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RESEARCH REPORT

ISSUES AND STRATEGIES FOR SHARED ACCOMMODATION



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ISSUES AND STRATEGIES FOR SHARED ACCOMMODATION FINAL REPORT

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ISSUES AND STRATEGIES FOR SHARED ACCOMMODATION

INTRODUCTION

The intent of this study was to answer the question: “Considering that sharing accommodation is a good economic strategy for single people, what strategies could facilitate this housing arrangement?” Other objectives were to identify

- barriers to shared housing
- strategies to successfully facilitate sharing in the private rental market in order to increase housing affordability
- practices used outside the supportive housing sector which could be adopted by supportive housing providers
- factors that are difficult to replicate in supportive housing

The research activities focused on single adults under the age of 65 (including students) who either share voluntarily as an affordability strategy in the private rental market or who, because of their special needs dependencies, are living in supportive housing. Emergency or transitional accommodation, homeowners with rooms or secondary suites to rent, generic rooming houses, intentional communities, or seniors' match-and-share programs were considered outside the scope of the research.

The study was initiated in October 2004 and completed in June 2005.

METHODOLOGY

The information for this study came from two major sources: (1) a literature review and (2) interviews with stakeholders including tenants who share in the private rental market, supportive housing residents, supportive housing managers and housing help agencies. The literature

review focused mainly on materials published in Canada and the United States since 1990; however, earlier material was considered if relevant. The findings of the literature review, including identified gaps, informed the development of the interview guides for tenants and other stakeholders.

The fieldwork for this study was conducted in Ottawa, Vancouver, Montréal and Gatineau. Sixty tenants and staff from 19 agencies were interviewed. A combination of face-to-face and telephone interviews was used to collect the information from each stakeholder group. The method used depended on respondent preference and feasibility.

FINDINGS

Is sharing a good housing option for single people? Based on the literature review and the interviews conducted with home sharers, it would appear that the answer is a cautious yes.

The sharing of accommodation tends to be a temporary situation averaging one to five years for most home sharers during periods of financial instability. Students and young employed people who were interviewed perceived sharing as a temporary situation, a cost saving vehicle, and a necessary part of a continuum of housing as they “moved up the ladder.”

Advantages of shared accommodation

There are powerful incentives to share, especially for low-income earners, students, and single people in receipt of social assistance who cannot afford to live on their own. These included: financial benefits, security, companionship and independence (assistance which is needed because of illness or disability).

Similarly, supportive housing providers and residents cited assistance with living expenses, safety and reduced isolation, as the main benefits to those in shared supportive living arrangements.

Challenges of shared accommodation

Considerable interpersonal efforts are required to make shared accommodation arrangements work. According to the literature, a lack of interpersonal skills, personal dysfunctions and disruptive lifestyle choices that play out in common spaces are the most significant barriers to successful shared accommodation arrangements. Despite the potential benefits for low-income households of this approach, poverty can also increase obstacles to successful accommodation sharing. The poor have fewer financial resources to deal with emergencies and often have less stability in their life circumstances.

Regardless of the motivation to share, housemate conflict was noted as the major reason for seeking other accommodation.

Both the literature and the interviews revealed that conflicts often arise when it comes to the sharing of finances. Sharers in rented houses and apartments are jointly responsible for rent and utilities. Therefore, in order for shared accommodation to be a financial benefit for people, there must be a means to ensure that people meet their financial responsibilities.

According to the interviews, lack of privacy is a big issue among people who share accommodation in the private rental market as well as in the supportive housing sector. Almost all housing units continue to be designed for the traditional nuclear family or affluent empty-nesters. When conventional housing is used as shared accommodation, key informants and tenants cited insufficient space as the major design barrier to sufficient privacy.

Supportive housing

The literature and housing providers agreed that the sharing of accommodation is especially challenging for those living with mental illness or attempting to control addictive behaviour. The increased stress of coping with a shared living arrangement can lead to exacerbation of an existing mental illness, addiction relapse, new mental health problems, and an inability to focus on goals such as going to school or finding steady employment. An additional challenge may be coping with roommates chosen for you, which is the general practice, according to interviewed supportive housing providers.

Supportive housing providers spoke with a common voice about the need to limit the number of residents living together. In general, supportive housing providers

saw supported housing, where people live independently with portable supports, as the model for the future.

STRATEGIES THAT MAXIMIZE SUCCESS

What becomes apparent is the similarity of factors supporting successful housing outcomes for individuals living together in either market rent or supportive housing. Specifically they are:

- a clear understanding of individual expectations and capabilities is used during the matching process;
- sharers are able to assume responsibility for shared finances and household tasks;
- sharers have the ability to resolve conflict productively, or manage disruptive behaviour, with or without supports;
- layout of the proposed housing offers the right balance between private and common space.

Flexibility is the most cited characteristic of successful home sharers. The study identified three specific strategies that housing providers and home sharers can use to maximize their success.

1. Tools to Facilitate Matching

The study identified strategies and tools that could be applied more widely to support sharing arrangements. Although most are directed at seniors and those wishing to share homes they own, they are just as applicable to anyone living in shared housing. Existing resources could easily be revised and made available through agencies that deal regularly with low-income singles who look at sharing as an affordability measure.

There are many different kinds of shared rental arrangements and different sets of laws that apply to them. Community Legal Education Ontario (CLEO) has recently launched an interactive website, www.cleo.on.ca/roommates, as a tool to help people who share rental accommodation identify which laws apply to their situation and their related rights and responsibilities¹.

The market tenants who self-select for sharing could benefit from access to some of these useful tools. Many of them came to their workable, successful sharing arrangements through trial and error which, while useful for maturation, might be more easily achieved if they could start with some simple checklists and template agreements. This is clearly an area that deserves some attention as a means towards the goal of facilitating successful sharing for affordability.

¹ Also see CMHC's *Your Guide to Renting a Home* www.cmhc.ca

2. Conflict Resolution Intervention

It became clear from reading any practical advice on the interpersonal success factors of home sharing that the chief social skill required is conflict resolution. The ability to name issues, discuss them without becoming defensive, avoiding blame, being open to various solutions, and coming to an agreement on how to deal with problems is essential. People must have communication and negotiation skills to handle conflict resolution in a productive manner. In the case of supportive housing, the conflict resolution role is often played by a support staff worker rather than the tenants themselves.

Another service offered by both supportive housing providers and match-and-share agencies is conflict resolution when things go wrong. This is an invaluable intervention that can salvage sharing situations otherwise headed for failure. Skilled supportive housing staff regularly do third party mediation and conflict resolution on an informal basis as part of their work in helping vulnerable people achieve a positive residential environment. Match and share agencies sometimes, but not always, offer follow-up intervention to their clients to help them work out conflicts that are threatening the arrangement.

In the private market sector, a number of different approaches could work to either extend the “life” of a shared arrangement (i.e. conflict resolution services and tools) or make the arrangement more pleasant by improving the design of shared housing. Most promising among these solutions (and least costly) is the creation of “self-help” tools that could be made available to potential home sharers.

Self-help materials could be made available through housing help offices or from a website. Housing help agencies are well positioned to support those seeking shared accommodation. Where funding is available for staffing and implementing programming to match and support home sharers, such services are well used.

