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Helping people find place & purpose

**John Howard**  
SOCIETY OF TORONTO

**CHANGE**  
TORONTO

## **Transitional Housing in Toronto: Perspectives and Opportunities**

**Thursday, February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2010 from 9:00-12:30**

**519 Church Street Community Centre**

### **Forum Overview**

In the fall of 2010, Change Toronto, The John Howard Society of Toronto and Redemption Reintegration Services held a series of forums on homelessness after incarceration. These forums, which attracted over 500 participants, highlighted the need to further discuss viable housing options for people coming out of incarceration. Following these workshops, Fred Victor and The John Howard Society of Toronto partnered on a transitional housing pilot project for former inmates in Toronto.

As a follow-up to the previous forums, Fred Victor, The John Howard Society of Toronto and Change Toronto held the February 2<sup>nd</sup> *Transitional Housing in Toronto: Perspectives and Opportunities* forum to continue the discussion of options for former inmates experiencing homelessness, as well as looking at transitional housing as an option for other individuals facing homelessness, such as newcomers, people with active addictions and seniors. Approximately 150 people from a variety of organizations and government agencies were in attendance and there was an additional waiting list for this forum.

Transitional housing offers individuals who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness, time-limited housing along with support services that can assist in building the skills necessary to maintain permanent housing in the future.

This forum's intent was to provide an opportunity for participants to learn more about ways in which transitional housing can address homelessness, hear about the successes and challenges of transitional housing that already exists in Toronto, and discuss opportunities for developing additional transitional housing in the city.

This discussion of transitional housing is not a new topic of discussion but rather one designed to meet renewed interest in the topic and explore the topic further from a variety of perspectives.

### **Agenda**

- Welcome and introduction by Mark Aston
- Presentation by Nick Falvo: Transitional Housing – history, role and effectiveness
- Perspectives on Transitional Housing:
  - Janet Stevenson from Toronto Community Addiction Team
  - Huda Bukhari from Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture
  - Greg Rogers and Amber Kellen from The John Howard Society of Toronto
- Question & Answer and Plenary Discussion Facilitated by Victor Willis
- Case Studies of Transitional Housing in Toronto
  - Robin Masterson from Fred Victor's Transitional Housing Program
  - Pablo Escobar from the Woodgreen Community Services' First Step to Home program.
- Q&A
- Closing

## **Speaker Bios**

### **Nick Falvo from Carleton University**

Nick hails from Carleton University and has worked for 10 years as a front line community worker within Toronto. In 2009 he wrote a policy paper on the Housing First approach to Toronto's Streets to Homes program, which is one of the only third party assessments ever written on the Streets to Homes program. Nick is currently a PhD candidate in Public Policy at Carleton University, where he teaches a course on affordable housing and homelessness. He is a frequent blogger on social policy and an occasional contributor to the Toronto Star.

### **Janet Stevenson from Toronto Community Addiction Team**

Janet is a Coordinator with Toronto's Community Addiction Team (TCAT). TCAT is a program of St. Stephen's Community House in partnership with St. Michael's hospital. TCAT provides city-wide mobile intensive case management to individuals who have frequent readmissions to withdrawal management and/or visits to emergency departments. TCAT works from a client directed, harm reduction philosophy and was developed to improve health and social outcomes for people with complex substance use issues. Janet has personal experience working with adults, youth and seniors through clinical and street outreach and drop-ins and community based settings, regarding complex addiction issues.

### **Huda Bukhari from The Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture**

Huda is currently a manager with the Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture. Huda has been a dedicated member of the settlement sector for over a decade. An immigrant to Canada herself, she began her career as a frontline worker for newcomers. Huda has presented at various conferences on refugee and immigrant issues in Canada, trained service providers on how to respond to survivors of torture, and coordinated civic engagement workshops for the Sudanese community across Ontario. She currently sits on the Board of Sojourn House and is a member of the Executive of the Canadian Council for Refugees.

### **Greg Rogers from The John Howard Society of Toronto**

Greg has been the Executive Director of The John Howard Society of Toronto since October 2005. He has extensive experience in Aboriginal Economic Development, Adult Education and Media Relations. Prior to moving to Toronto, Greg worked in Alberta, Ottawa and Nunavut. He attended the University of New Brunswick and St. Francis Xavier University.

### **Amber Kellen from The John Howard Society of Toronto**

Amber has spent the last 10 years of her career engaged in research focusing on the connection between homelessness and incarceration. She co-authored a report in 2006 entitled, "Justice and Injustice" and this resulted in funding for the John Howard Society of Toronto's Post-Incarceration Housing Program. She has also co-authored a book chapter on substance use within the prison system and has been called as an expert witness on housing barriers for former prisoners in high court.

