



HOMELESSNESS PARTNERING STRATEGY

Summary

Homeless2Home: A Community Exchange

Lynn McDonald et al., University of Toronto, Institute for Life Course and Aging, 2009

In this study, the researchers created a knowledge model integrating ideas from experts (academics, service providers, advocates) with the lived experiences of homelessness in order to generate strategies for housing stability in Toronto. It looked at episodic homelessness and how to stabilize individuals who have recently been re-housed and led to the development of a Community Action Guide.

Who was involved in this study?

Individuals of all ages living in Toronto and experiencing homelessness, at risk of becoming homeless, or may become homeless again. This project focused on 3 stages when individuals are the most vulnerable: youth transitioning from family or foster care to independent living; young adults who are experiencing financial pressure due to increasing family size; and older adults who are exiting from the labour force and transitioning to assistance programs such as welfare.

How was the Community Action Guide created?

Working group sessions were held with program participants (academics, service providers, advocates, and those with lived experience of homelessness) to create a consensus vision, to create content for future panel and forum opportunities.

The knowledge from these sessions was verified with a group of formerly homeless individuals, creating a horizontal exchange of information.

The group of formerly homeless individuals held an open forum on episodic homelessness. This forum promoted Housing First which was central to the solutions exchanged and documented in the forum.

This group conducted 14 panels, each of which focused on a different factor that causes homelessness. Every panel encouraged solution-focused dialogue and included both academics and individuals currently homeless.

A post-exchange analysis identified the central themes and strategies. These then formed the Homeless2Home Community Action Guide for distribution to local homelessness communities.

What issues do individuals experiencing or at risk of homelessness

Homeless2Home's goal was to address the 3 points of vulnerability that affect individuals who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless:

Youth

Housing stability; peer pressure in lower income areas; limited resources in higher income areas; and support systems not tailored to unique needs of youth.

Young Adult

Inadequate income and employment; lack of housing support or inaccessible information; and higher income demand versus shrinking income supply.

Older Adult

Lack of housing security when one is hospitalized; accelerated aging due to previous trauma and substandard health care while homeless; and reliance on informal care (such as families and friends).

Results and Recommendations:

Youth

- Create more youth-specific transitional housing with a variety of support options.
- Provide sensitivity training for staff; supporting youth's goals in a respectful and productive way.
- Create 'safe zones' to support Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) youth's self-esteem and emotional well-being.
- Develop a youth 'mental wellness centre' geared toward youth in crisis.

Young Adult

- Raise income assistance and minimum wage.
- Invest in individualized long term training and education to assist people re-entering the labour force.
- Create peer advocacy programs to assist in helping people navigate service systems.

Older Adults

- Ensure that the needs and ongoing support of the elderly are available within and outside of the hospital.
- Create a peer advocacy group that operates at "arm's length" to avoid conflict with the client.
- Improve community housing.

The inclusion of people with lived experience in every aspect of the program/policy development is crucial to creating sustainable solutions that encourage the prevention and reduction of homelessness.

This model of community exchange can serve as a template for other communities to develop an inclusive process of community knowledge transfer.