3. Design Features

The results of the field research confirm the findings of the literature review on the contribution of good design to the success of shared housing arrangements. The factors that facilitate success are

- provisions for privacy and quiet
- clear division of areas by function rather than open concept
- some choice and variety in common spaces
- separation of private and common spaces
- not too many people sharing a bathroom
- enough room in the kitchen to accommodate more than one or two people preparing food
- soundproofing
- durability of finishes
- a normal home-like appearance

In the case of supportive housing, smaller buildings are deemed more successful than larger ones when considering the quality of life of residents.

Good design can mitigate some of the minor lifestyle conflicts that can be expected to arise in any sharing situation, or poor design can exacerbate those minor annoyances so that they escalate into major problems. Good communication, respect and preventative rules can compensate for poor design. However, with unskilled sharers and lifestyle dysfunctions, poor design can lead to the breakdown of a shared housing arrangement.

CONCLUSION

Home sharing can be a viable affordable housing option for single people, particularly those on low income and those who may be at risk for homelessness. However, home sharing, whether it occurs in the private market rent sector or in the supportive housing sector, presents challenges to both the home sharers themselves and their housing providers.

A high level of interpersonal skills and processes for conflict resolution are key in both sectors.

The study identified strategies that housing providers and home sharers can use to maximize the likelihood of success

- tools to facilitate matching
- conflict resolution intervention
- design features

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ENJEUX ET STRATÉGIES EN MATIÈRE D'HABITATION PARTAGÉE

INTRODUCTION

Le but de la présente étude consistait à donner suite à la question : « Vu que l'habitation partagée constitue une bonne stratégie économique pour les personnes vivant seules, quelles sont les mesures qui pourraient favoriser ce mode d'habitation ? » L'étude voulait aussi cerner :

- les obstacles à l'habitation partagée
- les stratégies permettant de bien favoriser l'habitation partagée au sein du marché locatif privé en vue d'accroître l'abordabilité du logement
- les méthodes employées à l'extérieur du secteur des logements-services que pourraient adopter les organismes offrant ce type d'habitation
- les facteurs difficiles à reconstituer dans les logements-services

La recherche a porté sur les adultes vivant seuls, âgés de moins de 65 ans (étudiants compris) qui partagent volontairement leur logement y voyant là une mesure d'abordabilité au sein du marché locatif privé ou qui habitent un logement en milieu de soutien (ou logement-services) en raison de leurs besoins particuliers. On a cependant jugé que les logements de secours ou de transition, les chambres ou les appartements accessoires à louer, les maisons de chambres, les collectivités intentionnelles ou les programmes de jumelage et de partage d'habitation pour aînés débordent du cadre de la présente recherche.

L'étude a débuté en octobre 2004 pour se terminer en juin 2005.

MÉTHODE

L'étude tire ses renseignements de deux principales provenances : un dépouillement documentaire et des entrevues auprès d'intervenants, dont des locataires qui partagent un logement du marché locatif privé, des occupants de logements-services, des gestionnaires de logements-services et d'organismes dispensant de l'aide en matière d'habitation. Le dépouillement documentaire a été principalement consacré aux ouvrages publiés au Canada et aux États-Unis depuis 1990; par contre, on a tenu compte des ouvrages antérieurs s'ils s'avéraient pertinents. Les résultats du dépouillement, y compris les lacunes relevées, ont rendu possible la création de guides d'entretien à l'intention des locataires et autres intervenants.

L'étude a été menée à Ottawa, Vancouver, Montréal et Gatineau. Soixante locataires et le personnel de 19 agences ont été interviewés. On a recueilli des renseignements auprès de chacun des groupes cibles en effectuant des entrevues personnelles et téléphoniques, la méthode retenue dépendant de la préférence des répondants ou de sa faisabilité.

RÉSULTATS

L'habitation partagée est-elle une option de logement qui convient aux personnes vivant seules? D'après le dépouillement documentaire et les entrevues menées auprès des occupants de logements partagés, la réponse est affirmative, mais teintée de prudence.

L'habitation partagée répond généralement à une situation temporaire durant, dans la majorité des cas, de un à cinq ans, en période d'instabilité financière. Les étudiants et les jeunes employés qui ont été interviewés considéraient l'habitation partagée comme une situation temporaire, une façon de réaliser des économies et un élément essentiel du continuum du logement selon leur capacité à gravir les échelons.

Avantages de l'habitation partagée

De puissants incitatifs motivent les gens à partager l'habitation, surtout les personnes à faible revenu, les étudiants et les personnes vivant seules recevant des prestations d'aide sociale, qui ne peuvent pas s'en sortir par leurs propres moyens. Ce sont les avantages financiers, la sécurité, la compagnie et l'autonomie (aide requise en raison de maladie ou d'incapacité).

De même, les organismes et occupants de logements-services ont cité parmi les principaux avantages l'aide accordée pour faire face au coût de la vie, la sécurité et le sentiment de se sentir moins isolés.

Défis de l'habitation partagée

Pour fonctionner, l'habitation partagée requiert des efforts interpersonnels considérables. D'après la documentation consultée, le manque d'aptitudes interpersonnelles, les dysfonctions personnelles et le choix de style de vie dérangeant qui se manifestent dans les aires communes constituent les principaux obstacles à l'habitation partagée. En dépit des avantages éventuels reliés à cette stratégie pour les ménages à faible revenu, la pauvreté peut également nuire aux chances de réussite. Les personnes pauvres disposent de moins de ressources financières pour composer avec les situations d'urgence et leur vie accuse souvent moins de stabilité.

Peu importe leur motivation à partager l'habitation, les répondants ont indiqué que les conflits avec leur colocataire les incitaient principalement à se chercher un autre logement.

La documentation et les entrevues révèlent que les conflits surgissent bien souvent lorsqu'il est question de partager les finances. Le paiement du loyer et des services publics incombe aux deux locataires des maisons ou appartements locatifs. Par conséquent, pour que l'habitation partagée procure un avantage financier aux gens, il faut instaurer un moyen de faire en sorte que les gens respectent leurs obligations financières.

Selon les entrevues, le manque d'intimité est un enjeu majeur chez les gens qui partagent un logement autant au sein du marché locatif privé que du secteur des logements-services. Presque tous les logements continuent d'être conçus

pour les familles traditionnelles ou les ménages à l'aise maintenant sans enfants. Lorsque le logement conventionnel sert d'habitation partagée, les spécialistes et les locataires consultés ont indiqué le manque d'espace comme principal obstacle à l'intimité.

Logements-services

La documentation et les organismes de logement conviennent que l'habitation partagée pose un défi particulièrement difficile aux gens ayant une maladie mentale ou aux prises avec un problème de dépendance. Le stress accru de devoir composer avec le partage de l'habitation peut aggraver la maladie mentale, entraîner une rechute, donner lieu à de nouveaux problèmes de santé mentale et aboutir à l'incapacité de concentrer son attention sur des objectifs comme aller à l'école ou se trouver un emploi. Un défi peut être de composer avec un colocataire désigné, ce qui semble être pratique courante selon les représentants d'organismes de logements-services interviewés.

Les organismes de logements-services ont exprimé d'une seule et même voix la nécessité de limiter le nombre d'occupants partageant la même habitation. En règle générale, ces organismes considèrent le logement en milieu de soutien, où les gens mènent une vie autonome grâce à du soutien transférable, comme le modèle pour l'avenir.

