



Now and Tomorrow
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HOMELESSNESS PARTNERING STRATEGY

Bulletin

* May 2012, Volume 2, Issue 2

Mental Health

Message from the Director General

Welcome to the third edition of the HPS Bulletin, dedicated to homelessness and mental health. With research suggesting that a significant proportion of the homeless population experience mental health challenges, the need for evidence-based promising practices focused on preventing or responding to homelessness for those with mental health issues is clear.

Studies point to the success of a "Housing First" approach with supports for people who are homeless and living with severe and chronic mental health issues. Early findings from the Mental Health Commission of Canada's (MHCC) *At Home/Chez Soi* demonstration project suggest that client choice in location and type of housing, as well as course of treatment, have a significant impact on outcomes. We are pleased to work with the MHCC and to share findings from the *At Home/Chez Soi* project through a series of teleforums.

The links between mental health and homelessness are complex. This Bulletin features a selection of studies funded through the HPS which highlight community-level strategies that work. At the same time, some key knowledge gaps remain. Accordingly, I am pleased to announce the launch of a Call for Proposals that will explore evidence-based promising practices. In particular, we hope to explore service integration that enables those with mental health issues to remain housed, healthy, and integrated into the community. We are committed to sharing these findings to support community-level decision making. As always, we encourage you to share your ideas and promising practices with us. Great collaboration starts with knowledge sharing!

Have a great summer,
Barbara Lawless, Director General.



Photo by Greg Locke

The Stella Burry Community Services Housing Centre is co-located with 19 units of affordable housing in downtown St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador.

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SHARE YOUR STORIES

The next Bulletin, in the fall, will explore successful practices for integrating people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness into the labour market. Please share your stories and effective labour market integration-related practices by e-mailing NC-HPSINFO-INFO-SPLI-GD@hrsdc-rhdcc.gc.ca. We look forward to hearing from you!

INTERVIEW HIGHLIGHTS: Stella Burry Community Services Housing Program

Recognised as a leader in innovative programming, the Stella Burry Community Services (SBCS) housing program in St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador, works with individuals with mental health and homelessness issues. Thanks to Gail Thornhill, Director, and Melanie Hickey, Social Worker, who provided information on this Housing First model.

The SBCS housing program provides affordable housing and helps clients find and secure housing. The organization offers a wide range of support services to both clients and landlords while considering each client's unique needs.

In the heart of downtown St. John's, SBCS owns 100 affordable housing units and operates a central service centre. With a team of six staff (a Director, two Tenant Relations Specialists, two Housing Support Workers and a Social Worker), the program has served over 550 clients and engaged 35 landlords since it was established in 2009. The program began with help from staff from Toronto's Mainstay Housing and Victoria's Cool Aid Society, who provided mentorship and support in developing St. John's SBCS housing program.

SBCS provides a full range of services to assist individuals with complex needs, such as: help in finding housing; acquiring furnishings; accessing income support; and making referrals to other resources. One of the

unique features of this program is that it provides as much education and support to landlords as it does to clients.

There are many challenges to helping clients with complex needs to acquire safe, secure and affordable housing. For example, finding appropriate single dwellings is especially difficult in a tight housing market. There are also misconceptions or fear about people with mental health issues. The program supports both landlords and clients to develop positive relationships with each other, and assistance is always available to both. Not only are landlords encouraged to call during business hours if they are experiencing any concerns, Tenant Relations Specialists can be reached at any time, 24/7. As a result, SBCS maintains an active relationship with landlords, before and after clients move in, offering them assistance in the short and long term. This relationship with landlords has taken many years to build, but now landlords contact SBCS when they have a vacancy and often accept tenant referrals directly from SBCS.

Although clients are free to relocate whenever they desire, most choose to stay with SBCS housing for an extended period of time. Long-term housing provides a sense of security and community belonging, a valuable feeling for people with complex needs. The SBCS housing program demonstrates that the road to success is paved with perseverance and patience. Although building a trusting relationship between landlords and tenants with complex needs is a lengthy and tenuous process, it can yield very positive benefits for both.

