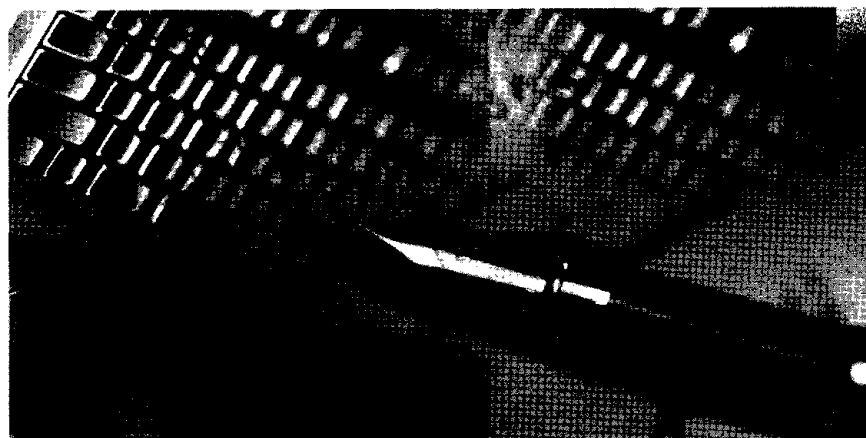




RESEARCH REPORT

INTERVENTIONS FOR ROOMING HOUSES/
SROS AND TENANTS

FINAL REPORT



HOME TO CANADIANS
Canada

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***INTERVENTIONS FOR ROOMING HOUSES/
SROs AND TENANTS***

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December 2001

**PREPARED BY:
THE STARR GROUP INC.**

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Executive Summary

Outside of social housing, rooming houses and single room occupancy (SRO) units are the least expensive form of permanent housing, and essential for very low-income single people. The CMHC study *Regulatory Factors in the Retention and Expansion of Rooming House Stock* (2000) provided information on a number of strategies to stabilize the rooming house stock, which is under constant threat from a variety of forces.

This study looked at other approaches to conserving rooming house and SRO stock and stabilizing tenancies. A range of initiatives was addressed in seven case studies involving:

- conflict reduction
- public education
- community development
- building construction and
- supportive housing.

Strong landlord-tenant and tenant-tenant relationships have many benefits. These include enhanced retention as well as expansion of rooming house stock, awareness of legal rights and responsibilities, and good building maintenance. Involvement of both landlords and tenants in the planning and development process avoids future conflicts. In addition, public education and information are essential to the successful retention and development of rooming house stock. A proactive approach involving stakeholders such as neighbours, tenants, politicians and developers can avoid not-in-my-back-yard (NIMBY) attitudes. Locally-based, non-profit, volunteer community organizations can build partnerships and alliances around rooming houses and SROs because then, risks, rewards and the expertise of all parties are shared. Flexible building codes and zoning by-laws are also important. Providing a one-window approach for owners to legalize unregistered buildings encourages retention, upgrading, tenant safety and lower rents. Supportive housing provides a “continuum of care” for dependent tenants to have safe, affordable housing and to reduce their hospital emergency and service agency visits.

Case Study A: Co-ordinated Crisis Response - City of Toronto Rental Housing Office

The City of Toronto’s Rental Housing Office (RHO) was established in January 2000 and funded by the City to address one of the eight recommendations of the Mayor’s Task Force on Homelessness: the lack of a comprehensive housing information system. With both telephone and Web site access, the RHO focus is on serving key stakeholders already providing information, advice and support to tenants and landlords including three agencies involved with rooming houses. The RHO does not duplicate existing community housing and legal services but provides referrals and facilitates information exchange on the prevention of tenant eviction. As the facilitator for a network of agencies and a forum for stakeholder discussion, the RHO provides: 1) coordination among information providers such as the Rental Housing Advisory Committee; 2) communication and dissemination of a Referral List of Information and

Advisory Services for Tenants and Landlords; 3) research and monitoring of housing trends and legislation for policy recommendations to City Council and; 4) direction of special projects such as a Tenant Defence Fund, hotline, education program and campaign on the rights and obligations of tenants. Translated information is made available as well as police briefings on landlord/tenant rights.

Considered an ongoing, but not permanent, project staffed by City employees, the RHO Advisory Committee meets quarterly. The diverse needs of well-organized tenants' associations and individual landlords continue to be an operational barrier. However, there is little organization of rooming house tenants compared to apartment tenants. The RHO has successfully brought together service providers, enhanced communication and informed City staff. A goal is to have agencies post and share information on the Web site, but maintaining the currency of electronic and printed materials remains challenging with salaries, computer hardware, Web design and directories being the primary costs.

Case; Study B: Housing Search Assistance - Action Logement/Action Housing, Ottawa

The non-profit Action Logement was established in 1989 to assist lower-income individuals and families to retain housing and find appropriate housing. A volunteer Board of Directors oversees a staff of 10 plus student help. It has approximately 1,800 files that increase in late summer as school and winter approach. Counsellors provide direct assistance by reviewing newspaper ads or completing Housing Registry applications for social housing. But, with over 13,000 applications and a five to seven year waiting list for subsidized housing, the Registry faces rising demand.

Action Logement maintains a database by building address and has an association with the University of Ottawa Community Legal Clinic to review Rental Housing Tribunal applications. Many clients are referred by emergency shelters and two counsellors travel to nearby communities to assist clients, many of whom have language problems, low incomes, no telephone, no lease co-signers or who face discrimination because of their immigration/refugee status. Action Logement receives funding from various levels of government plus fundraising activities; however, counsellors spend considerable unpaid time providing interpretation services at tenant-landlord meetings. Mediation is provided free through the Tenant/Landlord Mediation Services (TLMS) of Ottawa-Carleton profiled in the next case study.

Staff attempt to find safe, affordable and appropriate housing, but landlords are reluctant to house low-income tenants. Client demand continues to grow, vacancy rates are low and rents have risen dramatically in the past year. Some large landlords quote a minimum income of \$35,000-\$50,000 to afford their units. Time constraints and the requirement for more counsellors fluent in both official languages hamper services. A Web site, used until last year by the public and shelters, should be reinstated if funding permits. Action Logement has found that service for households seeking housing is best provided by a non-profit agency instead of a government service. Input from the community and the involvement of volunteers is critical to success and this can be accomplished with college or university students as part of their education program. Adequate and stable staffing, equipment and facility funding are essential.

Case Study C: Mediation - Tenant/Landlord Mediation Services (TLMS) of Ottawa-Carleton

Fonned in 1998 through a partnership between Action Logement and the University of Ottawa Community Legal Clinic, qualified mediators provide objective mediation, conciliation and negotiation services at no charge to tenants and landlords to resolve conflicts and avoid evictions. Dealing with laws, rights and responsibilities of both parties, the TLMS and its Board of Directors is based on a community vision, neutrality, impartiality and education. Working directly with the requesting clients, 12 trained volunteer mediators seek to intervene before a situation has escalated to the Rental Housing Tribunal stage. Planned public training and awareness sessions, funded by the Trillium Foundation, will focus on large rental buildings and social housing projects. Education and publicity continue through articles in local papers and by addressing neighbourhood concerns about social housing.

Typically, seven to 12 mediation sessions occur each month, the majority being between landlord and tenant or, tenant and tenant. About 80 per cent of mediation sessions end in agreement after a two-to three-hour session. Previously, when vacancy rates were higher, dissatisfied individuals in rooming houses would move. Now they seek the assistance of mediators to resolve conflicts involving noise, behaviour, eviction or maintenance issues. Many clients have mental health problems so an interdisciplinary approach involving social workers and other supports is needed. But, mediation training programs are expensive and require significant time commitment. TLMS relies on funding from various sources but has no base funding commitment from anyone source.

Both parties must agree to a mediation and must understand their rights and responsibilities. Landlords have been reluctant to participate. Many tenants have a history of problems with landlords. Issues have often escalated before mediation is sought. Education in the mutual benefits of early intervention is necessary. The lack of qualified volunteers, the expense and time commitment of training and, the lack of funding for translation/interpretation have constrained the organization. The number of rooming house units is expected to increase in the Ottawa area, as are the requests for mediation services. The activities of the TLMS can be duplicated in other centres given ongoing funding, a pool of qualified mediators, willing participants, recognized impartiality and education to encourage early mediation.

Case Study D: Community Development - Portland Hotel Society, Vancouver

Originally fonned to address the needs of individuals living in the old Portland Hotel, an SRO building, the Society decided to build and operate a purpose-built facility (the new Portland Hotel) as well as manage three other projects. Funding was provided by the CMHC's Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program (RRAP). Portland residents needed pennant, affordable, safe, clean housing plus a network of health and support services like nursing and addiction programs provided in situ to help them live independently. In 1991, the City sought to close the old hotel and the owner wanted to sell for redevelopment but the Downtown Eastside Residents Association (DERA) obtained a 10-year agreement to delay demolition and construct a

new facility .Resident consultations found that tenants with mental health problems could not cope in independent apartments and preferred smaller units. Many were unable to prepare meals and relied on food lines, so a communal kitchen was sufficient. Couples preferred a one-bedroom apartment. The majority of SRO units were constructed with private washrooms plus some studio units with kitchenettes. Residents were moved out of the sub-standard old Portland Hotel and into the new Portland Hotel.

The Portland Hotel Society's 40 full-time and 25 on-call trained and flexible staff aim to provide a 24-hour "asylum" for socially alienated people. There is a "no eviction" approach with the goal to find alternate housing before tenants are evicted. The Society's success is due to the cooperation of many levels of government including housing, health, social development and the attorney general. New tenants come from other SROs, institutions, shelters and off the street. Being unable to live in large quarters unsuited to their health and abilities, they deliberately choose SRO-type housing. Occupancy of the new Portland Hotel is restricted to core need (low-income) hard-to-house singles and couples with serious mental, physical and/or substance abuse problems. The Society plans to continue with existing programs and to negotiate purchase of additional projects as they become available. Renovation of existing SRO properties requires significant investment but results in lower ongoing operating costs.

Staff funding, training and support is critical to the success of the Society's unique approaches. Funding to cover resident programs in the arts, acupuncture therapy, camping trips and food for communal meals is difficult to obtain. Funding for a meals program should always be included in financial requests. With adequate housing and the required supports, even the hard-to-house can find stable accommodation that is far less costly than the street-jail-hospital treadmill. The appropriate housing form with the appropriate supports can break the cycle of homelessness. By responding to resident input, the Society designed a new building that provided the required amenities and retained the old Portland Hotel for future renovation. Funding and cooperation among various partners and governments is key in such projects as is effective lobbying for funding of more SRO units.

Case Study E: Rehabilitation Programs - Edmonton Safe Housing Committee

This demonstration project involved the renovation of an existing 21-unit inner city rooming house with shared washroom facilities using alternative Association for Preservation Technology (APT) housing standards in place of National Building Code and municipal standards. The non-profit APT received an ACT (Affordability and Choice Today) grant to develop lower cost Safe Housing Standards as equivalencies to standard building codes.

The objectives of the 1993 demonstration project were to draft alternative health and safety standards, evaluate the project building, renovate that building, educate inspectors, then modify and evaluate the standards as well as achieve consensus with landlords. As part of the project, the Safe Housing Committee established minimum levels of health and safety for existing residential buildings of six stories or less containing three or more units. These were adopted in 1994 and now apply to the majority of rooming houses especially those created from single- family houses. The project itself proceeded through a sequence of steps from drafting standards to consulting with stakeholders, preparing drawings and evaluating the results.

The project aimed at sub-standard rental accommodation with a focus on establishing a coordinated inspection approach involving city planning, development, finance, power, fire, health and legal departments. It was not possible for all property owners to upgrade to current standards so the Committee continued with the coordinated inspection program while working to develop alternate guidelines for the upgrading of multiple occupancy dwellings. Alternative standards were applied in the 21-unit pilot project building and cost comparisons made with similar RRAP renovation projects. For smaller “Division A” buildings (three stories or less, fewer than 10 occupants and a resident owner) the standards developed by the Committee were too costly. Landlords were unlikely to recoup costs from rent increases to low-income tenants. However, the standards were useful for buildings housing over 10 individuals. The total cost for the demonstration project was \$50,000 or \$2,831 per unit while the cost for RRAP renovations was \$9,476 per unit. Using the alternate standards, property upgrades were one-third to one-half the cost of regular standards. And, the reaction of tenants to their new living environment was positive.

The project demonstrated practical and cost-effective upgrading could be achieved and a fair and concise set of safety, occupancy, health and upgrading standards were acceptable to inner city property owners. The Safe Housing Standards have now been implemented for all multi-unit residential units of six storeys or less in the city of Edmonton. They work best in larger buildings with active management and good maintenance. An ongoing coordinated inspection system has been limited by staffing restrictions. Poor maintenance still occurs in some buildings but is detected through tenant complaints. Some properties require frequent inspections and a fine system for owners operating unsafe buildings is under consideration with work orders attached to buildings rather than owners. Only one of the alternate standards has been changed to require pressure-treated wood or steel for exterior fire escapes.

Case Study F: Legalization of Existing Units - Parkdale Pilot

This project addressed existing large, single-family homes that had been renovated into rooming houses and bachelorette units but had never received licenses to operate. Bachelorettes are defined as mini-apartments with a bathroom and some cooking facilities while rooming houses have shared bathrooms and cooking facilities. Although many conversions had taken place, rooming house construction had been prohibited in the Parkdale area since 1978. Licensing would ensure properties were maintained to a safe level. Many owners had not applied for licenses to avoid bringing properties up to code because of the expense and loss of units. Neighbours were concerned about property values but tenants were hesitant to complain fearing they would have no place to live. The project sought to retain housing while ensuring compliance with existing by-laws, fire and building codes.

In a door-to-door inspection of properties, some 250 buildings were identified. City staff met with residents, tenants, owners, improvement groups and social services. Mediation sessions were held. Community meetings sought stakeholder input. Units considered too small and unacceptable were found to be satisfactory living arrangements by tenants. Owners seeking to legalize a property began by submitting an application with drawings, an inspection was made and plans examined by building and fire departments. The owner was given a detailed list of

improvements and a timeframe for completion. A final inspection was made by the same person who conducted the initial inspection and, if satisfactory, a rezoning was issued and the owner applied for a license to operate the building. Corporate Counsel for the City provided legal advice to the pilot project and city councillors were supportive. Throughout the process, owners dealt with one contact person.

The first hurdle was to establish alternate standards for fire, safety, zoning and building. Parking and minimum lot standards were modified in some cases depending on pre-1978 renovations or 1978-1996 renovations. Community education and participation was a prime focus. This program provided a means to encourage owners to bring their buildings up to standards. By obtaining a license to operate the building as a rooming house or bachelorettes it was easier to obtain financing or to sell. Property owners typically spent \$10,000 to \$20,000 per building on renovations with some applying for RRAP funding to cover the costs. The program is new and fewer than 50 properties have been renovated but it will be necessary to track the licensing process, inspections and maintenance. The program is applicable to other areas of the city and to other communities; however, it does require a significant long-term municipal staffing commitment and cooperation among departments.

Case Study G: Supportive Housing - Supportive Housing Coalition, Toronto

Founded in 1982, the non-profit Supportive Housing Coalition (SHC) is an agency providing permanent, safe, affordable accommodation, including 16 rooming houses, for mental health consumer-survivors at 40 locations across the city. A 1999 Coalition survey of tenants found that 31 per cent had lived in their unit two to five years and 25 per cent between five and 10 years. There is currently a 10-year waiting list so the list is closed but prospective tenants can approach some 26 affiliated agencies with varying eligibility requirements. Funding is provided by a number of sources. All tenants are encouraged to participate in their community and they must be Canadian citizens, not owe rent, not own a house and be able to live on their own with support. One-third of the 15-member SHC Board of Directors is tenants. While not providing full-time help, Supportive Housing workers assist tenants by providing counselling, referrals, organizing daily routines, helping with housekeeping, conducting neighbourhood meetings, enhancing employment opportunities and instituting problem solving strategies. There is a ratio of one housing staff person for every 90 households. Future projects will focus exclusively on independent living bachelor units, some with cooking facilities. The SHC has found that such units work best for most single people. However, many residents are not able, or do not wish, to prepare their own meals, so a community kitchen will be provided on each floor. Residents do want their own bathroom with shower and, because many medications cause heat sensitivity, air conditioning is required along with a common recreation space. Supervision, while not 24/7 will be provided with a Mental Health Outreach Team covering off-hours.

The Coalition will re-house the 5 per cent of tenants who find they are unable to live independently but they may move into a rooming house bed while awaiting appropriate housing. However, unsupervised sharing of washrooms and kitchens often causes disputes among

residents and results in excessive damage to assets so the Coalition is seeking some change-of-use designations from rooming house to staffed boarding house format. Boarding homes also are excellent transitional housing for the previously homeless.

While many SHC buildings are forms of shared housing, three factors make developing new rooming/boarding houses difficult: affordability, the need for 24-hour staffing, and its lack of suitability to clients. The close contact in rooming houses and high resident turnover elevates stress and results in behaviour problems, vandalism and higher maintenance costs. Therefore, the Coalition is seeking to transform some rooming houses into congregate living with a staff member on site or to contract these properties to outside support agencies. They have found that public education is necessary for community acceptance of such housing, and measure their success to date based on residents' length of stay, ability to keep their rent payments current and to maintain their units.

Conclusions

Many initiatives can be effective in maintaining existing rooming house/SRO stock, stabilizing tenancy and improving tenants' quality of life. The debate continues over converting units into independent apartments versus maintaining old/creating new units. For clients with mental health problems there is a preference for SRO-type units over a group atmosphere unless 24-hour supervision is available. Redevelopment pressures for single family, tourist and student housing have caused a loss of permanent affordable rooming house/SRO units.

Tenants report satisfaction with small units such as bachelorettes, finding them "livable" as long as safety and maintenance are adequate. Tenant preference is for SRO units with a private washroom but without kitchenette. However, more than a room is required. Communities have established supportive housing programs involving education initiatives, mediation, facilitation and conflict resolution. Alternate standards and coordinated municipal building inspections have been successful in improving the physical condition of many units. Overall, the rooming house/SRO sector plays a significant role in the "hard-to-house" market.

Résumé

À part le logement social, les maisons de chambres et les bâtiments appelés, dans certaines régions, single room occupancy (SRO), sont la forme la moins coûteuse de logement pénnant et sont essentiels pour les personnes seules à revenu très faible. L'étude de la SCHL intitulée Facteurs de réglementation touchant le maintien et l'accroissement du parc de maisons de chambres (2000) présente plusieurs stratégies pour stabiliser le parc de maisons de chambres, constamment menacé par diverses forces.

La présente étude examine d'autres démarches pour conserver le parc de maisons de chambres et de SRO et en stabiliser l'occupation. Plusieurs initiatives sont examinées dans le cadre de sept études de cas portant sur :

- La réduction des conflits
- La sensibilisation du public
- Le développement communautaire
- La construction de bâtiments et
- Le logement supervisé.

De bonnes relations entre propriétaires et locataires et de locataire à locataire ont de nombreux avantages, notamment une meilleure conservation de même que l'expansion du parc de maisons de chambres, la conscience de droits et devoirs juridiques et un bon entretien des lieux. La participation des propriétaires et des locataires au processus de planification et d'aménagement évite les conflits futurs. En outre, la sensibilisation et l'information du public sont essentielles à la conservation et à l'expansion du parc de maisons de chambres. Une démarche pro active faisant appel à tous les intéressés, comme les voisins, les locataires, les politiciens et les promoteurs peut éviter l'attitude « Pas dans ma cour ». Des associations communautaires locales, sans but lucratif et bénévoles peuvent constituer des partenariats et des alliances autour des maisons de chambres et des SRO, parce qu'il y a partage des risques, des bénéfices et du savoir-faire de toutes les parties. L'assouplissement des codes du bâtiment et des règlements de zonage a aussi son importance. Offrir un guichet unique pour permettre aux propriétaires de légaliser des bâtiments non enregistrés encourage la conservation, la modernisation, la sécurité des locataires et des loyers modiques. Le logement supervisé offre un « continuum de soins » pour les locataires non autonomes qui auront un logement sûr et abordable et réduiront le nombre de visites aux salles d'urgence et aux agences de services.

Etude de cas A: Intervention de crise coordonnée - Bureau de location de la ville de Toronto

Le bureau de location (Rental Housing Office (RHO)] de la ville de Toronto a été mis sur pied en janvier 2000 et financé par la ville en réponse à l'une des huit recommandations du Mayor's Task Force on Homelessness (groupe de travail du maire sur les sans-abri): l'absence de système global d'information sur le logement. Accessible par téléphone et par Internet, le RHO vise à servir les principaux intervenants qui fournissent déjà de l'information, des conseils et un soutien aux locataires et aux propriétaires, notamment trois organismes qui s'occupent des maisons de chambres. Le RHO ne fait pas double emploi avec les services juridiques et de logement communautaires, mais fournit des références et facilite l'échange d'information sur la prévention de l'expulsion des locataires.

À titre de facilitateur pour un réseau d'organismes et de forum pour les intervenants, le RHO fournit: 1) la coordination entre les fournisseurs d'information, comme le comité consultatif sur les logements locatifs; 2) la communication et la diffusion d'une liste de renvois à ses services de consultation et d'information pour les locataires et les propriétaires; 3) des recherches et le suivi des tendances du logement et des mesures législatives en vue de recommandations sur les politiques au conseil municipal; 4) la direction de projets spéciaux comme un fonds de défense des locataires, une ligne d'information, un programme et une campagne de sensibilisation sur les droits et les obligations des locataires. Le RHO offre aussi des documents traduits de même que des séances d'information pour la police sur les droits des propriétaires et des locataires.