STRATÉGIES OPTIMALISANT LES CHANCES DE RÉUSSITE

Ce qui en ressort, c'est la similitude des facteurs de réussite parmi les gens qui partagent un logement locatif du marché ou un logement en milieu de soutien. Voici précisément en quoi ils consistent :

- une compréhension claire des attentes et capacités des personnes au cours du processus de jumelage;
- les colocataires sont en mesure d'assumer la responsabilité du partage des finances et des travaux ménagers;
- les colocataires sont en mesure de résoudre les conflits d'une façon profitable, de gérer les comportements dérangeants, avec ou sans aide;
- l'agencement du logement proposé offre le bon dosage d'aires privées et d'aires communes.

La flexibilité est la raison la plus citée qui explique la réussite du mode d'habitation partagée. L'étude a permis de relever trois stratégies précises que les organismes de logement et les colocataires peuvent adopter pour optimiser leurs chances de réussite.

I. Outils pour faciliter le jumelage

L'étude a permis de relever des mesures et des outils qui pourraient servir plus largement à soutenir la notion d'habitation partagée. Bien que la plupart soient destinés aux aînés et aux personnes désireuses de partager la maison qui leur appartient, ils s'appliquent tout aussi bien à quiconque partage un logement. Les ressources en place pourraient facilement faire l'objet d'une révision et être offertes par les organismes qui composent périodiquement avec les personnes à faible revenu vivant seules, qui envisagent l'habitation partagée comme une mesure d'abordabilité.

Il existe de nombreuses sortes de logements locatifs partagés et bien des lois les régissent. Community Legal Education Ontario (CLEO) a récemment lancé un site Web interactif, www.cleo.on.ca/roommates, un outil pour aider les gens qui partagent un logement locatif. Il peut aider les locataires à trouver les lois qui s'appliquent à leur situation de même qu'à connaître leurs droits et responsabilités inhérents¹.

Les locataires du marché qui choisissent eux-mêmes de partager leur logement pourraient tirer parti du recours à certains de ces outils utiles. Bon nombre sont parvenus, après maintes tentatives, à des arrangements viables et fructueux qui pourraient être réalisés avec plus de facilité s'ils commençaient par de simples listes de vérification et modèles d'ententes. Il s'agit manifestement d'un domaine qui mérite une certaine attention en vue de favoriser la réussite de l'habitation partagée à des fins d'abordabilité.

2. Intervention en matière de résolution de conflits

Il devient évident à la lecture de tout conseil d'ordre pratique sur les facteurs de réussite interpersonnelle de l'habitation partagée que la principale aptitude sociale requise réside dans la résolution de conflits. L'aptitude à désigner les enjeux par leur nom, à en discuter sans adopter une attitude défensive, à éviter le blâme, à manifester de l'ouverture à l'égard des différentes solutions et à parvenir à une entente quant aux moyens de composer avec les problèmes, est essentielle. Les gens doivent posséder des aptitudes en matière de communication et de négociation pour régler les conflits de façon productive. Dans le cas des logements-services, le règlement des conflits est bien souvent confié à un travailleur de l'organisme de soutien plutôt qu'aux locataires eux-mêmes.

Aussi bien les organismes de logements-services que les organismes de jumelage et partage offrent de régler les conflits lorsque la situation tourne mal. C'est une intervention inestimable qui permet de récupérer une situation d'habitation partagée qui autrement serait vouée à l'échec. Le personnel qualifié d'organismes de logements-services offre régulièrement les services de médiation et de résolution de conflits d'une tierce partie, sans caractère officiel, dans le cadre de leur travail en vue d'aider les gens vulnérables à obtenir un milieu de vie favorable. Les organismes de jumelage et de partage d'habitation offrent parfois, mais pas toujours, une intervention de suivi à leurs clients pour les aider à surmonter les conflits en matière d'habitation.

Dans le secteur privé, différentes démarches pourraient permettre de prolonger la « durée » du partage d'habitation (ex. : services et outils en matière de résolution de conflits) ou de rendre l'arrangement davantage plaisant en améliorant le concept de l'habitation partagée. Les solutions les plus prometteuses (et les moins coûteuses) résident dans la création d'outils « d'entraide » qui pourraient être offerts aux candidats à l'habitation partagée.

La documentation d'entraide pourrait être offerte par l'intermédiaire de bureaux d'aide au logement ou à partir d'un site Web. Les organismes d'aide au logement sont bien placés pour soutenir les personnes à la recherche d'une habitation à partager. Lorsqu'on dispose de fonds pour assurer la dotation en personnel et la mise en oeuvre de programmes de jumelage et de partage à l'intention des colocataires, ces services sont bien utilisés.

3. Caractéristiques conceptuelles

Les résultats de la recherche sur le terrain corroborent ceux qui ont été obtenus lors du dépouillement documentaire sur l'apport d'un bon concept à la réussite de l'habitation partagée. Les facteurs favorisant la réussite sont les suivants

- dispositions visant l'intimité et la quiétude
- division nette des aires selon la fonction plutôt qu'aménagement à aires ouvertes
- choix quelconque et diversité des aires communes
- séparation des aires privées et des aires communes
- nombre pas trop élevé de personnes devant partager la salle de bains
- cuisine suffisamment grande pour permettre à une ou deux personnes de préparer les repas
- insonorisation
- durabilité des revêtements de finition
- aspect normal du logement

¹Consultez aussi la publication SCHL *Votre guide pour la location d'un logement*, www.schl.ca

Dans le cas des logements-services, les bâtiments de plus petite taille peuvent connaître davantage de succès que ceux d'envergure lorsqu'on envisage la qualité de vie des occupants.

La bonne conception peut compenser certains conflits mineurs de style de vie qui risquent de se produire dans toute situation de partage, sinon la piètre qualité de conception risque d'amplifier les petits ennuis et les faire dégénérer en problèmes majeurs. De bonnes communications, le respect et l'adoption de règles de prévention peuvent compenser la piètre conception. Par contre, dans le cas de colocataires sans aptitudes et de dysfonctions des styles de vie, la piètre conception risque de se traduire par l'échec du mode d'habitation partagée.

CONCLUSION

L'habitation partagée peut se révéler une option de logement viable et abordable pour les personnes vivant seules, en particulier celles qui touchent un faible revenu ou qui risquent de devenir sans abri. Par contre, au sein du marché locatif privé ou du secteur des logements-services, elle pose des défis tant aux colocataires qu'aux organismes de logement.

Un haut niveau d'aptitudes en relations interpersonnelles et en résolution de conflits s'impose dans les deux secteurs.

L'étude a cerné les mesures que les organismes de logement et les colocataires peuvent adopter pour optimiser leurs chances de réussite

- outils pour favoriser le jumelage
- intervention en matière de résolution de conflits
- caractéristiques conceptuelles

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Social Data Research is pleased to present the final report for the study: *Issues and Strategies for Shared Accommodation*. The study was conducted in partnership with SPARC BC (Social Planning and Research Council of BC), and Luba Serge, a consultant in Montreal. The study was initiated in early October 2004 and completed at the end of June 2005.

The final report describes how the study was conducted and integrates the findings from the two main study components: the literature review; and, the interviews with stakeholders including tenants who share in the private rental market, supportive housing residents, supportive housing managers and housing help agencies.