### **Robin Masterson from Fred Victor**

Robin has over 20 years of experience working in non-profit housing for people who are homeless and/or living in poverty and have concurrent disorders, varying degrees of mental health and/or who actively use substances. Robin is very passionate about finding long term housing solutions for this community.

### **Pablo Escobar from Woodgreen Community Services**

Over the past 9 years Pablo has worked with Woodgreen in various capacities. As a front line staffer he has worked as Woodgreen's Rooming Housing Policy Worker and as Woodgreen's Rooming House Emergency Response worker. In these positions, Pablo supported rooming house disaster victims across the City of Toronto to navigate crisis when/as they arose. Along with his MSW from the University of Toronto, Pablo holds degrees in Political Science, Philosophy and Social and Political Thought.

## **Welcome by Mark Aston**

All in attendance were welcomed by Mark Aston of Fred Victor and Change Toronto. Mark started the day's discussions off by providing an event overview and context. He explained that the hope for this event was for all present to enjoy their time together sharing information and discussion of the event's topic of transitional housing.

Mark also provided an overview of Change Toronto. Change Toronto is a collaborative consisting of representatives from social service agencies including Fred Victor, The John Howard Society of Toronto, Parkdale Activity-Recreation Centre, Working for Change, The Dream Team, the Learning Enrichment Foundation and Eva's Initiatives. Representatives from these agencies are working together to find new solutions to homelessness and related issues.

Since 2007, Change Toronto has worked to provide meaningful engagement, leadership and employment opportunities for people with lived experience of homelessness and poverty. One of Change Toronto's initiatives, the Cooling Centre Project, provides employment, training and leadership opportunities to a number of people with lived experience of homelessness through the operation of the City's cooling centres during extreme heat alerts. While implementing the Cooling Centre Project, it was recognized that many people with personal experience of homelessness want to find work in the social service sector but often come up against a number of barriers. As such, Change Toronto set out to bring together stakeholders through a series of dialogue sessions, in a manner similar to this transitional housing forum, to hear from multiple voices in open discussion and explore solutions. Last year Change Toronto discussion sessions brought together over 500 people to talk about homelessness after incarceration.

## **Introductory Presentation on Transitional Housing**

### **Presentation by Nick Falvo from Carleton University**

Nick provided some background on the history of transitional housing and how it fits within the continuum of shelter and housing.

Housing First is defined as rapid access to housing with no probationary period, no need to show housing readiness, no need to follow the advice of a physician and no need to complete a drug or alcohol treatment program.

Ontario has a history with Housing First. Supportive housing in Ontario began in the 1980s, as did the Homes First Society. In 1994, homeless persons were designated a priority group for new vacancies arising in all non-profit housing units in Ontario. In the late 1990s PARC, CRCT, Sistering, and Houselink were involved in a pilot project. Between 2000 and 2005 there was an expansion of supportive housing. In Ontario, the number of units increased from 2,400 to 4,200. Also during this time, the Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing created 3,000 new rent supplements. In 2002, Fred Victor initiated a program moving "long-term homeless persons" (people who had been homeless for over a year) from shelter into permanent housing, and then providing follow-up services. One of Toronto's best-kept secrets is that through many of the aforementioned efforts, roughly 6,500 homeless persons per year were moved from Toronto's emergency shelter system into permanent housing.

In the US, Pathways to Housing was founded in 1992 by Dr. Sam Tsemberis and he is widely credited as being the originator of the Housing First model. Around this time, academic literature began to show the positive outcomes of Housing First. Also, the "Million-Dollar Murray" article by Malcolm Gladwell widely popularized the Housing First topic in the mainstream.

The Streets to Homes (S2H) Housing First program in Toronto began in February 2005. At this time, there was a strong focus on 'rough sleepers' and the program had substantial resources. A key point of the S2H program is that from the 3rd meeting/contact with a client, it takes an average of 16 days for that client to receive keys to their new unit. Internal research suggests very positive outcomes. Beginning in May 2008, S2H implemented a 'panhandling enhancement' which shifted the focus to all street-involved people, including panhandlers in the downtown core.

Prior to the panhandling enhancement, 600 persons were housed per year through S2H and most remained housed 18 months later. Those who were housed had improved health outcomes, increased the amount and quality of food being consumed, had more sleep, were drinking and using drugs less, had fewer arrests, spent less time in jail, used hospitals less and visited health providers more often. Much of S2H's early success occurred when Toronto vacancy rates were relatively high. It was an opportunistic and well-timed program, in that regard.

However, S2H does have shortcomings. The program does not add to affordable housing stock and some participants are left with less than \$100 per month to live on. Less than 10% of participants have a telephone and two-thirds of S2H clients report regularly running out of money to buy food. There is limited choice in the type of housing and neighborhood where housing is available. There have been problems with shared housing. As well, the outcomes have not been as positive for Aboriginal persons.