For more information about the Stella Burry Community Services (SBCS) housing program go to <http://www.stellaburry.ca/>

CALLS FOR PROPOSALS

on Mental Health and Homelessness

Applicants are invited to submit proposals for projects that will increase knowledge about **prevention of homelessness for those with mental health issues** in Canada.

Successful applicants will contribute to developing effective solutions to address the issue. Of particular interest are:

- integrated treatment and housing programs for those with concurrent disorders; and
- discharge policies/practices and system integration.

The closing date for this CFP is June 19. To find out more, please visit the HPS Web site at www.hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/homelessness/funding/knowledge_development.



MOVING FORWARD: Homeless Mental Health Horizontal Pilot Project

The Horizontal Pilot Projects (HPP) between the HPS and other federal programs aim to: address common risk factors or client groups associated with homelessness; prevent homelessness by addressing its root causes; and, reduce the impact of homelessness on other policy areas and vice versa.

Employment, for example, is an important factor in the prevention of homelessness, as well as a critical pathway to housing stability. In 2010, HPS embarked on an HPP with Service Canada to provide assessment, training, and employment opportunities to mental health clients at risk of homelessness. The project, known as *Moving Forward: Homeless Mental Health Project* has demonstrated positive results:

- 67% graduation rate
- 43% of participants were working, volunteering or furthering their education at the time of graduation
- At a three-month follow-up, 82% of this group was working, volunteering or in school

The project is continuing to assist clients who have mental health issues, leverage employment opportunities and introduce program improvements. The project is reaching out to new clients and expanding from warehouse training and work experience into the culinary and hospitality sectors.

Approximately 100 participants will receive essential job skills training, life skills programming, job matching, work placement, and long-term support and counselling. Alberta's Ministry of Employment and Immigration provided seed funding and continues to be part of the project's Advisory Committee. For more information, please contact John Keating at 819-997-4218, or john.keating@hrsdc-rhdcc.gc.ca.

HPS TELEFORUMS

Upcoming: The next Teleforum will be held on May 24 and will present Raising the Roof's *Youthworks* initiative, which develops partnerships between community agencies and the private sector to assist homeless youth to enter the labour market. Future Teleforums will feature additional successful measures to support the labour market integration of homeless and at-risk individuals.

In case you missed our recent Teleforums:

- In March, the third in a series of Teleforums featuring the *At Home/Chez Soi* project outlined challenges and lessons learned in using a Housing First approach in project sites.
- The April Teleforum looked at how promising practices in outreach services across urban, suburban and rural communities can be replicated to prevent and reduce homelessness.

EMAIL US

If you wish to be added to the mailing list for future Teleforums, or if you have missed one of the presentations and would like to hear the recording, please e-mail us at na-hps-teleforums-spli-gd@hrsdc-rhdcc.gc.ca.

MENTAL HEALTH AND HOMELESSNESS IN CANADA:

What the Research tells us about Strategies that Work

The Homelessness Knowledge Development national funding stream (HKD) of the HPS supports projects that focus on data development; research and analysis; identification and sharing of best practices; and knowledge dissemination. The HPS has funded studies on mental health and homelessness which show that this population is among the most underserved and marginalized. This section summarizes some of this research, as well as innovative practices and changes in philosophy that have made a difference for this population.

Successful Housing Practices

Housing First is an innovative approach to helping clients attain permanent, affordable and accessible housing. Traditionally, clients with mental health issues were expected to be “housing ready” before being housed; however, studies show that clients thrive when they are housed and therefore recommend that communities focus on long-term housing rather than temporary shelters (Tsemberis et al., 2009; van Wyk et al., 2011).

The Housing First model, developed by Pathways to Housing in New York City, includes an integrated system of supports. This approach has been well-received by clients as well as housing workers, police, landlords, and business owners. Several agencies, including the At Home/Chez Soi project run by the Mental Health Commission of Canada, have adopted this approach (Tsemberis et al., 2009; Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2012). The Pathways Housing First program includes two specially-staffed teams to provide 24/7 client support as needed, as well as mandatory client visits. Clients were found to be half as likely to be hospitalized, 52% less likely to be jailed and more likely to be stably housed in the longer term (Tsemberis et al., 2009).