Considéré comme un projet à durée indéterminée mais non permanent relevant de fonctionnaires municipaux, le comité consultatif du RHO se réunit tous les trimestres. Les besoins divers des associations de locataires bien organisés et de propriétaires individuels continuent de faire obstacle. Toutefois, les locataires des maisons de chambres sont très peu organisés si on les compare aux locataires d'appartements. Le RHO a réussi à réunir des fournisseurs de services, à améliorer les communications et à informer les fonctionnaires municipaux. On tente entre autres d'amener les agences à afficher et à partager l'information sur le site Web, mais il n'est pas facile de tenir à jour les documents électroniques et imprimés, les principaux coûts étant les salaires, le matériel informatique, la conception du site Web et les répertoires.

Etude de cas B : Aide pour la recherche de logements - Action Logement/ Action Housing, Ottawa

L'organisme sans but lucratif Action Logement a été créé en 1989 pour aider les personnes et les familles à faible revenu à conserver leur logement et à trouver un logement convenable. Un conseil d'administration bénévole surveille un effectif de 10 personnes plus des stagiaires étudiants. Il compte environ 1 800 dossiers et ce nombre augmente à la fin de l'été de même qu'à l'approche de l'hiver et de l'année scolaire. Les conseillers offrent une aide directe en examinant les petites annonces des journaux ou en remplissant une demande au Registre de logement social. Cependant, avec plus. de 13 000 demandes et une liste d'attente de cinq à sept ans pour le logement subventionné, le Registre fait face à une demande croissante.

Action Logement tient une base de données par adresse de bâtiment et est associé à la clinique juridique communautaire de l'Université d'Ottawa pour examiner les demandes au Tribunal du logement. Beaucoup de clients sont envoyés par des refuges d'urgence et deux conseillers se rendent dans les localités voisines pour aider les clients, dont beaucoup ont des problèmes : difficultés linguistiques, faible revenu, pas de téléphone, pas de cosignataires de bail ou discrimination en raison de leur statut d'immigrant ou de réfugié. Action Logement reçoit de l'argent de divers paliers de gouvernement et de ses campagnes de financement; cependant, les conseillers consacrent bénévolement beaucoup de temps à fournir des services d'interprétation à des rencontres de locataires et de locataires. La médiation est assurée gratuitement par le Service de médiation locataires/locataires d'Ottawa-Carleton qui est le sujet de la prochaine étude de cas. Le personnel tente de trouver des logements sûrs, abordables et convenables, mais les propriétaires hésitent à loger des clients à faible revenu. La demande des clients continue de croître, les taux d'occupation et les loyers ont subi des hausses spectaculaires au cours de la dernière année. Certains grands propriétaires indiquent qu'il faut un revenu de 35000 \$ à

50 000 \$ pour avoir les moyens d'habiter leurs logements. Le manque de temps et de conseillers parlant couramment les deux langues officielles nuit au service. Un site Web, utilisé jusqu'à l'an dernier par le public et les refuges, devrait être remis en service si les ressources financières le permettent. Action Logement a pu constater qu'il est préférable que ce soit un organisme sans but lucratif plutôt qu'un organisme gouvernemental qui assure les services aux ménages à la recherche d'un logement. L'apport de la collectivité et la participation de bénévoles sont essentiels à la réussite et la meilleure façon d'y parvenir est de recruter des étudiants de niveau universitaire ou collégial dans le cadre de leur programme d'études. Un financement suffisant et stable pour le personnel, le matériel et les locaux est essentiel.

Etude de cas C : Médiation - Service de médiation locateurs/locataires d'Ottawa-Carleton

Issu d'un partenariat entre Action Logement et la Clinique juridique communautaire de l'Université d'Ottawa, ce service a été fondé en 1998. Des médiateurs qualifiés fournissent gratuitement des services objectifs de médiation, de conciliation et de négociation aux locateurs et aux locataires en vue de résoudre les conflits et d'éviter les expulsions. Traitant des lois, des droits et devoirs des deux parties, le service et son conseil d'administration se caractérisent par une vision communautaire, la neutralité, l'impartialité et l'éducation. Travaillant directement avec les clients demandeurs, 12 médiateurs bénévoles formés tentent d'intervenir avant que le Tribunal du logement ne soit saisi de l'affaire. On prévoit des séances publiques de formation et de sensibilisation, financées par la Fondation Trillium, axées sur les grands immeubles locatifs et les ensembles de logements sociaux. Le service poursuit son travail d'information et de publicité par des articles dans les journaux locaux et en répondant aux préoccupations des gens du quartier relativement aux logements sociaux.

Il y a normalement de sept à 12 séances de médiation par mois, dans la plupart des cas entre propriétaire et locataire ou entre locataires. Quelque 80 % des séances de médiation se terminent par une entente après une séance de deux à trois heures. Précédemment, alors que les taux d'occupation étaient plus élevés, les locataires insatisfaits des maisons de chambres déménageaient, mais maintenant ils s'adressent à des médiateurs pour résoudre les conflits relatifs aux problèmes de tapage, de comportement, d'expulsion ou d'entretien. Beaucoup de clients sont aux prises avec des problèmes de santé mentale, de sorte qu'il faut une démarche interdisciplinaire avec des travailleurs sociaux et d'autres soutiens. Cependant, les programmes de formation à la médiation coûtent cher et exigent beaucoup de temps. Le Service vit de fonds provenant de diverses sources, mais son financement n'est jamais garanti.

Les deux parties doivent accepter la médiation et doivent comprendre leurs droits et leurs devoirs. Des propriétaires se font tirer l'oreille. Beaucoup de locataires ont des antécédents de difficultés avec des propriétaires. Il y a souvent eu escalade du litige avant qu'on ait recours à la médiation. Il faut des efforts de sensibilisation aux avantages réciproques d'une intervention hâtive. Le manque de bénévoles compétents, le coût et la durée de la formation et le manque de fonds pour la traduction et l'interprétation sont autant d'obstacles. On prévoit que le nombre de places dans les maisons de chambres augmentera dans la région d'Ottawa, de même que les demandes de services de médiation. Les activités du Service peuvent être reproduites dans

d'autres centres à la condition de disposer de ressources financières suffisantes, d'une réserve de médiateurs qualifiés, de participants bien disposés, d'une impartialité reconnue et d'efforts de sensibilisation pour encourager une médiation hâtive.

Etude de cas D : Développement communautaire - Portland Hotel Society, Vancouver

Fondée à l'origine pour répondre aux besoins des résidents de l'ancien hôtel Portland, un SRO, la Société a décidé de construire et d'exploiter un bâtiment (le nouvel hôtel Portland) et d'administrer trois autres ensembles de logements. Les fonds provenaient du Programme d'aide à la remise en état des logements (PAREL) de la SCHL. Les résidents du Portland avaient besoin d'un logement permanent, abordable, sûr et salubre ainsi que d'un réseau de services de santé et de soutien comme des programmes de soins infirmiers et de désintoxication offerts sur place pour les aider à être autonomes. En 1991, la ville voulait fermer l'ancien hôtel et le propriétaire voulait le vendre à un promoteur, mais une association communautaire, la Downtown Eastside Residents Association (DERA), a obtenu un délai de 10 ans pour retarder la démolition et construire un nouvel immeuble. La consultation des résidents a révélé que les locataires souffrant de problèmes de santé mentale ne pouvaient pas vivre dans des appartements autonomes et préféraient des petits logements. Beaucoup étaient incapables de se préparer des repas et avaient recours à des soupes populaires, de sorte qu'une cuisine communale était suffisante. Les couples préféraient un appartement d'une chambre. La majorité des logements aménagés comportent une salle de bains privée et il y a quelques studios avec cuisinette. Les résidents ont été déménagés de l'ancien hôtel Portland, qui était en mauvais état, dans le nouvel hôtel Portland.

Le personnel de la Portland Hotel Society se compose de 40 personnes à plein temps et 25 en disponibilité. Leur formation et leur flexibilité leur permettent d'assurer un « asile » 24 heures sur 24 aux personnes socialement aliénées. L'objectif fixé est « zéro expulsion » et on tente de trouver une solution de rechange avant d'expulser un locataire. Le succès de la société s'explique par la collaboration de plusieurs organismes gouvernementaux, s'occupant notamment de logement, de santé ou de développement social, ainsi que du ministère du procureur général. Les nouveaux locataires proviennent d'autres SRO, d'institutions, de refuges et de la rue. Étant incapables de vivre dans de grands locaux ne convenant pas à leur santé et à leurs capacités, ils choisissent délibérément de vivre en chambre. Le nouvel hôtel Portland loge uniquement des personnes seules éprouvant des besoins impérieux de logement (à faible revenu) difficiles à loger et des couples éprouvant de graves problèmes mentaux, physiques ou de toxicomanie. La société prévoit poursuivre les programmes actuels et négocier l'achat d'autres ensembles de logements à mesure qu'ils seront offerts sur le marché. La rénovation de SRO existants exige un investissement important mais réduit les frais de fonctionnement.

Le financement, la formation et le soutien du personnel sont essentiels à la réussite des démarches particulières de la société. Il est difficile d'obtenir des fonds pour les programmes destinés aux résidents: arts, acupuncture, excursions de camping et aliments pour les repas communautaires. Les demandes de fonds devraient toujours prévoir le financement d'un programme de repas. Avec un logement approprié et les soutiens nécessaires, même les personnes difficiles à loger peuvent trouver à se loger de façon stable, à un coût beaucoup moindre que le cercle vicieux rue-prison-hôpital. La bonne façon d'habitation et les soutiens nécessaires peuvent briser le cycle de l'itinérance. En écoutant les résidents, la société a conçu un nouveau bâtiment

comportant les aménagements nécessaires et conservé l'ancien hôtel Portland en vue de rénovations futures. Le financement et la coopération entre les divers partenaires et gouvernements sont essentiels dans de tels projets, tout comme un bon lobbying devant permettre d'obtenir des fonds pour d'autres SRO.

Etude de cas E : Programme de remise en état - Edmonton Safe Housing Committee

Ce projet de démonstration consistait à rénover une maison de 21 chambres du centre-ville avec salles de bains partagées en utilisant les nonnes de l'Association pour la préservation et ses techniques (APT) au lieu du Code national du bâtiment et des normes municipales.

L'organisme sans but lucratif a reçu une subvention ACT (Abordabilité et Choix Toujours) pour élaborer des normes moins coûteuses de sécurité des habitations en guise d'équivalents des codes standard du bâtiment. Les objectifs de ce projet de démonstration de 1993 étaient de rédiger de nouvelles normes de sécurité et de salubrité, d'évaluer l'immeuble en cause, de le rénover, de former les inspecteurs, puis de modifier et d'évaluer les normes en plus de dégager un consensus parmi les propriétaires. Dans le cadre du projet, le comité a fixé des niveaux minimaux de salubrité et de sécurité pour les bâtiments résidentiels de six étages ou moins comprenant trois logements ou plus. Ces normes ont été adoptées en 1994 et s'appliquent maintenant à la majorité des maisons de chambres, surtout celles qui ont été aménagées à partir de maisons individuelles. Le projet proprement dit a connu une série d'étapes: rédaction des normes, consultation des intervenants, préparation des plans et évaluation des résultats.

Le projet visait les logements locatifs inférieurs aux nonnes et était centré sur une démarche coordonnée d'inspection faisant appel aux services municipaux de l'urbanisme, de l'aménagement, des finances, de l'énergie, des incendies, de la santé publique et du contentieux. Il n'était pas possible pour tous les propriétaires d'amener leur immeuble au niveau des normes actuelles, de sorte que le comité a poursuivi le programme d'inspection coordonnée tout en travaillant à élaborer de nouvelles directives pour la modernisation des logements collectifs. Les nouvelles normes ont été appliquées dans l'immeuble de 21 chambres faisant l'objet du projet pilote et on a comparé les coûts avec des projets de rénovation PAREL semblables. Pour les petits immeubles de la « Division A » (maximum de trois étages, moins de 10 occupants et un propriétaire résident), les normes élaborées par le comité étaient trop coûteuses. Il était peu probable que les propriétaires puissent récupérer les coûts des augmentations de loyer imputées aux locataires à faible revenu. Cependant, les normes étaient utiles pour les bâtiments logeant plus de 10 personnes. Le coût total du projet de démonstration était de 50 000 \$, soit 2 831 \$ par logement, alors que le coût des rénovations du PAREL était de 9476 \$ par logement. Les normes de rechange permettaient de moderniser un immeuble pour le tiers ou la moitié du coût des normes ordinaires. Et la réaction des locataires à leur nouveau milieu de vie était positive.

Le projet a démontré qu'il est possible de réaliser une modernisation pratique et économique et qu'un ensemble juste et concis de normes de sécurité, d'occupation, de salubrité et de modernisation était acceptable pour les propriétaires du centre-ville. Les normes de sécurité des habitations sont maintenant appliquées pour tous les logements collectifs de six étages et moins dans la ville d'Edmonton. Elles fonctionnent le mieux dans les grands bâtiments avec une gestion active et un bon entretien. Les restrictions de personnel empêchent le maintien d'un système coordonné d'inspection. L'entretien laisse toujours à désirer dans certains immeubles, mais le

problème est décelé par les plaintes des locataires. Certains immeubles doivent être inspectés fréquemment et on envisage un système d'amendes pour les propriétaires qui exploitent des immeubles non sécuritaires, avec des ordonnances d'effectuer des travaux visant les bâtiments et non les propriétaires. Une seule des nouvelles normes a été modifiée et on exige maintenant du bois traité sous pression ou de l'acier pour les escaliers d'évacuation extérieurs.

Etude de cas F : Légalisation de logements existants - Projet pilote Parkdale, Toronto

Ce projet visait de grandes maisons individuelles qui avaient été transformées en maisons de chambres et en mini-studios mais n'avaient jamais reçu de permis d'exploitation. Un mini-studio est un mini-appartement avec une salle de bains et un coin cuisine, alors que dans les maisons de chambres les salles de bains et les cuisines sont partagées. Même s'il y avait eu beaucoup de conversions, la construction de maisons de chambres était interdite dans le secteur Parkdale depuis 1978. Les permis devaient faire en sorte que l'entretien des immeubles assure la sécurité. Beaucoup de propriétaires n'avaient pas demandé de permis pour ne pas avoir à se conformer au code du bâtiment en raison du coût que cela aurait entraîné ainsi que de la réduction du nombre de logements. Les voisins s'inquiétaient de la valeur de leur propriété, mais les locataires hésitaient à se plaindre, craignant de ne plus avoir d'endroit où se loger. Le projet visait à conserver les logements tout en assurant le respect des règlements et des codes du bâtiment et de protection contre l'incendie.

Une inspection de porte à porte a permis de repérer quelque 250 immeubles. Les fonctionnaires municipaux ont rencontré des résidents, des propriétaires, des associations communautaires et des services sociaux. Il y a eu des séances de médiation. Des réunions communautaires ont permis de consulter les intéressés. Des logements jugés trop petits et inacceptables étaient considérés comme des milieux de vie acceptables par les locataires. Des propriétaires désireux de légaliser leur immeuble commençaient par soumettre une demande avec des plans, on procédait à une inspection et les services du bâtiment et des incendies examinaient les plans. Le propriétaire recevait une liste détaillée des améliorations à apporter et un échéancier pour les travaux. La personne qui avait fait la première inspection procédait à une inspection finale et si le résultat était satisfaisant, la modification de zonage était accordée et le propriétaire demandait un permis pour exploiter l'immeuble. L'avocat général de la ville a fourni des conseils juridiques au projet pilote et les conseillers municipaux ont accordé leur appui. Tout au long du processus, les propriétaires traitaient toujours avec la même personne-ressource.

Le premier obstacle était de fixer de nouvelles normes pour l'incendie, la sécurité, le zonage et la construction. Les normes relatives au stationnement et à la taille minimale des terrains ont été modifiées dans certains cas selon que les rénovations dataient d'avant 1978 ou d'entre 1978 et 1996. La sensibilisation communautaire et la participation étaient mises en évidence. Le programme constituait un moyen d'encourager les propriétaires à se conformer aux normes. Un permis d'exploiter l'immeuble comme maison de chambres ou mini-studios facilite l'obtention du financement ou la vente de l'immeuble. En général, les propriétaires ont dépensé entre 10 000 \$ et 20 000 \$ par immeuble pour les rénovations, certains ayant présenté une demande au PAREL pour couvrir les coûts. Le programme est nouveau et moins de 50 immeubles ont été rénovés, mais il faudra faire le suivi de la délivrance des permis, des inspections et de l'entretien. Le

programme peut s'appliquer à d'autres secteurs de la ville et à d'autres collectivités; toutefois, il exige un engagement à long terme sur le plan des effectifs municipaux et une collaboration entre les services.

Etude de cas G : Logement supervisé - Supportive Housing Coalition (SHC), Toronto

Fondée en 1982, cette coalition sans but lucratif offre des logements permanents sûrs et abordables, dont 16 maisons de chambres, pour consommateurs-survivants de soins de santé mentale à 40 endroits dans la ville. Un sondage réalisé en 1999 auprès des locataires a révélé que 31 % d'entre eux habitaient leur logement depuis deux à cinq ans et 25 % depuis cinq à 10 ans. La liste d'attente est actuellement de 10 ans, et donc fennée, mais les locataires éventuels peuvent s'adresser à 26 organismes affiliés, dont les exigences d'admissibilité varient. Les fonds proviennent de diverses sources. Tous les locataires sont encouragés à participer à la collectivité et ils doivent être citoyens canadiens, ne pas devoir de loyer, ne pas posséder de maison et être autonomes avec des services de soutien. Le tiers des 15 membres du conseil d'administration sont des locataires. Sans fournir d'aide à plein temps, les travailleurs de la coalition aident les locataires par divers moyens: conseils, renvois, organisation de la routine quotidienne, aide pour le ménage, réunions de quartier, occasions d'emploi et stratégies de résolution de problèmes. Le rapport est d'un travailleur pour 90 ménages. Les projets futurs comporteront uniquement des studios, certains avec coin cuisine. La SHC a constaté que ces logements sont ceux qui fonctionnent le mieux pour la plupart des personnes seules. Cependant, beaucoup de résidents ne peuvent ou ne veulent pas préparer leurs propres repas, de sorte qu'il y aura une cuisine communautaire à chaque étage. Les résidents désirent toutefois leur propre salle de bains avec douche, et parce que beaucoup de médicaments rendent sensible à la chaleur, la climatisation est nécessaire, de même qu'un lieu de récréation commun. Il y aura supervision, mais pas 24 heures sur 24, une équipe volante de santé mentale assurant une permanence.

La coalition relogera les 5 % des locataires qui ne peuvent être autonomes, mais ils pourraient emménager dans une maison de chambres en attendant une place appropriée. Toutefois, le partage non surveillé des salles de bains et des cuisines est une source fréquente de conflits entre les résidents et cause souvent des dommages excessifs aux actifs, de sorte que la coalition voudrait transformer les maisons de chambres en pensions supervisées. Les pensions sont aussi un excellent logement de transition pour ceux qui étaient auparavant sans abri.

Si plusieurs des immeubles de la SHC représentent diverses formes de cohabitation, trois facteurs militent contre l'aménagement de nouvelles maisons de chambres: l'abordabilité, la présence obligatoire de personnel 24 heures sur 24 et le fait que cette sorte de logement ne convient pas à la clientèle. Le contact étroit dans les maisons de chambres et le roulement élevé des résidents augmentent le stress et donnent lieu à des problèmes de comportement, à du vandalisme et à une augmentation des coûts d'entretien. C'est pourquoi la coalition cherche à transformer certaines maisons de chambres en foyers, avec un membre du personnel sur place, ou à céder ces immeubles à contrat à des organismes extérieurs de soutien. La coalition a constaté qu'une sensibilisation du public s'impose pour faire accepter ces logements par la collectivité et mesure sa réussite à ce jour d'après la durée du séjour des résidents, leur capacité de payer le loyer à temps et d'entretenir leur logement.

Conclusions

Plusieurs initiatives peuvent réussir à maintenir le parc existant de maisons de chambres et de SRO, à stabiliser l'occupation et à améliorer la qualité de vie des locataires. La controverse se poursuit quant à savoir s'il faut convertir les logements en appartements autonomes ou bien conserver les anciens logements ou en créer de nouveaux. Dans le cas des clients qui ont des problèmes de santé mentale, les SRO sont préférables aux logements de groupe, sauf s'il y a surveillance ininterrompue. Les pressions pour le réaménagement en maisons individuelles, hébergement touristique ou logements d'étudiants ont entraîné une perte de maisons de chambres et de SRO offrant un logement permanent et abordable. Les locataires se disent satisfaits de petits logements comme les mini-studios, les trouvant « vivables » pourvu que la sécurité et l'entretien soient suffisants. Les locataires préfèrent des SRO avec salle de bains mais sans coin cuisine. Toutefois, il faut plus qu'une chambre. Les collectivités ont mis au point des programmes de logement supervisé comportant des initiatives de sensibilisation, la médiation, la facilitation et la résolution de conflits. De nouvelles normes et des inspections coordonnées ont réussi à améliorer l'état de nombreux logements. Dans l'ensemble, le secteur des maisons de chambres et des SRO joue un rôle important dans le marché des « difficiles à loger ».