Evaluations of Housing First programs have yielded positive results, but this kind of program may not meet the needs of someone with active addictions. There have not been many studies on the impact of Housing First for individuals with active addictions.

Transitional housing is "an intermediate step between emergency crisis service and long-term permanent housing. It is more long-term, service-intensive, and private than emergency shelters, yet remains limited to stays of between three months and three years." (Novac et al, 2009). "It is intended for people who need some degree of structure, support, supervision, and skill building to move from homelessness into stable, permanent housing." (Novac et al, 2009).

Some of the services provided in transitional housing include case management, alcohol and drug treatment, financial counselling, employment services, child care, domestic violence counselling, services for HIV/ AIDS patients and many more. A kind of personal change is supposed to occur while a person is in transitional housing. Many transitional housing programs require that participants sign contracts stating they will work toward specific goals during their time with the program.

Transitional housing residents are supposed to "graduate" from transitional housing, into more permanent, more independent housing. Because transitional housing of one year or less is exempt from the Residential Tenancies Act, residents of transitional housing can be discharged from their program at any time if they fail to follow the rules of the program.

Transitional housing often has more costs related to it than permanent or supportive housing due to increased staffing and support costs. Also, "Transitional housing is controversial. Critics view it as stigmatizing, destabilizing, and a drain on resources better used for permanent housing..." (Barrow and Zimmer, 1999)

Programs can partner to deliver different aspects of transitional housing. For example, in 2006, Fred Victor and S2H partnered to deliver the Rapid Access Pilot Project. This provided three months of intensive case management and for up to 10 clients with active addictions. Through this program, there were 2.5 full time equivalent Case Managers.

Convertible housing is a way of combining transitional housing with permanent housing. Through convertible housing, transitional housing participants can work toward shifting their tenancy from temporary to permanent.

In retrospect, some ‘treatment first’ programs have been onerous; perhaps even a set-up for many. At times, they have asked too much, and held people back unnecessarily. Housing First, by contrast, was initially presented with too much enthusiasm; popular and political communication in particular lacked nuance. “In proposing research-based solutions to homelessness, we are suggesting that policy responses should be framed not simply as ‘what works?’ but as ‘what works for whom?’” (Kertesz et al, 2009)

In regards to policy, funders could encourage treatment first programs to ease up on the rules and undertake an audit of sorts. For example, are urine tests really necessary and why not allow overnight guests? There should be some work on developing provincial tenancy guidelines for transitional housing. Currently, tenure rights are all or nothing. It is important not to rule out transitional housing for some individuals; supports such as Managed Alcohol Programs have demonstrated positive outcomes. It’s not clear that Housing First programs should be required to ‘screen in’ every willing participant. The results of the At Home/Chez Soi study will need to be scrutinized. This is a national study of Housing First with 2,285 participants, 1,325 of which will receive housing and be followed for at least 2 years.

## **Perspectives on Transitional Housing**

### **Presentation by Janet Stevenson from Toronto Community Addiction Team:**

In Toronto there is a subgroup of individuals identified as accessing the health system very frequently and many of these clients are getting lost in the system. Toronto Community Addictions Team (TCAT) started as a new program in St. Stephen’s Housing and Homeless Services stream beginning in January 2010. TCAT provides mobile case management services to people living with complex substance use issues who are frequent users of crisis medical services.

TCAT provides integrated care to help program participants achieve healthier outcomes through coordinating access to a range of community and physical and mental health services, thereby reducing dependency on emergency medical care. The TCAT program is a partnership led by St. Stephen’s Community House and St. Michael’s Hospital, including most of the Toronto-area hospitals with Emergency Departments and/or Withdrawal Management Services.

TCAT works from a harm reduction perspective, assisting clients to achieve recovery that is meaningful to the individual service user. TCAT provides mobile supports, addictions counseling, access to primary and psychiatric care, assistance with housing, and service coordination among health care providers in the hospital and community.

TCAT has become a permanent program and staff work with individuals from across the City to offer treatment services and supports like money management, trusteeships, helping people access housing, social referral, medications and other supports. The TCAT team does a lot of community accompaniment as well as undertaking work on legal issues, creating community connections and meeting with other service providers.

The main TCAT program began in 2010 and 2011 was marked by the start of a problematic substance abuse partnership project. 2012 will herald a new pilot program launch in partnership with St. Michael’s Hospital for short term case management to help individuals navigate in the community once discharged from hospital treatment.

Among TCAT service users, housing is a major challenge. The lack of affordable and sustainable housing in Toronto is a huge issue. Accessing affordable housing is largely location based. Location is a big issue in respect to housing as obtaining affordable housing often means leaving the community where service users feel safe and relocating them to a place where they become vulnerable. In some cases, acquiring housing places people so far outside of the communities they know that they are left without adequate community support.