Another successful approach to support clients with mental health issues involved bringing housing services to the clients. One innovative approach involved placing a housing advocate on the hospital psychiatric ward to work with clients to establish concrete housing options after discharge (Forchuk, 2009). Staff felt this approach

freed them to focus on clinical interventions rather than discharge logistics. Clients found this service helpful and effortless, and with it were more likely to move successfully from the hospital into housing, rather than homelessness.

Health Care Strategies

Clients with mental health issues often receive health care only in a crisis situation; they use emergency hospital services for a situation which could be handled by a family health care provider (Gray et al., 2010; Forchuk, 2009). This leads to a lack of continuity between the treatment given in emergency health care and any follow up by a service provider, including shelters. For example, homeless clients often do not fill their prescriptions. Accordingly, one study recommends increasing communication between the health care system and shelter/transitional housing personnel. Using a Housing First approach, with integrated supports, helps to address this issue.

Individuals with mental health issues often feel stressed when waiting in noisy emergency rooms. One solution offered by a Vancouver hospital, presented in *Hospitals and Homelessness* (Gray et al., 2010), is to provide a separate waiting room for homeless clients with mental health issues.

For more information on these studies, please contact us: **NC-HPSINFO-INFO-SPLI-GD@hrsdc-rhdcc.gc.ca**.

Reports Consulted

At Home Chez Soi Early Findings Report: Volume 2: January 2012. Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2012.

Homelessness and Concurrent Disorders: Housing with Support. van Wyk, R., van Wyk, A., Harrison E. & Franklin, G., 2011.

Hospitals and Homelessness: The Experiences of Homeless and Under-Housed Persons, Service Providers & Health Professionals & The Emergency, Inpatient & Outpatient Profiles of Homeless and Under-Housed Persons. Gray, D., Moulton, G., Frankish, J., & Ratzlaff, M., 2010.

Pathways Housing First Manual: Canadian Edition. Tsemberis, S., Stefancic, A., Thompson, P., Veenandaal, J., Walker, J., 2009.

Reducing Psychiatric Discharges to Homelessness. Forchuk, C., 2009.



OTHER NEWS

Community Reports Coming

HPS is working on summarizing the outcomes of projects funded through the Designated Communities, Aboriginal Communities and Outreach Communities funding streams over the 2007 to 2011 period. This summer, each Designated Community CAB will receive the summaries for both their community and their province or territory.

Metropolis

The 14th National Metropolis Conference was held February 29–March 3, 2012, in Toronto and featured HPS-funded research on immigration and homelessness. For more information:

<http://www.canada.metropolis.net/>

National Housing Research Committee (NHRC)

On April 24, 2012, the NHRC's Homelessness Working Group meeting featured mental health and homelessness. Related information is available on the NHRC Web site <http://nhrc-cnrl.ca/en/home>.

A summary of the fall 2011 Homelessness Working Group presentations on youth are available on the http://homelesshub.ca/ResourceFiles/Youth-HomelessnessSession_Summary.pdf.

Canadian Housing and Renewal Association (CHRA)

The CHRA hosted its 44th National Congress on Housing & Homelessness May 1–4, 2012, in St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador. For more details please visit the <http://chra-achru.ca/en/>.

Release of the Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS) version 3.8

The HP Secretariat is finalising the last steps prior to the release of HIFIS 3.8. The new version features several new modules, including case management and housing placement.

HIFIS is a user-friendly, free of charge data management software built for, and in consultation with homelessness stakeholders across Canada. As a client management tool, the software will enhance service providers' ability to manage their daily operations and collect information about the population using shelters. HIFIS data can also be used to assist communities with their longer-term planning efforts and capacity building to address local homelessness challenges.

Also, a web version of the software, HIFIS 4, is currently under development. More information will follow later this year.

For additional information about HIFIS, please consult our web site at <http://hifis.hrsdc.gc.ca/logiciel-software/index-eng.shtml>

HPS Web site Expansion

HPS is expanding its Web site to share knowledge and community-level practices around homelessness. The new content is expected to be online early summer 2012. We will keep you informed.