1.1 Objectives

The main purpose of this study was to answer the general question: “Considering that sharing accommodation is a good economic strategy for single people, what strategies could facilitate this housing arrangement?” To address the overall research question, the study had a number of specific objectives. These were to identify:

- Barriers to shared housing;
- Strategies to successfully facilitate sharing in the private rental market in order to increase housing affordability;
- Practices used outside the supportive housing sector which could be adopted by supportive housing providers; and
- Factors that are difficult to replicate in supportive housing.

1.2 Study Parameters

The research activities were designed to focus on single adults under the age of 65, (including students), who either share voluntarily as an affordability strategy in the private rental market, or who, because of their special needs dependencies, are living in supportive housing. Emergency or transitional accommodation, homeowners with rooms or secondary suites to rent, generic rooming houses, intentional communities, or seniors’ match and share programs were considered outside the scope of the research.

1.3 Background

The definition of shared housing

Shared accommodation is defined in the literature, and for the purpose of this study, as the sharing of one dwelling unit by two or more unrelated adults. All household members have their own private space and share some or all of the living areas and amenities. Shared accommodation has always been a common residential arrangement that met people’s various personal, financial, and dependency needs. In North America, shared accommodation was a common and socially acceptable

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residential arrangement until the 1930's. (Després 1991, Franck 1987, MacLaren Plansearch et al 1986)

The history of shared housing

Around the turn of the last century, shared accommodation began to be perceived as socially less acceptable. Growing economic prosperity made it possible to afford more privacy. Because of the suburban space available in North America and the development of car culture, housing for the middle and upper classes gravitated towards single detached dwellings. Design was based on the ideology of the nuclear family. In very densely populated urban cores apartment buildings and row housing still offered single-family occupancy, but without the luxury of surrounding private outdoor space. More and more, home sharing was seen as the less-desirable fate of the poor and those in transitional life stages. Today, however, there may be a general perception that shared accommodation is a residential arrangement for college students or young unmarried professionals who want to reduce their housing expenses, or a government-funded group arrangement for people with special needs. (Carlson 2002, Després 1991, Kenyon & Heath 2001)

The literature suggests that because of the significant increase in one-adult households with limited annual income, shared accommodation has once again gained wider currency as a strategy for achieving affordability. "Rising housing costs and economic hardships experienced by the elderly, young single people, single parents, and homeowners, as well as the tremendous increase in homelessness in the United States seem to be making the sharing of housing more acceptable, but primarily for economic, not social, reasons." (Franck, 1987)

How is supportive housing defined?

The Corporation of Supportive Housing website in the U.S. defines supportive housing as a successful, cost efficient combination of affordable housing with services that help people live more stable, productive lives.

The literature on housing options for persons with special needs describes three models of supportive housing - custodial, supportive and supported (Regional/Municipal Working Group on Long-term Supportive Housing 1996, CAMH 2001, Nelson et al 1999, HUD 1995). All include shared accommodation options.

In the custodial model, residents often share bedrooms but have little choice over roommates. They have limited privacy, few provided recreational activities, and are often bound by formal rules governing their activities.

The supportive model assists individuals to live in the community by developing life-skills through community-based treatment and rehabilitation. Supportive housing includes group homes, SROs and low support apartments. Housing and supports are linked and support staff often works on-site supporting all who live there. Residents are involved in housekeeping chores and may participate in decision-making about their housing.

Supported housing is a newer model, emerging in the 1990's. It involves portable support tied to the individual, not the housing site. Typically, supported housing has

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been identified with apartments, housing co-ops or other government funded social housing for people with low incomes, and may or may not involve shared living space. Supported housing can also include affordable private market housing options such as congregate living, home sharing and rooming houses.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

The information for this study came from two major sources: (1) a literature review; and (2) interviews with stakeholders including tenants who share in the private rental market, supportive housing residents, supportive housing managers and housing help agencies. These information-gathering activities shared the same overall objectives as the study as a whole. More specifically, however, they were designed to identify benefits and challenges of sharing accommodation; to examine trade-offs or strategies to address challenges; to identify barriers to informal sharing of accommodation; and to identify strategies used by supportive and transitional housing providers for problem solving and mediation.

2.1 The Literature Review

The literature review¹ focused mainly on materials published in Canada and the United States since 1990, however, earlier material was considered if relevant. A key word search was used to identify articles, books, and websites relevant to the topic. In addition, the National Secretariat on Homelessness and key informants in Canada, the U.S, the U.K. and Australia were asked to identify relevant published and unpublished works.

A significant number of the documents identified describe supportive housing initiatives or home sharing programs for seniors or specific special needs populations. Less was found about the shared accommodation experiences of low-income adults not requiring supports. However, it became evident that many of the findings on specific populations could be transferred to a broader context because most of the advantages, disadvantages, aids and barriers to successful sharing were a common experience of all adult home sharers.

The findings of the literature review, including identified gaps, guided the subsequent research project. In particular, the review helped to inform the development of the interview guides and tenant surveys.

¹ The full literature review report including references is available under separate cover.

2.2 Interviews with Stakeholders

The fieldwork² for this study was conducted in four sites: Ottawa; Vancouver; and Montreal and Gatineau.³

Method of data collection

A combination of face-to-face and telephone interviews was used to collect the information from each stakeholder group. The method used depended on respondent preference and feasibility⁴.

The majority of interviews with housing placement officers and supportive housing providers were completed face-to-face and on-site in their offices. Both front-line workers and representatives of management participated in the study. In a number of instances group interviews were conducted with front-line staff and management together.

Most supportive housing residents did not have their own telephone so these respondents were generally interviewed face-to-face at their place of residence. The majority of students and non-students sharing accommodation in the private rental market were interviewed over the telephone. Supportive housing residents and private rental market tenants were provided compensation for their time.

Selection of housing placement agencies and supportive housing providers

A list of potential agencies was prepared by the consulting team and finalized with CMHC during the first phase of the research. Housing placement agencies, supportive housing providers, and other selected key informants were contacted at each site and asked to participate in the study. The interview guide was sent in advance of the interview. Nineteen agencies participated across all four sites. The breakdown by site was: Ottawa = 9; Vancouver = 5; Montreal = 4; and Gatineau = 1.

Sample of private market tenants and supportive housing residents

Sixty persons, all single adults (not seniors) who share accommodation were interviewed across the four field sites. In order to obtain a broad sample, a combination of methods was used to recruit respondents.

For students and non-students in the private rental market recruitment methods included:

- Referrals from housing help agencies and student offices;
- Recruitment flyers and posters at housing placement offices;
- Classified advertisements under “shared housing”; and

² The full results report for the stakeholder interviews is available under separate cover.

³ All interviews in Montreal and Gatineau were completed in French. These two sites were combined in the analysis of the results.

⁴ For example, persons without access to a private telephone line were interviewed in person.

- Word of mouth.

Supportive housing residents were recruited with the help of supportive housing providers who posted notices and facilitated introductions to potential participants.

Selection criteria were developed to guide the selection of tenants and residents to ensure a good representation of different types of respondents. The criteria were based on the following personal characteristics:

- Males and females (about 50/50);
- Different age groups (about the same number under age 25, age 25-34, and age 35+);
- Non-students versus students (No more than 5 students at each site);
- Private rental and supportive housing residents (No more than 5 residents living in supportive housing at each site); and
- Working and non-working persons.