There are also major challenges with the suitability of available housing. Rooming houses can cost a person's entire rent portion and leave little money afterwards for meeting their other needs. This lack of funds often keeps other issues unaddressed such as accessing adequate food and medical care, etc.

The location of housing often leads to issues of discrimination and stigma. Tenants often face stigma issues with landlords when viewing residences. It is important to note that this is not an overarching generality as there are good landlords in Toronto, but issues of landlord discrimination can occasionally be found to be an issue. In these instances, TCAT works with clients to assist in negotiating the power dynamic between landlord and tenant. TCAT also assists clients in addressing behaviors in order for them to sustain their housing. Harm reduction and safety needs are a huge element of the follow up for those TCAT works with.

There are also challenges related to rules within some residences in Toronto. For example, seizure prone individuals are encouraged to always have someone with them, but if they move somewhere where guests are not permitted there can be issues in respect to their advised treatment requirements.

The challenges and missteps of clients can provide learning opportunities for these individuals and can help in making the next step towards moving into more long-term or permanent housing if that is what the client indicates they want to do. We have to offer opportunities and acknowledge the right to housing, right to choice, individual response, and the individual's skills, wants and needs. We also need to increase the individual's power to build skills and have ongoing support to develop resources to participate and have long term stability in whatever means is of importance to them.

As a final point, we need more managed alcohol treatment programs.

#### **Presentation by Huda Bukhari from Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture:**

The Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture (CCVT) was founded by several Toronto doctors, lawyers and social service professionals, many of whom were associated with Amnesty International. They had begun to see victims of torture in their practices. Many of the victims were in the process of claiming refugee status in Canada. There was a recognized need for specialized counseling for the social and legal problems faced by this particular client group. Lawyers, social workers and community groups saw clients who were survivors of torture, often badly in need of treatment by doctors and other health professionals.

CCVT was incorporated in 1983. The Centre was the second such facility in the world to be established. The first was in Copenhagen in 1982. In 2003, CCVT was accredited to the International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims (IRCT). CCVT is a non-profit, registered charitable organization and receives funding from Federal, Provincial and Municipal governments, the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Torture Victims, foundations, religious organizations and individuals. In 1998, CCVT became a member agency of the United Way.

CCVT runs a number of different programs and is involved in a number of initiatives. CCVT offers counseling, support groups, crisis intervention, art therapy and coordinated professional services. CCVT's Settlement Services includes information and orientation, translation, time limited counseling, employment-related supports and referrals to resources relating to the economic, social, cultural, educational and recreational facilities that could contribute to the initial settlement of the client. The Children's Program at CCVT has been created to meet the specific needs of refugee children and their families in Canada through assessment, individual and family counseling, crisis intervention, support groups for children, youth and parents. ESL classes are also offered. CCVT provides a public education program that responds to requests for information, and provides assistance and consultations on torture and the effects of torture as well as regularly producing publications.

In 2010, CCVT saw 2272 clients. 10% of clients were youth and 15% were unaccompanied youth and/or youth living in shelter. 75-85% of clients are looking for housing assistance. People won't feel settled if they don't feel safe at home – without a safe home people cannot effectively tackle any other problems.

CCVT has assisted approximately 16,000 survivors from 136 different countries since being founded. Survivors include people who have been subjected to severe torture or prolonged severe multiple experiences of victimization; children and adolescents subjected to torture or witnessing violence; sexually traumatized people, particularly women and children; seniors who have been subjected to various types of torture; and people who have gone through traumatic exit, transit, and exile experiences. These traumatic experiences, compounded by their disorienting effects, produce severe physical and psychological damage.

For those forced to leave their countries, the process of flight is usually frightening, dangerous, and extremely stressful. Conditions of flight are terrifying and for the refugee there is no guarantee that they will arrive to their destination safely. For refugees there is a continuous period of great stress, insecurity and fear. For refugees who have survived torture, the disruption of life and any pattern of normalcy can last for years and perpetuate periods of prolonged stress. CCVT gives hope after the horror.

Newcomers are often exploited or pressured by landlords. A Toronto Star article recently chronicled the exploitative rent demands that can be asked of newcomers. New immigrants are being asked by landlords to pay as much as a full year of rent upfront to secure their first home because they have no Canadian employment or credit history. They are being exploited because they don't know the rules, the laws or their rights.

CCVT clients overwhelmingly identify housing as a need and survivors of torture have special housing needs. Newcomer victims of torture often have unique mental health needs as a result of fear of persecution and post-traumatic stress disorder. CCVT clients may also have unique physical health needs arising from the effects of torture and the trauma of exile. Many newcomers experience culture shock, face language barriers and have difficulty finding employment. All of this has an impact on finding and maintaining housing. Resettlement is difficult, but crucial to recovery. It is incredibly difficult to tackle the mental and physical health issues experienced by newcomers who have experience trauma without resettlement and housing.

