

STREETS TO HOMES



A made-in-Toronto program to end street homelessness

A C A S E S T U D Y

1. Background

This case study has been prepared by Streets to Homes, a program of the Shelter, Support and Housing Administration Division of the City of Toronto.

1.1 The sponsor

The Streets to Homes program started in February 2005 after Toronto City Council made a commitment to end street homelessness in Toronto. Streets to Homes provides leadership, undertakes focused initiatives, and demonstrates innovation and system coordination to help people find and keep housing. The work of Streets to Homes encompasses front-line and policy work conducted by City staff as well as the work of more than 30 non-profit organizations that work in partnership with the City on street outreach, follow-up supports to individuals housed, and a range of other related initiatives.

1.2 Program goals and history

Streets to Homes works exclusively with homeless individuals living outdoors. There are other programs in Toronto that work with individuals in shelters and that help people avoid homelessness by assisting them to find and keep housing.

Streets to Homes is a “made-in-Toronto” strategy for ending street homelessness. It was born out of two earlier City of Toronto initiatives. The first assisted the residents of Tent City — a homeless encampment on the shores of Lake Ontario — to find and keep housing when the landowner abruptly evicted them. City officials helped more than 100 of the people evicted to move directly into housing and more than 80 per cent remained housed five years later (for more information see www.toronto.ca/housing/pdf/tentcity5.pdf).

The second initiative involved the response to an encampment of homeless young people under Bathurst Bridge. The bridge was scheduled for demolition and the youth were required to move. By bringing services to the site and actively helping people gain access to housing, almost all of the youth in the encampment obtained housing within about three weeks.

Project at a glance

Sponsor name

Streets to Homes – City of Toronto

Goals

- End street homelessness
- Community reintegration and independence

Target population

Homeless people living outdoors

Housing tenure

Permanent housing

Number of suites

- No set number
- Units are primarily scattered-site and in the private market
- Lease agreements are negotiated by Streets to Homes, but the legal agreement in the lease is solely between the tenant and the landlord

Factors for success

- Commitment of organizations involved with Streets to Homes to end street homelessness
- Partnerships with a range of private and non-profit organizations
- Centralized follow-up supports that are consistently provided

Location

- Toronto, Ontario

Project start date

- February 2005





Both the Tent City and Bathurst Bridge experiences were rooted in a harm reduction and “housing first” approach (without using either phrase). These philosophies formed the backbone of the Streets to Homes strategy used since 2005.

Streets to Homes works with all homeless people living outdoors, including those living in parks, ravines, under bridges, on sidewalks, laneways, alleys, stairwells, building alcoves, squats and living in vehicles. These are the homeless people who have slipped through the cracks or have refused other supports. They are more likely to have a longer history of homelessness than average, and many are dealing with mental and physical illnesses and addictions.

2. Program Description

Streets to Homes works one-on-one with homeless individuals to provide a range of practical housing options and to create individualized housing plans that respect clients’ personal preferences and autonomy. Outreach workers assist their clients through each step needed to find housing, such as replacing identification, gaining access to income supports, completing housing applications, and searching for apartments.

A key principle of the Streets to Homes strategy is an end to “blind referrals.” Instead of telling a homeless individual living outdoors where to get income assistance or where an apartment for rent is located, outreach workers accompany clients to appointments, and where necessary, advocate or negotiate on the client’s behalf. This helps to ensure that clients receive the services to which they are entitled and which may not have been accessible to them had they attended on their own.

Once clients are in housing, the next step is ensuring they are able to keep their housing. To date, almost 90 per cent of people who have found housing remain housed. This is possible because of the investment in follow-up supports, a centralized approach to assigning supports, monthly case conferences among follow-up workers, and a consistent model of support used by all follow-up workers. The focus is on helping clients to set individual goals and working on a reasonable plan to achieve them.

Follow-up workers meet with clients in their new homes and assist with the often difficult transition from life on the street by linking them to resources in the community and helping to develop life skills. The goal setting and support process is intended to assist individuals in achieving full independence within one year. After that, they are likely to

be fully reintegrated into the community, with sufficient life skills to manage day-to-day living, and with participation in meaningful daytime activities, such as employment, education, job training, volunteering, or social and recreational programs.

The focus of the follow-up supports is on the client as well as the community where the landlord or building superintendent and program staff work to troubleshoot any issues before they escalate into an eviction. This includes addressing behaviours and ensuring rent is paid on time. Follow-up workers also focus on community development. A place that feels welcoming is a place where a person is inclined to stay.