2.3 Analysis of Results

A two-step approach was used to analyse the results for this study. In the first step, a qualitative approach was used that examined areas of agreement and disagreement between the various stakeholder groups and across the three field sites. To assist with this process, each site prepared a field report that outlined the results of the interviews conducted in their respective site. In the second step, the results of the literature review were integrated with the results of the stakeholder interviews to arrive at the overall conclusions.

3.0 INTEGRATED RESULTS

The following section integrates the “bottom line” findings of the literature review and the key informant interviews in terms of areas of agreement and debate.

3.1 Is Sharing A Good Housing Option For Single People?

Based on the literature review and the interviews conducted with home sharers, it would appear that the answer is a cautious yes. A number of sources in the literature review point favourably towards shared accommodation as an affordability strategy for adults with limited annual income (Després 1991, Dinning 2004, Franck, 1987, MacLaren Plansearch et al 1986, SHIP B.C. website).

Interviews with key informants indicated that the sharing of accommodation tends to be a temporary situation averaging 1 to 5 years for most home sharers during periods of financial instability. Most home sharers reported having had other shared arrangements in the past. Interviewed students and young single employed persons viewed sharing as a temporary situation, a cost saving vehicle, and a necessary part of a continuum of housing as they “moved up the ladder”. For others interviewed, sharing was the norm, but arrangements often changed due to a variety of reasons.

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Regardless of the motivation to share, housemate conflict was noted as the major reason for seeking other accommodation. This indicates that sharing accommodation can be a viable affordable housing strategy for singles if approaches to handling the possible issues that may arise are determined before conflict occurs.

Advantages of shared accommodation

It's not surprising that so many market rent tenant respondents keep returning to shared accommodation. There are powerful incentives to share, especially for low-income earners, students, and single people in receipt of social assistance who cannot afford to live on their own. The literature, observations of housing help and student housing office staff, and comments by home sharers about the benefits of sharing accommodation were found to be remarkably alike:

- Financial benefits – For the person on a tight budget and students away from home, home sharing can reduce the cost of housing, food and appliances, and provide access to better living conditions.
- Independence – A housemate can assist someone who needs help to remain independent due to illness or disability. A reduction in rent or room and board may be negotiated in exchange for assistance.
- Security – Another person living in the home can lessen the fear of being alone. This is especially important to youth alone in a new city, seniors, and those with a past history of abuse.
- Companionship – There is someone to talk to, and potentially share similar interests.

Similarly, supportive housing providers, their residents and the corresponding literature (Johnson 2001, CAMH 2001, Fitzpatrick et al 2000) cited reduced isolation, safety, and assistance with living expenses as the main benefits to those in shared supportive living arrangements. Some group home respondents also talked positively about the provision of meals, staff support and opportunities to socialize and learn skills such as meal preparation. Others spoke of getting off the streets and out of shelters as the most important benefit, while Chipperfield et al, 1990, documented increased housing stability, probability of work, school or voluntary activity, and decreased rates of hospitalization for those with mental illness in a shared accommodation setting (CAMH 2001).

The interviews with supportive housing residents also provided some insight into the potential health benefits of a successful shared arrangement although this area needs further study. A number of respondents spoke of improved sense of health – physically, mentally and emotionally – since moving to their current home.

Who benefits and how?

Beyond the benefits noted for home sharers above, little is known about the kinds of circumstances in which long-term shared housing may be a preferred option. For some it may only be beneficial during a particular stage of their lives, such as when homelessness or mental illness creates isolation (Pleace 1995, Fitzpatrick et al 2000).

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Interviewed housing providers agreed with Chipperfield et al, 1990, that suitable candidates for supportive housing have no history of significant violence or substance abuse; require assistance in the development of skills and supports necessary for cooperative living; have a strong desire to live with others, and; some ability to interact positively. Supportive housing may be best suited for those with permanent disabilities involving difficulties with nutrition and hygiene, or as transitional housing that can provide opportunities to improve and practice social skills with guidance before moving on to independent housing.

Other studies documented that communities' which include shared housing options benefit from:

- Existing housing stock becoming affordable for residents
- The best use of expensive land in good locations
- The accommodation of increasing numbers of single person households
- The maintenance of neighbourhood demographic diversity (older and younger less-affluent households can mix with mid-age families and couples)
- Use of public facilities and infrastructure
- Good use of aging housing stock, and
- An alternative to apartment complexes

(Hemmens, Hoch, Carp, 1996)

Disadvantages of shared accommodation

Much of the literature on the voluntary sharing of living space emphasized the considerable interpersonal efforts required to make shared accommodation arrangements work (Richards & Lindsay 2003, Anucha & Hulchanski 2003). This was repeated by market rent tenants interviewed for the study who described scenarios in which social challenges and financial issues arose such as when a roommate failed to pay his or her portion of the bills, had different expectations about cleanliness and visitors, or engaged in behaviours (such as substance abuse) that produced a dangerous situation for others living with them.

The same challenges were observed in the field study when those with special needs were housed together. Indeed, persons with special needs have less capacity to deal with conflict and stress because of their own disabilities. An additional challenge may be coping with roommates chosen for you, which is the general practice, according to interviewed supportive housing providers. Fitzpatrick et al, 2000 identified choice in roommates as crucial to client satisfaction about their housing situation. Residents may have difficulty maintaining relationships with friends and family if they are uncomfortable with housemates (Anucha & Hulchanski, 2003, Pyke et al 1996). Interviewed housing providers corroborated this finding.

The literature and housing providers agreed that the sharing of accommodation is especially challenging for those living with mental illness or attempting to control addictive behaviour. The increased stress of coping with a shared living arrangement can lead to exacerbation of an existing mental illness, addiction relapse, new mental health problems, and an inability to focus on goals such as going to school or finding steady employment (Anucha & Hulchanski 2003, Nelson et al 1995, Pleace 1995).

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The study found that home sharing might not be a good idea for some individuals. Those struggling with substance abuse or with uncontrolled mental illness are particularly challenged in a shared housing arrangement with or without supports. One informant commented, “When someone experiences paranoia it is not easy to alleviate their fears of someone taking their food or belongings when it is quite possible for this to happen”.

3.2 Barriers To Shared Housing

Regulatory barriers

Regulations such as zoning bylaws often reflect societal attitudes about what is considered “good housing”. As such, in some jurisdictions, they safeguard single family housing by restricting the number of unrelated adults who can live together. For the most part, interviewed home sharers indicated an average of 2 or 3 individuals sharing housing within the confines of traditional housing. It is only when housing is purpose-built or renovated to accommodate sharers that bylaws may be problematic.

Some public policies were found to be disincentives to mixed gender sharing. Income assistance policy in B.C., for example, can lead to benefit cutbacks if a recipient’s roommate is deemed a spouse (Richards & Lindsay 2003). Ontario is being challenged on a similar “spouse in the house” rule.

Design barriers

Apart from a few innovative examples, almost all housing units continue to be designed for the traditional nuclear family or affluent empty-nesters (Laberge, 2004). When used as shared accommodation, key informants and tenants cited insufficient space as the major design barrier to sufficient privacy.