**Presentation by Greg Rogers and Amber Kellen from the John Howard Society of Toronto:**

The John Howard Society has 65 offices across Canada in 10 provinces and 2 territories. If there is a prison in your community there is likely a John Howard office. John Howard Canada undertakes national policy, John Howard Ontario undertakes provincial policy.

97% of all those who go to prison in Canada are eventually released. About 80,000 people a year are released from Ontario jails. There are 2,000 men in Toronto in jail tonight and this will rise to 3,000 when the new superjail opens in South Etobicoke in 2012/2013. One in three women in jail is Aboriginal and one in five men in jail is Aboriginal. The largest growth in Toronto jails has come from Caribbean, South Asian and East African men. 1 in 10 Canadians have a criminal record. Those who go to prison tend to have low literacy rates, cycle in and out of the system and live in poverty. Prison is an all-inclusive, three-meals-a-day form of care, but works out to be a very expensive form of transitional housing.

In 2006, anecdotal evidence led to a study entitled "Justice and Injustice" which looked at the relationship between homelessness and the criminal justice system. This study had several important findings and established a correlation between homelessness and incarceration in a local context. 1 in 5 homeless people come directly from corrections. The City of Toronto's Street Needs Assessment supports similar numbers. The cost of incarceration is approximately \$152/day.

Through this research, the issue gained credibility, momentum and media attention. In September 2006, John Howard Society of Toronto and Elizabeth Fry Toronto were contracted by Streets to Homes to provide Post Incarceration Housing Supports. This included referrals for releases who were homeless to differing types of housing and follow up support for one year after housing placement. To date over 550 men have been housed; City of Toronto reports an 83% retention rate.

Former inmates experience a number of barriers to success. While many former inmates have been housed, many more have been lost while they waited for housing to become available to them. There are barriers to accessing private market rent, such as lack of money. There is resistance even within social services to engage with this population. Many former inmates have returned to pre-incarceration situations, leading back to imprisonment. Shelters do not offer support and structure, attributes identified in successful transitional housing situations. There is a need for ongoing case management and follow up beyond one year.

In 2008, the report “Homeless and Jailed: Jailed and Homeless” was released. This study mapped the housing trajectory and service needs of people leaving the criminal justice system. This report also received media attention and a Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services senior staff in the Deputy Minister’s office was assigned to responding to the report’s recommendations and to developing a discharge planning report. New discharge plans are pending.

The John Howard Society of Toronto commissioned a cost benefit analysis entitled “Making Toronto Safer”. This report was funded by Toronto Community Foundation and was authored by John Stapleton from Open Policy. The report identified significant cost savings if transitional housing were to be provided for otherwise homeless former inmates. There would be a savings of \$350,000 over a life time per person. This report has generated positive critical response from media and government. Following the report, a partnership was established with Fred Victor to provide 10 units of transitional housing for former inmates. The early results related to retention and reduced recidivism are promising.

There are other transitional housing initiatives that have shown a positive impact with this population including transitional housing through The John Howard Society of Ottawa, The John Howard Society of Thunder Bay, New York City’s Academy, NACRO- U.K. and Housing Benefit (U.K.).

The next steps include discovering innovative ways to build or renovate, and operate transitional housing projects specifically for former inmates- there is a need for a pilot opportunity in Toronto. Work needs to be done to investigate additional and expand existing partnerships in order serve more former inmates. There also needs to be some follow-up regarding the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services discharge planning report.

## **Q&A and Plenary Discussion**

### **Facilitated by Victor Willis from Parkdale Activity-Recreation Centre**

This was a discussion of other potential applications for transitional housing and how transitional housing can be further developed in Toronto.

**Question:** *What I want to address is how far our sector is being forced from real estate realities converting what used to be a rental market into a condo ownership market. How do we do something about this massive elephant in the room that is making it impossible for those seeking housing in our communities?*

#### **Responses:**

- Fix the for profit model. We have an issue and we need affordable housing with supports.



- I don't think the real challenge is that there are a lot of condos, the real challenge that the federal government has withdrawn from social housing. The Harper government has actually been spending more on social housing than Liberal government did, but federal government always leads. When the federal government invests money in housing the provinces tend to pick up the cause too.
- The federal government has a role in poverty reduction, however, so far have refused to come to the table with a national poverty reduction strategy.
- I think we also have to speak to how our City has to pick up this ball and run with it. When we take guys down to get their Ontario Works, daily we are taking 20 and 22 year olds down and putting them on the welfare system. How can you live on the OW amount offered? You can't. Our view is if we can get you on ODSP, it's a miracle, but any efforts in respect to transitional housing are going to have to be very creative.