Follow-up supports are usually provided for one year. At the end of the year, in the majority of cases, the individual is expected to be able to continue to live independently in their new home without ongoing support. For individuals requiring support beyond a year, every effort is made to help them obtain community-based (most often Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care funded) programs that can provide ongoing, intensive case management and/or help them to move from their current housing into housing with more intensive supports. In these instances, supporting and ensuring success in this transition can mean that follow-up workers provide support beyond the one-year mark.

The Streets to Homes Program is built on partnerships. Streets to Homes receives guidance in implementing the strategy by the Street Outreach Steering Committee, a group of more than 30 representatives from outreach providers, hostels, health care, the business community, housing providers and various City Divisions. The policy leadership of the initiative benefits from this broad range of perspectives and buy-in across sectors. All members of the Street Outreach Steering Committee are at an executive or comparable level within their organization. They have the ability to influence program, policy and action within their own organizations to align with the objectives of the program where necessary.

Street outreach workers, follow-up workers, landlords/superintendents and the community at large have a role to play in ensuring homeless individuals make a successful transition into housing. Follow-up support workers develop ongoing relationships in the communities where their clients are housed. Volunteers from the community play an important role by hosting community meals and other social events that provide opportunities for clients to get to know their neighbours and integrate into their new communities.

Streets to Homes responds to concerns about homeless individuals living outdoors as identified by other City Divisions, political officials or members of the general public. In addressing community concerns regarding street homelessness, Streets to Homes, while remaining client centred, has also accepted the responsibility for working with communities to resolve issues. This means attending community meetings, meeting with residents' associations and business owners, responding to concerns from the general public, and being responsive to concerns relayed by political officials. In the course of this work, Streets to Homes staff have become accountable for resolving the issues.

In addition, the program has developed and implemented a number of related initiatives. Examples include:

- Toronto's first Street Needs Assessment, undertaken with the help of more than 750 volunteers
- a vocational assessment project to support clients in housing who are interested in working
- a Mobile Multi-disciplinary Outreach Team, established to provide specialized support for people living outside who have exceptionally challenging physical or mental health problems and/or addictions to help them find and keep housing
- a post-incarceration supports program to support individuals to gain access to housing when they are discharged from the criminal justice system with no home to go to.

2.1 The people

Since the program's start in February 2005, Streets to Homes has assisted more than 1,750 people to move from living outdoors into housing. Every person housed receives support for a minimum of one year, and almost 90 per cent of the people housed through the program remain housed.

The outdoor homeless population can be characterized as having been homeless, on average, for six years — 89.5 per cent of the outdoor homeless population is 50 years old or younger, with an average age of 37. By way of self-identified gender, the outdoor homeless population is 81.6 per cent male, 17.7 per cent female and 0.7 per cent transgendered. Aboriginal people are disproportionately represented in the entire homeless population (16 per cent) but even more so in the outdoor homeless population (26 per cent).

People living outdoors are proportionately the highest users of detox services, harm reduction services and drop-in programs. To help them get housing, people living outdoors also report a higher need than the rest of the homeless population for assistance with getting access to alcohol/drug treatment, detox, harm reduction programs, help with housing needs, and help with mental health.

2.2 The housing

The Streets to Homes program is an innovative model of housing for homeless individuals, with its focus on providing scattered-site, follow-up supports to formerly homeless individuals in a wide range of types and locations of housing. Staff members with Streets to Homes work hard to find housing choices that meet clients' needs at rates they can afford, despite the fact that Toronto's rental market is characterized by low vacancy rates and high rents. For example, the average rent for a private bachelor unit in Toronto is \$743 (CMHC 2006 Rental Market Report), while the shelter portion of social assistance benefits for a single person is \$325.



Streets to Homes works intensively with large property management firms to secure rental units for clients. More than 60% of clients housed through Streets to Homes choose to live in the private market — at rates they can afford. Very few receive a subsidy. Streets to Homes has also developed partnerships with rent-g geared-to-income, supportive and transitional housing providers, all of whom provide some units on a monthly basis to Streets to Homes.

Research shows that Streets to Homes clients report a high level of satisfaction with housing outcomes and the housing process. Offering choice — not placement — is key to ending homelessness for people who have often lived outdoors for many years. Clients are presented with housing options, which they may decline. If they decline, other housing options are presented.

All units, private and non-profit, are reviewed by housing staff before the client signs a lease. The review notes any deficiencies with the unit. Housing staff work with landlords to address any shortcomings before the lease is signed or clients move in. In some situations, clients may select a unit with uncorrected deficiencies against the advice of the housing staff, as it is their right to choose. The housing follow-up workers will help re-house clients should they change their mind.