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Rooming houses are an essential form of housing for very low income single people, including those with mental health problems. Outside of social housing, they are the least expensive form of permanent accommodation currently available in most cities. The study *Regulatory Factors in the Retention and Expansion of Rooming House Stock*¹ provides information on how regulations such as municipal by-laws, zoning, health, fire-safety and maintenance, licensing, and enforcement have affected the number and type of rooming houses operating and being constructed across the country. The study helps to identify how these regulations must be changed to become less restrictive and more facilitative, to support the preservation and creation of rooming houses. The study also found that barriers to the retention or creation of rooming houses are often related to non-regulatory factors such as lack of support to tenants (e.g. mental health workers); conflicts between landlord and tenant, tenant and tenant or rooming house occupants and neighbours; and lack of financing for construction or conversion of existing buildings. The purpose of this study, therefore, is to examine how these factors have affected the retention and expansion of rooming house stock.

The examples reviewed in Section 2.0 provide information related to the range of initiatives taken in Canada and the United States beyond the establishment and enforcement of regulations that can help conserve rooming house stock and stabilize rooming house tenancy. The areas covered in our review include:

- reducing conflicts between landlords and tenants and between tenants;
- public education;
- community development;
- constructing, converting and rehabilitating buildings; and
- supportive housing (e.g. health, social service or other support to tenants)

Although some of the initiatives may have been applied to other forms of rental housing, the strategies used can also be effectively applied to rooming house applications.

¹ The Starr Group Inc. in Association with Richard Drdla Associates (2000), *Regulatory Factors in the Retention and Expansion of Rooming House Stock*, CMHC Research Report

2.0 EXAMPLES OF INITIATIVES AFFECTING THE RETENTION AND EXPANSION OF ROOMING HOUSE STOCK

Below we outline some recent examples of initiatives and approaches undertaken in various communities across Canada and the United States to help conserve rooming house stock and stabilize rooming house tenancy.

2.1 REDUCING CONFLICTS BETWEEN LANDLORDS AND TENANTS AND BETWEEN TENANTS

One of the biggest problems affecting rooming house tenants is the possibility of eviction. Tenants may be evicted for a number of reasons, primarily the inability to pay their rent, or coming into conflict with landlords or other tenants. A number of projects have been undertaken to help reduce conflicts between tenants and landlords and between tenants in a rooming house. Below we outline some recent examples in Canada and elsewhere.

- **The Fremont Public Association**

The **Fremont Public Association**² in Seattle, Washington provides housing counselling to landlords and tenants. They believe that “the difference between housing stability and homelessness can often revolve around how much we know about leases or mortgage documents, and how well we can advocate for ourselves in negotiating with landlords and lenders”. Their counselling service helps people understand tenants’ rights and responsibilities under state and local laws. They support tenants threatened with eviction with either rental assistance and/or mediation with a landlord to manage a short-term crisis. They also provide no charge voice-mail services to tenants without phones to help them communicate with landlords and other service providers.

- **City of Toronto Rental Housing Office (RHO)**

The City of Toronto **Rental Housing Office (RHO)**³ was established in 1999. The mandate of the RHO is “to enhance security of tenure by supporting key stakeholders that provide information, advice and support to tenants and landlords on rental housing matters”. The RHO provides information on a number of initiatives related to the prevention of tenant eviction from rooming houses and other forms of rental accommodation. These include the Eviction Prevention Kit and Training Workshops, the Early Intervention Pilot Project and The Tenant Survival Manual and Checklists. Further discussion of the initiatives undertaken by the Rental Housing Office is provided in section 4.0.

² Fremont Public Association, Seattle, Washington <http://www.fremontpublic.org/client/shelter.html>

³ The City of Toronto Rental Housing Office, Toronto, Ontario
http://www.city.toronto.on.ca/toronto_housing/rho/index/html

- **Federation of Metro Tenants' Associations**

The **Eviction Prevention Kit and Training Workshops**⁴ were developed by the Federation of Metro Tenants' Associations (FMTA) of Toronto. The Kit contains information about the grounds for eviction, the rights of the tenant facing eviction, procedures before the Ontario Rental Housing Tribunal and the community resources that can be accessed by tenants when facing eviction. The kit also contains material for agency workers to use when providing information or referrals to clients facing eviction.

The **Tenant Survival Manual and Checklists**⁵ were created in 1998/99 by the Federation of Metro Tenants' Associations to support tenants facing eviction. In addition to the updating of the manual, which was recently completed for 2001, checklists about the most frequently asked issues were developed in multiple languages as companion pieces to the Manual. The latest edition covers the following topics:

- leases and tenancy agreements;
- rent increases;
- illegal rents and charges;
- evictions: procedure and prevention;
- privacy and harassment issues;
- subletting and assignment;
- maintenance and repairs;
- representing yourself at the Tribunal; and
- building a tenants' association.

- **Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation**

The **Early Intervention Pilot Project**⁶ was initiated in 1999 by the **Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation (CERA)** in the former Metro Toronto. The project was a 12-week eviction and homelessness prevention strategy where tenants in receipt of an eviction application were contacted by mail and telephone and informed of their rights and obligations under the Tenant Protection Act. The overall goal of the project was to prevent further homelessness by providing tenants with information and resources to maintain their current housing or to find alternate

⁴ Federation of Metro Tenants' Associations, Toronto, Ontario <http://www.torontotenants.org/tenant.htm>

⁵ Federation of Metro Tenants' Associations, Toronto, Ontario <http://www.torontotenants.org/tenant/htm>
and City of Toronto Rental Housing Office, Toronto, Ontario
http://www.city.toronto.on.ca/toronto_housing/rho/index.html

⁶ Ramsay, J. (2000) *Early Intervention Pilot Project: Final Report*. Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation, Toronto, Ontario. <http://www.web.net.cera/>

accommodation. The project also provided income support to tenants through the city-supported Rent Bank and Shelter Fund. In the final report of this project, the author listed several indicators of the effectiveness of the project, including:

- the rate at which tenants disputed their eviction applications increased in the weeks following the start of the project;
- referrals to Social Services resulted in social assistance recipients getting access to the Shelter Fund to maintain their housing;
- an increased number of telephone calls to the Federation of Metro Tenants' Associations' Eviction Hotline;
- unsolicited calls back to CERA from tenants thanking volunteers for their intervention and calling to say that they had retained their housing; and
- tenants seeking help from legal clinics, Tenant Duty Counsel and community agencies with their eviction application.

A similar program was set up in May 2000 in Ottawa-Carleton. CERA continues to offer eviction programs in Toronto and Ottawa. As well, the organization supports local Homelessness Advisory Groups throughout Ontario by providing data from the Rental Housing Tribunal to groups who are running eviction prevention programs. These groups contact the tenants scheduled for Tribunal hearings to inform them of their programs and provide support when it is requested.

- **Housing Search Assistance, Action Logement/Action Housing, Ottawa**

Action Logement/Action Housing⁷ was established ten years ago to assist individuals and families seeking safe, affordable housing in the city of Ottawa. They focus primarily on the eastern areas of the city, with Housing Help Ottawa covering the remaining communities. The primary focus of Action Logement is to work directly with individuals and families who are looking for housing to assist them in their search.

Each client seeking assistance goes through the intake process where general information is taken about his or her needs, income levels and household composition. The client then speaks to a counsellor who provides information on housing appropriate to the client's needs. Many of the clients have language barriers, so translation services are provided, especially for those who do not speak English and are inquiring about properties where the management speaks only English. Counsellors follow up with their clients during the housing search process. Services include offering free voice-mail use for clients without access to telephones, advising clients of their rights, accompanying the client to the Rental Housing Tribunal, and providing legal services and referrals to agencies including mediation services.

We have reviewed the programs of Action Housing/Logement in further detail in section 5.0.

⁷ Telephone interview with Action Logement staff, Ottawa, Ontario

- **Mediation Services, Tenant/Landlord Mediation Services of Ottawa-Carleton, Ottawa**

The **Tenant/Landlord Mediation Services of Ottawa-Carleton**⁸ was established in 1998 as a partnership between Action Logement/Action Housing and the University of Ottawa Community Legal Clinic. Legal services and referrals are provided through mediation counsellors, including students at the University of Ottawa Faculty of Law. Mediators have completed a recognized mediation training program, and are supervised by a Mediation Supervisor. Mediation services are provided at no charge to the clients, and are provided in both French and English.

More information on the effectiveness of the programs provided by Tenant/Landlord Mediation Services is provided in section 6.0.

- **Placing Rent in Escrow**

Tenant and landlord disputes can result not only in the eviction of tenants, but can also result in the withholding of rent by tenants for code violations by the landlord. Sometimes tenants use this as a way to avoid paying rent⁹ and can create a large financial loss for landlords. A number of states in the U.S. have put into place **mandatory rent escrow** procedures. By holding the accruing rent in escrow, tenants with legitimate complaints related to code violations have a better chance of having these repairs completed by owners, since owners will receive most of the escrowed rent after repairs are completed. Judges may, if necessary, order the escrowed funds to be used for repairs. Schloming and Schloming recommended that rent escrowing could be used in targeted buildings to remedy long-standing problems as a more positive approach than condemning buildings and evicting tenants.

- **Resident Involvement**

Involving rooming-house tenants in the management of their housing has been tried in a number of different jurisdictions. In the early 1990's, Toronto's **Rupert Project**¹⁰ was implemented, in part, as an initiative to help rooming house tenants take some control over management and tenant relations. Other examples of tenant involvement were found in U.S. cities including **Jersey City, Louisville, New Orleans** and **Rochester** in the 1970's. In the Literature Review portion of their report, authors MacKay and Love cited Robert Kolodny's¹¹ statement that these

⁸ Tenant/Landlord Mediation Services of Ottawa-Carleton, <http://www.atreide.net/info-recherche/mediation>

⁹ Schloming, L. and Schloming, S. (2000), *The Road Home: Working with Small Property Owners to Preserve and Create Affordable Rental Housing*. <http://www.pioneerinstitute.org/crg/bgc/roadhome.cfm>

¹⁰ Stein, H., Teeple, C. and Foley, K. (1995), *The Private Rooming House Project of the Rupert Hotel Coalition Pilot Project, Rooming Houses in the City of Toronto: Three Recent Studies*, Rupert Community Residential Services of Toronto Inc.

¹¹ MacKay, H. and Love, A. (1994), *Tenant Management of a Rooming House*, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation. Ottawa, Ontario

projects were highly successful, in part because tenants were empowered, had expanded employment opportunities, developed leadership skills and worked toward the revitalization of depressed residential districts.

The **Vancouver Area Network of Drug Users**¹²(VANDU) meets on a weekly basis, and was formed “to give Vancouver’s most marginalized residents a voice in any municipal plan affecting them.” A delegation from VANDU appeared before a city council committee to air concerns over a variety of issues, including housing, and the participants have found that having the opportunity to make their voices heard has resulted in enhanced understanding of the needs of their members.

- **Conclusions**

The retention and expansion of the current rooming house stock can be enhanced by strengthening the relationships between tenants and between tenants and landlords. Critical to this is the need for landlords and tenants to be aware of their rights and responsibilities under applicable provincial or municipal legislation relating to landlord-tenant issues, including providing information to prevent evictions. Landlords must be aware of the requirement to maintain their buildings in good order to ensure tenants do not have just cause for withholding rents. Including both tenants and landlords in the planning process when housing is being developed or rehabilitated helps to ensure that their needs are met and can assist in avoiding future conflicts.

2.2 PUBLIC EDUCATION

- **NIMBY Public Education Reports**

A critical issue related to rooming houses is the “Not In My BackYard (NIMBY)” attitude of many of the neighbours and politicians in jurisdictions where rooming houses exist or where conversions of buildings into rooming houses are planned. Education is an important component of the strategy to retain current rooming house stock. The National Low Income Housing Coalition’s **NIMBY Report** is produced in the U.S. on a monthly basis. The report for February 2001¹³ describes a telephone survey undertaken by the Coalition on Homelessness and Housing in Columbus, Ohio (COHHIO) to determine community beliefs about homeless facilities.

The results of the telephone survey are also relevant to those wishing to overcome community resistance to other forms of affordable housing. Other useful educational tools are found in the National Low Income Housing Coalition’s BiYearly NIMBY Report entitled **Smart Growth**

¹² Wood, C., (March 8, 1999), Small Solutions, Across Canada, fresh initiatives give new hope to the homeless, MacLean’s Online, Special Report, <http://www.canadiansocialresearch.net/homemac.htm>

¹³ The NeighborhoodWorks Journal, The NIMBY Report, February 2001, National Low Income Housing Coalition, Washington, D.C. <http://www.nlihc.org/nimby/020201.htm>

and Affordable Housing dated Spring, 2001¹⁴. This report contains articles including “How to deal with property values concerns” and “Affordable housing does not lower property values”, which can be useful tools to help educate residents and politicians concerned about rooming houses in their jurisdictions.

- **City of Toronto Rental Housing Office Education/Co-ordinated Response Initiatives**

Education is also a component of the City of Toronto **Rental Housing Office**¹⁵. An information package intended to educate tenants and landlords about their rights and responsibilities during Rental Rooming House Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program (RRAP) renovations is being developed, and an education program for police officers regarding landlord/tenant rights and responsibilities and landlord/tenant referral information resources is being established. In addition, existing written information resources for tenants and landlords will be made available in multiple languages. This office also plans to work with other city departments/divisions to disseminate information about city policies, by-laws and services including property standards and rooming house licensing, and to provide training to city staff on relevant landlord/tenant matters.

- **Peel Housing Opportunity Centre**

The **Peel Housing Opportunity Centre**¹⁶ set up an **Education Committee** to create a comprehensive education package on affordable housing: what it is, why it exists, who lives in it, and to address the myths and realities surrounding it. They hoped that such a package will increase neighbourhood acceptance of affordable housing projects by effectively addressing any misconceptions. The information package includes a video of interviews with various stakeholders and a seven-member focus group.

- **Conclusions**

The provision of accurate information about rooming houses, SROs¹⁷ and other forms of affordable housing is important to the successful development of new rooming houses as well as the retention of the existing stock. Wherever possible, neighbours, prospective tenants, politicians and developers should be brought together during the planning process in a proactive way to help avoid NIMBY attitudes.

¹⁴ The NeighborhoodWorks Journal, The NIMBY BiYearly Report, Spring, 2001, National Low Income Housing Coalition, Washington, D.C. <http://www.nlihc.org/nimby/index.htm>

¹⁵ City of Toronto Rental Housing Office, http://www.city.toronto.on.ca/toronto_housing/rho/index.html

¹⁶ Bruce, D. (1998) *A-C-T In Action: Affordability and Choice Today: Lessons Learned*, CMHC

¹⁷ SRO stands for Single-Room-Occupancy unit. This type of unit is designed to house one person, and has a combined living/sleeping area. Other amenities such as a washroom or kitchen area may be provided within the room, or may be located in a common area to be shared with other residents.

2.3 COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Rooming house renovations and conversions often fulfill an important community development role. By increasing local understanding of the importance of this role, communities can help build support for the rooming house sector.

- **Community Development Corporations**

Community Development Corporations (CDCs)¹⁸ have played an important role in establishing and maintaining rooming houses and in educating communities about the importance of this kind of housing, particularly in the U.S. CDCs are non-profit organizations and are generally community-based and volunteer-run. They are often the initiators of the development or rehabilitation of rooming houses or SROs, and they work closely with municipal and/or national organizations that provide technical support services such as direct assistance and grants to hire consultants, legal services and other kinds of technical advice and support. Successful CDC operations generally involve partnerships with private investors to ensure the successful funding and development of much needed low-income rental housing. Below we outline some recent examples of community development initiatives related to rooming houses in Canada and elsewhere.

- **Maryland Center for Community Development**

Maryland is one example of how community organizations can have a positive impact on existing low-income housing. The **Maryland Center for Community Development**¹⁹ is a state-wide, non-profit organization that promotes housing and community development, fair housing opportunities and community investment in Maryland through technical assistance, training, information, education and advocacy. They have been successful in maintaining Baltimore County low-income housing, including rooming houses, that was threatened by new development, and have developed a Sustainable Communities Initiative that is creating a capital pool for older neighbourhoods to stimulate re-investment projects.

- **Indianapolis Community Development Corporation**

Indianapolis, Indiana²⁰ has a number of community development corporations (CDCs) that engage in housing revitalization, economic development and partnerships with other community institutions. They bring neighbours together to address issues such as absentee landlords, dilapidated housing, vacant buildings and other related problems. CDCs maximize public funds

¹⁸ Kernan, J., Lt. Governor (Indianapolis, Sunday Star, May 9, 1999). *Community Development Corporations Catalysts for Change*. Indianapolis, Indiana, <http://www.state.in.us/ihfa/ihfaprograms/kernan/columns/1999/990509.htm>

¹⁹ Maryland Center for Community Development <http://www.mccd.org/publicpolicy/index.html>

²⁰ Kernan, J. Lt. Governor (Indianapolis Sunday Star, May 9, 1999) *Community Development Catalysts for Change* <http://www.state.in.us/ihfa/ihfaprograms/kernan/columns/1999/990509.htm>

by building alliances with financial institutions, equity investors and charitable donors. The Indiana Housing Finance Authority often partners with CDCs across Indiana to construct or rehabilitate special needs housing such as homeless shelters, rooming houses and transitional housing.

- **Sacramento Mutual Housing Association**

One community development initiative in Sacramento, California has taken the form of community organizing where residents are provided with adequate information and tools for decision making. One positive outcome of effective community organizing in Sacramento was related to the development of SRO housing units. A staff proposal before the housing commission would have disallowed further construction of SRO hotels in the downtown area. Because SRO residents were able to speak for themselves at a public forum, commission members who attended the meeting voted unanimously to send the proposal back to staff for more community input and discussion. Successful community organizing in Sacramento through the **Sacramento Mutual Housing Association**²¹ has resulted in communities that are more stable, local governments that are more supportive and processes that are in place to resolve problems when they arise.

- **U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Blue Ribbon Practices in Housing and Community Development**

Two examples of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Blue Ribbon Practices in Housing and Community Development are found in **New Orleans, Louisiana** and **Iowa City, Iowa**.

New Orleans²² has a very active homeless coalition (UNITY for the Homeless, Inc.). Through the work of this organization, in conjunction with the City of New Orleans and Volunteers of America of Greater New Orleans, the first SRO in the City of New Orleans was built. It houses more than 60 recovering, formerly homeless addicts in a permanent and safe dwelling, where their addictions can be treated. This facility will serve as a model for other similar programs. Funding for the renovation of the building was made available by the sale of tax credits and HUD committed rental assistance for the tenants.

Iowa City²³ was able to establish a new SRO rooming house through the city's Emergency Housing Project. Community partners worked together to enable the purchase of the property, businesses provided flexible and non-traditional employment opportunities to the SRO tenants, and tenants were charged below Fair Market rents as part of the development of the project. According to a report on the project, the project has been of benefit to everyone associated with

²¹ The NeighborWorks Journal, <http://www.nw.org/resources/pub/nwjjournal/1998/vol6no2/p08.html>

²² U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Blue Ribbon Practices in Housing and Community Development, City of New Orleans, LA Homeless Coalition Activities, <http://www.hud.gov/ptw/docs/la0398.html>

²³ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Blue Ribbon Practices in Housing and Community Development, Iowa City, Iowa, Continuum of Care <http://www.hud.gov/ptw/docs/ia02.html>

it. The company that employs the homeless people purchased new equipment and increased the number of employees. They co-sign apartment leases for their employees and provide funds for a security deposit. The SRO property owners collect Fair Market rents on at least four of their units, which helps offset some costs for building management.

- **Minnesota Housing Preservation Project**

Another Community Development Project is the **Housing Preservation Project**²⁴ in Minnesota. This project was founded by the Family Housing Fund to address the need to maintain over 9,000 units of rental housing which were identified as likely to be converted to higher-rent housing.

The efforts of the Housing Preservation Project included:

- education of tenants, advocacy organizations, policy makers and others about preservation issues and strategies;
- legal intervention on behalf of tenants of threatened projects and advocacy organizations, including negotiation with owners and funders and litigation, when necessary;
- policy development, including state and national legislation to maximize preservation resources; and
- technical assistance to tenants, owners and purchasers, including the structuring of financing packages that maintain the federal subsidies and affordability of the projects.

This group was able, during 1998, to successfully preserve hundreds of units of federally-subsidized affordable rental housing.

- **San Francisco Community Housing Partnership**

The **Community Housing Partnership**²⁵ (CHP) in San Francisco has used a community involvement process that includes homeless and formerly homeless people, advocates, service providers, city staff, private business representatives and others to engage in long-term project development. The primary mission of the organization is to develop affordable, permanent housing with optional on-site support systems and employment opportunities and to include homeless people and the tenants of their buildings in all decision-making, project development and organizational opportunities.

²⁴ Housing Preservation Project, Minnesota, <http://www.gmhf.com/Pages/Housing%20Preservation.htm>

²⁵ The Community Housing Project, Coalition on Homelessness, San Francisco, CA <http://www.sfo.com/-coh/chp.html>

A number of SROs have been developed by CHP since 1990. The organization was also able to rehabilitate three buildings at low cost by hiring a number of tenants to complete the work. Tenants are also training to perform maintenance services at CHP sites. The CHP works collaboratively with other housing and employment providers in order to share and co-ordinate resources.