**Comment:** *We want to partner – we see opportunities and you might see opportunities. We might want to work with you.*

**Question:** *About newcomers, what constitutes a newcomer? If I'm coming from the Dominican Republic and live in Calgary for ten years then come to Toronto, am I a newcomer in Toronto after living in Calgary for 10 years? What is the definition of newcomer timeframe and pathways of newcomers in Canada and what is my label and title?*

**Response:**

Depending on who you talk to within government the definition changes. For some funders and government departments, a newcomer is someone who has spent 3 years or less in Canada or until they become citizens. My personal definition however is that I'm a newcomer and have been in Canada almost 17 years and still learning. When you move you are a secondary migrant – now had you been here as a secondary migrant for over five years than you are not technically a newcomer.

**Comment:** *I want to hear more about transitional housing for youth.*

**Comment:** *I worked with those considered hard core criminals and had folks who wanted to get into long term housing. People need to get back into the community.*

**Question:** *I've been a housing worker for a long time. In 2003, McGuinty wanted to establish 20,000 new affordable units and then about a year later instead of building, actually took units and turned them into above ground parking. Is there accountability about where these units are and what happened? These affordable housing units are something that is so sorely needed.*

**Responses:**

- Toronto Disaster Relief Committee and others have started to address gaps between policy and what happened on the ground.
- Many of you are aware that it has been 2 years since the announcement of a poverty reduction strategy in Ontario. However, as a 5 year strategy they didn't even make an attempt to make a dent in housing and the waiting list for social housing, so in another few years (2013) there is supposed to be another attempt at updating this strategy. The point is that each strategy is expected to have different themes – the theme for the last poverty reduction strategy was children and so, if people mobilized perhaps we could shift the focus to housing – be mindful of that.

**Question:** *I have a question about what model it is that we are looking at. I understand dedicated housing but given the way funding models are working we seem to be getting away from that. Does it need to be a stand-alone program or do we need to look outside the community and link services?*

**Responses:**

- This is a really interesting point speaking to gaps in way funding flows down through the sector. What really matters is what the population we are trying to serve requires, so depending upon the level of support and services required we possibly could do scattered housing but the overall advantage of having one population under one roof is you can provide more acute support in a way that is more accountable.
- Both scattered housing and dedicated housing show benefits and challenges. Planning has to be individually geared to client needs – there are benefits for some to living together versus benefits for other individuals to be away from challenges and triggers, etc. Participant driven programs such as in Ottawa are really good examples of quite successful programming.

**Comment:** *I have spent time in shelters and have worked in this sector for many years. The industry suffers from a gap in strategic management – I see people who are dislocated from services and a lot of organizations are not empowering their clients and are in fact suppressing them to create/maintain a power dynamic aimed at protecting turf and so we act in silos we don't want to cross pollinate, we don't want to share. If we focus on this we can create new opportunities and have more tools to serve the community we want to serve.*

Following the Q&A, participants were invited to split up into small groups, identify topics of interest related to transitional housing and sign-up to discuss these topics in the future. The topics for further discussion included:

- Addictions and Transitional Housing
- Aftercare and Follow-up
- General Interest in Transitional Housing
- Mental Health and Transitional Housing
- Newcomers and Transitional Housing
- Partnerships
- Policy and Advocacy
- Seniors and Transitional Housing
- Women and Transitional Housing
- Youth and Transitional Housing

## **Case Studies of Transitional Housing in Toronto**

### **Robin Masterson from Fred Victor Transitional Housing:**

The Transitional Housing Program (THP) at Fred Victor opened in August 2011 after building renovations at Queen and Jarvis were completed. THP was based on the Rapid Housing Access Program (RHAP) which operated from July 2006 until September 2010 when the program was closed due to renovations to the site. RHAP was a partnership between Streets to Homes and Fred Victor. RHAP was initially a pilot project designed to provide quick and easy entry to housing for clients with complex needs who are living rough on the streets, in ravines or encampments. RHAP provided transitional housing for up to 3 months, intensive case management and community development to 10 units which were located within the housing units at Queen and Jarvis. All clients were referred by Streets to Homes. Transitional housing, intensive case management and community development was provided by Fred Victor. Streets to Homes worked with clients to find permanent housing and provided follow up support.

RHAP addressed a need for quick entry into housing. Many participants came directly from the street on the same day or soon after S2H met with them. Most people who came to RHAP had been living on the streets and had no

identification, income or rental references and were therefore declined by other housing providers. Most participants had difficulty maintaining housing in their past. Most people served by RHAP were actively using substances and many were dealing with concurrent disorders.

RHAP had a formal evaluation completed by two consultants in February 2007. The evaluation concluded that the program was quite successful and that all clients who had been served reported their life had changed in a positive way after coming into the RHAP program. The evaluators also noted that it was a cost effective program and was comparable in cost to other supportive housing options. The evaluation did make some recommendations including having dedicated units which were grouped together as opposed to scattered units throughout the site, more staff training, more staff available to the program, dedicated harm reduction workers and that follow up work be done by a Fred Victor staff who is part of the program.

