First Interview)

Interview Guide for Tenants

Building Community: A Case Study of Supportive Housing for Young Mothers (SHYM)

Interview preamble:

Thank-you for agreeing to meet with me today to talk about your experiences with SHYM. I'm going to ask you a few questions about your past housing experiences as well as questions about your experiences at SHYM. We are interested in understanding how you see SHYM.

Do you have any questions about any of this? We hope that, in no way, you feel coerced (forced) to be here. Are you ready to start the interview? Okay, if you are ready, I will turn on the tape recorder...to start, I'd like to ask you a few questions about yourself...

Personal Information

How old are you?

How long have you been at SHYM?

How many children do you have? How old are they?

Where were you living right before you came to SHYM?

Past Housing

Can you describe how you became homeless?

What factors pushed you out of your home/to street?

Can you describe some of your other housing experiences, prior to moving in here?

What are some of the challenges you have faced in finding affordable and safe housing?

Current Housing

Can you explain the process of getting into SHYM?

How did you found out about SHYM?

How did you actually get connected to SHYM?

What happened after you applied?

How did you feel when you first came to SHYM? How do you feel now?

Can you walk me through a typical day – from the moment you wake up until you go to bed?

If every day is different, tell me about yesterday.

Can you tell me a little bit about your experience living in this setting?

What do you like about it? What do you not like about it?

What do you like about your living space?

Can you tell me about what it is like living with other tenants?

How long do you see yourself living here? How will you know when you are ready to leave?

Do you think you can voice your ideas/concerns/opinions about the organisation? How so?

Other than your housing, how have things changed for you since moving into this house? In your view, what made the difference?

Do you think you are able to make decisions about your own life at SHYM? What helps or hinders? If things should change, can you propose solutions?

Can you tell me about your experience living in this neighbourhood?

Do you think there are supports in your neighbourhood? If so, what are they and do you use them?

Neighbourhood services – are you in walking distance to shops, transit, parks, schools, etc?

Supports and Services

Before coming to live at SHYM did you have expectations for what kind of support would be available to you?

If so, has SHYM lived up to these expectations? Explain.
What kind of supports or services do you access through SHYM?
How do you access them?
Do you feel that these services - or some of these services - are helpful to you? What makes them helpful?
Do you feel that these services – or some of these services – are not helpful to you? What makes them unhelpful?
How could these services change to be more helpful?
Are there any services you need/would like that are not available for you right now?
Do you feel that SHYM is teaching you important lessons about living on your own?
Overall, do you believe that SHYM serves a useful purpose? How? Can you propose ways in which it could improve?

Sense of Self

Can you tell me how you feel about yourself?
Do you like/dislike yourself? How do you bring out the best in you?
Do you feel healthy/unhealthy – how so? Ways you try to keep healthy?
Do you feel you are able to solve your own problems? Ways you try to solve problems?
Who would you say is the most supportive person/persons in your life? What do they do that is so supportive?
Do you have other people in your life who are supportive?
Is there anyone in your life that is not supportive? What do they do that is unsupportive?
Do you feel that there are people in your life who understand and care about you? What do they do to support/understand you?
How hopeful are you about your situation? Your future? Do you have a positive outlook? How do you build that in yourself?
Has living at SHYM made you feel differently about yourself? Positively or negatively? How did that change occur?
How is it being a mother at SHYM? Do you feel comfortable at SHYM? What do you/others do to make you comfortable? (How does that happen?)
Do you think that where you live affects how you feel about yourself?
Do you think that where you live affects how you feel about yourself as a mother?

Post-interview commentary:

Thank-you for sharing your stories and experiences with me. Now, you may take a few minutes to reflect on your comments and whether you are comfortable with us using pieces or sections of what you have said as direct quotations – any quotations we use will be ‘cleaned’ of identifying information. If you are uncomfortable with the idea of anything you said being quoted directly, please tell me so we can be sure that the informed consent clearly shows your preference. Thank-you again for taking time from your day to speak with me.