- **Downtown Eastside Revitalization Program/The Vancouver Agreement**

The **Downtown Eastside Revitalization Program**²⁶ began in 1998 as a means to “create partnerships with community residents and neighbourhood groups, as well as public and private sectors, to help develop and implement long-term solutions to community safety, health, housing and economic development.” The draft *Housing Plan for the Downtown Eastside, Chinatown, Gastown and Strathcona* was created in 1998, and according to the 2000 Downtown Eastside Community Monitoring Report, was to have further public discussion prior to being presented to Council. The Downtown Eastside Community Revitalization Program Interim Report²⁷ recognizes the need to control new development and gentrification that threaten the existing SRO hotel stock. The city developed the H.O.M.E.S. (Housing Order Maintenance Enforcement Safety) pilot program to ensure problem SRO buildings were adequately maintained.

The **Vancouver Agreement**²⁸ was signed by the federal, provincial and city of Vancouver governments to promote and support sustainable economic, social and community development in the city of Vancouver, focussing initially on the area known as the Downtown Eastside. The agreement was first negotiated in draft form in June 1999, and was circulated to the public for their response. Meetings were held in September 1999 with community representatives and the general public to obtain input, and the finalized version of the agreement was developed. The agreement states that “where appropriate, the parties will partner with other institutions, including foundations, the non-profit sector, post-secondary and other educational institutions, and the private sector.”²⁹

One of the principles for the Downtown Eastside Strategy is to ensure existing residents are not displaced from the community by promoting the maintenance and upgrading of housing including market and non-market properties. The Vancouver Agreement outlines some of the objectives of the housing sub-component as follows:

²⁶ City of Vancouver 2000 Downtown Eastside Community Monitoring Report, <http://www.city.vancouver.bc.ca/commsvcs/planning/dtes/dtehome.htm>

²⁷ City of Vancouver Administrative Report, Downtown Eastside Community Revitalization Program – Interim Report (February 1 2000) Report to Vancouver City Council from the City Manager, <http://www.city.vancouver.bc.ca/ctyclerk/ccclerk/000201/a7.htm>

²⁸ The Vancouver Agreement, (March 9, 2000) *Urban Development Agreement Regarding Economic, Social and Community Development in the City of Vancouver* between Her Majesty the Queen in Right of Canada and Her Majesty the Queen in Right of the Province of British Columbia and the City of Vancouver

²⁹ *ibid.*

- “ensure an adequate number of safe, secure, and affordable permanent housing units for low-income and high-risk individuals;
 - ensure that existing single-room occupancy units in the Downtown Eastside are maintained and offer safe, affordable, and liveable shelter until other forms of housing are available in Vancouver and the province;...
 - increase housing options for low-income people in other parts of the city and the province; and
 - increase the effectiveness of health services by integrating them with a range of housing alternatives.”
- **Downtown Core Housing Project, Main and Hastings Community Development Society**

The **Main and Hastings Community Development Society**³⁰ oversaw this study which involved interviews of 1,447 residents of SROs in Vancouver’s downtown between June and August 1999. The survey was an update of the 1991 survey of residents, and was completed to obtain a current picture of the residents of SROs, including demographics, their health and housing needs. The Main and Hastings Community Development Society worked in collaboration with the Tenants’ Rights Action Coalition, using funding provided by BC Housing. The survey results found that in 1999, 1 in 4 residents had lived in the area between 2 to 5 years, compared to only 1 in 10 respondents in the 1991 survey.

Survey respondents indicated that they are concerned about the management of the SRO buildings, including problems with vermin and noise, as well as poor maintenance. The study found that in 1999, 90% of the respondents indicated that they would prefer to live in a self-contained apartment instead of a SRO unit compared to 80% in 1991. In 1999, only 2% indicated a preference to remain in SRO housing, compared to 11% in 1991. Despite the stated preference for a self-contained apartment, 67% of the respondents indicated that they expected to be living in the area for the next three years, although the availability of self-contained apartment units clearly will not meet that need.

The study states that although SROs are required to meet the housing needs of low income singles in the downtown core, SRO housing “is not an answer to homelessness and should not be seen as a permanent solution.”³¹ A number of respondents (11%) favoured the creation of new permanent affordable housing over programs to renovate old SRO buildings. However, the study also states that “provided certain conditions were met, almost two-thirds of all residents indicated that they were in favour of government and non-profit groups buying and renovating hotels and then renting them back to current residents at the same rent”.³² These conditions included making the rooms larger and having a private bathroom for each unit.

³⁰ Downtown Core Housing Project, 2000, Main and Hastings Community Development Society in collaboration with Tenants' Rights Action Coalition, funded by BC Housing

³¹ *ibid.*, page 9

³² *ibid.*, page 31

A high number of individuals responded that they had lived in another SRO before moving to their current SRO address (42%), 33% had lived in another type of rental housing, and 4% had come directly from a shelter. Women make up only 15% of the residents in SROs in the area, and 65% of the residents were under age 45. Aboriginal people represent 8% of the general population, but 15% of the residents interviewed responded that they belonged to this group. Most residents had lived in their unit for less than two years, with 33% having moved within the previous six months, and only 11% having lived in the same unit for five years or longer.

- **Chicago Lakefront SRO**

The **Lakefront SRO**³³, a Community Development Corporation, rehabilitated and managed several SRO buildings with supportive services for the homeless in the Uptown, Edgewater and Lakeview neighbourhoods of Chicago. Lakefront also works as a development consultant and has collaborated with other agencies to preserve and create SRO housing in Chicago. Because of Lakefront's experience and expertise, new projects formed with inexperienced partners have a better chance of being successful.

- **Conclusions**

Community development organizations can play a critical role in the development and maintenance of rooming houses and SROs. This kind of locally-based, not-for-profit, voluntary organization is able to build partnerships and alliances with developers, government agencies and other groups in joint ventures where each partner provides a necessary component to the provision and maintenance of rooming houses and SROs. In this way, both the risks and rewards involved in developing and financing projects are shared among many stakeholders. All groups involved in such initiatives are able to bring their expertise, resources and their own unique requirements to the project through such alliances.

2.4 CONSTRUCTING, CONVERTING AND REHABILITATING BUILDINGS

One of the problems associated with rooming houses is that the buildings are often older and were converted from single family housing into multiple-unit housing that has deteriorated over the years. Closing the buildings would mean that people would lose their housing, but the cost of renovating these buildings to comply with national and provincial building codes is frequently prohibitive. A variety of initiatives have been undertaken to address this issue. Some recent examples are outlined below.

³³ Levavi, P., Chicago CDCs Increase Efficiency, <http://www.nhi.org/online/issues/87/citywidecdc.html>

- **Edmonton A•C•T Demonstration Project**

In 1993, the city of Edmonton was awarded an **A•C•T (Affordability and Choice Today)** grant to undertake renovations in a demonstration building using a set of alternative renovation standards developed by the Association for Preservation Technology. They developed a Table of Alternate Technical Measures called **Safe Housing Standards**³⁴ that can be applied as equivalencies to the National Building Code, but have a lower cost to landlords.

The project's main objectives were to:

- develop a draft set of alternative health and safety standards;
- carry out a detailed site evaluation of an existing building;
- renovate the building using the Safe Housing Standards in place of the requirements of the National Building Code;
- educate inspectors in the use of alternative standards to ensure the renovations met the requirements of the standards developed; and
- modify and evaluate the alternative standards and achieve consensus with landlords.

The project was able to demonstrate that practical and cost-effective upgrading to meet health and safety standards can be achieved in a residential property by carefully applying Safe Housing Standards. They were also able to demonstrate that the Safe Housing Standards developed provide a fair and concise set of safety, occupancy, health and upgrading standards to inner-city property owners.

It was felt that these standards would help alleviate some of the past problems associated with uneven or sporadic interpretation of standards by various city of Edmonton departments. According to the report, "these (Safe Housing Standards) can be readily applied elsewhere in Alberta and should be of benefit to municipalities across Canada that have aging housing stock in need of repair".

More information on this program can be found in section 8.0.

- **Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program (RRAP)**

Building rehabilitation support is available through the **Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program (RRAP)**. RRAP funding is available throughout Canada and is delivered by Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) in some jurisdictions and by the provincial/territorial housing agency in others. RRAP offers financial assistance to rooming house owners for repairs to their buildings in order to bring them up to minimum health and safety standards. The assistance is a forgivable loan. Funds are to be used to complete repairs that will bring the dwelling up to a defined minimal level of health and safety in order to extend the useful life of the building for at least 15 years.

- **Alameda County Conversion of Unused Military Housing**

³⁴ Bruce, D., (1998) *A-C-T In Action: Affordability and Choice Today: Lessons Learned, Final Report*, CMHC

Alameda County, California received a U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Blue Ribbon award for their conversion of unused military bases into housing for the homeless³⁵. **The Collaborative**, formed by providers of services to the homeless in Alameda County, in conjunction with the Alameda Naval Air Station, rehabilitated 261 units of SRO, as well as other kinds of housing. In addition, several buildings located on the former military base were able to be used for economic development enterprises. Another large building on the base became a multi-service centre to provide office space and classroom facilities for job training and employment services. Funding for this project came from a wide variety of sources including funds granted to the Collaborative by the Oakland Base Reuse Authority, and other government and private and public agencies. Technical assistance was provided by a number of organizations including the East Bay Conversion and Reinvestment Commission, the Center for Community Change and the Center for Economic Conversion.

- **Kenmore Hotel Conversion, New York City**

Housing and Services Inc., a non-profit management and development company in New York City, has completed a rehabilitation of the Kenmore Hotel³⁶ into SRO rental units (efficiency apartments) plus community space. Housing and Services Inc. operates 11 supportive housing buildings and has acted as development advisors to non-profit agencies. In order to operate successfully, they work very closely with the community where the project is located. The rehabilitation of the Kenmore Hotel included an expanded lobby, which is used as a social meeting area, and the construction of a library, exercise room and community room. Funding for the Kenmore Hotel rehabilitation included \$14 million in equity supplied by Bell Atlantic under the tax-credit program for low-income housing, as well as rent vouchers to supplement tenants' rent payments to meet operating requirements.

- **San Diego SRO Development**

Between 1975 and 1985, San Diego saw a loss of approximately 1,367 SRO units. San Diego has now reversed this trend through taking direct action to reduce conversions and setting up special classifications for SROs. Between 1987 and 1993, over 2700³⁷ new or renovated, privately owned, single-room units were added to the market, with the vast majority being built and run without public subsidy. San Diego's special **SRO Code Task Force** made recommendations to the city council and other city agencies in order to facilitate SRO construction by responsibly altering and relaxing regulations.

³⁵ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Blue Ribbon Practices in Housing and Community Development, Alameda County, California, Continuum of Care Expansion Base Closure, <http://www.hud.gov/ptw/docs/ca0198.html>

³⁶ Culhane, D.P., Metraux, S. and Hadley, T., (2001) *the Impact of Supportive Housing for Homeless People with Severe Mental Illness on the Utilization of the Public Health, Corrections, and Emergency Shelter Systems: The New York-New York Initiative*, <http://www.fanniemaefoundation.org>

³⁷ Kojima, R. (1995) *Single Room Occupancy Housing Policy, A Study of Vancouver's SRO Housing*, Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario

Some of the steps taken to support the development of SROs included:

- **classifying SROs as a commercial use for planning and zoning purposes.** By allowing SROs to be constructed in commercial, rather than residential zones, San Diego enabled developers to take advantage of inexpensive land in poorer commercial areas on the fringe of downtown;
- **permitting construction of smaller rooms without a full kitchen or bath.** State permission was given to reduce the minimum room size for single-room units and to allow rooms to have a partial bath (a toilet separated from the living area by a half-wall), with showers down the corridor and microwave ovens instead of full kitchens. This resulted in more units being built and lower rent charges;
- **permitting building code equivalencies.** Building safety codes were reviewed in order to find alternative, less costly ways to provide equivalent alternatives to current requirements;
- **parking.** The city let SRO developers provide .5 spaces per room (generally the requirement would be 1.0 spaces per room) through the use of variances. Less land was devoted to parking, which meant that additional rooms could be built on the site and lower rents could be charged;
- **handicapped access.** SROs were classified as hotels when it was advantageous to do so in order to reduce costs. By using this classification, they were able to reduce the number of handicapped units required in each project;
- **hotel tax.** In this case, for tax purposes, SROs were not classified as hotels, which eliminated the need to collect a 7% “transient occupancy tax”;
- **water and sewer capacity charges.** The city had been charging SRO owners a relatively high per room water capacity charge. By calculating the charges based on the number of actual private plumbing fixtures in each room, the cost was significantly reduced; and
- **lack of subsidies.** The SROs were financed by private owners, although rent subsidies have been made available to some very low-income tenants.

SROs in San Diego have their own kind of “housing ladder”. The size of the rooms and type of amenities available improve with higher rent levels, and even the rules governing when guests may visit vary with rent levels, demonstrating that, even at very low incomes, people want to distance themselves from those poorer than themselves.

- **Province of British Columbia SRO Initiative**

The Province of British Columbia is involved in a number of initiatives related to the purchase and rehabilitation of SRO hotels in the Downtown Eastside of the city of Vancouver. Funding for some of the rehabilitation was made available through CMHC. The hotels are operated by a number of organizations, including the **Portland Hotel Society**³⁸. The first of these projects, the Portland Hotel, was initially managed under agreement between the owner and the Downtown Eastside Residents Association. The Portland Hotel Society was formed shortly after, and took over management of the building in 1993. The Society received its name as a result of the visit by Jim Green of the Downtown Eastside Residents Association to Portland Oregon to see how

³⁸ Wood, Chris., Small Solutions, Across Canada, fresh initiatives give new hope to the homeless, Maclean’s Online, March 8, 1999 Special Report, <http://www.canadiansocialresearch.net/homemac.htm>

that city had developed their program to purchase and manage SRO buildings. The Society now has agreements to manage four SRO properties (including the new Portland Hotel), and is currently negotiating for the purchase of the old Portland Hotel property.

A more detailed discussion of the initiatives undertaken by the Portland Hotel Society is provided in section 7.0.

- **Strachan House, Toronto**

Strachan House³⁹, in the city of Toronto, is an example of how a factory converted into individual units for the homeless has succeeded in mixing architecture and social aims. Because of the design of the building, there is an atmosphere of calm, safety and security throughout the building. Strachan House was developed collaboratively between the non-profit Homes First Society; environmental and restoration consultants; a team of artists; and Strachan House residents and staff.

- **Foyer des Cent Abris, Montreal**

A Montreal-based initiative, organized by the non-profit housing **organization Foyer des Cent Abris**⁴⁰ and supported by A·C·T, involved the construction of two demonstration rooming houses built through public tender. The construction of these projects involved revision to municipal regulations, including the zoning, building and design standards. The revised standards that were developed included:

- reducing the required minimum unit area size;
- eliminating the requirement for parking spaces;
- permitting the building to be higher than the height of the adjoining building; and
- requiring the alignment of the setback.

The goal of this project was to reduce the cost of project development and to improve the life of rooming-house residents.

³⁹ Dault, G.M. (Globe and Mail, July 17, 1999) *Designing a Real Home for the Homeless*, Toronto, Ontario

⁴⁰ Energy Pathways Inc. (1995) , *Innovative Rooming Houses, Foyer des Cent Abris Non-Profit Organization, Montreal, Quebec*, Affordability and Choice Today (A·C·T) Demonstration Project

- **Parkdale Pilot Project, Toronto**

This initiative was begun by the City of Toronto in response to the need to legalize existing rooming houses and bachelorette units in the Parkdale community. These units were typically found in buildings that had been designed as single family homes, but had been converted to rooming houses or bachelorette units prior to December 1996. Any owner of a property used for this purpose that had not gone through the licensing process was invited to participate.

The initiative involved setting up mediation between the residents associations, business improvement groups, building owners and tenants. City of Toronto staff provided assistance in the mediation process, working with the stakeholders to draft the document, which would create alternate standards for these existing properties. Alternate standards for parking requirements, minimum unit sizes and excess gross floor areas were developed. The property owners were able to meet with an inspector who would provide instruction on which areas required upgrading to meet building standards, and indicated they were happy with this approach. Owners were seeking licensing by the City in order to obtain financing or in some cases sell the property to a new owner who would continue to operate the rooming houses/bachelorette units.

The City has found this project has been very successful in bringing properties up to standard, with 30 buildings legalized and 20 buildings in the legalization process. Further details regarding this initiative are found in section 9.0.

- **Conclusions**

Construction and rehabilitation of rooming houses and SROs can often be more easily undertaken when building codes and zoning by-laws are flexibly interpreted or modified to recognize that this form of housing does not fully fit the standard definitions of housing served by existing codes and by-laws. These changes do not jeopardize the safety of residents, and, in fact, frequently provide upgraded housing for tenants but at a lower cost to developers, which in turn can result in lower rents being charged to tenants. By providing a one-window approach for owners to legalize use, communities can encourage owners to upgrade buildings and retain the existing rental units.

2.5 SUPPORTIVE HOUSING

Many of the individuals living in rooming houses require more than just a room. Many of these people have a number of special needs including alcoholism, drug addiction, physical and/or mental illnesses. In order for these “special needs” tenants to be able to maintain their housing, a range of health and social supports are needed, tailored to each individual’s requirements. Supportive housing services can be flexibly delivered from 24-hour on-site support to off-site drop-in programs, depending on the needs of the tenant population.

A number of studies on supportive housing (The Corporation for Supportive Housing, 2000; Fannie Mae Foundation, 2001; the Supportive Housing Association of New Jersey) have found that people, once in supportive housing, rely far less on public or emergency systems and use the supportive services provided in their housing units. Below we outline some recent examples of supportive housing initiatives.

- **San Francisco Area Health, Housing and Integrated Services Network**

The San Francisco Bay Area's **Health, Housing and Integrated Health Services Network**⁴¹ (HHISN) serves two supportive housing developments that have both been the subjects of current research. Preliminary analysis of the research shows that, within 12 months of moving into supportive housing:

- use of emergency rooms in hospitals falls by 58%;
- use of hospital in-patient beds falls by 57%, with another 20% decline in the following 12 month period; and
- use of residential mental-health programs disappears.

- **British Columbia Supportive Housing Initiatives**

British Columbia has a number of Supportive Housing Developments⁴², including the **Jim Green Residence**, the new **Portland Hotel**, the **Sunrise Hotel** and the **Washington Hotel** and other SRO replacement projects currently underway in the Downtown Eastside of the city of Vancouver. These developments generally serve a “hard to house” population who previously lived on the streets or in inadequate housing. The Portland Hotel Society is actively providing support services directly to four of these projects.

- **Chicago Lakefront SRO**

The **Lakefront SRO**⁴³ in Chicago, Illinois, is a model of supportive housing. Lakefront SRO was founded in 1986 by a group of advocates for the homeless and shelter providers in Chicago's Uptown neighbourhood to stem the loss of single room occupancy housing in Chicago. Lakefront buildings house a diversity of tenants – men and women, young and old, literate and illiterate, drunk and sober, employed and unemployed. Lakefront's model of supportive housing

⁴¹ Corporation for Supportive Housing, *Supportive Housing and Its Impact on the Public Health Crisis of Homelessness*, San Francisco, California <http://csh.org/pubs.html>

⁴² British Columbia Housing, *Homelessness: Responding to the Hard to House, A British Columbia Perspective on a National Problem* <http://bchousing.org/files/finalhomelessnessconf.pdf>

⁴³ Lakefront SRO, What Is Supportive Housing? <http://www.lakefrontsro.org/supporthousing.htm>

is called blended management, where property and asset management, housing development and supportive staff work together as a team to give tenants the support they need to “reach their highest potential and to keep the buildings in good shape, physically and financially⁴⁴.”

According to Lakefront SRO literature, the purpose of blended management is to:

- effectively provide and maintain clean, safe, sanitary and affordable housing to single, low-income individuals in accordance with fair housing practices, funding and lending requirements;
- assist tenants in understanding the rules and regulations that allow tenants to remain in housing;
- provide tenants with the resources to identify personal goals and achieve self-sufficiency; and
- offer tenants the opportunity to experience community through social, educational and leadership programs.

Tenants are offered a continuum of care to meet each individual tenant’s needs. Specific social services include: caseworker support, networking and referrals for tenants requiring assistance beyond Lakefront’s set of services, organizing activities such as group camping trips to foster a stronger tenant community atmosphere and providing financial advocacy for tenants who need assistance.

Lakefront also trains and hires tenants onto Lakefront staff (25% of Lakefront staff are current or former tenants), and arranges meetings for tenants to speak with city and state politicians. Tenants are also linked by staff members to services ranging from literacy classes to programs that teach computer skills.

Recovery support is provided to tenants through tenant assessments to ensure appropriate case management plans are developed, appropriate educational forums and referrals to organizations such as Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous are made and regular follow-up by staff is undertaken to provide support after addiction treatment program completion.

- **Supportive Housing Coalition, Toronto**

The **Supportive Housing Coalition**⁴⁵ is a non-profit agency in the city of Toronto that provides housing for mental health consumer-survivors. This organization has 40 residential locations across the city, including rooming houses, where some degree of support is offered to the tenants who require it. Tenants living in Supportive Housing Coalition housing have a say in running the organization through their representation on the organization’s Board of Directors. Supportive Housing Workers work as agents for the landlord by helping tenants meet their responsibilities and maintain their housing, and provide support for tenants on an individual basis and in community meetings.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*

⁴⁵ The Supportive Housing Coalition, Toronto, Ontario <http://www.supportivehousing.ca>

Supportive Housing Workers provide a variety of supports to tenants including:

- counselling;
- referral services;
- organizing support for daily routines such as budgeting, shopping, etc.;
- mediating between tenant and tenant or tenant and landlord;
- helping tenants identify problems and work through problem-solving strategies; and
- working with tenants to find employment.

