



Council
to Homeless
Persons

Jenny Smith Scholarship 2024

Housing First insights: Implementation and fidelity

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Acknowledgement of Country



Acknowledging the lands of the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung and Bunurong people of the Kulin Nation

Research took place across unceded ancestral lands throughout Turtle Island (Canada), including xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Sk̓wxwú7mesh (Squamish), səliwətaʔ (Tsleil-Waututh), Anishinaabeg, Anisininew, Ininiwak/Nehethowuk, Oceti Sakowin/Dakota Oyate, Mississaugas of the Credit, Anishnabeg, Chippewa, Haudenosaunee, Wendat, Anishinabe Algonquin, and Kanien'kehá:ka Nations. These lands are now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples.

Introduction

- **Zach Biggin**, social worker and coordinator at Launch Housing's Melbourne Street to Home (MS2H) program.
- **Jenny Smith Scholarship**, awarded through Council to Homeless Persons supported overseas travel to places at the forefront of Housing First principles, policy, and practice.



Outline

/ Housing First – the basics

/ Context

/ Trip Report

/ Insights

/ Questions

Housing First – the basics

- **Housing First** is an approach that provides people experiencing chronic homelessness and multiple disadvantage with immediate **access to safe, affordable, and permanent housing**, without preconditions.
- **Flexible, person-centred, non-mandatory support** is offered to address health, social, or other challenges.
- HF operates throughout Europe, North America and Australia. It shows **strong evidence of positive housing and health outcomes** and cost savings for individuals who are chronically homeless.

Housing First – a philosophy and a model

- The Housing First **philosophy** starts with the **right to housing**....and, in many countries, it is used to describe a range of services offered to different groups of people.
- The Housing First **model** is a distinct service design for a specific group of people. These services are recognised internationally through the adherence to a **core set of principles** which describe the ethos and ways of working.

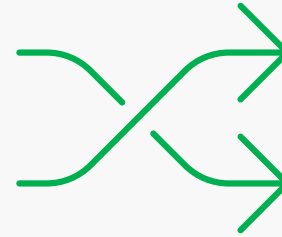
Housing First Principles



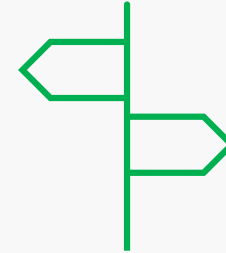
People have a right to a home



Housing and support are separated



Flexible support for as long as needed



Choice and self-determination



Active engagement without coercion



Social and community inclusion



Recovery orientated practice



Harm reduction approach

Housing First Fidelity

Close adherence **in practice** to Housing First principles

- Accountability to the **evidence** and objectives of Housing First
- Accurate **replication** of the Housing First model without compromising its proven effectiveness
- Promotes best possible practice and **outcomes** for people experiencing complex disadvantage and social exclusion

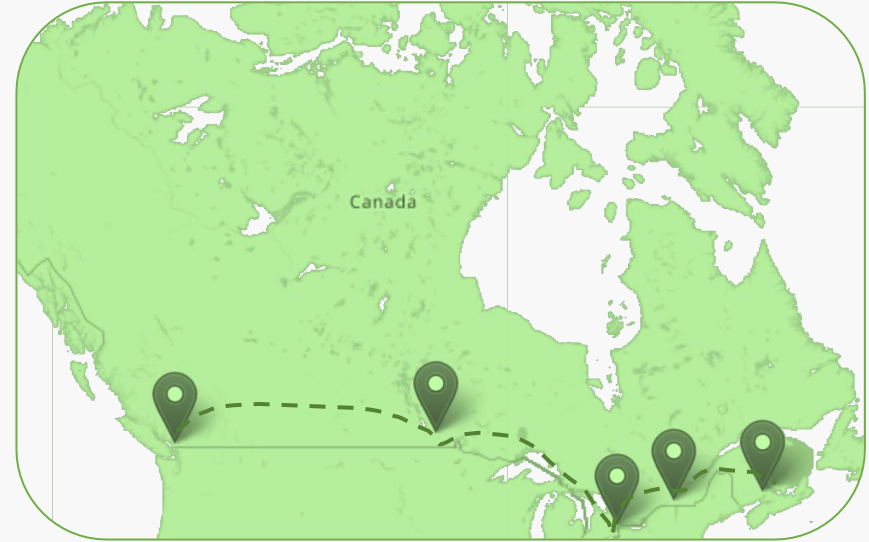
Context

- Visited sites of the **world largest Housing First trial**
- The **At Home/Chez Soi Housing First demonstration project** ran 2009-2013 across Canada
- Explored Housing First programs' sustainability and fidelity
 - **How are programs maintaining fidelity ten years on from the initial trial?**
 - **What are they doing well that we can learn from?**
- Looked at the impact of:
 - Multidisciplinary and clinical teams
 - Indigenous-led and codesigned programs
 - Housing stock availability and options