Community barriers

Most shared living arrangements go unnoticed within a community. College and university towns with their seasonal influx of students were noted as the exception. Some educational institutions are making efforts to work towards acceptance and harmony with permanent residents by educating both the community and students about off-campus housing (City of Waterloo, 2004).

Personal barriers

According to the literature, a lack of interpersonal skills, personal dysfunctions and disruptive lifestyle choices that play out in common spaces are the most significant barriers to successful shared accommodation arrangements. (SPEC Associates, 1987). In the end it will be each roommate’s personal abilities to manage and resolve conflict that will make or break the arrangement. Poverty itself increases obstacles to successful accommodation sharing. The poor have fewer financial resources to deal with emergencies and have less stability in their life circumstances (Richards & Lindsay, 2003). Any realistic strategy that seeks to maximize the success of shared living must be able to address the inevitable personal barriers that can confound the best of intentions.

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The interviews with supportive housing residents and market rent tenants who share supported the findings of the literature review. For the most part, home sharers tended to interact with each other in a positive manner, often socializing together, and sharing meals. Personal issues that interfered with the arrangement were mainly centred on lifestyle differences, in particular substance use. In one or two cases, friendships ended over issues related to sharing. In one case, the respondent felt the best recourse was to treat the living arrangement as a business relationship.

3.3 Strategies for Successful Sharing

The literature suggested that there may be some strategies used in other housing sectors such as rooming houses or single room occupancy (SRO) units that could be implemented to improve the chances for success in a shared accommodation arrangement. The interviews were very helpful in discerning which of these strategies could actually work in a typical shared arrangement and provided some additional approaches that have been tried.

Strategies that housing providers can use

There is an assumption made that all landlords regardless of the property or type of arrangements they manage want to minimize damages to their property. Although landlords are not obligated to support tenants in their shared arrangements, it may be beneficial to do so. The following are two strategies uncovered in the literature that key informants for this study felt might have some merit for market rent landlords or supportive housing providers:

1. Offering a “trial period” to tenants of a few weeks during which no long-term contract or lease is signed. This gives both the landlord and the co-tenants an opportunity to “screen out” potential dysfunctional roommates. Although this approach has been used with SRO’s, and by one agency in the field study supporting the developmentally delayed, it may be more difficult to implement in other settings. Different jurisdictions’ landlord and tenant legislation, for example, may restrict the ability for roommates to do such trial runs in market rent accommodation. When two or more people agree to share housing and are both named on the lease, there is often little either tenant can do if the situation becomes untenable, unless either can find a substitute sharer who will sublet. This approach needs further study.
2. Providing and/or facilitating access to practical advice for sharers. The literature review uncovered sources of tenant advice including home sharers match-making websites. These types of resources could be tailored to a particular jurisdiction or housing arrangement by housing help agencies. Housing help agencies interviewed as part of this study suggested the following types of advice be given to tenants who are seeking shared accommodation:
 - Check the financial stability of potential roommates.
 - Have a clear set of **written** house rules and expectations (e.g., dishes can or cannot accumulate in the sink, partying, house guests, cleaning, food sharing).

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- Predetermine **in writing** grounds for ending the shared accommodation relationship.
- Be open to seeking professional help with conflict resolution.
- Make sure that the place is big enough and has a layout that provides enough privacy such as your own bedroom.
- Don't sign a lease if you still haven't found a roommate.
- Be very clear about the type of shared arrangement from a legal perspective, and particularly who is considered the landlord. Don't take a damage deposit so as to avoid being viewed as a landlord.
- If you are the head tenant or licensee, have a "back-up" plan (how to pay the rent if a roommate leaves without paying the notice period).

The above suggestions could be included in a procedure manual for front line staff who are in a position of providing advice to individuals considering a shared arrangement. Similar information could be posted on a website for potential home sharers.

The study found that home share matching agencies (including some universities and colleges) and supportive housing providers essentially provide the same services to mitigate the inherent potential difficulties of sharing and increase the potential of success. The three main services that they provide are:

- screening and matching
- provision of tools to facilitate sharing
- conflict resolution intervention

Design features that facilitate sharing

According to the interviews, privacy, or lack of it is a big issue among persons who share accommodation in the private rental market as well as supportive housing sector. Incorporating design features that maximize privacy to the extent that it still results in the provision of affordable housing should be an ideal. Both the literature and the interviews produced some consensus around the types of design features that could contribute to a more successful sharing arrangement in the private rental market. These features are:

- Incorporating private bedrooms (one person per bedroom) that are large enough to accommodate a single bed, a bedside table, a dresser, a TV stand, a closet with built-in storage space, a work-space, a mini fridge/microwave counter, and a small sitting area (about 250 sq' feet).
- If ensuite bathrooms are not feasible, designing bathrooms that are large enough to accommodate the toiletries of two persons, and include a bathtub with shower.
- Have a layout that places the bathrooms close to the bedrooms.
- Avoid an open-plan design for kitchen and living room.
- Include an eat-in kitchen or dining area. Make sure the kitchen is big enough for more than one person to work in at the same time.
- If unit has two stories, make sure all bedrooms are on the second floor.
- Separate bedrooms with common spaces – for example, use a design that places the living room in the centre with bedrooms at either end of the unit.
- Have a private pathway or hall from common entrance to bedrooms.

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- Make sure interior walls separating bedrooms and common areas are well sound proofed.
- Provide some common out door space for socializing and/or smokers – this could be a balcony, front porch or yard.
- Indoor and outdoor spaces should be accessible to tenants and visitors of all abilities including those in wheel chairs.

These points reflect similar findings for preferable supportive housing design features as noted later in this chapter.

Interpersonal factors that facilitate sharing

The literature and the interviews with persons who share indicated that arrangements are more successful if potential sharers are flexible and willing to make adjustments on variables such as privacy, differences in personality and interests, decision-making, sharing responsibilities, daily routines, food habits, and housekeeping standards. Flexibility is usually the most cited characteristic of successful sharers. Other personality traits that can predict a successful match are: friendly, sympathetic, good communicator, willing to compromise, open-minded, honest, trustworthy, reliable, tolerant, and respectful. It was clear from the interviews in all three sites that home sharers who are “social by nature” look forward to the company and friendship they receive from their roommates. Surveys cited in the literature indicate that those who were successful sharers understood that shared housing involves the development of relationships. Those not interested in compromising, or those expecting a perfect housemate are not likely to be successful in a shared housing arrangement. (MacLaren Plansearch et al, 1986)

One of the areas debated in the literature was the importance of knowing your roommate prior to moving in together. Based on the interviews conducted, market rent tenants and particularly students were more likely to move in with acquaintances or friends than was the case for supportive residents, who typically had roommates chosen for them. Not all persons interviewed felt it was an advantage to have previously known your roommate, and in fact, in some cases moving in with friends had resulted in broken friendships. Others saw moving in with someone not previously known to them as an opportunity to broaden their social network.

It became clear from reading any practical advice on the interpersonal success factors of home sharing that the chief social skill required is conflict resolution. The ability to name issues, discuss them without becoming defensive, avoiding blame, being open to various solutions, and coming to an agreement on how to deal with problems is essential. People must have communication and negotiation skills to handle conflict resolution in a productive manner. In the case of supportive housing, the conflict resolution role is often played by a support staff worker rather than the tenants themselves.