Additional information on the work of the Supportive Housing Coalition is provided in section 10.0.

- **Habitat Services, Toronto**

Habitat Services⁴⁶ is a program operating in the city of Toronto which was established in 1989 to provide rooming house accommodation and support to individuals with mental health problems. Funded jointly by the province of Ontario and the city of Toronto, Habitat Services signs contracts with individual rooming house operators to provide room and board to individuals with mental health problems. The operator receives an agreed-upon per diem rate, which is paid jointly by the province, the city and the tenant. The quality of room and board must be provided in accordance with standards established by Habitat Services.

Habitat Services maintains a team of inspectors who visit each rooming house regularly to ensure compliance with the agreement. Habitat Services also ensures that each individual receives social support services from outside agencies visiting the rooming houses. This approach has stabilized the residency of the tenants and provides a stable source of income for operators, most of whom are private sector rooming house operators investing their own resources.

- **Conclusions**

Since many of the tenants in rooming houses and SROs require support services for a variety of reasons, providing these services as a “continuum of care” has been shown to result in tenants requiring less emergency support from hospitals and other outside support service agencies. Supportive housing can be a major factor in turning people’s lives around – not only by ensuring that they have safe, affordable housing, but by ensuring that other needs related to the daily living of these tenants are met.

⁴⁶ Mayor’s Homelessness Action Task Force (January 1999) *Taking Responsibility for Homelessness, An Action Plan for Toronto, Report of the Mayor’s Homelessness Action Task Force*, Dr. Anne Golden, Chair, Toronto, Ontario

3.0 CASE STUDIES: OVERVIEW

As the discussion of various programs and projects in Section 2.0 have demonstrated, there are many examples of non-regulatory initiatives in both Canada and the United States that have helped conserve rooming house stock and stabilize rooming house tenancy.

The case studies in the following sections have been selected from the examples to provide a more detailed overview of various approaches that have been taken across Canada to maintain existing and create additional rooming houses/SRO units, and to stabilize rooming house tenancy.

The following examples of approaches taken are discussed:

- **Co-ordinated Crisis Response: City of Toronto Rental Housing Office, Toronto, Ontario**

The city of Toronto Rental Housing Office provides a good example of how one city has been able to establish and operate a centre that co-ordinates crisis response to issues related to rooming houses and rental housing in general. The City has years of experience with this form of housing, diverse population and large number of tenants living in rooming houses.

- **Housing Search Assistance, Action Logement/Action Housing, Ottawa, Ontario**

In view of their role in working with tenants to assist with housing search, Action Logement/Action Housing in Ottawa demonstrates proven practices to help individuals and households find suitable housing.

- **Mediation Services, Tenant/Landlord Mediation Services of Ottawa-Carleton, Ottawa, Ontario**

Tenant/Landlord Mediation Services of Ottawa-Carleton in Ottawa illustrates successful approaches to mediation between tenants/landlords and tenants/tenants.

- **Community Development: Portland Hotel Society, Vancouver, British Columbia**

The Portland Hotel Society provides an example of creating new housing, undertaking renovations and providing ongoing management to existing buildings that have been renovated, resulting in the redevelopment of the neighbourhood, and retaining the existing SRO stock.

- **Building Rehabilitation Programs: Edmonton Safe Housing Committee, Edmonton, Alberta**

This initiative makes use of innovative rehabilitation standards to create low-cost rooming house accommodation.

- **Legalization of Existing Units: Parkdale Pilot Project, Toronto, Ontario**

This project has been successful in encouraging landlords of rooming houses and bachelorette units to bring their properties up to the existing building standards, and has resulted in better understanding between owners, City staff, neighbourhood groups, tenants and social service agencies.

- **Supportive Housing: Supportive Housing Coalition, Toronto, Ontario**

Toronto's Supportive Housing Coalition is the largest non-profit provider of supportive housing in Ontario. As an organization that supports tenants who are in need of support beyond housing, the Supportive Housing Coalition has demonstrated that, once housed, tenants with mental health problems are able to grow and develop the skills needed to function in society with the support provided through the organization.

4.0 CASE STUDY A: CO-ORDINATED CRISIS RESPONSE

City of Toronto Rental Housing Office, Toronto, Ontario

4.1 OBJECTIVES OF INITIATIVES

The Mayor's Task Force on Homelessness report⁴⁷ written in January 1999 reviewed the housing supports available to the homeless and those at risk of becoming homeless. This report found that there were eight main reasons why the existing service arrangement was not able to meet the needs. These are:

1. funding
2. service patchwork
3. lack of ongoing service management
4. emergency bias
5. inadequate attention to sub-groups
6. lack of a comprehensive information system
7. limited capacity to change the system
8. poor accountability.

The City of Toronto recognized the need to address these deficiencies, and various programs and action plans have been implemented. The City of Toronto's Rental Housing Office was established to meet one of these gaps: to address the lack of a comprehensive information system.

4.2 DESCRIPTION OF APPROACH

The mandate of the **Rental Housing Office (RHO)**⁴⁸ is "to enhance security of tenure, affordability, and quality of rental housing in Toronto by supporting key stakeholders that provide information, advice and support to tenants and landlords on rental housing matters". The Rental Housing Office has both telephone and web site information access. The Rental Housing Office does not deal directly with tenants or landlords, beyond providing some information of interest on the web site. Instead, the focus is placed entirely on serving the key stakeholders that are already working directly with tenants and landlords.

⁴⁷ Dr. Anne Golden, Chair (1999) *Taking Responsibility for Homelessness: An Action Plan for Toronto*, Report of the Mayor's Homelessness Action Task Force, City of Toronto, Ontario, page 31

⁴⁸ The City of Toronto Rental Housing Office, Toronto, Ontario
http://www.city.toronto.on.ca/toronto_housing/rho/index/html

The RHO web site identifies their stakeholders as:

- tenant organizations;
- landlord organizations;
- political representatives;
- city departments/divisions;
- community agencies (such as legal clinics, housing help centres and community information centres);
- Ontario Rental Housing Tribunal and other provincial ministries/agencies; and
- CMHC and other federal agencies.

There are three agencies directly involved with rooming house landlords and tenants: Woodgreen Community Centre, Toronto Christian Resources Centre and Open Door Rooms Registry.

The RHO provides information on a number of initiatives related to the prevention of tenant eviction from rooming houses and other forms of rental accommodation. These include the Eviction Prevention Kit and Training Workshops, the Early Intervention Pilot Project and The Tenant Survival Manual and Checklists. The RHO is not intended to duplicate the information and advisory services being provided by community groups and other stakeholders serving tenants and landlords in the city, but instead provides referral services for agencies to enable them to direct clients to the most appropriate agency.

There are four main functions of the RHO as described on their web site:

1. Provide co-ordination amongst providers of services:

- To facilitate a Rental Housing Advisory Committee to support the network of providers that provide information, advice and support to tenants and landlords on rental housing matters;
- To work with the Rental Housing Advisory Committee on identifying key information and advisory needs to support the development and implementation of community services to meet those needs; and
- To enhance the capacity of the network to provide information and advice by organizing workshops and other training activities.

2. Provide information and communication

- To develop and maintain a “Referral List of Information and Advisory Services for Tenants and Landlords” and disseminate it widely;
- To launch and maintain an information Web-site with links to related agencies and services;

- To develop an inventory of existing written information resources for tenants and landlords and ensure that they are written in plain language and available in multiple languages;
- To co-ordinate the production of information resources for tenants and landlords in response to identified information gaps and ensure that they are written in plain language and available in multiple languages; and
- To work with other city departments/divisions to disseminate information about city policies, by-laws and services (e.g., property standards, notification of rent reductions as a result of property tax decreases, second suites, rooming house licensing) and provide training to city staff on relevant landlord/tenant matters.

3. Research and monitoring

- To undertake research on emerging trends in the rental housing market (including evictions and rent increases) and publicize results;
- To monitor and report on the impacts of legislation affecting tenants and landlords (including the Tenant Protection Act); and
- To make recommendations to city council on positions related to legislation and policy changes in support of rental housing.

4. Special projects

The RHO will initiate and/or co-ordinate special projects that relate to information, advice, and support to tenants and landlords on rental housing matters. Special projects completed or underway include:

- Tenant Defence Fund;
- Expansion of the Tenant Hotline;
- Second Suites Education Program;
- Eviction Prevention Projects;
- Property Tax Decreases/Automatic Rent Reduction Notification Program; and
- Campaign on the Rights and Obligations of Tenants.

The Rental Housing Office Advisory Committee has the following specific functions:

- To facilitate co-ordination and support for the network of agencies providing information and advisory services to tenants and landlords;
- To create a forum for discussion among key stakeholders of issues affecting tenants and landlords;
- To provide advice to RHO staff on the activities of the RHO;

- To work with the RHO in the development and dissemination of information materials on matters affecting tenants and landlords including the Tenant Protection Act;
- To work with the RHO to develop, maintain and distribute an inventory of community information resources across the city;
- To participate in information sharing and monitoring legislation affecting tenants and landlords including impacts of the Tenant Protection Act; and
- To provide a forum where city departments/divisions can seek and receive input from key stakeholders about city policies and services related to social housing.

Education is also a component of the City of Toronto Rental Housing Office. An information package intended to educate tenants and landlords about their rights and responsibilities during Rental Rooming House Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program (RRAP) renovations is being developed, and an education program for police officers regarding landlord/tenant rights and responsibilities and landlord/tenant referral information resources is being established. In addition, existing written information resources for tenants and landlords will be made available in multiple languages.

4.3 PARTICIPANTS

The City of Toronto funds the Rental Housing Office. The Rental Housing Advisory Committee which is co-ordinated by the Rental Housing Office includes both tenant and landlord representatives and organizations, community agencies, political representatives, city staff and other government representatives. Core representatives will include a representative from each of the following community services sectors:

- Community legal clinics;
- Tenant duty counsel program;
- Legal Aid Ontario;
- Tenant/landlord service and advocacy organizations (one person each from Federation of Metro Tenants' Associations, Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation and Landlord Self-Help Centre);
- Tenant/Landlord umbrella organizations;
- Housing Help Centres (one person each from all 7 centres unless the centres designate one individual to represent all 7 centres); and
- Councillor's offices with between 3-5 staff of Councillor's offices participating

The meetings of the Rental Housing Offices Advisory Committee are open to other participants including individual tenants and landlords. The initial meetings of the Rental Housing Office Advisory Committee began with a number of individuals in attendance beyond the core representatives. Since that time, attendance has generally been only from the core representatives noted above.

Staff from city divisions/departments will provide information and policy support to the committee, and will include staff from Shelter, Housing and Support; Social Development and Administration; Social Services; Urban Planning, Municipal Licensing and Standards, Public Health and the Toronto Housing Company. Meetings are chaired by the Manager of Housing Programs and co-chaired by the Senior Rental Housing Officer.

4.4 TIMEFRAME

The City of Toronto Rental Housing Office (RHO) was established January 1, 2000.

The meetings of the Rental Housing Office Advisory Committee are scheduled on a quarterly basis and will continue to take place as long as the Rental Housing Office operates and co-ordination of service providers is needed. The Advisory Committee has been meeting on a quarterly basis throughout 2001.

The Rental Housing Office is considered an ongoing project, but not necessarily a permanent project.

4.5 RESOURCES UTILIZED

A Referral List of Information and Advisory Services for Tenants and Landlords is posted on the Rental Housing Office web site, but it was noted that the posted list was dated May 2000. The information provided on the web site indicated that the referral list was to be updated at least three times annually. The referral list provides information on organizations arranged by the following categories:

- general information and referral;
- information and advice;
- information and legal advice;
- mediation and conflict resolution;
- discrimination and human rights;
- housing placement referrals;
- rent bank;
- maintenance;
- emergency housing;
- tenants' associations and housing advocacy; and
- specialized agencies.

Staff at the Rental Housing Office indicated that the web site information was to be updated in the near future.

4.6 REQUIRED APPROVALS

The Rental Housing Office is a city initiative, and is fully staffed by employees of the city of Toronto. As such, the Rental Housing Office will continue to operate as long as funding is provided for this service from the city's budget.

4.7 BARRIERS ENCOUNTERED

One of the barriers identified by staff at the Rental Housing Office was the two distinct groups that were to be served by the office. Landlords and tenants have widely varying needs, and while the tenants' associations tend to be fairly well organized, there are relatively few landlords involved in any type of association. The office seeks to meet the needs of both of these groups, and therefore ensures that special projects are undertaken that will address the requests of landlords and tenants, without providing extensive emphasis on only one group.

However, it should be noted that there is relatively little organization of tenants in rooming houses compared to rental apartments. As a result, the needs of the rooming house tenants are met through programs aimed at tenants in general, but not specifically for that housing form.

4.8 ASSESSMENT OF SUCCESS IN MEETING OBJECTIVES

The Rental Housing Office has been successful in bringing together the service providers who are working directly with landlords and tenants in the city of Toronto. Communication has been enhanced, and takes place both formally and informally, including information sharing at Rental Housing Office Advisory Committee meetings. This provides a means for agencies to obtain information that will be of assistance in meeting the needs of those seeking help outside the scope of the agency being contacted. In addition, participation by various agencies on the Advisory Committee and the information sharing process keeps city staff well informed of services provided and new initiatives being taken by service providers.

It is also the goal of the Rental Housing Office to have agencies post information on the web site for the use of other agencies. This could include information on programs, upcoming workshops and other activities that may interest different service providers.

4.9 POTENTIAL IMPROVEMENTS

The web site that was created in 2000 when the Rental Housing Office was set up has not, for the most part, been kept current. This is one area that requires constant updating, and is naturally quite demanding on staff resources. Although the Referral List of Information and Advisory Services for Tenants and Landlords is updated on a three times yearly basis, and more frequently as agencies inform the Rental Housing Office, the Referral List posted on the web had not been updated. Agencies are provided with updated lists directly by the Rental Housing Office, and therefore do not rely on the web list.

4.10 APPLICABILITY ELSEWHERE

As noted above, the purpose of the Rental Housing Office is to provide information sharing for providers of services for tenants and landlords. These providers include those working directly with rooming house landlords and tenants, although there is no specific focus on these groups. The key to success is the continued information sharing process among service providers, ensuring that reference lists are kept current and identifying the need for special projects to be undertaken such as the current Campaign on the Rights and Obligations of Tenants. Staffing and office costs including web site design and updates, computers and directories are the primary costs.

5.0 CASE STUDY B: HOUSING SEARCH ASSISTANCE

Action Logement/Action Housing, Ottawa, Ontario

5.1 OBJECTIVES OF INITIATIVES

Action Logement was established in 1989 to provide housing search assistance to individuals and families seeking safe, affordable housing. The goal of the program is to assist tenants to retain their housing and those seeking housing to find appropriate housing.

5.2 DESCRIPTION OF APPROACH

Action Logement provides housing search and retention services to individuals and families who are generally lower-income and are having difficulty finding housing or facing eviction. Each client seeking assistance is processed through the intake system, and then a counsellor is assigned to work with the client on an ongoing basis. Action Logement had 1,800 files open as of August 2001. They generally see an increase in clients requesting services late in the summer as single parents seek permanent housing so they can place their children in school, and throughout early fall as individuals who have been sleeping on the streets and in parks seek permanent shelter from the coming winter.

Housing counsellors provide direct assistance with housing search. The office provides daily updates of rental listings in newspapers, and also is a source for applications for the Housing Registry (Ottawa's social housing application list). If a client wishes to apply for social housing, the counsellor will ensure the application is complete and the information is provided to the Housing Registry. It was noted that the Housing Registry currently has over 13,000 applications on file, resulting in a 5-7 year waiting list for homeless people.

Action Logement takes approximately 10 calls per day from clients seeking subsidized housing. Of the 549 client files that are identified as homeless, approximately 120 clients had requested accommodation in rooming houses or shared accommodation. Action Logement also has an association with the University of Ottawa Community Legal Clinic. If a client is seeking assistance with a Rental Housing Tribunal application, then the file will be reviewed by someone, generally a University of Ottawa Faculty of Law student, to determine the chances of success at the Tribunal.

Many of the clients are referred by emergency shelters and community agencies including social assistance offices. There are also two counsellors who travel to other communities on a regular, once-weekly basis to assist clients who cannot travel to the office. The office maintains a database of rental housing units by building address, providing information such as number of units of each size and minimum rents charged by unit size.

Clients of the services face a number of barriers when they are seeking housing or looking for help to retain housing. These barriers include language, income levels, rent charged, requirement of co-signers for leases, lack of a telephone and discrimination because of immigration status. Many clients come into the office for assistance because they do not speak

English, and the landlords and managers at the rental buildings provide services in English only. Counsellors will place telephone calls on behalf of the client, and sometimes accompany the client to the building to provide interpretation services. Unfortunately, the time spent going to an interview with a landlord is not considered paid duty, and counsellors must therefore use their own free time if they feel this is necessary.

The agency provides voice-mail services to its clients at no charge. The counsellor will set up this service for a client as long as the client requires it. By providing this access, clients seeking housing can obtain information from landlords and have a means to access messages.

Many of the clients served by Action Logement are new to Canada, and include refugees and recent immigrants. Typically, these clients have not established themselves, and therefore many are receiving social assistance until they are able to find suitable jobs. Landlords face both the communication problem with those who cannot speak English, as well as income level barriers, and the counsellors frequently experience difficulty in finding suitable housing for these households.

Mediation services are provided at no charge to Action Logement clients through the Tenant/Landlord Mediation Services of Ottawa-Carleton (discussed in further detail in Case Study C following). A tenant faced with a Rental Housing Tribunal hearing can seek legal aid, but where this is unavailable, is always able to seek the assistance of the mediation counsellor.

The agency has noted an increase this year over previous years for both housing search services and mediation services. Increases in housing search assistance are the result of fewer affordable rental units being on the market, and poor maintenance conditions in many of these units. Increases in requests for mediation services have been fuelled by tenants seeking to avoid Rental Housing Tribunal applications.

5.3 PARTICIPANTS

Action Logement is a non-profit agency, and receives funding from various levels of government. The Board of Directors provides services on a volunteer basis, with no current representation by politicians.

As of August 2001, Action Logement had approximately 1,800 files open. These files would be created at the time an individual sought assistance from staff, including those seeking mediation services. Agency staffing levels are typically 10 full-time staff, 2 summer students and 5 volunteer students during the school year.

5.4 TIMEFRAME

Action Logement has been offering services to tenants since 1989. The agency is well established, receiving funding from federal and provincial programs. It is expected that the agency will continue to provide services over a long time period.

5.5 RESOURCES UTILIZED

Action Logement operates an office at 450 Rideau Street, Suite 200 in Ottawa. This office provides space for counsellors to meet directly with clients to discuss their needs. Funding for their services comes from a variety of federal and provincial programs.

Action Logement is a source for applications for the Social Housing Registry of Ottawa, and provides direct assistance to clients submitting applications for social housing.

5.6 REQUIRED APPROVALS

Action Logement applies for funding to various federal and provincial programs. To date there has been no significant funding problem experienced, with additional fundraising activities meeting any gaps.

5.7 BARRIERS ENCOUNTERED

One area that has become quite frustrating to the Action Logement housing search counsellors when they are looking for affordable housing for clients is the reluctance of landlords to house low-income tenants. Rents have risen dramatically over the past year, with a typical two-bedroom apartment renting for \$925 and no three-bedroom townhouses available under \$1,000. For individuals and households with low incomes, these rents are clearly unaffordable. Some of the larger corporations have even taken the step of advising the agency that recommended minimum annual income levels are between \$35,000 to \$50,000 to rent a unit in their buildings, which puts these units well outside the range of households receiving social assistance. As well, units that once rented at affordable levels have risen dramatically because of the ability of the landlord to raise rents once a unit becomes vacant. Households with low incomes are required to provide a lease co-signor in many cases, which is not possible for many clients because they are new to the area or do not have anyone who could act in this capacity.

Counsellors whose clients have not been able to reach an agreement through mediation are placed in a position of assisting the tenant through the Rental Housing Tribunal process. Tenants who cannot come to an agreement with the landlord would then be evicted, and would be forced to seek alternate housing.

Limits of staffing time have also been identified as a barrier to providing services to clients at Action Logement. Action Logement staff are currently not paid to attend interview sessions between landlords and tenants who are seeking housing, even when there is a communication barrier or possibility of discrimination taking place. A client who cannot communicate well in the language of the landlord or who does not know their rights and responsibilities will generally not be successful in finding suitable housing without the advocacy and attendance of a counsellor. As well, housing research counsellors must be able to communicate in both official languages, as many landlords and tenants are not fluent in common languages.

5.8 ASSESSMENT OF SUCCESS IN MEETING OBJECTIVES

Action Logement staff are committed to working with their clients to find safe, affordable, appropriate housing. They have seen a continued growth in the number of clients served, but have recently experienced difficulty in arranging housing due to extremely low vacancy rates in the City of Ottawa. The lack of affordable housing has directly impacted their ability to assist their clients.

5.9 POTENTIAL IMPROVEMENTS

Action Logement had a web site that was funded until last year. This site provided information on the services available to the general public, and also was used by shelters for access to file information. The web site was found to be useful to these agencies, and should be reinstated if possible. Action Logement has also identified a need for additional counsellors to handle the increasing client load, including those fluent in both official languages.