APPENDIX C

SHYM STAFF INTERVIEW GUIDE (First Interview)

Interview Guide for Staff

Building Community: A Case Study of Supportive Housing for Young Mothers (SHYM)

Interview preamble:

Thank-you for agreeing to meet with me today to talk about your experiences with SHYM. We are interested in understanding the strengths and limitations of this housing service.

Do you have any questions about any of this? We hope that in no way, you feel coerced (forced) to be here. Are you ready to start the interview? Okay, if you are ready, I will turn on the tape recorder. I would like to begin with a couple of questions about your role here at SHYM...

Personal Information

How long have you worked at SHYM?

Can you describe your position at SHYM?

How did you come to be involved with SHYM?

How does SHYM determine what programs and services will be offered?

How did SHYM make the decision to create this particular supportive housing program?

What process was used to select the type of housing, tenants, etc?

How do staff know if SHYM is beneficial? What systematic tracking mechanisms exist to determine how SHYM is meeting its goals/mandate?

Tenants

Who are the tenants of SHYM? Can you describe them?

Is this the population that was originally envisioned to live here?

If not, who was the originally envisioned population?

Do you feel that having a different population changes SHYM's effectiveness?

Can you describe the day to day lives of the tenants?

In your opinion, how do you think the tenants experience SHYM?

SHYM History and Philosophy

Can you describe your understanding of how SHYM came into being? What process was used to select the type of housing, tenants, etc?

Can you describe the philosophy that guides SHYM?

Do you think that philosophy has been successful in reality?

What are the goals of SHYM?

Do you think that SHYM has been successful at meeting those goals?

How do you know when you have met goals? What evidence do you see or want to see?

What kinds of challenges, successes and opportunities do you see at SHYM?

SHYM Services

What kinds of services are available to the tenants of SHYM? What process was used to select the type of services?

Which of these services do you feel benefit the tenants the most? Explain.

Which services (if any) do you feel are not of great benefit to the tenants? Explain.

Are there services that are not available that you feel would benefit the tenants? Explain.

Would you suggest any restructuring of SHYM in order to provide a more effective and supportive living situation for the tenants? What would that restructuring look like?

Overall, do you think that SHYM has been an effective support for the tenants? Explain.

Overall

What need is SHYM hoping to fulfill?

Do you believe that SHYM serves a useful purpose? How? What changes could improve its overall effectiveness?

Post-interview commentary:

Thank-you for sharing your stories and experiences with me. Now, you may take a few minutes to reflect on your comments and whether you are comfortable with us using pieces or sections of what you have said as direct quotations – any quotations we use will be ‘cleaned’ of identifying information. If you are uncomfortable with the idea of anything you said being quoted directly, please tell me so we can be sure that the informed consent clearly shows your preference. Thank-you again for taking time from your day to speak with me.

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APPENDIX D

Interview Guide for Board Members

Building Community: A Case Study of Supportive Housing for Young Mothers (SHYM)

Interview preamble:

Thank-you for agreeing to meet with me today to talk about your experiences with SHYM. We are interested in understanding the strengths and limitations of this housing service.

Do you have any questions about any of this? We hope that in no way, you feel coerced (forced) to be here. Are you ready to start the interview? Okay, if you are ready, I will turn on the tape recorder. I would like to begin with a couple of questions about your role here at SHYM...

Personal Information

How long have you been on the board?

How did you come to be a board member?

Can you describe your duties as a board member?

How does SHYM determine what programs and services will be offered?

How did SHYM make the decision to create this particular supportive housing program?

What process was used to select the type of housing, tenants, etc?

How does the Board know if SHYM is beneficial? What systematic tracking mechanisms exist to determine how SHYM is meeting its goals/mandate?

Tenants

Who are the tenants of SHYM?

Is this the population that was originally envisioned to live here?

If not, who was the originally envisioned population?

Do you feel that having a different population changes SHYM's effectiveness?

SHYM History and Philosophy

Can you describe your understanding of how SHYM came into being? What process was used to select the type of housing, tenants, etc?

Can you describe the philosophy that guides SHYM?

Do you think that philosophy has been successful in reality?

What are the goals of SHYM?

Do you think that SHYM has been successful at meeting those goals?

How do you know when you have met goals? What evidence do you see or want to see?