Many articles in the literature stressed that sharing successfully depends on trust and predictability. Good relationships in general depend on reliable expectations, and on productively dealing with situations when expectations are not met. To be successful, accommodation sharing relationships require explicit, defined expectations based on

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mutual agreement. Without these up front clarifications, the relationship has to be continually renegotiated. Market rent tenants interviewed for the study provided some advice that addressed the issue of managing expectations and supported what was found in the literature regarding ways to improve the chances of a successful sharing arrangement. These suggestions could be incorporated into a “helpful hints” tool for persons thinking about sharing accommodations. Listed in their own words, the suggestions included:

- If it doesn't feel right when you meet the person then don't go into a sharing arrangement with them. It's very important that you feel that you could communicate with your roommate.
- Ideally, know the person fairly well beforehand, but don't necessarily share with a close friend as there is a risk of boundaries being overstepped and losing a friendship.
- Ask a lot of questions before deciding to share with another person. Ask for references from your prospective roommate.
- Think about your own lifestyle, needs and expectations and communicate them clearly and honestly at the beginning.
- Establish **written** 'house rules' on partying, noise (TV, radio, music), chores, use of space, putting stuff away, tidiness, smoking, and guests.
- Share with people of your own age and interests. Determine whether you prefer male or female company and seek that out. Ideally, do a trial run of sharing.
- Be aware that sharing requires a level of patience and be prepared to hang in there for a while to give it a chance to work. You cannot expect to control the space all of the time.
- Don't stew on issues. Communicate your needs.
- Make sure you have a clear understanding about financial obligations, even have them written down for rent, utilities, and other shared expenses like household supplies and food. Keep receipts.
- Leave notes for minor issues and schedule meetings for major issues.
- Be respectful, fair, courteous, friendly, and communicative with roommates.
- Don't plan on hanging around the house too much because of the potential to infringe on the space of others.
- Model the behaviours that you expect of others.
- Look for how your roommate is going to perceive your actions and respect that and act accordingly.
- Set up space specifically for each person in the refrigerator and food cupboards, and specific areas of the house for each person.
- Arrange for separate phone lines or separate voicemail boxes.
- Consider joint names on utility and communication bills.

Both the literature and the interviews revealed that conflicts often arise when it comes to the sharing of finances. Sharers in rented houses and apartments are jointly responsible for rent and utilities. Therefore, in order for shared accommodation to be a financial benefit for people, there must be a means to ensure that people meet their financial responsibilities. Successful sharing relationships will involve up front work on

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financial responsibilities and a plan that addresses what to do if one of the sharers is unable to meet their financial commitment.

The comments above relate to the relationship between the sharers themselves. However the need for home sharers to have a good relationship with their landlord and their neighbours is also important according to the literature. Establishing a workable relationship with the landlord from the outset will be necessary for successful shared housing arrangements. (Richards & Lindsay, 2003)

Other factors

The literature found that location and surrounding community are very important features of housing satisfaction, especially to low-income singles without financial resources who are sharing because of affordability. Research has found that home sharers appeared to be more attached to their neighbourhood than to a specific dwelling, indicating that location is important to their sense of identity.

Location is also important in terms of access to amenities and services. Some of the home sharers interviewed for this study were students or had jobs. Living close to where they worked or went to school was an important factor in their selection of housing. Other studies cited in the literature also found that persons who need to share for affordability reasons would be less likely to own cars, and would therefore want to live in neighbourhoods with pedestrian or public transportation access to work, school, grocery shopping and other important amenities. (Després, 1991)

In areas where there is a concentration of shared households, such as off-campus student housing, the literature notes the need for community tolerance and respect of different lifestyles, bylaws and rules, responsibilities, and follow-through between different stakeholders (City of Waterloo, 2004). This suggests that there is a role for all stakeholders – tenants, landlords, universities and colleges, neighbourhood associations and municipal councillors to work together to maintain an appropriate balance of housing options in a given community or neighbourhood.

3.4 Strategies For Supportive Housing Providers: Lessons From The Supportive Housing Sector

Number of residents, housing design and location

While substantive studies linking the design of shared spaces for special needs individuals to client outcome and housing stability were found missing in the literature, this study provided ample information on the topic.

Supportive housing providers spoke with a common voice about the need to limit the number of residents living together. Strong feelings were voiced about the inadequacies of larger facilities such as rooming houses with supports. One informant made the following comments about such housing in his community. “These buildings were bought in 1987, the international year of the homeless, and then renovated. At the time there was a feeling that it was OK to house homeless persons in lesser housing – i.e. have them share facilities (or put them in studios that are very small, for the most part with very bad sound insulation). This should not be repeated – these people need

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decent, regular housing. People do not like living there. It is hard for people to have a sense of attachment – they do not take care of the rooms or of the common areas. The turnover is very high as is the cost of maintenance – often rooms need considerable repairs when people move out.”

Supportive housing providers and residents re-emphasized the importance of good design and identified the following points as key in the provision of successful group living situations:

- Provide private bedrooms with adequate storage and separate eating, smoking and socializing areas. Provide a variety of types of washrooms. Tubs sooth away pains while walk in showers aid those with mobility issues. One bathroom for 2 residents is considered ideal.
- Avoid an open plan, multiple stairs and entrance ways; and small bedrooms, bathrooms and common spaces. Housing on one level and wheel chair accessibility is preferable as residents often have mobility issues.
- Consider the appropriateness/inappropriateness of fridges, and sinks in bedrooms for each residential group
- Only use durable furnishings and fixtures that can withstand heavy use.
- Proximity to transportation and/or walking distance to shopping are important.

Policy requirements

Supportive housing providers concurred with the literature about the value of assessment and screening in developing the best mix of residents in a unit (HUD Training Series). Once a placement is determined, informants advised introducing newcomers slowly into the residential community. Housing newcomers to Canada is particularly challenging since living communally with unrelated adults may not be within their cultural experience. When mismatches occur it is important to coordinate moves that better address the needs of the persons involved.

Some long-term agencies housing residents with complex issues at high risk of eviction separate the functions of property management and support. Such an approach is recommended in the literature (HUD, Hemmens et al 1996) as it allows support workers to assist an individual with issues that may cause eviction while the property manager will evict if all else fails. Other agencies with a more stable resident population usually have the housing support worker provide both functions as “who else better knows when an individual should be evicted”.

Other policy recommendations support those contained in the Supportive Housing Training Manuals produced by the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Essentially they focus on ensuring resident input into house rules that are clear, consistent and change according to the changing needs of the residential community.

The role of support staff

Those housing individuals with special needs considered supports critical to the success of shared living arrangements. In their experience, as each individual does better, the whole residential community does better.

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Respondents at each site acknowledged the importance of the support they received from staff sensitive to their issues. Access to someone with mediation skills and knowledge about social and recreational services in the community was also considered essential.

In general, supportive housing providers saw supported housing, where people live independently with portable supports, as the model for the future. One commented that this model would cost less than group homes in the long run.

