



## Vancouver At Home Update

March 2010

### VANCOUVER PROJECT TEAM

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### At Home/Chez Soi to investigate possible benefits of 'Housing First'

At Home/Chez Soi is the name given to the Mental Health Commission of Canada's research demonstration projects in mental health and homelessness that are currently being implemented in the following five Canadian cities: Moncton, Montreal, Toronto, Winnipeg and Vancouver.

They will look at the Housing First model of intervention. The Housing First model is an approach to ending homelessness and helping people with mental health issues get back into community life. This approach has produced positive results in other cities where it has been implemented. A comparison between different Housing First approaches and "care as usual" is being studied in all cities.

A total of 2,285 homeless people living with mental health issues will participate across the five sites. 1,325 Canadians from that group will be given a place to live, and will be offered services to assist them over the course of the initiative. The remaining participants will receive the regular services that are available in the five cities.

### Vancouver's At Home/Chez Soi Project Launches

A meaningful celebration marked the official start of the Mental Health Commission of Canada's At Home/Chez Soi Vancouver project on November 23, 2009. The event was held at the Coast Clubhouse.



#### Special Ceremony

Over 100 people attended the launch which included formal remarks from Mayor Gregor Robertson. The event was co-hosted by the Mental Health Commission of Canada's Chief Operating Officer Louise Bradley, and Vancouver project site coordinator Catharine Hume. Opening and closing prayers were performed by Elder Seis Lom (Glen Williams), Urban Native Youth Association and witnessed by Linda Mitchell, Métis Native Health and Doreen Little John, Native Health.

Guests watched a short video overview of the project and heard from local people with lived experience of mental health issues who each spoke powerfully of their own recovery and the critical importance of a safe and stable home in their journey to recovery.

For more information or to see the video visit [www.mentalhealthcommission.ca](http://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca)

## At Home/Chez Soi in Vancouver

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In Vancouver, five hundred people will be recruited to the study:

- Three hundred people will receive housing and supports.
- Two hundred people will receive the services currently available.

Of the three hundred who will receive housing, two hundred participants will receive apartments in a variety of neighbourhoods:

- One hundred of these participants will be supported by an **Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) Team** led by RainCity Housing.
- One hundred of these participants will be supported by an **Intensive Case Management Team (ICM)** led by Coast Mental Health.

The other 100 participants receiving housing will reside in a single site location in the downtown core and will be supported by the **Congregate team** led by Portland Hotel Society.

Key partners in Vancouver include: the StreetoHome Foundation, the City of Vancouver, BC Housing, the Ministry of Housing and Social Development, the Ministry of Health, Vancouver Coastal Health Authority, the Vancouver Foundation, and the Vancouver Police Department.

The At Home/Chez Soi project is the largest of its kind in Canada.

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## Vancouver At Home Update by Dr. J. M. Somers

The Vancouver study team started recruitment in October 2009, and receives referrals from diverse agencies and groups throughout the city. Vancouver's At Home research project has recruited over 100 participants, and is on track to complete recruitment of 500 people by April 2011.

The study includes two broad groups of participants, who are distinguished on the basis of their recent level of functioning. Participants in each group are assigned by chance to one of the study interventions, or to usual care (that is, the care that is provided through existing sources).

A review of the first 100 participants provides a preliminary look at the population of people with mental illness who are homeless in Vancouver.

- 25% of participants are female.
- 23% of participants reported having an Aboriginal cultural identity.
- Two-thirds of the sample reported some form of psychotic disorder, such as schizophrenia.
- Substance use and substance-related harms have been reported by nearly all participants. Alcohol and crack cocaine are the substances used most commonly by participants.
- Two-thirds of participants reported some form of police contact during the preceding six months, with one third reporting multiple instances of arrest, incarceration, or probation over the same period.
- 40% of participants reported the use of ambulance
- 65% reported emergency room attendance during the past six months.

When full recruitment has been completed the project will prepare a comprehensive report describing study participants. In subsequent years, data will be analysed in order to examine changes over time in diverse aspects of participants' lives, including housing stability, quality of life, physical and mental health, social relations, and vocational activity among many other areas.

## Update on the National Consumer Panel by Sandra Dawson

The National Consumer Panel is an advisory group of persons with lived experience of mental health issues and homelessness. It has 11 members from five sites (including peer workers, research assistants, and advisors) and meets 12 times per year. Locally, the panel roles are filled by Julia Weisser, Peer Engagement Coordinator on the ACT team, and Sandra Dawson on the Local Advisory Committee.