What kinds of challenges, successes and opportunities do you see at SHYM?

SHYM Services

What kinds of services are available to the tenants of SHYM? What process was used to select the type of services?

Which of these services do you feel benefit the tenants the most? Explain.

Which services (if any) do you feel are not of great benefit to the tenants? Explain.

Are there services that are not available that you feel would benefit the tenants? Explain.

Would you suggest any restructuring of SHYM in order to provide a more effective and supportive living situation for the tenants? What would that restructuring look like?

Overall, do you think that SHYM has been an effective support for the tenants? Explain.

Overall

What need is SHYM hoping to fulfill?

Do you believe that SHYM serves a useful purpose? How? What changes could improve its overall effectiveness?

Post-interview commentary:

Thank-you for sharing your stories and experiences with me. Now, you may take a few minutes to reflect on your comments and whether you are comfortable with us using pieces or sections of what you have said as direct quotations – any quotations we use will be ‘cleaned’ of identifying information. If you are uncomfortable with the idea of anything you said being quoted directly, please tell me so we can be sure that the informed consent clearly shows your preference. Thank-you again for taking time from your day to speak with me.

APPENDIX E
Second Interview Guide for Tenants
Building Community: A Case Study of Supportive Housing for Young Mothers (SHYM)

Experience of SHYM

How did you feel when you first came to SHYM? How do you feel now? Why do you think you feel differently now?

Can you tell me a little bit about your experience living in this setting?

What do you like about it? What do you not like about it?

Do you feel differently now then you did 6 months ago? Why or why not?

What do you like about your living space?

Can you tell me about what it is like living with other tenants? Has this changed in the last 6 months?

How long do you see yourself living here? How will you know when you are ready to leave?

Do you think you can voice your ideas/concerns/opinions about the organisation? How so? Do you feel differently about this then you did 6 months ago? Why or why not?

Other than your housing, how have things changed for you since moving into this house? In your view, what made the difference?

Do you think you are able to make decisions about your own life at SHYM? What helps or hinders? If things should change, can you propose solutions?

Can you tell me about your experience living in this neighbourhood? Has your experience changed in the last 6 months? Why or why not?

Supports and Services

Before coming to live at SHYM did you have expectations for what kind of support would be available to you? If so, has SHYM lived up to these expectations? Explain.

What kind of supports or services do you access through SHYM?

How do you access them?

Have there been any changes to the programs or services over the past 6 months? How do you feel about these changes? Are they positive or negative changes?

Do you feel that these services - or some of these services - are helpful to you? What makes them helpful?

Do you feel that these services – or some of these services – are not helpful to you? What makes them unhelpful?

How could these services change to be more helpful?

Are there any services you need/would like that are not available for you right now?

Do you feel that SHYM is teaching you important lessons about living on your own?

Overall, do you believe that SHYM serves a useful purpose? How? Can you propose ways in which it could improve?

Sense of Self

Can you tell me how you feel about yourself? Has this changed in the last 6 months? Why or why not?

Do you like/dislike yourself? How do you bring out the best in you?

Do you feel healthy/unhealthy – how so? Ways you try to keep healthy?

In general, would you say your health is
excellent (5), very good (4), good (3), fair (2), poor (1).

In general, would you say your mental health is
excellent (5), very good (4), good (3), fair (2), poor (1)?.

Do you feel you are able to solve your own problems? Ways you try to solve problems?

Who would you say is the most supportive person/persons in your life? What do they do that is

so supportive?

Do you have other people in your life who are supportive?

Has your support network changed over the past 6 months? Why or why not?

Is there anyone in your life that is not supportive? What do they do that is unsupportive?

Do you feel that there are people in your life who understand and care about you? What do they do to support/understand you?

How hopeful are you about your situation? Your future? Do you have a positive outlook? How do you build that in yourself? Do you feel more or less hopeful now than you did 6 months ago?

Has living at SHYM made you feel differently about yourself? Positively or negatively? How did that change occur? Have you noticed any changes in the last 6 months?

How is it being a mother at SHYM? Do you feel comfortable at SHYM? What do you/others do to make you comfortable? (How does that happen?) Has this changed over the last 6 months?