Through the RHAP evaluation as well as consultations with staff, RHAP participants and Streets to Homes, a new physical space was designed. There is now one floor dedicated to THP with 20 units. THP participants now have larger rooms and everyone has their own private bathroom. Participants share two kitchens and a large common area and programming space. The THP staff office is located on the same floor as the units.

Under the new Transitional Housing Program, transitional housing is provided for 20 participants on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor of Queen and Jarvis Housing. Participants can stay in THP for up to one year. S2H funds and makes referrals for 10 of the units and the John Howard Society of Toronto provides staffing and referrals for 10 units. At least 2 staff are on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor Monday to Friday 8:30am-11pm and Saturday and Sunday 3pm-11pm. Housing and Harm Reduction Staff, Support to Daily Living Staff and John Howard Society Staff provide case management, community development activities and programming. THP Follow Up Staff work with participants to develop housing plans, find suitable permanent housing and provide follow up support for up to one year.

All participants meet at least once per week with their case manager. A case management plan is developed with the objective of providing participants with a process to obtain the skills and resources needed to reside independently in stable and permanent accommodation.

There are specialized services available to participants in the THP. Life skills services are provided to participants through programming that includes cooking, cleaning, laundering, shopping and personal hygiene. Financial skills are provided consisting of programs designed to teach participants financial planning skills including budgeting, obtaining income supports, obtaining bank accounts and trustee services as required. Social connections and resource services consist of programs designed to teach participants community development skills and include weekly participant meetings, conflict resolution meetings, outings, arts and crafts and movie nights. Health support services include harm reduction support groups, referrals to medical, psychiatric and dental services, medication management and connecting participants with personal support workers, long term case managers and mental health supports as identified through case management plans.

Participants in THP also receive follow up supports. Employment and education support services consist of skills upgrading, job/career planning and volunteer opportunity planning. Housing and follow up services are provided to the 10 S2H participants by the THP Follow Up Worker and consist of the development of a Housing Plan, applications, securing permanent housing, development of a community map and follow up support for one year. John Howard Society of Toronto staff provide housing and follow up support to the participants in their 10 units.

THP is located within the Queen and Jarvis Housing Program and works closely with that program. All rent collection, rent calculations, rent geared to income files and annual income reviews are completed by the Intake Worker at Queen and Jarvis Housing. During hours when THP staff are not on duty, the program is monitored and assisted by Queen and Jarvis Housing Staff and Security.

#### THP Expected Outcomes:

- 20 participants will receive case management support to end their homelessness.
- 20 participants will receive up to 12 months of individualized case management support to develop tenancy and life skills to maintain permanent housing.
- 20 participants are referred to permanent housing.
- 80% of THP graduates experience decreased social isolation and are able to maintain permanent housing for at least 12 months.
- 100% of THP graduates will develop a community map.
- 80% of housed THP graduates will be actively involved in their discharge plan.
- 20% of housed THP graduates will be linked with on going community supports after discharge from follow up support.

#### How are we doing?

- In the first 5 months we have had 80% of participants have maintained their housing for at least 3 months.
- All clients have met with their case managers and participated in programming.
- One client has graduated and is now living in permanent housing at Queen and Jarvis.
- 1 client abandoned their unit.
- 3 clients have been asked to leave the program due to serious safety concerns.
- All clients have met with the Follow Up Worker and are working on Housing Plans.

The idea of this program has always been a harm reduction program so we know our clients sometimes use substances but this doesn't serve as a barrier to their access to services. All clients served through our program have provided us with feedback to note that their life changed in a positive way. As Nick stated in his comments, transitional housing can be quite expensive as compared to regular supportive housing, but is necessary for many.

#### **Pablo Escobar from Woodgreen's First Step to Home:**

I want people to think about the issues brought up today, such as housing those who have been homeless a long time and the length of time for transitioning effectively, while also noting that transitional housing is defined in legislation as a year or less. Woodgreen feels this legislation is inadequate and that folks who have been homeless for a long time need more time to transition effectively. Woodgreen provides transitional housing assistance for up to 4 years.

Woodgreen provides transitional housing for men over 55. This housing is offered through a harm reduction perspective in a Housing First model. The specific clientele assisted are men 55 years of age and older who are street involved, homeless and/or have a history of unstable housing. Woodgreen's First Step to Home program offers fully furnished bachelor units.