Post-occupancy research with clients who have been housed through Streets to Homes demonstrates a relationship between housing satisfaction and choice. Those who felt they had a choice were more likely to report being satisfied with their housing. In addition, the research demonstrates that individuals in independent units are much more satisfied, compared to those in shared accommodation, with their housing, have better food security, and greater improvements in most quality of life aspects. Those in shared accommodation are more likely to move.

2.3 Access to housing

Eligibility criteria

The client must be homeless and living outdoors to be eligible for the program; or was homeless and living outdoors at the time they were incarcerated or admitted to hospital.

Degree of “housing readiness”

Consistent with housing first principles, Streets to Homes believes all people are ready for housing.

Program expectations

There are three program expectations:

1. The client agrees to have their rent paid directly to the landlord.
2. The client agrees to have follow-up supports for approximately one year.
3. The client agrees to be on the waiting list for social housing

Program demand

At times program demand exceeds the availability of units.

2.4 Harm reduction and substance use

Substance use

Alcohol and crack cocaine are the substances most often used.

Policies and approaches are relevant to housing the target group.

Use of substances

Streets to Homes uses a harm reduction philosophy, with housing as the cornerstone. There is no requirement for clients to receive treatment or decrease use of drugs or alcohol. Despite this, post-occupancy research demonstrates significant changes in substance use once people are housed:

- 49% of clients decreased alcohol use
- 17% quit the use of alcohol altogether
- 73% decreased use of other drugs
- 31% quit the use of other drugs altogether.

To assist individuals whose addictions are preventing them from choosing housing, Streets to Homes also has a Mobile Multi-Disciplinary Street Outreach Team which includes a concurrent disorders therapist, nurse, psychiatrists, housing support worker and street outreach worker.

Security measures

There are no security measures specifically in place for Streets to Homes clients.

Guests

Clients are full tenants with all the rights of tenants under the Residential Tenancies Act.

Conflicts among residents

If there is conflict with other residents, resolution strategies are put into place by follow-up workers.

Temporary absence

Like any other tenant who has a lease, clients may choose to be absent from their apartment whenever and however long they choose, so long as their rent is paid.

Residents who are abstinent

Residents who are abstinent can continue to live in their units.

Legal issues

On occasion clients will run into legal issues as a result of their substance use; however, post-occupancy research has found that there is a dramatic decrease in interactions with police and the criminal justice system when people are housed in comparison with their experiences when they were homeless.

2.5 Exits from housing and/or programs

Voluntary move-outs

Streets to Homes is based on choice, not placement. Almost 40 per cent of clients move at least once. This is for a range of reasons: a change in preference about the area of the city where they would like to live, a relationship break-up, to move closer to family, to move out of the city, to move to Rent Geared to Income housing, etc. In these instances, follow-up workers support the client in the move and work with them to ensure ongoing residential stability.

Evictions

Evictions are rare. Significant support is provided to the clients, landlords and communities. If a client's behaviour negatively impacts their tenancy and an eviction may be forthcoming, every effort is made to resolve the situation and avoid the eviction. If that is not possible, re-housing assistance is provided.

2.6 Services

Model of service delivery

A diverse range of services is delivered under the Streets to Homes umbrella:

Types of services

Services	Type of service Availability	Service provider	Are services available on site (Yes/No)	Source of funding: Public Private Charitable
Street Outreach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 7 days per week, 20 hours per day: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Locate individuals living outdoors ● Make housing appointments and assist in completing housing applications ● Transport to housing appointments ● Help obtain ID ● Help get income assistance ● Connect with other relevant supports (e.g., health, mental health, addictions, legal, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 9 non-profit agencies and City staff representing approximately 35 FTEs 	Services are available outdoors throughout the entire City of Toronto	Public
Mobile Multi-disciplinary Street Outreach Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 1 full-time nurse ■ 2 part-time psychiatrists ■ 1 part-time concurrent disorders therapist ■ 1 full-time housing worker ■ 1 full-time senior street outreach worker (case manager) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Toronto North Support Services ■ St. Michael's Hospital ■ Fred Victor Centre ■ Centre for Addiction and Mental Health 	Services are available outdoors throughout the entire City of Toronto	Public
Post Incarceration Housing Supports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Discharge planning into housing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ John Howard Society ■ Elizabeth Fry Society ■ Prisoners HIV/AIDS Support Action Network 	<p>Services available at Toronto area courts, detention centres and jails, as well as Provincial and Federal institutions releasing homeless people back to Toronto</p> <p>Referrals also accepted if released within past 90 days</p>	Public
Vocational Assessment and Employment Assistance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Intensive psycho-vocational assessment ■ Pre-employment services ■ Access to (re)training ■ Links to employers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Jewish Vocational Services ■ Toronto Social Services (City Staff) ■ HPI Transitions to Work Team (City staff) 	Services are available at a downtown multi-service agency	Public