Do you think that where you live affects how you feel about yourself?

Do you think that where you live affects how you feel about yourself as a mother?

Reflections on the last interview.

The last time we spoke you raised a couple of issues that were important to you.

Do you still feel the same way about these issues?

Why have your feelings/experiences not/changed?

APPENDIX F

Second Interview Guide for Staff

Who are the clients? Has this changed in the last months?

Why do you think the mothers who have left SHYM left?

Do you keep in contact with those mothers?

What do you think the mothers find the most and least helpful about SHYM?

Any new successes or challenges over the past few months?

What changes have happened here over the past few months?
Any changes in staffing? (Having the Family Support Worker)

What has stayed the same over those months?

What are your hopes now? Have they changed?

Some of the issues raised in the previous interview

Any movement in the area of educational training?

More child care?

Thought there needed to be more programs, more routine.

Believe the programs are fluffy.

Tightening up of screening process

Felt that SHYM wasn't reaching goals/potential. Change?

Potential for outreach program?

Trying to get funding from Prevention - or fit in somewhere in regards to funding

APPENDIX G

TENANT INFORMED CONSENT FORM

[TO BE PRINTED ON DALHOUSIE LETTERHEAD]

School of Social Work
6414 Coburg Road
Halifax, Nova Scotia
Canada B3H 2A7
(902) 494-3760
Fax (902) 494-6709

TENANTS INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Building Community: A Case Study of Supportive Housing for Young Mothers (SHYM)

Dr. Jeff Karabanow
Maritime School of Social Work – Dalhousie University
6414 Coburg Rd. Halifax, NS, B3H 2A7
Tel: (902) 494-1193
jkaraban@dal.ca

Dr. Jean Hughes
School of Nursing – Dalhousie University
5869 University Ave., Halifax, NS, B3H 3J5
Tel: (902) 494-2456
jean.hughes@dal.ca

In order to receive more information or clarification about the study at any time, or to report any unusual occurrences or difficulties related to the research, please use the following contact person:

Dr. Jeff Karabanow – (902) 494-1193 – jkaraban@dal.ca
6414 Coburg Rd. Halifax, NS, B3H 2A7

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

We invite you to take part in a research study being carried out by Dr. Jeff Karabanow, who is a professor at Dalhousie University. Taking part in this study is voluntary and you may refuse to answer any question and/or withdraw from the study at any time. The study is described below. The description tells you about the risks, inconvenience (hassles), or discomfort that you might experience. Participating in the study might not benefit you, but we might learn things that will benefit others. You should discuss any questions you have about this study with the people who explain it to you.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study is interested in your experiences, concerns and insights concerning SHYM. We want to understand how you became homeless and learn about your experiences within SHYM – your hopes and aspirations upon entering supportive housing and whether and how your needs are being met. We hope the information and knowledge from this study will help inform service providers and policy makers about young mothers and supportive housing issues.

STUDY DESIGN

We will be carrying out two interviews with tenants at SHYM – one in the fall and the second in the spring – about their experiences coming to, and living in, SHYM. We will also be using a ten minute questionnaire that asks about health and different activities of daily living. In addition, we will be interviewing staff and board members at SHYM about their experiences with the services.

WHO CAN PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY?

You may participate in the study if you are currently a tenant at SHYM.

WHO WILL BE CONDUCTING THE RESEARCH?

The study is being carried out by Dr. Jeff Karabanow and Dr. Jean Hughes at Dalhousie University. Candida Hadley has been hired as research coordinator for this project. In order to receive more information or clarification about the study at any time, or to report any unusual occurrences (events) or difficulties related to the research, please use one of the following contact people:

Professor Jeff Karabanow, PhD.	or	Professor Jean Hughes
6414 Coburg Rd., Halifax, NS		5869 University Ave., Halifax, NS
(902) 494 1193 or jkaraban@dal.ca		(902) 494-2456 or jean.hughes@dal.ca

WHAT YOU WILL BE ASKED TO DO

We would like to ask you a few questions about your experiences at SHYM, whether you think the programs are effective and how you came to be a tenant at SHYM. The interviews should take approx. 60 minutes and will be conducted by our research coordinator. In addition, we will be using a ten minute questionnaire that asks about your health and different activities of daily living. If you agree, we would like to audio-tape the conversation.

POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

The risks connected with the study are likely to be minor and include the possibility that you may find discussing your experiences emotionally upsetting. You will be respected with the greatest sensitivity. There is a chance that an interview may bring up past issues that are still unsettled. In such a case, the interviewer will invite you to take a break, continue the interview at another time or stop the interview. The interviewer is also prepared to provide you with a list of supports and resources and/or refer you to a staff member at SHYM if desired.

POSSIBLE BENEFITS

The benefit of this study is that you will be asked to talk about your experiences and concerns about using supportive housing. Participant information will help build further knowledge about the unique needs of young mothers and possibly assist in building social policy (the guidelines for living conditions in society).

COMPENSATION

You will be compensated \$20.00 for your time.

CONFIDENTIALITY AND ANONYMITY

The research team will do everything possible to maintain your anonymity (privacy). Each interview will be audio-taped and a code number will be used instead of your name to ensure a high level of anonymity (privacy). The same code number will be used on the questionnaire – so that we can link the questionnaire to the interview without needing to know names. Your name will not appear on the questionnaire or the audio-tape or the transcript. Audio-tapes will be transcribed (typed out word-for-word) by a professional who has signed a confidentiality agreement stating that the interview contents will remain confidential (to keep secret) and they will not discuss the content of the interviews with anyone. The research team will be the only people to read the transcripts. Tapes will be destroyed once transcripts (written copies of the interviews) have been made. Transcripts will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the principal investigator's office (at Dalhousie University) and must be kept on file for 5 years post-publication as stated in Dalhousie University research policy. Questionnaire responses will be analyzed for broad characteristics to highlight the particularities of the tenants who participated in this project. In reporting findings through reports, presentations, and publications, all names and any characteristics that might identify participants will be removed.

IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS

If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to call (902) 494-1193 at any time. You will also be provided with any new information that might affect your decision to participate in the study. You will receive a copy of the consent form at the outset of the study for your records. Participation is voluntary. You may withdraw your participation at any time.

In the event that you have any difficulties with, or wish to voice concern about, any aspect of your participation in this study, you may contact Human Research Ethics/ Integrity Coordinator at Dalhousie University's Office of Human Research Ethics and Integrity for assistance: (902) 494-1462.

PROBLEMS OR CONCERNS

If you have any difficulties with, or wish to voice concerns about, any aspect of your participation in this study, you may contact Patricia Lindley, Director of Dalhousie University's Office of Human research Ethics Administration, for assistance at (902) 494-1462, patricia.lindley@dal.ca

[TO BE PRINTED ON DALHOUSIE LETTERHEAD]

TENANTS INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Building Community: A Case Study of Supportive Housing for Young Mothers (SHYM)

SIGNATURE PAGE

“I have read the explanation about this study. I have been given the opportunity to discuss it and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I hereby consent to take part in this study. However, I realize that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time.”

I agree to be audio taped

☐ yes

☐ no

I agree to allow direct quotations from my interview to be used

☐ yes

☐ no

If I leave SHYM before my second interview in 6 months and leave a forwarding address, I agree to be contacted, through SHYM, and offered the opportunity to complete the second interview for this study.

☐ yes

☐ no

Participant's Signature

Date

Researcher's Signature

APPENDIX H

WORKER/BOARD MEMBER CONSENT FORM [TO BE PRINTED ON DALHOUSIE LETTERHEAD]

School of Social Work
6414 Coburg Road
Halifax, Nova Scotia
Canada B3H 2A7
(902) 494-3760
Fax (902) 494-6709

WORKER/BOARD MEMBER INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Building Community: A Case Study of Supportive Housing for Young Mothers (SHYM)

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Tel: (902) 494-2456
jean.hughes@dal.ca

In order to receive more information or clarification about the study at any time, or to report any unusual occurrences or difficulties related to the research, please use the following contact person:

Dr. Jeff Karabanow – (902) 494-1193 – jkaraban@dal.ca
6414 Coburg Rd. Halifax, NS, B3H 2A7