5.10 APPLICABILITY ELSEWHERE

It was recommended that if a group sought to provide similar services to households looking for housing, it would be best provided by a non-profit agency instead of a government service. One of the keys to providing services that are needed in the community is the ability to determine the areas of highest need, which can best be determined by listening to the community. The involvement of volunteers is also critical to the success of programs and services, and can be enhanced by including college or university students who work directly with clients as part of their education program. Adequate funding must be provided for staffing and equipment and facility costs, which, in the case of Action Logement, is provided through different levels of government.

6.0 CASE STUDY C: MEDIATION

Tenant/Landlord Mediation Services of Ottawa-Carleton, Ottawa, Ontario

6.1 OBJECTIVES OF INITIATIVES

The Tenant/Landlord Mediation Services of Ottawa-Carleton was formed in 1998 through a partnership between Action Logement and the University of Ottawa Community Legal Clinic. The purpose of the organization is to provide mediation services at no charge to tenants and landlords to resolve conflicts and avoid evictions. The organization provides services in mediation, conciliation and negotiation, with an emphasis on objectivity to the parties involved.

Qualified mediators conduct mediation sessions between landlords and tenants or between tenants and tenants under the supervision of a Mediation Supervisor. The mediators involved have all completed extensive training in this area, and are familiar with laws, rights and responsibilities of tenants and landlords.

6.2 DESCRIPTION OF APPROACH

Mediation services are provided at no charge to clients through the Tenant/Landlord Mediation Services of Ottawa-Carleton. These services are provided between the landlord and tenant, or, less frequently, between tenants in a rental building. A tenant faced with a Rental Housing Tribunal hearing can seek legal aid, but where this is unavailable, is always able to seek the assistance of the mediation counsellor. Clients are referred to Tenant/Landlord Mediation Services of Ottawa-Carleton by Action Logement, the University of Ottawa Community Legal Clinic or other agencies.

The Tenant/Landlord Mediation Services of Ottawa-Carleton (TLMS) has based their organization upon:

- a community-based vision;
- a mediation model based on the interests of the involved parties;
- neutrality and impartiality of TLMS during the mediation process; and
- community education

The mediators work directly with the clients who have requested their services. Both parties in the situation must agree to the mediation process. Generally, tenants would seek mediation services before an application has been filed to appear at the Rental Housing Tribunal.

The organization is seeking to expand their education programs, to ensure that both landlords and tenants are aware of their services and seek assistance before a situation has escalated to the point where an application has been made to the Rental Housing Tribunal. Training sessions are scheduled in the near future for the general public, which will have a focus on housing corporations including social housing projects. Funding has been received from the Trillium

Foundation for this pilot project to determine the effect education and awareness can have in avoiding evictions. The upcoming English-language course is 75% filled, but there has been less interest in the French-language course. One of the possible explanations given for this level of interest in the Francophone course is that there are fewer Francophone social workers in the Ottawa area.

The organization is involved in education programs in various areas. The Co-ordinator submits articles to be printed in the Ottawa Regional Landlords Association's quarterly magazines as well as local newspapers. There is still ongoing facilitation work at the community level between neighbourhood groups and housing providers to address concerns regarding social housing.

6.3 PARTICIPANTS

The Board of Directors of the Tenant/Landlord Mediation Services of Ottawa-Carleton (TLMS) includes representation from the following organizations and groups:

- Action Logement;
- University of Ottawa Community Legal Clinic;
- Franco-Ontario Housing Coalition;
- private tenants' association;
- provider of social housing;
- private landlords' association;
- co-operative housing sector;
- mediation sector; and
- community representative

Mediators are individuals who have completed a recognized mediation training program, and volunteer their time to TLMS. Mediators work directly under the supervision of the Mediator Supervisor who has both theoretical and practical experience in mediation between landlords and tenants. The Co-ordinator noted that most mediation training programs are expensive and require a significant time commitment. It is expected that the upcoming mediator training sessions will be well attended by those seeking training in this area.

There are typically seven mediation sessions scheduled each month. Of these, approximately half will be between landlord and tenant, 25% between tenant and tenant, and the remaining 25% between other parties. The Co-ordinator indicated that in the past, where vacancy rates were higher, individuals in rooming houses who were dissatisfied with their housing or in conflict situations with the landlord or other tenants would generally seek another place to live. There is little affordable housing available today as rental vacancy rates are currently around .2%. As a result, these individuals are seeking the assistance of mediators to resolve conflicts.

The primary reasons why a tenant in a rooming house would seek mediation would be:

- noise problems;
- behaviour of other tenants;
- notice of eviction or verbal notice from landlord; or
- maintenance issues.

The Co-ordinator indicated that many of their clients have mental health problems, estimating about 25-30% of tenants are mental health survivors. The organization has found a holistic approach to be necessary in order to meet the needs of their clients, involving an interdisciplinary team including social workers and others providing supports. At this time, the organization has not fully developed processes to include these support agencies, although in many cases consultation does take place with the client's social worker to obtain additional information helpful during the mediation process.

Landlords have generally been reluctant to go through the mediation process, and it is the experience of the mediators that the parties seek their assistance too late in the conflict process.

There are currently 12 experienced mediators available to conduct sessions, with 4-5 of these providing active services. The organization can co-ordinate up to 12 mediation sessions per month, but any level higher than that would put a strain on the Co-ordinator's administration time.

6.4 TIMEFRAME

Tenant/Landlord Mediation Services of Ottawa-Carleton was established in 1998. The organization relies on funding from various sources, and has not received a base funding commitment from any one source.

The Tenant/Landlord Mediation Services of Ottawa-Carleton continues to seek funding, and seeks to continue and expand their role in the future.

6.5 RESOURCES UTILIZED

Funding for the organization has come from a variety of sources, including the Fondation Franco-Ontarienne and HRDC. The City of Ottawa provided the first year funding. The United Way provided funding for the second year of operations, and has also been approached to providing base funding for the next three years. Trillium Foundation has provided funding for the third year, including the pilot education project aimed at the general public. The organization is currently seeking funding from the HRDC Supporting Community Partnerships Initiative (SCPI) program.

6.6 REQUIRED APPROVALS

Tenant/Landlord Mediation Services of Ottawa-Carleton does not require approvals for any of their programs from any level of government. However, because their programs are funded through a variety of sources, these programs must meet the criteria of the funding agencies.

6.7 BARRIERS ENCOUNTERED

A number of barriers are encountered by Tenant/Landlord Mediation Services of Ottawa-Carleton mediation counsellors in their attempts to resolve disputes. Firstly, both parties must be willing to go through the mediation process. Secondly, both parties must understand their rights and responsibilities, and be willing to fulfill these responsibilities. It is the experience of the mediation counsellors that in many cases, a tenant seeking mediation services has an extensive history of problems with landlords because of a lack of understanding and a need for supports. In these cases, it is necessary to refer the client to agencies that can provide supports so that the tenant can fulfill their responsibilities.

In many cases, the parties have been in conflict for an extended period of time, and the issue has escalated to a point where the mediator has difficulty working out a resolution. If the parties had sought mediation at an earlier stage, it would have been easier to work through the mediation process to a solution. Educating tenants and landlords to the benefits of early intervention is an ongoing focus of the organization.

The Co-ordinator has also placed an emphasis on educating the public on issues surrounding homelessness. Both landlords and tenants must be made aware of the impacts of their actions on those who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.

The organization has been limited by the number of volunteers qualified to act as mediators. Training for mediators is generally expensive, and the organization is hoping that the sessions to be held this fall under the pilot project funded by the Trillium Foundation will result in more mediators for their team. However, the Co-ordinator only works two days per week because of funding limitations. If additional mediators were available, the task of organizing the mediation sessions would require additional time commitments on the part of the Co-ordinator.

Another barrier to providing effective mediation is the language spoken by the parties and the mediator. The organization has found that the majority of tenants speak English (75%), while a higher percentage of landlords are English-speaking (85%). As a result, there are many cases where the parties are not able to communicate in a common language. Mediators seek to involve translators where possible instead of directly providing the translation themselves. The organization also seeks mediators who are fluent in both French and English to address this language barrier. Using translators where language barriers occur ensures that the parties receive the information they need to participate, and also permits the mediator to remain neutral throughout the mediation process. Funding limits do not permit hiring translators, and therefore the organization relies entirely on volunteer translators.

6.8 ASSESSMENT OF SUCCESS IN MEETING OBJECTIVES

The Tenant/Landlord Mediation Services of Ottawa-Carleton has been providing services since it was created in 1998. The Co-ordinator indicated that approximately 80% of the mediation sessions result in an agreement between the parties. Most mediation sessions are completed in a two to three hour meeting. In many cases, however, agreement is not possible because of the long-standing conflict between the parties and the delay in seeking mediation.

6.9 POTENTIAL IMPROVEMENTS

The Tenant/Landlord Mediation Services of Ottawa-Carleton (TLMS) does have a website, but the information is not current. The site is in the process of being updated.

Additional funding is required to provide for translators who can provide services to the parties during the mediation process. The organization also requires an on-going funding commitment in order to continue to meet its goals and objectives.

In the cases where one of the parties may have a mental health problem, the Co-ordinator indicated that the involvement of social workers and others who provide supports to these individuals is necessary. The organization is seeking to establish a better collaboration process with these support workers to provide greater understanding of the individual and plan effective action to be taken to support the individual during and after the mediation process.

When asked about the future of rooming houses in the Ottawa area, the Co-ordinator indicated that the number of units in this form of housing was likely to increase in the near future. The current housing crisis caused by the low vacancy rates will likely encourage the development of additional rooming house units, and the City of Ottawa is currently promoting this option. As a result, it will likely result in an increase in the number of tenants and landlords of rooming houses who approach the organization for mediation services.

The Ottawa Regional Landlords Association has also recently created a special group of rooming house owners within its organization. Continued education of these landlords in the services available from the Tenant/Landlord Mediation Services of Ottawa-Carleton will be necessary to provide them with the opportunity to seek mediation services early on when conflicts arise.

6.10 APPLICABILITY ELSEWHERE

The activities of the Tenant/Landlord Mediation Services of Ottawa-Carleton could be duplicated in other centres across Canada. The requirements of an ongoing funding commitment, qualified mediators and willingness on the part of landlords and tenants to participate in the process could be met. An education campaign is also necessary to encourage parties to seek mediation early on in a conflict situation instead of waiting until the issue has become a crisis.

The use of volunteer mediators and translators has affected the effectiveness of the Tenant/Landlord Mediation Services of Ottawa-Carleton, as significant levels of commitment are required. Communities seeking to set up a similar program must ensure that there is a pool of volunteers willing to participate, and then prepare training programs to provide these individuals with the skills they will require. Ongoing education of mediators is also required as legislation affecting landlords and tenants changes.

Finally, the organization must commit to a neutral stance in the mediation process, and ensure all parties are aware of the impartiality of the mediator. By communicating this policy to the general public, parties in conflict will be encouraged to seek their services because of the assurance that the process will remain fair and neutral.

7.0 CASE STUDY D: COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Portland Hotel Society, Vancouver, British Columbia

7.1 OBJECTIVES OF INITIATIVES

The Portland Hotel Society was formed to address the needs of individuals living in the Portland Hotel, a SRO building in the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver. The Society saw the need to find a safe and permanent home for the residents of the hotel. A management agreement was signed in 1991 between the owner of the property and the Downtown Eastside Residents Association, with a further arrangement made for the Portland Hotel Society to manage the property. Since that time, the Society has seen the construction of a purpose-built facility (the new Portland Hotel) with 87 units, comprised of 73 SRO units, 2 accessible studio rooms and 12 one-bedroom apartments. The residents of the former Portland Hotel moved to the new premises at 20 West Hastings Street in June 2000.

The Portland Hotel Society recognized that the residents of the former Portland Hotel not only needed permanent, affordable, safe housing, but also a network of support and health services to enable them to live independently. The Health Board provides services, including frequent visits by nurses and programs to assist those coping with addiction.

The Portland Hotel Society manages three projects in addition to owning and operating the new Portland Hotel. The management of these SRO hotels, the Sunrise, the Washington and the Regal, ensures that the residents have a safe, clean building which is well-managed and properly maintained, and are provided with support services and access to health care. As well, instead of facing possible eviction from redevelopment, the residents have been able to retain their housing, and the SRO housing stock has been maintained. The new Portland Hotel includes space for support programs to operate, providing service to the residents of all four projects.

7.2 DESCRIPTION OF APPROACH

The Downtown Eastside Residents Association saw a need to become directly involved in the management of the Portland Hotel located at 412 Carrall Street in downtown Vancouver. This hotel had long been used as a SRO, with 70 rooms. This building housed a population of “extremely difficult to house” individuals.

In 1991, the City of Vancouver was seeking to close the hotel. The owner of the property wanted to sell the land and building for redevelopment, which would leave the current residents without housing. Jim Green of the Downtown Eastside Residents Association had heard of a program in Portland, Oregon where groups had purchased and renovated SRO buildings that were under threat of redevelopment. In 1991, he spearheaded the 10-year agreement between the owner and the Downtown Eastside Residents Association (DERA) to have DERA manage the building which was located across the street from their offices. The Portland Hotel Society was formed, and in 1993 took over the management of the building from DERA.

In 1993, the owner of the property attempted to have the management agreement revoked by seeking eviction on human rights grounds. By taking this action, the owner hoped to be released from the management contract, and therefore able to sell the building. The owner was unsuccessful in both points, being unable to have the agreement revoked and also unable to find an interested purchaser for the property. Since that time, the relationship between the property owner and the Portland Hotel Society has significantly improved, with negotiations currently underway for the Society to purchase the building. The new Portland Hotel at 20 West Hastings Street was constructed and opened in 2000. The residents moved from the old Portland Hotel, which currently remains vacant, although the Society is still renting the building from the owner.

The new Portland Hotel was specifically designed to meet the needs of the existing residents at the former Portland Hotel. During the planning stages for the new building, the residents in the 69-room Portland Hotel were asked about their preference for unit types and amenities. The Society found through this consultation process and through their experience that many residents with serious mental health problems are unable to cope in independent apartments or large rooms, and prefer smaller areas. As a result, the majority of the units constructed were SRO units, as well as a small number of accessible studio units. All SRO units were constructed with private washrooms in response to the requests of the residents.

Couples were surveyed to determine their housing needs and preferences, with the finding that a one-bedroom apartment would be most appropriate for these households. A small number of the units in the building do have kitchenettes for those who are able to prepare their own meals. However, many of the residents are unable to prepare their own meals, relying primarily on food lines for meals. The Society found that having a communal kitchen on each floor would provide these residents with the facilities they needed if they wanted to prepare their meals.

The Sunrise and Washington Hotels were purchased in 1998 through a partnership between the Vancouver/Richmond Health Board, City of Vancouver and the provincial government. Funding for the rehabilitation was provided by CMHC's RRAP program. Because the previous owners of both properties had not been managing these buildings efficiently, the buildings had been partially vacant prior to the start of renovations. The existing residents moved from room to room within the building as the renovations progressed, which ensured no resident would be displaced during the renovation process. The residents were quite cooperative during this renovation process.

The Regal Hotel was purchased by the Greater Vancouver Housing Corporation in partnership with the Vancouver/Richmond Health Board. This hotel was renovated in 1999. All three SRO projects are managed by the Portland Hotel Society, which provides support services and day-to-day operating management.

The Portland Hotel Society has taken a unique approach to providing management services. Their purpose is to work "to provide housing, services and advocacy specifically to a group of people who have not been well received in other housing settings...the Society is committed to working with people throughout both their good and their bad times. What the Society hopes to

provide is a form of “asylum” for people who have been socially alienated and without stable housing.”⁴⁹ Staff are fully trained and must be able to be flexible in their approaches to providing supports to residents.

One of the important aspects of their management plan is a “no eviction” approach which has been instituted in three of the four projects. In the Regal Hotel, a modified approach has been taken by staff, with a goal of finding alternate housing for tenants before they are evicted. In addition to managing the four projects mentioned above, the Society supports Unity Housing and VANDU residents with the financial administration of their projects.

7.3 PARTICIPANTS

The board of the Portland Hotel Society meets on a monthly basis, and is involved primarily in safeguarding its constitution and lobbying for resources. The Portland Hotel Society has approximately 40 full-time employees, as well as 25 on-call staff. The majority of these staff are “Mental Health Workers”, which involves a number of duties including cleaning, active listening, crisis intervention, security and answering telephones.

The purchase and construction of the new Portland Hotel and purchase and renovation of the other three hotels managed by the Portland Hotel Society would not have been possible without the cooperation of many levels of government. The Director of Operations indicated that in particular, the former chair of BC Housing had been instrumental in helping them with their projects. While BC Housing mainly funds independent apartment-style buildings, they have committed to maintaining the existing SRO stock through providing funding for the purchase of buildings to groups such as the Portland Hotel Society.

New tenants come from other SROs, institutions, shelters and off the street. Residents contact the Society directly, or are referred by people who are involved in their lives including family members, social workers, or doctors. The residents who are referred to the projects either have been unable to access stable housing for a considerable period of time, or in some cases, have never had stable housing. They are referred because of the trained staff in the buildings and the ability of the Society to successfully house individuals who have difficulty obtaining stable housing situations. The residents make a deliberate choice to seek SRO-type housing over independent units, generally because they are unable to live in larger quarters, and find that this type of housing best suits their health and abilities. Many of them have only lived in SRO housing, and would be unable to make the transition to independent units if they were offered.

The lease for the land stipulates that the occupancy of the new Portland Hotel is restricted to core need (low-income) hard-to-house singles and couples, with priority to persons or couples where at least one person has a serious mental health, physical health, and/or substance abuse problem.

⁴⁹ Evans, L. (2000) *Making Room*, article in *Visions*

Levels of government and organizations involved in the construction of the new Portland Hotel include:

- Downtown Eastside Residents Association
- Portland Hotel Society;
- City of Vancouver (provided land through a lease at a discounted rate);
- British Columbia Ministry of the Attorney General;
- British Columbia Ministry of Health;
- British Columbia Ministry of Social Development and Economic Security;
- BC Housing;
- Greater Vancouver Mental Health Services Society;
- Vancouver/Richmond Health Board;
- Real Estate Foundation;
- Vancouver Foundation;
- Central City Mission Foundation; and
- Government of Canada

Funding for the anticipated purchase of the old Portland Hotel property has been sought from BC Housing, the City of Vancouver and HRDC's SCPI program, with RRAP funding to be used for the renovations. The Society is seeking funding from the Provincial Ministry of Health for the support programs.

7.4 TIMEFRAME

The Portland Hotel Society was incorporated in 1993 and took over management of the existing Portland Hotel at 412 Carrall Street, Vancouver. The contract for management ended mid-2000.

For the new Portland Hotel, the lease terms for land with City of Vancouver were approved by City Council February 4, 1997, construction was set to start in June 1997, and the residents moved into the building June 2000.

The Sunrise and Washington Hotels were renovated and the Portland Hotel Society began management in 1998. The Regal Hotel was renovated in 1999 with occupancy in March 2000 under management by the Portland Hotel Society.

The Portland Hotel Society is currently seeking to purchase the old Portland Hotel, with a goal of completing the negotiations by the end of September 2001 and completing renovations by late 2002 or Spring 2003.

The Director of Operations indicated that the Portland Hotel Society plans to continue on with their existing programs, and intends to pursue the purchase of additional projects as they become available. The population served by the Society is considered “hardest to house”, and they will endeavour to keep their programs and services focused on this population group.

7.5 RESOURCES UTILIZED

City of Vancouver approved a lease for the new Portland Hotel project for a term of 60 years. The amount of \$356,250 was due within 90 days of the receipt of the occupancy permit. The prepaid rent was equal to 75% of the land’s market value. The original lease amount had been set at \$656,250, but was reduced through a \$300,000 grant from the Affordable Housing Fund.

Funding for the support programs is provided by the Greater Vancouver Mental Health Services Society and the Vancouver/Richmond Health Board. BC Housing funds building capital and operating costs. Other levels of government providing funding include the Ministry of the Attorney General, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Social Development and Economic Security and the federal government. Other organizations contributing to the project include the Real Estate Foundation, the Vancouver Foundation and the Central City Mission Foundation.

The Sunrise and Washington Hotels are owned through a partnership involving the Vancouver/Richmond Health Board, City of Vancouver and the province, with funding for the renovations coming from the RRAP program. The Vancouver/Richmond Health Board provides funding for the support services.

The Greater Vancouver Housing Corporation owns the Regal Hotel. The City of Vancouver has leased the first floor of the building for use for seniors programs. The Vancouver/Richmond Health Board funds the support services provided by the Portland Hotel Society. The Portland Hotel Society manages the day-to-day operations, including tenant selection.

The purchase of the old, vacant Portland Hotel is currently under negotiation with the owner, and would involve a partnership between BC Housing, the City of Vancouver and HRDC through their SCPI program. The funds for the necessary renovations to the building would be sought from the RRAP program.

7.6 REQUIRED APPROVALS

The approvals required for the Portland Hotel Society’s projects have involved various levels of government. Arranging the purchase of an existing hotel property for renovation has been quite onerous, requiring cooperation from the City of Vancouver, Province of British Columbia and the Government of Canada through a host of programs and departments.

7.7 BARRIERS ENCOUNTERED

The purchase and renovation of existing SRO properties requires a significant level of financial contribution. Areas such as plumbing and electricity required extensive renovations in the buildings, which were undertaken for the Sunrise and Washington hotels, but not for the former Portland Hotel. As a result, because the former Portland Hotel had not been renovated, the Society faced significantly higher operating costs than in the other buildings.