Trip report

6 cities in Canada visited
14 organisations visited
55 meetings attended with
practitioners, managers, peer
workers, service users, and more



Organisations engaged with included RainCity, CMHA (Winnipeg, Toronto & Ottawa), Mount Carmel Clinic, Siloam Mission, Manitoba Government, Health Outreach Community Supports, N'dinawemak Shelter, Services and Housing in the Province, Options Housing, La Porte Ouverte, and Diogène

Insights

Lived experience is embedded at all levels

- **Lived experience prioritised**, through both identified roles and in all recruitment processes
- Lived experience was **front and centre** in programs with barriers removed
- Organisations maintained robust structures for seeking feedback

“I work differently from other specialists ... I'm never wearing a mask, I'm always just me”
– *Peer Supporter, Mississauga*

“We truly believe in the importance of client voices ... not lip service, a check box, or tokenism. We're looking for genuine engagement”
– *Community Development Manager, Mississauga*

Lived experience is embedded at all levels

- **Harm minimisation approaches** supported by lived and living experience
- Willingness to think outside the box and provide what communities need



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Multidisciplinary teams are deeply integrated in organisations

- Large varied teams in programs, some with 15-20 staff
- Enabled **shared problem solving** and multiple contacts for participants
- Range of practitioners enabled **supportive and streamlined referral pathways**

Montreal, 20+ staff:

10 intervention workers, 2 location agents, financial trust agent, secretary, psychologist, social workers, OT, special education worker.

Mississauga, 20 staff:

Intensive housing case managers, addictions specialist, trauma specialist, hoarding specialists, justice workers, dual diagnosis workers, peer workers.

Winnipeg, 13+ staff:

Rehab manager, housing coordinator, 4 rehab workers, Indigenous cultural liaison worker, psychiatrist, 2 peer workers, OT, nurse.

Vancouver, 16+ staff:

Coordinators, team lead, social worker, 5 outreach workers, nurses, doctors, psychiatrist, Indigenous cultural liaison worker, counselling student

Strong culture and practice of broad, flexible, and open-ended support

- **Recognition of multiple systemic failures** that Housing First program participants have experienced
- Willingness to **do whatever it takes** to engage with people
- **Open-ended support** with no pressure to close

“we recognise that we’re often the only social support for people ... we’re often the last stop for people that have been turned away from every other service”

– Peer worker, Toronto



Integrating health care and homelessness for better client outcomes

- Homelessness is treated as a **health issue**
- **Silos reduced** between sectors such as homelessness, mental health, AOD
- Programs created to **bridge gaps of support** identified in communities

Case example:

Health Outreach Community Supports (HOCS), Winnipeg

- Providing pathways to clinical mental health support for Housing First participants requiring a clinically complex response
- Collaborating in care planning with Housing First programs
- Goal of 'decolonising healthcare'

Programs focusing on social and community inclusion

- **Wraparound support** at a high-risk time, increasing assertive outreach
- Programs developing **resource kits**, education programs, and providing bursaries to **support new tenancies** and **help people thrive**
- Social prescribing program to **connect people with community supports**
- Peer workers integral in supporting new tenancies

“Having lots of people knocking on doors early on [in a tenancy] helps”

– Case Worker, Ottawa

“I couldn’t believe that a year earlier I was in jail, and then there I was at George Brown College”

– Recipient of bursary, Toronto

Programs focusing on social and community inclusion

- Peer-led and low-barrier drop in spaces to help people find **community and purpose** after experiences of homelessness
- Scaling up support and proactively addressing risks when people are housed



Private rental subsidies can provide rapid access to secure housing

- Issues with sourcing adequate housing stock are universal
- Programs use **rental subsidy programs** to access the private rental market
- Private rental options offer **tenure blind** housing and **increased choice** for participants
- **Housing specialist roles** separate housing from support and maintain relationships with private rental providers

Ongoing evaluation and engagement supports fidelity

- **Local adaptations** enabled programs to meet local needs whilst **maintaining fidelity**
- **Regular fidelity assessments** and exchanges support a maintained focus of programs
- Housing First engagement and reflection supports staff retention and satisfaction
- **Local Housing First networks** promote resource sharing and effective advocacy

Local cultural adaptation – Winnipeg

- Program in Winnipeg advocated for adaptation of the Housing First model to reflect perspectives of local Indigenous communities.
- Local Housing First network altered fidelity assessment to include cultural measures

Conclusion

Questions



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Thank you.

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