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

We invite you to take part in a research study being carried out by Dr. Jeff Karabanow, who is a professor at Dalhousie University. Taking part in this study is voluntary and you may refuse to answer any question and/or withdraw from the study at any time. The study is described below. The description tells you about the risks, inconvenience (hassles), or discomfort that you might experience. Participating in the study might not benefit you, but we might learn things that will benefit others. You should discuss any questions you have about this study with the people who explain it to you.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study is interested in your work experiences, concerns and insights concerning SHYM. We want to understand how this initiative succeeds at supporting young mothers and how it can be improved. This knowledge will hopefully be used by policy makers/service providers to create better situations for young mothers who are homeless or at risk of being homeless.

STUDY DESIGN

We will be carrying out two interviews with tenants and staff/board members at SHYM – one in the fall and the second in the spring – about their experiences with SHYM. For tenants, we will also be using a ten minute questionnaire that asks about health and different activities of daily living.

WHO CAN PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY?

You may participate in the study if you are a worker or board member with SHYM.

WHO WILL BE CONDUCTING THE RESEARCH?

The study is being carried out by Dr. Jeff Karabanow and Dr. Jean Hughes at Dalhousie University. Candida Hadley has been hired as research coordinator for this project. In order to receive more information or clarification about the study at any time, or to report any unusual occurrences (events) or difficulties related to the research, please use one of the following contact people:

Professor Jeff Karabanow, PhD.	or	Professor Jean Hughes
6414 Coburg Rd., Halifax, NS		5869 University Ave., Halifax, NS
(902) 494 1193 or jkaraban@dal.ca		(902) 494-2456 or jean.hughes@dal.ca

WHAT YOU WILL BE ASKED TO DO

We would like to ask you a few questions about your work with the tenants of SHYM. The interviews should take approximately 45 minutes each and will be conducted by our research coordinator. If you agree, we would like to audio-tape the conversation.

POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

The risks associated with the study are anticipated to be minimal. Participants will be respected with the greatest sensitivity.

POSSIBLE BENEFITS

The benefit of this study is that you will be asked to talk about your experiences and insights related to supportive housing for young mothers. As such, participant information will help build further knowledge about youth homelessness and supportive housing and possibly influence service delivery and/or social policy.

COMPENSATION

We appreciate you offering us your valuable time and insights .

CONFIDENTIALITY AND ANONYMITY

The research team will do everything possible to maintain your anonymity (privacy). Each interview will be audio-taped and a code number will be used instead of your name to ensure a high level of anonymity (privacy). Audio-tapes will be transcribed by a professional who has signed a confidentiality agreement stating that the interview

contents will remain confidential and they will not discuss the content of the interviews with anyone. The research team will be the only people to read the transcripts. Tapes will be destroyed once transcripts have been made. Transcripts will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the principal investigator's office (at Dalhousie University) and must be kept on file for 5 years post-publication as stated in Dalhousie University research policy. In reporting findings through reports, presentations, and publications, all names and any characteristics that might identify participants will be removed.

IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS

If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to call (902) 494-1193 at any time. You will also be provided with any new information that might affect your decision to participate in the study. You will receive a copy of the consent form at the outset of the study for your records. Participation is voluntary. You may withdraw your participation at any time.

In the event that you have any difficulties with, or wish to voice concern about, any aspect of your participation in this study, you may contact Human Research Ethics/ Integrity Coordinator at Dalhousie University's Office of Human Research Ethics and Integrity for assistance: (902) 494-1462.

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[TO BE PRINTED ON DALHOUSIE LETTERHEAD]

WORKER/BOARD MEMBER INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Building Community: A Case Study of Supportive Housing for Young Mothers (SHYM)

SIGNATURE PAGE

I have read the explanation about this study. I have been given the opportunity to discuss it and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I hereby consent to take part in this study. However, I realize that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time.

I agree to be audio taped ☐ yes ☐ no

I agree to allow direct quotations from my interview to be used ☐ yes ☐ no

If I leave SHYM before my second interview in 6 months and leave a forwarding address, I agree to be contacted, through SHYM, and offered the opportunity to complete the second interview for this study.