Funding for adequate staffing levels continues to be a concern to the Portland Hotel Society. Because the residents are considered “hard to house”, they require a high level of safety, security, support and cleaning staff on a 24-hour basis. The Society has received funding for 2 staff persons to be available 24-hours per day for the new Portland Hotel building, but only has one staff person at a time available for the other buildings. Staff are trained in all aspects of managing the building and providing support services, including providing security, cleaning, and interacting with residents both in crisis situations and day-to-day activities. The funding level for staffing limits the Society’s ability to provide sufficient staffing to handle security, support and safety for the residents at the Sunrise, Washington and Regal hotels.

Staff training and support is critical to the success of their programs. Staff are instructed in the goals and constitution of the Society, and continue to take additional training throughout their employment. This places a burden on the Society to obtain adequate funding to replace staff who are taking training, locate and secure qualified instructors and provide course costs.

An additional area where the Portland Hotel Society is continuing to face difficulties is obtaining funding to cover programs for residents such as art, writing, music, acupuncture therapy, camping trips and food for communal meals. The Society does provide one communal meal daily for the residents at the Portland Hotel, but is not able to provide meals at the other buildings they manage due to limited funding.

7.8 ASSESSMENT OF SUCCESS IN MEETING OBJECTIVES

The Portland Hotel Society has proven that by providing adequate housing and the required supports, even those who are considered extremely hard to house can find stable housing. This form of housing is far less costly than having individuals moving between the street and jail or to hospital and back. The combination of providing the appropriate housing form along with required support services has enabled the tenants to remain in their units instead of continuing the cycle of homelessness.

By addressing the needs of a specific population such as the existing residents of the former Portland Hotel, the Society was able to design a new building that would provide the amenities and features required by this group of tenants. The Society responded to their requests and recommendations for washrooms in each unit, communal kitchens on each floor as well as kitchenettes in some units and one-bedroom suites for couples.

The Portland Hotel Society has also demonstrated that SRO buildings are a required housing form in the Downtown Eastside, and that the stock of these units must be retained to meet the needs of residents who cannot live in other forms of housing such as independent apartment units. Programs to provide housing for low-income residents must ensure that the housing built will be appropriate for the population it will serve, and must include flexibility to cover various housing forms.

The RRAP program, which funded the renovations of the SRO buildings that have been carried out in the Downtown Eastside, has also proven to be a means to reduce on-going operating costs. The comparison of operating costs between the former Portland Hotel which was not renovated to other projects such as the Sunrise and Washington hotels proves that renovation programs are effective in reducing operating costs, and therefore should be continued.

7.9 POTENTIAL IMPROVEMENTS

The experience of the Portland Hotel Society with the former Portland Hotel building has proven that for buildings with a history of poor maintenance, a renovation process is necessary in order to ensure the building meets safety standards and to reduce operating costs. Groups seeking to acquire similar properties should actively pursue renovation programs such as RRAP funding to cover the costs of necessary renovations.

The residents of the Portland Hotel are provided with one communal meal per day in the building, but this meal program has not been extended to other buildings managed by the Portland Hotel Society. Adequate funding for meal programs should be included as part of the funding for support programs.

7.10 APPLICABILITY ELSEWHERE

The Portland Hotel Society provides an example to other groups seeking to duplicate their efforts to develop support programs for those considered hard to house, effectively manage SRO buildings, and design a new building to meet the needs of a specific population group. The Society has spent many years understanding the needs of tenants in SRO housing, and therefore has been able to develop unique approaches to housing and support services. One of the keys to their success is staff education and training programs, which they have found to be necessary in order to continue to meet the support needs of their residents.

Funding and co-operation between various partners and levels of government is one of the keys to success. Another important element is the recognition by funding programs of the need to retain and create SRO housing units for certain population groups. A group seeking to duplicate their efforts must find ways to effectively lobby for funding for SRO units from government programs that are traditionally geared to building independent apartment units.

8.0 CASE STUDY E: BUILDING REHABILITATION PROGRAMS

Edmonton A·C·T Demonstration Project, Edmonton, Alberta

8.1 OBJECTIVES OF INITIATIVES

This demonstration project involved the renovation of a 21-unit rooming house in the city of Edmonton using alternative housing standards developed by the Association of Preservation Technology in place of the standards required by the National Building Code and existing municipal standards.

The Association for Preservation Technology⁵⁰ (APT) is a non-profit organization dedicated to building preservation and heritage issues. APT received an **A·C·T (Affordability and Choice Today)** grant to recommend alternate standards to those in the National Building Code and various municipal approvals processes. They developed a Table of Alternate Technical Measures called **Safe Housing Standards** that can be applied as equivalencies to the National Building Code, but have a lower cost to landlords.

In 1993, the Safe Housing Committee⁵¹ of Edmonton was awarded an **A·C·T (Affordability and Choice Today)** grant to undertake renovations in a demonstration building using the Safe Housing Standards developed through the work of the Association for Preservation Technology's project.

The main objectives of the Edmonton Safe Housing Committee's demonstration project were to:

- develop a draft set of alternative health and safety standards;
- carry out a detailed site evaluation of an existing building;
- renovate the building using the Safe Housing Standards in place of the requirements of the National Building Code;
- educate inspectors in the use of alternative standards to ensure the renovations met the requirements of the standards developed; and
- modify and evaluate the alternative standards and achieve consensus with landlords.

⁵⁰ Energy Pathways Inc. (1995) *Affordability and Choice Today (A·C·T) Streamlined Approval Process Project: Code and Approval Process Models for Residential Renovation*, Association for Preservation Technology, Ottawa, Ontario <http://www.fcm.ca/act/index-e.html>

⁵¹ Energy Pathways Inc. (1996) *Affordability and Choice Today (A·C·T) Streamlined Approval Process Project: Safe Housing Standards for Affordable Renovation*, Office of the Commissioner of Housing, Planning and Development, City of Edmonton, Alberta <http://www.fcm.ca/act/index-e.html>

8.2 DESCRIPTION OF APPROACH

The demonstration project involved renovating an inner-city rooming house containing 21 units with shared washroom facilities, located at 9612-102nd Avenue. The renovation standards of the National Building Code and the city of Edmonton's local standards were reviewed by the Edmonton Safe Housing Committee and alternate standards called Safe Housing Standards were developed in June, 1994. These standards were adopted by the Edmonton Board of Health. The Edmonton Fire Chief advised the City that "compliance with the Standards would achieve an acceptable level of life safety in accordance with the Alberta Fire Code⁵²." The Safe Housing Standards established the minimum levels of health and safety for existing residential buildings that are six storeys in height or less and contain three or more units. These standards, therefore, would apply to the majority of rooming houses in the city of Edmonton, especially those that had been created by renovating single-family homes.

The report indicates the following steps were taken in the demonstration project:

- "reviewing the draft standards to ensure they would be easily understood by property owners;
- surveying and evaluating a typical converted 9-unit "Division A" demonstration building to identify existing hazards;
- preparing a design brief to address building deficiencies with reference to the draft standards;
- consulting and negotiating with stakeholders to reach agreement on improvements to be made;
- preparing design drawings, specifications and construction cost estimates;
- preparing workshop drawings, and renovating to the standards a purpose-built 21-unit "Division B" demonstration building; and
- evaluating and finalizing the standards."⁵³

A "Division A" building is used for residential occupancy only, is three storeys high or less, has ten or fewer occupants, and has a resident owner or designated resident to supervise the building. A "Division B" building is six storeys high or less, and does not meet the requirements of "Division A" buildings.

According to the report, "the reaction of tenants to their new living environment was unanimously positive."⁵⁴

⁵² *ibid.*, page ii

⁵³ *ibid.*, page i

⁵⁴ *ibid.*

8.3 PARTICIPANTS

The project was initiated by the city of Edmonton Safe Housing Committee. This committee was established in 1992 to improve living conditions for those living in sub-standard rental accommodations. The committee had a number of areas of focus, including inspecting properties using a co-ordinated inspection approach involving the city's planning and development, finance, power, fire, and law departments as well as the Board of Health. The committee also recognized that it would not be feasible to expect property owners to upgrade their properties to meet the current Alberta Building Code, and therefore decided to take a different approach to ensuring the properties were safely upgraded.

The committee continued with the inspection program, but also worked to develop guidelines for the upgrading of multiple occupancy dwellings that did not meet the Alberta Building Code and/or Fire Code. As well, the committee embarked on this pilot project to determine the impact of using alternative standards in place of the existing standards, which had been proven to be too costly for property owners to implement.

The Safe Housing Committee worked with the following organizations in the demonstration project:

- Greater Edmonton Home Builders' Association, Renovation Committee;
- Alberta Labour, Building Standards Branch;
- Alberta Municipal Affairs, Housing Division;
- Alberta Association of Architects;
- Inner-City Housing Society; and
- Richard J. Vanderwell, Architect Ltd.

8.4 TIMEFRAME

The original standards developed by the Association of Preservation Technology were established in 1992 through a consultation process. The Safe Housing Committee was originally established in February 1992, and in the first year, saw the need to develop alternate standards for upgrading multiple occupancy dwellings to the standards of the National Building Code, the Alberta Building Code and the Fire Code. The renovation of the 21-unit building began in 1993 and was completed by spring 1994.

8.5 RESOURCES UTILIZED

As previously noted, the standards set out in the report by the Association for Preservation Technology were used as the basis for the Safe Housing Standards developed by the Edmonton Safe Housing Committee. Energy Pathways Inc. prepared the reports outlining both projects, including the cost comparison between the demonstration project and similar RRAP renovation

projects undertaken in the city of Edmonton in the same time period. The Safe Housing Committee worked with the Office of the Commissioner of Housing and the Office of the Solicitor General to develop the alternate standards.

8.6 REQUIRED APPROVALS

Since the alternative standards were designed to be used in place of existing standards set out in the National Building Code, Alberta Building Code and the Fire Code, it was necessary to obtain approval from the Commissioner of Housing and the City Solicitor, as well as the various city departments including Planning and Development, Finance, Power, Fire and Law and the Edmonton Board of Health. Each department provided input into the development of the standards and gave final approval for the renovation of the demonstration project.

8.7 BARRIERS ENCOUNTERED

The study found that for smaller buildings classified as “Division A” buildings which are three storeys or less in height, have 10 or fewer occupants and have a resident or resident owner living on site to supervise the building, the standards developed by the Safe Housing Committee would be too costly in many cases to encourage renovations. Because these buildings were typically built as single family homes, some of the requirements of the standards such as providing 2 exits from each floor, cold and hot water plumbing and kitchen facilities such as countertops, sinks and drains would prove expensive. Landlords would likely be unable to recoup these costs from rent increases, as the majority of tenants had low-incomes and the rent must be kept at a similar level to other rental properties in the neighbourhood. As a result, although the standards were found to be quite useful for buildings housing over 10 individuals, the cost of renovating smaller buildings to the Safe Housing Standards would not generally be affordable for the landlord.

8.8 ASSESSMENT OF SUCCESS IN MEETING OBJECTIVES

The total cost of the renovation for the demonstration project was \$50,000, or \$2,831 per unit. A comparison with other properties renovated using Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program (RRAP) funding in the city of Edmonton found that the average cost per unit for buildings between 20 and 33 units were \$9,476 (20 unit building), \$8,803 (29 unit building) and \$17,756 (33 unit building).

The project was able to demonstrate that practical and cost-effective upgrading to meet health and safety standards can be achieved in a residential property by carefully applying Safe Housing Standards. They were also able to demonstrate that the Safe Housing Standards developed provide a fair and concise set of safety, occupancy, health and upgrading standards to inner-city property owners. The property owners were also active participants in the process, and contributed some creative suggestions that were implemented. The Safe Housing Standards have been implemented for all multiunit residential buildings of six storeys or less in the city of Edmonton.

To follow up on the project and the effectiveness of the alternate standards, we contacted the Co-ordinator of the Safe Housing Committee⁵⁵, who stated the city has found that by using the alternate standards, the cost to upgrade the property is between one-third and one-half of the cost that would be incurred if the building was required to meet the standards of the Building Code.

The City had found that the alternate standards project had worked best in larger buildings, but in cases where there were 6 or fewer units, the owners frequently did not keep the building in good repair after the renovations were completed. In addition, buildings that did not have a strong, active manager on site were found to have more problems with building maintenance. As a result, the Safe Housing Committee will be looking at properties upgraded over the past five years to ensure they meet current requirements.

The co-ordinated inspection system that was set up is limited by staffing limitations. There is currently only one fire inspector assigned to rooming houses, and therefore many properties are going without regular inspections. The Safe Housing Committee will begin meeting on a monthly basis starting in October 2001, with a focus on cleaning up the old files and enforcement of work orders.

8.9 POTENTIAL IMPROVEMENTS

As noted above, although some rooming house properties had been brought up to the required alternate standards in the mid-1990's, some of these same properties are in poor shape today. This is due to the simple fact that although the owners spent a considerable amount of money to upgrade the property, some of them, particularly owners of smaller buildings, did not follow up with adequate maintenance. The Edmonton Safe Housing Committee generally learns of these properties through contact with former or current tenants who are calling to complain about the building. In fact, staff have found that it is possible for a building to return to an unsafe state within one year of completing renovations.

The key to ensuring the buildings are properly maintained is a systematic, timely inspection program. Because of staffing limitations, the focus of the Edmonton Safe Housing Committee was shifted from inspecting existing rooming houses to dealing with complaints regarding single family housing and administering the RRAP program. The Committee has seen approximately 110 properties demolished which were unable to be brought up to safe condition, with the majority of these being single family homes. As a result, the rooming house stock has not been significantly affected by these necessary demolitions. In most cases where a single family home is demolished, a new structure is generally built on the land, with some of these being duplexes and fourplexes, resulting in additional rental units in the city.

As a result of the shift in focus of the Committee away from rooming houses, the annual property inspection program was not undertaken for all properties that were renovated. The Committee is aware of perhaps a half-dozen unsafe properties of the hundreds of properties that had been renovated. This fall the focus of the Committee will be to set up a regular inspection program,

⁵⁵ Mike Brown, Co-ordinator of the Safe Housing Committee and City of Edmonton Safety Codes Officer

recognizing that some properties will require semi-annual inspections to ensure standards are met. A multi-disciplinary approach has proven necessary for the inspection program, requiring adequate staffing commitments to follow-up on work orders.

Part of the inspection process will be to identify buildings that were renovated using RRAP funding to ensure the owners are maintaining their properties. As well, the Committee will discuss setting up a fine system for owners who are operating unsafe buildings. There is currently a fine of up to \$20,000 for owners charged with not obeying health orders, but the fire and building fines are significantly lower, and therefore are not a deterrent.

Owner education has also proven to be necessary, with many new owners of poorly maintained properties claiming ignorance of the requirements. To combat this, the city now puts the work order on the building instead of the owner, so that if the building changes hands the new owner is aware of the requirements of the work order. The health department has placed work orders on the building title to ensure compliance in situations where the ownership can change.

The Co-ordinator of the Safe Housing Committee indicated that they are also seeking to change one of the agreed to alternate standards as a result of their observations over the past five years. The alternate standards do permit exterior fire escapes from second and third floors to be constructed from wood. Since their experience has proven that some landlords do not adequately maintain these fire escapes, the Safe Housing Committee will look into changing the alternate standards to require pressure-treated wood or steel for the fire escapes for upper floors.

8.10 APPLICABILITY ELSEWHERE

It was felt that these standards would help alleviate some of the past problems associated with uneven or sporadic interpretation of standards by various city of Edmonton departments. According to the report, “these (Safe Housing Standards) can be readily applied elsewhere in Alberta and should be of benefit to municipalities across Canada that have aging housing stock in need of repair”. This A·C·T project demonstrates that residential buildings that might otherwise have been demolished or remain vacant, because of prohibitive costs in renovating to meet current building code requirements, can be revitalized economically to meet the pressing need for affordable housing.⁵⁶

The experience of the city five years after the project was described by staff as very profitable, with the properties that have been renovated using the alternate standards generally in good shape. Once the regular inspection program is instituted, the city will be in a position to ensure the rooming house stock is maintained to a safe standard. The Safe Housing Committee and his department are still receiving requests for information from municipalities across the country that are seeking to implement similar programs.

⁵⁶ *ibid.*, page 19

9.0 CASE STUDY F: LEGALIZATION OF EXISTING UNITS

Parkdale Pilot Project, Toronto, Ontario

9.1 OBJECTIVES OF INITIATIVES

This project was initiated in response to a need to address existing properties that had been renovated into rooming houses and bachelorette⁵⁷ units in the Parkdale community, but had never received licenses to operate. These buildings were typically constructed as large single family homes, which were later renovated into multi unit buildings. The Rupert Coalition⁵⁸ further defines bachelorette units in the Parkdale neighbourhood as “mini-apartment; usually a room with its own bathroom and some cooking facilities”, while rooming houses have shared bathroom and cooking facilities. Rooming houses have not been permitted to be constructed in the Parkdale neighbourhood since 1978, although many conversions had taken place after this date. The City of Toronto issued an interim control by-law in December 1996 that prohibited the creation of additional rooming houses in the area.

The City of Toronto recognized the need to license properties used for rooming houses and bachelorette units in order to ensure these properties were maintained to a safe level. The City also was aware that many properties were being used as rooming houses or had bachelorette units that were operating without licenses, and that enforcement of standards had not been carried out. Many of the owners of these buildings had not applied for licensing to avoid the requirement of bringing the building up to the building code requirements. In many cases, the owner was aware that to meet the building code requirements would result in a loss of rental units, and the cost of renovations was prohibitive. The neighbours of these buildings were concerned about the level of property maintenance, and the Business Improvement Association also expressed concerns about the use of the properties for rooming houses. Tenants living in these units were hesitant to complain about unsafe conditions because the building could be closed, leaving them without a place to live.

The objective of the program is to retain housing, while ensuring that the housing meets the existing by-laws, fire codes and building codes.

9.2 DESCRIPTION OF APPROACH

The City of Toronto initiated the project, with staff provided by the City. The Director of the Pilot Project, Ms. Sylvia Watson, is also Corporate Counsel to the City, and has overseen the project. The project began with a door to door search of buildings by City inspectors to identify buildings which were in use as rooming houses or contained bachelorette units but were not zoned for that use, with approximately 250 such buildings identified.

⁵⁷ A bachelor unit is defined as an apartment consisting of one room serving as bedroom and living room, with a separate bathroom. A bachelorette unit is defined as a very small bachelor apartment. Source: Newcomers Guide to Canadian Housing, CMHC, 1999

⁵⁸ The Rupert Coalition, The Most Frequently Asked Questions, <http://www.web.net/~rupert/faq.htm>

A committee was formed which included representation from local residents' associations, tenants, property owners, local Business Improvement groups, neighbours of buildings seeking legalization and social services providers. City staff from the Parkdale Pilot Project attended the meetings and provided resources. The members of the committee came to a consensus on alternate standards to be used for the properties. Tenants have been involved on the committee, with a small group of active tenants, but generally the involvement has been for shorter periods of time.

Community meetings have been held to give interested parties an opportunity to voice their opinions and concerns. These meetings have been effective in bringing tenants, owners and neighbours together to come to an understanding about the building. Tenants are encouraged by program staff to actively participate in the process, including speaking at community meetings to let neighbours know how they feel about living in their units. There is often initial concern on the part of neighbours that the units are too small and unacceptable, but the tenants are able to express their satisfaction with their living arrangements, and therefore bridge the concerns.

An owner seeking to legalize a property begins the process by submitting an application, including drawings of the existing building. An inspection is made of the property to ensure that the drawings accurately reflect the building as it stands and is used at the time of application. The plans are examined by the building and fire departments to outline which areas do not meet the current standards. A meeting then takes place where the owner is given a detailed list of improvements required for legalization. Owners have expressed appreciation that they are able to deal with one contact person instead of having to go to various departmental staff to get information on the modifications required. The owner is given a timeframe to complete the renovations. A final inspection is made by the same inspector who conducted the initial inspection, accompanied by a fire inspector. If the building is found to meet all of the requirements, then a site specific rezoning is issued for the property to be used as a rooming house or bachelorette property. The owner then applies for a license from the City to operate the building.

The alternate standards developed to permit the site-specific rezoning focussed on parking, unit sizes and gross floor area. Parking requirements are for one parking spot per living unit, but the committee recognized that the vast majority of tenants did not own vehicles, and the properties did not have sufficient space to provide parking at this level. The standard of providing two parking spots for each building was set, but properties unable to provide two parking spots are not prohibited from being legalized because of this limitation.

The committee agreed to minimum size standards based on the time the building was renovated into rooming house or bachelorette units. If a building had been renovated prior to 1978, no minimum size standard was applied. For any building renovated between 1978 and 1996, the minimum size for a bachelorette unit was set at 18.4 square metres (200 square feet), with most of the existing units in the range of 20.24 square metres (220 square feet). The smallest bachelorette units were 16.1 square metres (175 square feet). The minimum rooming house bedroom size for properties renovated between 1978 and 1996 was set at 13 square metres (140 square feet).

The issue of the building having a gross floor area in excess of one times the lot coverage was also addressed. If the basement is used as a living area, frequently the coverage was over this one times coverage limit. The committee reviewed this requirement, and determined that no maximum lot coverage would be set.