3.5 Strategies For The Supportive Housing Sector: Lessons From The Market Rent Sector

Information from reviewed studies about market rent shared accommodation, or from this study, do not provide any new information that would be relevant to improving the quality of life of those living in supportive housing. What does become apparent is the similarity of factors supporting successful housing outcomes for individuals living together in either market rent or supportive housing. Specifically they are:

- A clear understanding of individual expectations and capabilities is used during the matching process
- Sharers are able to assume responsibility for shared finances and household tasks
- Layout of the proposed housing offers the right balance between private and common space;
- Sharers have the ability to resolve conflict productively, or manage disruptive behaviour, with or without supports

Ultimately how minor or major lifestyle differences are managed depends on the communication and conflict resolution skills of the sharers as well as the availability of assistance from third parties. When these are lacking, the sharing arrangement will almost always degenerate and end in failure. On the other hand, skilled communication or intervention can settle escalating conflicts before they get out of hand, or bring a reasoned end to sharing situations that can't be salvaged before too much harm is done.

3.6 Factors Which Are Difficult To Replicate

The study uncovered many strategies, some proven and some not, that facilitate shared accommodation. Most of these strategies are generic and could benefit all sectors. However, some strategies that are successful in one sector may be difficult to replicate in another.

The supportive housing providers spoke about their efforts to ensure a potential new resident would be compatible with the existing residents in a shared living situation. These efforts included finding out about the history, behaviour, and characteristics of the candidate as well as involving existing residents in meeting their prospective roommate. Although the existing residents were rarely able to make the actual decision about a new resident, there was at least an opportunity to assess whether there might

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be any major personality conflicts. This type of “matching” approach requires staff time and expertise that may not be readily available in the typical housing help agency that often has minimal staff.

Similarly, home sharing agencies administer a questionnaire or interview candidates about their lifestyle preferences as well as carry out criminal reference checks and ask for references. This previewing function acts to screen out the most obvious cases of mismatch or dysfunction that will immediately cause problems. Sharers in the market rent world only have their previous knowledge of their prospective roommate to judge their compatibility. This may range from nothing at all, to minimal social familiarity or second hand reports through a mutual acquaintance, to an established and tested friendship. Home share agencies sometimes also provide “self-help” tools to help potential sharers achieve success. These may be in the form of educative materials, template roommate agreements, and checklists of items it is wise to work out in advance. These types of tools may be more difficult to replicate in the supportive housing sector. Supportive housing providers spoke about the work involved in maintaining a positive living environment. The methods or tools they use include orientation for new arrivals, formal and informal life skills lessons, modeling of desirable relationship skills, house meetings to discuss issues, and the various policies, procedures, and rules that avoid conflict in daily living. These approaches require staff.

Supportive housing is a structured environment that is designed to help people with various disabilities achieve quality of life. Even supported housing, without on-site staffing, includes facilitation of the shared housing arrangement. Because disabled people do not for the most part have a lot of choice about where they live, the system is designed to make shared living as positive as possible. The home share agencies also provide tools to help potential sharers achieve success. While such agencies can't provide the kind of on-site lessons in good sharing habits or the imposed policies of the supportive housing providers, the tools have the same intent – to help develop realistic expectations, to encourage practical problem prevention, and to guide sharers in establishing workable mutually agreeable rules.

Another strategy that has shown some success in the market rent sector that may be difficult to replicate in the supportive housing sector is offering a “trial period” to residents for a few weeks to test compatibility. The ability to have a “trial period” requires a lot of flexibility on the part of the housing provider, and alternative space if an arrangement does not work out. Supportive housing providers often work in “a crisis” mode and must meet the needs of their community at any given time. This often does not allow for flexibility.

One example of innovation in providing trial periods of housing for special needs individuals, however, was identified through this study. It involved a partnership between an agency providing life skills training to individuals with developmental delays, families undertaking life time planning for their disabled family member, and a university with an empty student residence during the summer. Young adults were given an opportunity to experience living away from their families by participating in a short term, shared, supportive housing experience in the university residence. This has led to a better understanding of the skill sets these particular individuals need in a supportive shared housing situation, a chance to practice those skills, and a better understanding

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of the type of housing and supports they will need in the future - before their requirement for housing becomes a crisis.

4.0 CONCLUSIONS

Home sharing can be a viable affordable housing option for single persons, particularly those on low income and those who may be at risk for homelessness. However, home sharing whether it occurs in the private market rent sector or in the supportive housing sector, presents challenges to both the home sharers themselves and their housing providers. The study identified strategies that housing providers and home sharers can use to maximize their success.

In the private market sector, the study uncovered a number of different approaches that could work to either extend the “life” of a shared arrangement (i.e., conflict resolution services and tools) or make the arrangement more pleasant by improving the design of units that would/could be shared. Most promising among these solutions (and least costly) is the creation of “self-help” tools that could be made available to potential home sharers. Housing help agencies are well positioned to support those seeking shared accommodation. Where funding is available to staff and implement programming to match and support home sharers, such services are well used. At a minimum, self-help materials could be made available through housing help offices or from a website.

4.1 Areas that Maximize Success

Tools to Facilitate Matching

The study identified strategies and tools that could be applied more widely to support sharing arrangements. Although most are directed at seniors and those wishing to share homes they own, they are just as applicable to generic sharers. Existing resources could easily be revised and made available through agencies that deal regularly with low-income singles who look to sharing as an affordability measure.

A recent newcomer to the accommodation sharing scene is matchmaking via the Internet. Although the Internet information is U.S.A. focused, it is possible to post housing needs and housing options for Canadian cities through existing sites. Depending on the site accessed, telephone assistance, tools and documents may be available for purchase.

There are many different kinds of shared rental arrangements and different sets of laws that apply to them. Community Legal Education Ontario (CLEO) has recently launched an interactive website, www.cleo.on.ca/roommates, for people who share rental accommodation. It can help renters figure out which laws apply to their situation and their rights and responsibilities.

The market tenants who self select for sharing could benefit from access to some of these useful tools. Many of them came to their workable successful sharing arrangements through trial and error which, while useful for maturation, might be more easily achieved if they could start with some simple checklists and template

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agreements. This is clearly an area that deserves some attention as a means towards the goal of facilitating successful sharing for affordability.

Conflict Resolution Intervention

Another service offered by both supportive housing providers and match and share agencies is conflict resolution when things go wrong. This is an invaluable intervention that can salvage sharing situations that would otherwise be headed for failure. Skilled supportive housing staff do third party mediation and conflict resolution all day long on an informal basis as part of their work in helping vulnerable people achieve a positive residential environment. Match and share agencies sometimes, but not always, offer follow up intervention to their clients to help them work out conflicts that are threatening the arrangement.

Design Features

The results of the field research confirm the findings of the literature review on the contribution of good design to the success of shared housing arrangements. The factors that facilitate success are provision for privacy and quiet, clear division of areas by function rather than open concept, some choice and variety in common spaces, separation of private and common spaces, not too many people sharing a bathroom, enough room in the kitchen to accommodate more than one or two people preparing food, soundproofing, durability of finishes, and a normal homelike appearance. In the case of supportive housing, smaller models are deemed more successful than larger ones when considering the quality of life of residents.

Good design can mitigate some of the minor lifestyle conflicts that can be expected to arise in any sharing situation, or can exacerbate those minor annoyances so that they escalate into major problems. Probably good communication, respect, and preventative rules can override poor design, but given unskilled sharers and lifestyle dysfunctions, poor design could be the game breaker in a shared housing arrangement.

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