The Panel is available for consultation on any issue related to participants, as well as concerns of persons with lived experience employed by At Home/Chez Soi. Please contact Sandra or Julia via Melissa Stephens (melissas@vancouverfoundation.ca) to forward your concerns, questions or comments to the Panel. We offer expertise and connections from a rich variety of stakeholders and personal experiences. Knowledge transfer, cultural issues, resources, and ethics are just some of the topics in focus. Examples of NCP work include providing input on documents for participants, and diligent discussion papers on research issues brought to the Panel.

When the Vancouver Peer Reference Group is formed (May 2010), local concerns can also be brought to them for discussion. They will report to the local Project Team.

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## Most Frequently Asked Questions From Vancouver's At Home Field Office

### Q. What are the eligibility criteria for participation?

A. There are three primary criteria:

- 19 years of age or older;
- Absolutely homeless (living on streets or in a shelter for at least 7 nights in the past year) or Precariously-housed (living in an SRO and experiencing at least two one-week episodes of absolute homelessness or one episode of at least 4 weeks duration); and
- Severe mental illness (e.g., psychotic disorder, Bipolar disorder). Note: Formal diagnosis is not required.

### Q. What if someone has a severe substance use disorder, but no underlying mental illness?

A. We are not excluding people who have substance use disorders, but an underlying mental disorder other than substance use or substance-induced psychosis must be present.

### Q. What is involved in enrolling a potential participant into the project?

A. First, contact our Field Office at 604-675-2380 for a telephone pre-screen. If we think the individual is a good fit for the project, we will work with you to organize for one of our interviewers to meet with the individual in the community or at our Field Office. First, the interviewer will ensure that the individual meets all the eligibility criteria for the study ("Screener"); this takes about 45 minutes. If the individual is eligible, the interviewer will then conduct the first interview ("Baseline"); this takes between 1 to 2 hours, at the end of which the participant will learn what group they have been assigned to.

### Q. What if the participant does not receive housing and support through the study?

A. If a participant is assigned to a Treatment-as-Usual group, they are still a very important part of the study. They will be re-contacted every 3 months to take part in the follow-up interviews and will receive a cash honorarium for their time. We will communicate the results of group assignment to all referral agencies.



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## Intensive Case Management Update by Dawn Slykhuis, ICM Team Leader

*Intensive Case Management (ICM) is one intervention within the "Housing First" model. The ICM team is available 12 hours a day, 7 days a week to support participants in brokering services within the existing service delivery system. Self-determination, choice and harm reduction are at the centre of the ICM philosophy.*

The ICM team at Coast got off to a quick start. By November we had our team hired (team leader, four case managers and one social worker case manager) and as of January we had received over 30 participants into our program. Most individuals were housed within days or a couple of weeks. Our very first client was housed in less than a day after being referred to us.

We have been able to work with people on their goals, staying true to our philosophy of recognizing each individual as an expert in their own life. Goals we have worked on include: accessing mental health services, decreasing substance use, accessing medications for HIV and taking care of other physical health issues, delivering and bringing home a healthy baby, obtaining part time work, money management, learning new skills (cooking and baking) and of course keeping their homes safe and stable.

We have developed programming for our participants including a community kitchen, newsletter for participants, outings to the movies, aquarium and leisure centres, and an 'orientation night' which we are hoping will grow and develop into a peer learning group. We are looking forward to engaging with participants and providing them with an opportunity to share skills with each other and with us, as well as to support each other.



ICM Team Moves in

## Housing Update by Mark MacDonald, Portfolio Development Officer, MPA

*Motivation Power and Achievement Society (MPA) is responsible for securing 200 scattered site housing units for the Vancouver At Home project.*

As of mid-February we have reached a number of milestones with the At Home project. We have been housing people for five months and we have accumulated a mixed portfolio of BC Housing and private market apartments across Vancouver. We have 54 bachelor and 1-bedroom apartments – and one 2-bedroom townhouse. We are adding new apartment units to our housing inventory at an average rate of 13 additional units per month. Our goal is to have 200 participants housed by the end of 2010 and we are well on our way. To date, we have 32 people living in secure, furnished, insured housing of their own.

In February, we hosted a landlord appreciation event. Our goal was to let landlords know that they were not alone in the project, that there are other landlords out there working with the teams and with tenants to help ensure stable housing. We also wanted to let landlords know in a tangible way that we appreciate that they're doing something new. We wanted the landlords to know that while they work away in the background, they, and this opportunity they have taken, are greatly appreciated.

The landlords who took time from their busy day to visit us learned a few new things about our program, saw our offices and met all the people involved. For everyone it was the opportunity to learn that they are part of a larger group, a team doing good work to help others. We are hoping that over the course of time a community of landlords interested in and committed to supporting people be successful in their housing will develop.