The City relies on records from previous inspections dating back prior to 1978 to determine when a building was renovated into rooming house or bachelorette use. These records also provide information on any new units that have been created since December 1996 after the interim control by-law prohibiting the construction of additional units was put into place.

9.3 PARTICIPANTS

The project began with a series of mediation sessions held with representatives of the local residents' associations, rooming house and bachelorette property owners, the local Business Improvement Association, social service providers and tenants of the properties. Over two years, the committee, with the assistance of City staff acting as a resource, worked out a draft document that outlined alternate standards for the properties and would permit the owners to seek legalization and apply for licensing.

Residents of the buildings currently pay between \$425-450 for a room in a rooming house, and between \$500-550 for a bachelorette unit. Tenants are typically single, but there are some children living with a single parent in the units.

Community meetings were held where the neighbours of buildings could obtain information and address their concerns. City staff involved in the project include the Director, and two inspectors assigned specifically to the project who provide both the initial and final inspections. The Director indicated that one of the keys to making the project work is coordination between City departments and staff to ensure the same individuals make inspections of the property before and after the renovations.

Local City of Toronto Councillors have also been actively involved in the project, providing support to the committee and City staff.

9.4 TIMEFRAME

The Parkdale Pilot Project has been operating for two years.

9.5 RESOURCES UTILIZED

As previously noted, staff from the City of Toronto provide services for this project. The Director is also Corporate Counsel for the City, and therefore is able to provide legal advice to the committee. City staff include inspectors dedicated to this pilot project.

9.6 REQUIRED APPROVALS

The first hurdle for the committee was to set out the alternate standards for the owners of properties seeking legalization. This step required detailed examination of the current building code, zoning requirements, and fire and safety standards to see which requirements could be modified yet still result in a building safe for the occupants.

9.7 BARRIERS ENCOUNTERED

A number of barriers have been encountered during the program. One of the major areas of work was the development of the alternative standards, which required significant time involvement by the participants on the committee. The program Director indicated that although some tenants have been active on the committee, it was generally difficult to have consistent representation by tenants.

Community education has also been a prime focus of the project. Neighbours and business owners were initially hesitant to participate in the process, fearing that the units being legalized would not be fit for the tenants. Having tenants speak for themselves at community meetings and on the committee has resulted in greater understanding of their needs.

Owners of properties must take the first step in the process toward legalization. Some owners are reluctant to spend money on renovations, or in some cases are likely unable to find financing, and therefore cannot or do not participate. Education of these owners is critical in order for them to see the benefits of the program.

9.8 ASSESSMENT OF SUCCESS IN MEETING OBJECTIVES

Of the approximately 250 buildings identified by City inspectors that would require legalization, thirty have completed the process to date, with twenty currently in process. More applications from property owners are being submitted, with the City waiting for these owners to make applications. The project Director noted that not all of the buildings identified by the inspectors would require legalization, as some could have been changed back to use that complies with the zoning of the property.

The City had long been aware of the existence of these buildings, and has found that this program has provided a means to encourage property owners to bring their buildings up to standards. Many property owners have been enthusiastic about the program, because once they obtain a license to operate the building as a rooming house or operate bachelorettes, it is easier to obtain financing or sell the building to another owner. Under the program, the property owners have typically spent between \$10,000 and \$20,000 per building on renovations, with some owners applying for RRAP funding to help cover the costs.

9.9 POTENTIAL IMPROVEMENTS

Since the program is still relatively new, it is difficult to outline potential improvements. An assessment of the program should be made once a significant number of properties have been legalized to find areas where improvements can be made.

It will also be necessary to track the licensing process to ensure that buildings that have applied for licenses continue to apply for renewal, and sufficient inspections are carried out by staff on a systematic basis to effectively monitor maintenance and safety issues.

9.10 APPLICABILITY ELSEWHERE

The program Director indicated that the City is considering expanding the program to other areas of the City, particularly The Annex and Cabbagetown. Both of these communities contain buildings which are used as rooming houses or have been divided into bachelorette units, but have not been legalized.

It would appear that a similar approach could be taken in any community that is known to have a considerable stock of rooming house, SRO or bachelorette housing which is not currently permitted by the zoning of the property. Alternate standards could be developed using the same methods as this pilot project, and then the legalization process begun. The project does, however, require a significant long-term staffing commitment from the municipality, and co-operation between various municipal departments.

10.0 CASE STUDY G: SUPPORTIVE HOUSING

Supportive Housing Coalition, Toronto, Ontario

10.1 OBJECTIVES OF INITIATIVES

The **Supportive Housing Coalition**⁵⁹ is a non-profit agency in the city of Toronto that provides housing for mental health consumer-survivors. This organization has 40 residential locations with a total of 828 units across the city, including rooming houses, where some degree of support is offered to the tenants who require it.

The supportive housing program is intended to provide permanent, safe, affordable housing for persons with mental health problems. The Supportive Housing Coalition seeks to improve the lives of these tenants by addressing poverty, homelessness and the stigma that most individuals with serious mental illnesses face. All tenants must be able to live independently, with various support programs in place to assist them. By providing these support systems, the tenants are able to retain their housing and receive the assistance they require to live independently and reach their goals. The organization seeks to foster a sense of active participation in the community for its tenants.

There are currently 16 rooming houses operated by the Supportive Housing Coalition. These properties contain a total of 130 beds, with the smallest house having four beds. The organization also provides services to two boarding homes on a per diem model.

The authors of the Mayor's Homelessness Action Task Force⁶⁰ noted that supportive housing is a necessary form of housing for those who are chronically homeless or who have difficulty maintaining stable housing. This report recommended that "the chronically homeless population in Toronto should be diverted from the emergency system to permanent supportive housing". The report also identified rooming houses as one of the housing forms appropriate for supportive housing residents, and that the city look into purchasing existing rooming houses for rehabilitation into supportive housing units.

10.2 DESCRIPTION OF APPROACH

The Supportive Housing Coalition seeks to enhance each resident's independence by providing the needed supports.

Tenants living in Supportive Housing Coalition housing have a say in running the organization through their representation on the organization's Board of Directors. One-third of the members of the Board of Directors are tenants. Supportive Housing Workers work as agents for the landlord by helping tenants meet their responsibilities and maintain their housing, and provide support for tenants on an individual basis and in community meetings.

⁵⁹ The Supportive Housing Coalition, Toronto, Ontario <http://www.supportivehousing.ca>

⁶⁰ Dr. Anne Golden, Chair (1999) *Taking Responsibility for Homelessness: An Action Plan for Toronto*, Report of the Mayor's Homelessness Action Task Force.

Supportive Housing Workers provide a variety of supports to tenants including:

- counselling;
- support with everyday living;
- referral services to support agencies;
- conducting neighbourhood meetings for each building;
- organizing support for daily routines such as budgeting, shopping, etc.;
- mediating between tenant and tenant or tenant and landlord;
- enhancing employment opportunities, including the innovative Fresh Start program;
- helping tenants identify problems and work through problem-solving strategies; and
- working with tenants to find employment.

Future projects planned will focus entirely on independent living units, typically designed as bachelor units with a bathroom and one room combining a sleeping and living area. Some of these units will have kitchenettes so the residents can prepare their own meals. However, the finding in many cases is that residents either are not able to or do not wish to prepare their own meals.

The organization is currently in the planning stages for a new project, which will see kitchenettes provided in some units, but also a community kitchen located on each floor where residents can prepare meals. The recent survey of residents found that they wanted their own bathroom with a shower unit instead of a bathtub, but did not necessarily want kitchen appliances in each unit. For those requesting kitchens in their units, the appliances would include a microwave oven and small refrigerator, but no stove. Another important element to this building will be air conditioning in the units. Because many of the tenants take medications that cause sensitivity to heat, they find the summer months are unbearable without air conditioning in their rooms. The project will also contain common space for recreation, which will be passively supervised by staff. Staffing for this proposed project will not be on a 24-hour basis, but there will be staffing present seven days per week, with the Mental Health Outreach Team providing coverage where required when staff are not present.

The organization has a policy of re-housing individuals who try to live independently but find they are unable to do so. Approximately 5% of tenants have been in this situation, and these individuals are given priority for housing. However, because of the high vacancy rates in the rooming house properties, many of these returning residents move back into a rooming house bed, and have to wait for an independent unit to become available.

10.3 PARTICIPANTS

The Board of Directors of the Supportive Housing Coalition is comprised of 15 members, of which 5 must be mental-health consumers who are tenants in the buildings operated by the organization. The residents of SHC have found that obtaining supportive housing is critical to their success of living in the community once they are released from hospital treatment programs.

The Supportive Housing Coalition provides housing in 823 units throughout the city of Toronto for individuals who are living with mental illness. These tenants must also meet the following criteria:

- be Canadian citizens, have landed status or be a refugee claimant;
- not owe rent to any other non-profit housing authority;
- not own a house, or be willing to sell it within 6 months of moving into SHC housing; and
- be able to live independently or with support from family, friends or other social agencies.

Tenants in the buildings must also be linked to mental health services before they are accepted as residents.

As noted previously, the residents in the rooming house properties are considered a fairly vulnerable population. The design of the rooming houses and the requirement to share facilities such as washrooms and kitchens frequently causes disputes among the residents, who in many cases would function better in a private unit. Only in the two homes that operate as boarding homes with staff preparing meals and monitoring medications has the resident population been fairly stable. The result of individuals with mental health problems sharing facilities in the rooming houses without 24-hour staff supervision has been increased damage and wear to the assets. For this reason, the organization is seeking to change the use of these properties into a boarding home format where possible. They have also found that boarding homes act very well as transitional housing for those who were previously homeless, and will be focussing on this use in the future.

Single individuals applying to the Supportive Housing Coalition's housing typically request a one-bedroom unit. However, the experience of the staff is that most applicants function better in a bachelor unit than a one-bedroom unit. Very few applicants have requested placement in a rooming house building. Because of the necessity to share the facilities with other residents, and the lack of 24-hour staffing, tenants in rooming houses see these homes as much more dangerous and upsetting than apartment buildings. Many tenants in rooming houses are frightened and in some cases in danger from the behaviour of the other tenants, and this ongoing issue has resulted in the decision to seek funding for 24-hour supervision for these buildings.

As was found in the Vancouver Portland Hotel Society project, many of the residents are better suited to living in bachelor-sized units than independent one-bedroom apartments. The residents moving into independent apartments will be monitored to see how they cope with the larger living space.

The Supportive Housing Coalition surveyed its residents in 1999 regarding their previous housing. They found that 50% of the tenants responded to the survey, and of these respondents, 12% had moved from boarding homes to independent units. The survey found that 6% had lived in their unit for less than one year, 23% between one and two years, 31% between two and five years, 25% between five and ten years, and 6% over ten years.

The Supportive Housing Coalition has an overall vacancy rate of 5%, but noted that it is significantly higher in the rooming house properties. Reasons for a tenant leaving include death due to poor health from being homeless or as a result of serious mental illness, eviction (14 units in entire portfolio last year), abandonment of unit, or moving to a higher level of support such as a hospital, nursing home or other facility providing psycho-geriatric support.

10.4 TIMEFRAME

The Supportive Housing Coalition was founded in May, 1982, and has been actively providing supportive housing services in the City of Toronto since that time. The organization is seeking to expand their services to other properties in the future as these become available.

The last purpose-built rooming house was constructed in 1989/90 by the Supportive Housing Coalition. The organization is moving away from rooming house forms to individual SRO-type units that contain private washrooms, and in some cases kitchenettes.

10.5 RESOURCES UTILIZED

The Supportive Housing Coalition has generally one housing staff person for every 90 households. Supportive Housing Workers do not provide full-time support and counselling for tenants, but instead will provide referrals to the appropriate support and counselling agencies including medical/therapeutic services. The Supportive Housing Workers also provide programs and activities to build relationships between tenants in the buildings.

10.6 REQUIRED APPROVALS

The Supportive Housing Coalition receives funding from a number of sources. Regular reporting is made to the Ministry of Health. Many of the properties were built through CMHC-financed programs, so a reporting system for audits and financial reports is in place as well.

10.7 BARRIERS ENCOUNTERED

One of the significant barriers faced by staff at the Supportive Housing Coalition is the limit of housing units available. There is currently a ten-year waiting list for a unit⁶¹, with the waiting list of the Supportive Housing Coalition currently closed. However, individuals seeking a unit are able to approach one of 26 agencies with housing units within the Supportive Housing Coalition's buildings. These agencies have their own eligibility requirements for services, and have a specific number of units reserved for their clients within the portfolio. As a result, these

⁶¹ Supportive Housing Coalition, http://www.supportivehousing.ca/get_in/vacancies.htm

applicants must meet both the eligibility requirements of the Supportive Housing Coalition and the individual mandate of the agency.

The Supportive Housing Coalition has experienced difficulty in developing new rooming/boarding homes because of three factors: affordability, the need for 24-hour staffing, and the lack of suitability of this housing form to many of their clients. Twenty of the buildings operated by the Supportive Housing Coalition are shared facilities, including shared houses and apartments and rooms in boarding homes and group homes. The rooming house form requires residents to live together and share facilities. This brings residents into close contact with each other, and in many cases has caused a high level of stress for the residents who are affected by the behaviour of the other residents. The current model does not provide for 24-hour staffing in these projects.

The organization has found that the highest vacancies in their portfolio are within the rooming houses, with most residents expressing a strong preference for independent units. To further address this issue, a study will be launched this fall to examine shared housing.

The organization is seeking to transform the use of rooming houses to congregate living with a staff member on site to provide meal preparation and cleaning services. This goal will be achievable only if funding to provide adequate staffing is found. Another option currently under consideration is to contract these properties to outside agencies that will provide the necessary support services to the residents.

The organization has found a high level of public education in the neighbourhood necessary to achieving community acceptance. Programs have been developed to address the concerns of neighbours in the community toward the presence of the residents.

The experience of the Supportive Housing Coalition is that the rooming house properties have a significantly higher maintenance cost than independent units in an apartment building. The population in the rooming houses is generally less stable than those living in the apartment buildings, with higher cases of vandalism and greater wear and tear on the building.

10.8 ASSESSMENT OF SUCCESS IN MEETING OBJECTIVES

The Supportive Housing Coalition measures the success of its programs by a number of indicators. These include the length of stay of residents, the ability of the residents to keep rent payments current, and the ability to maintain their units. One other indicator not mentioned was the long waiting list to enter their housing, which has resulted in the closing of their waiting list. Potential applicants are currently instructed to apply through affiliated organizations to ensure the necessary supports are in place before the unit is offered.

The data gathered in their 1999 study of residents indicated that they have been highly successful in meeting their objectives for length of stay in a unit. As previously noted, 62% of their residents had lived in their unit for two years or longer. The low vacancy rate of 5% also confirms the success of the organization, with the majority of vacancies occurring in rooming house or shared accommodation facilities.

10.9 POTENTIAL IMPROVEMENTS

As noted previously, there are some issues and areas where the Supportive Housing Coalition is considering changes. Staffing levels at rooming house properties are not sufficient to provide for 24-hour staffing for these buildings, while the disabilities of the residents clearly requires this. Moving from a rooming house (where residents do not have direct supervision and share facilities) to a congregate living format (where staff prepare meals and provide supervision) will provide additional staffing for these properties.

The number of units available for mental health consumer-survivors is not sufficient to meet the need. Additional units that are appropriate for these residents are required to reduce the cycle of hospital/street/housing that many individuals face.

There are a host of community resources available to this particular population. One of the keys to providing support services is the effective use of these community resources, recognizing that this is a niche population that is not well served by typical rental housing providers. Adequate support services must be provided to enable each tenant to maintain their independence to the degree they are able. Housing forms must be varied and must match the needs of the resident, e.g. private washrooms, kitchen appliances, bachelor units, etc.

The organization has seen a need for a formal conflict resolution process. They will be launching a pilot project this winter to address this need, which up to now has been handled on an informal basis. In the first quarter of this year, there were over 200 addressed through staff intervention.

A new area where the Supportive Housing Coalition is seeking to develop programs is providing a drop-in centre for tenants. This centre will help the tenants combat social isolation, using tenants as volunteers to provide programs, building on the strengths of these residents. The facility is to be located near the head office of the organization which will enable staff to attend programs and provide guidance.

Another new program that is currently being explored is the creation of garden clubs for the residents. Tenants are encouraged to grow their own fruits, vegetables and flowers, with some of the plants to be purchased by the Supportive Housing Coalition. As well, the organization is currently creating good food box programs for its residents, which provides education for the tenants in healthy eating.

The level of resident involvement in the buildings varies between the projects. Community meetings are held regularly in some of the buildings, with residents expressing their opinions of what they want in their building. This process is building slowly, and the organization is developing best practices that will be implemented throughout the portfolio.

10.10 APPLICABILITY ELSEWHERE

The Executive Director of the Supportive Housing Coalition recommended that this type of housing is best managed by a non-profit agency, not a City department. Using an organization outside of city bureaucracy provides a better structure for the programs. They have also found that having the City own the building and contract out the support services to an advocacy group is highly effective, combining the expertise of the agency and the funding support of the city for the project.

11.0 CONCLUSIONS

The above case studies clearly demonstrate that many forms of initiatives can be effective in retaining existing rooming house/SRO stock and in stabilizing tenancy and improving the quality of life for residents. Some key conclusions reached from our research are summarized below.

The ongoing debate over the viability of rooming houses and SRO units as suitable housing continues in some Canadian communities. Even in communities such as Vancouver that have a significant housing stock in these housing forms, there is ongoing discussion of whether or not additional units should be created. However, it is also the experience of many of the organizations working directly with residents living in rooming houses and SRO units that only this housing form will meet the needs of a specific group of tenants. As a result, while there is continued pressure from some sectors to convert units into independent apartments, many service agencies and advocacy groups are working to maintain the existing stock and create additional units.

The many years of experience of the Supportive Housing Coalition point out that, for clients with mental health problems, there is a preference for SRO type units over units that require residents to share facilities. Unless an agency can provide 24-hour supervision in a rooming house, the residents will generally have difficulty living in this group atmosphere. However, in the cases where there is 24-hour staffing, such as rooming houses operated through Habitat Services programs, the boarding house form does provide appropriate housing for residents with mental health problems.

Protection of the existing stock from redevelopment pressures has become necessary in areas where neighbourhood characteristics are changing. Since the buildings typically used for rooming houses were originally designed as single family homes, many of these properties are being sought by developers seeking to restore the building back to its original use. The hotels typically housing SRO units in the Vancouver area are also under redevelopment pressure to convert to tourist use. Indeed, many of these units are now serving dual purposes; housing tourists during peak tourist seasons and housing single residents during the rest of the year. The net effect of this redevelopment pressure has been the loss of permanent affordable housing units and causing individuals who have lived in a particular neighbourhood for many years to move elsewhere because of the lack of affordable rental housing. The use of rooming houses and SROs by university and college students puts additional pressure on these long-time residents.

The experience in the City of Toronto's Parkdale neighbourhood also provides insight into the views of the tenants living in this housing form. One of the interesting outcomes of the legalization process has been the increased understanding of the needs of the tenants. Although many neighbours expressed the belief that small units such as bachelorettes are not "liveable", the tenants who spoke at numerous public meetings indicated that they were quite satisfied with living in these units as long as they were safe and adequately maintained.

The further experience of the Portland Hotel Society during the design process for the new purpose-built facility provides additional insight into the housing needs of tenants of rooming houses and SROs. The existing tenants of the old Portland Hotel were surveyed to find out what

they wanted in their building. The overall response was to provide each SRO unit with a private washroom, but not to provide a kitchenette in most units, and to build apartment units only for couples and a small segment of the single residents.

Many tenants living in rooming houses and SRO units have been found to need more than a room to live in. Communities across Canada have set up supportive housing programs that involve various professionals and volunteers who assist the residents in their daily lives. Tenants who are not provided with a sufficient level of support geared to their individual needs are most likely to come into conflict with the landlord or other tenants. Tenants also require a high level of support to resolve conflicts with landlords and other tenants.

Many communities continue to require licensing for rooming houses and SRO buildings. Legalization programs such as the Parkdale Pilot Project provide an example where a community has chosen to establish a program to legalize existing buildings but not permit additional units to be created. Once these buildings had gone through the required renovations and were given site specific re-zoning, the owner applied for licensing from the City. The benefit of this program to the City was the ability to regularly inspect the property as part of the licensing process.

Funding for programs and services for landlords and tenants of rooming houses and SROs is vital to the creation of new housing units and to maintain the existing stock. Both landlords and tenants must be aware of their rights and responsibilities, and ongoing education programs in this area are necessary. Mediation and facilitation programs have proven effective in this area, and similar programs could be quite effective in other communities.

The physical condition of many existing rooming houses and SRO buildings is still causing concern throughout Canada. Communities have found that without regular inspections, building conditions are not always kept to a safe standard. Using a co-ordinated inspection approach has been seen as the best way to conduct inspections, as this reduces conflicting instructions between municipal departments on how to address building safety requirements.

Tenants continue to seek mediation services to address building conditions, as seen in the Ottawa area. The use of alternate standards in Edmonton and Toronto have proven effective in upgrading the safety of buildings. It was also recommended that an inspection process be set up specifically for buildings renovated using RRAP funding to ensure the owners were providing sufficient ongoing maintenance once the renovations had been completed.

In conclusion, it is clear that the rooming house/SRO sector is playing a significant role in accommodating the “hard-to-house” and others experiencing difficulty accessing the rental housing market. By considering the types of initiatives described in this report, communities can play a key role in stabilizing this important component of the housing market and helping those in need find adequate and highly suitable accommodation.

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