First Step to Home provides support to individuals to build skills and also provides supports required to be able to transition into other longer term or permanent housing that meets their needs. Along with providing transitional housing, participants are provided with case management, social, recreational and life skills supports, harm reduction and substance use treatment services, mental health supports, nursing and primary health care and assistance with activities of daily living. On site supports and services include: 24 hour staffing, assistance with activities such as grocery shopping, community leadership and peer programs, follow up supports, harm reduction and addiction services, intensive case management, life skills development, low barrier programming, personal support and homemaking, social and recreational activities, support transitioning to permanent housing, supportive counseling, volunteer opportunities and weekly assistance keeping the unit clean. Geriatric care is offered as we house a lot of seniors. Units are fitted with emergency services.

A unique and controversial aspect of the program is the length of stay terms – participants can stay up to 4 years. There is a no guest policy and there is 24 hour staffing. It is a challenge to fit this programming into existing legislation that defines transitional housing as less than a year. Transitional housing is exempt from tenant protection legislation so Woodgreen can set policies such as the no guest policy and fast tracking evictions (as a last resort). The length of stay is essential to this model, so Woodgreen asks participants to sign year-long agreements to participate in various stages of the transitional housing program. Once a participant completes a year in the program, they “graduate” a stage, then they are asked to reapply to enter the program at the next stage. This transitional housing is not subsidized but follows the 30% income determinant RGI rule or shelter portion of income for costs to residents.

Open since April 2010, the program is developing organically to better meet needs of residents. The program is entering into a process and policy review and developing an exit plan for residents which will look at where residents will transition to. First Step to Home has been operating for 2 years, but is still in the development stage.

The program receives LHIN funding and other funding and has a referral agreement with Streets to Homes. There is a closed referral process only open to partner agencies. Program staff includes 2 harm reductions specialists, a part time nurse practitioner, 2 full time personal service workers and an independent living support worker. Around monthly income support and/or pension cheque time we provide accompaniment, bagged lunches, daily maintenance and hope to eventually develop a peer program for those who transition out to come back and help with these supports.

Woodgreen offers a graduated program with four stages each lasting up to a year. The idea behind this is that it takes individuals with concurrent disorders more than a year to effectively transition. Folks apply to the next phase of the program. This reflects transition from homelessness. The first year is focused on trust building and stability. Year 2 is planned for goal setting and housing strategy. The 3rd and 4th years focus on exploring housing readiness and transitioning out.

Regarding the no guest policy, residents can have guests in TV room but not in units. This does not include residents visiting each other or family supports. Elderly tenants have the highest issues of victimization and many have had their units taken over in the past due to drug issues, etc. This is not just a Woodgreen policy, residents usually really like the policy, because many have experienced victimization in the past.

It is essential that we organize and reach out to change existing legislation so that we can provide the services that so many folks need.

## Final Q&A

**Comment:** *A lot of studies have been going on for many years and I really like what I heard today but something important is that people have made decisions about us without us (people with lived experience). I think we need to make it a point that no decision about us be made without us. It is essential to recognize that we are important.*

### Responses:

- This comment is one that is fundamental to Change Toronto and how we keep the perspective of people with lived experience involved in leadership.
- Part of the development of Woodgreen’s programming comes from discussions with residents.

**Question:** *It’s amazing what can be done, although Toronto Community Housing has units for seniors they are very hard to get, so I am curious as to your thoughts regarding safety and security for seniors.*

**Response:**

There are occasionally safety and security concerns related to assaults and assaults with weapons. If we were to go for a speedy eviction it generally has to do with those things. We work with people closely so that before we evict someone for aggressive behavior we try to work through a situation by filling out a behavioral contract after removing them to another location for a few weeks. We try everything before evicting, but sometimes we acknowledge that we need to do so. If we have to, we try to do so in a very gentle way so those evicted can connect back to the partnering agency that referred folks to us. Sometimes this is out of our hands - if cops get involved after an altercation sometimes residents are de facto evicted if an order is placed on them. They are still allowed to access services after being evicted.

**Question:** *Regarding the no guest policy, do we really want people to spend lifetime alone? I also question how do we balance people's rights and needs for safety? In cases when people are evicted, were these convictions of criminal activity or were these allegations? Does this raise constitutional rights issues around housing as we always seem to forget that people are assumed innocent until proven guilty?*

**Responses:**

- The focus is on the actual behavior rather than actual charges.
- Under the Social Housing Reform Act there are some issues around actual criminal charges versus behaviors. We work on establishing appropriate behaviors to maintain safety for all residents.

**Comment:** *There wasn't any mention of the role of peers in transitional housing.*

**Response:**

Woodgreen has a 4 year program and the goal is for people to link back in after they graduate from the program and have residents support each other in a variety of ways. The goal is to increase peer involvement, such as having more peers in support positions or maintenance positions.

**Closing**

We will get out a report and transcription with power points to all here today and will also follow up with the contact lists generated during the plenary session and link people via e-mail to convene and continue this discussion.

We scratched the surface in a few hours and please put forward additional ideas to the person who you registered with. Thank you for coming out today.