☐ yes ☐ no

Participant's Signature

Date

Researcher's Signature

APPENDIX I

THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION QUALITY OF LIFE (WHOQOL) -BREF

The World Health Organization Quality of Life (WHOQOL)-BREF

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WHOQOL-BREF

The following questions ask how you feel about your quality of life, health, or other areas of your life. I will read out each question to you, along with the response options. **Please choose the answer that appears most appropriate.** If you are unsure about which response to give to a question, the first response you think of is often the best one. Please keep in mind your standards, hopes, pleasures and concerns. We ask that you think about your life **in the last four weeks.**

Very poor	Poor		Neither poor nor good	Good		Very good
1.	How would you rate your quality of life?	1	2	3	4	5

Very dissatisfied	Dissatisfied		Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Satisfied		Very satisfied
2.	How satisfied are you with your health?	1	2	3	4	5

The following questions ask about **how much** you have experienced certain things in the last four weeks.

Not at all	A little		A moderate amount	Very much		An extreme amount
3.	To what extent do you feel that physical pain prevents you from doing what you need to do?	5	4	3	2	1
4.	How much do you need any medical treatment to function in your daily life?	5	4	3	2	1
5.	How much do you enjoy life?	1	2	3	4	5
6.	To what extent do you feel your life to be meaningful?	1	2	3	4	5

Not at all	A little		A moderate amount	Very much		Extremely
7.	How well are you able to concentrate?	1	2	3	4	5
8.	How safe do you feel in your daily life?	1	2	3	4	5
9.	How healthy is your physical environment?	1	2	3	4	5

The following questions ask about how completely you experience or were able to do certain things in the last four weeks.

Not at all	A little		Moderately	Mostly		Completely
10.	Do you have enough energy for everyday life?	1	2	3	4	5
11.	Are you able to accept your bodily appearance?	1	2	3	4	5
12.	Have you enough money to meet your needs?	1	2	3	4	5
13.	How available to you is the information that you need in your day-to-day life?	1	2	3	4	5
14.	To what extent do you have the opportunity for leisure activities?	1	2	3	4	5

Very poor	Poor		Neither poor nor good	Good		Very good
15.	How well are you able to get around?	1	2	3	4	5

Very dissatisfied	Dissatisfied		Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Satisfied		Very satisfied
16.	How satisfied are you with your sleep?	1	2	3	4	5
17.	How satisfied are you with your ability to perform your daily living activities?	1	2	3	4	5
18.	How satisfied are you with your capacity for work?	1	2	3	4	5
19.	How satisfied are you with yourself?	1	2	3	4	5

20.	How satisfied are you with your personal relationships?	1	2	3	4	5
21.	How satisfied are you with your sex life?	1	2	3	4	5
22.	How satisfied are you with the support you get from your friends?	1	2	3	4	5
23.	How satisfied are you with the conditions of your living place?	1	2	3	4	5
24.	How satisfied are you with your access to health services?	1	2	3	4	5
25.	How satisfied are you with your transport?	1	2	3	4	5

The following question refers to how often you have felt or experienced certain things in the last four weeks.

Never	Seldom		Quite often	Very often		Always
26.	How often do you have negative feelings such as blue mood, despair, anxiety, depression?	5	4	3	2	1

Do you have any comments about the assessment?

[The following table should be completed after the interview is finished]

Equations for computing domain scores		Raw score		Transformed scores*	
				4-20	0-100
27.	Domain 1	$(6-Q3) + (6-Q4) + Q10 + Q15 + Q16 + Q17 + Q18$ + + + + + + =	a.	b:	c:
28.	Domain 2	$Q5 + Q6 + Q7 + Q11 + Q19 + (6-Q26)$ + + + + + =	a.	b:	c:
29.	Domain 3	$Q20 + Q21 + Q22$ + + =	a.	b:	c:
30.	Domain 4	$Q8 + Q9 + Q12 + Q13 + Q14 + Q23 + Q24 + Q25$ + + + + + + + =	a.	b:	c:

Visit our website at www.cmhc.ca