Types of services

Services	Type of service Availability	Service provider	Are services available on site (Yes/No)	Source of funding: Public Private Charitable
Rapid Access Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2 case managers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fred Victor Centre City staff 	Housing provided at Fred Victor Centre housing with intensive case management for a 90 day stay if required for stabilization or other complications	Public
Follow-up Supports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Currently 35+ housing support workers and soon to be 35+ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Currently 15 organizations 	Delivered in the client's home; can also include accompaniment to appointments in the community	Public
Furniture Bank	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Moving and furniture service to help clients furnish and stabilize in their apartments Available two days per week 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Furniture Bank (non-profit organization) 	Clients meet at the furniture bank facility, pick out the furniture they would like free of charge and then the furnishings are delivered to their new home	Public
Aboriginal Specific Street Outreach Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aboriginal individuals living outdoors may choose to receive culturally appropriate outreach services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Anishnawbe Health Toronto 	Services are available outdoors throughout the entire City of Toronto	Public
Fast-tracked Social Assistance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Individuals living outdoors can gain access to Ontario Works within one business day with the assistance of a Streets to Homes partner agency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Toronto Social Services (City staff) 	Services are available in three downtown social services offices	Public
Social and Recreational Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Volunteers work in buildings and neighbourhoods where large numbers of clients have been housed to host monthly recreational events or dinners to help all tenants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Darchei Noam Newman Centre Other faith-based groups 	Services are available in buildings that have large concentrations of Streets to Homes clients; currently offered at three sites	None

Types of services

Services	Type of service Availability	Service provider	Are services available on site (Yes/No)	Source of funding: Public Private Charitable
Social Housing Applications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ All street outreach and follow-up partners have the ability to gain access to TAWL (Toronto Applicant Waiting List) to submit and check the status of social housing applications of clients 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ All Streets to Homes street outreach and follow-up agencies and City staff 	Available in the home offices of the partnering organizations	
Trusteeship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Clients housed through the program can store their ID and have assistance with money management through Streets to Homes for the first few months of their tenancy until they are better equipped with budgeting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Streets to Homes (City staff) 	Available at the Streets to Homes Office	
Long-term health-funded case management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Follow-up supports through Streets to Homes are available for one year, and clients requiring follow-up supports beyond the one year are transferred to Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care-funded case management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Agencies receiving Ministry of Health Funding 	Various locations throughout the City	Public
Assessment and Referral Centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Service is available 7 days per week from 8:30 pm until 8 am ■ Street-involved homeless people can get respite off the street for the night or get access to the shelter system through the Centre 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Hostel Services (City staff) 	Located in the downtown core	Public



2.8 Funding

The source of funds is as follows:

City	\$2.3 M
Province	\$2.5 M
Federal	\$3.9 M
	\$8.7 M

City Operations – 28%

**Community Partners – 72%
(Grant Agencies)**

These figures do not include United Way or other charitable donations that individual Streets to Homes partner agencies may have in any given year.

Also, expenses do not include social assistance payments to clients (Ontario Works, Ontario Disability Support Program, Old Age Security, Guaranteed Income Supplement, etc.)

Changes in services

The most important changes have been:

- Focusing all street outreach services city wide on helping clients move to housing
- Increasing the availability of follow-up supports
- Conducting research on effectiveness
- Creation of a City unit to concentrate efforts and expansion to help meet service demands.

Connections with community programs/agencies

Streets to Homes has found that formal written service agreements ensure mutual accountability and better program outcomes.

2.7 Staffing and personnel issues

Staff burnout

Streets to Homes is a fast-paced, high-demand, high-profile and Blackberry-based environment. A few staff members have left the City unit since the beginning of the program.

Policies exist for hiring formerly homeless individuals.

Streets to Homes follows the hiring policies of the City of Toronto. Formerly homeless individuals are eligible to apply for any available position in the City for which they qualify.



3. Outcomes, challenges and factors for success

The Streets to Homes program has housed 1,750 people directly from the streets using a scattered-site approach. Almost 90 per cent of people housed since the program began in February 2005 have remained housed. There is clear evidence of improvement in quality of life and health.

One challenge has been ensuring sufficient follow-up supports. Far more homeless people were interested in housing than initially anticipated, and our ability to help them get housing was also better than expected. Follow-up supports constitute the single largest program investment.

Another challenge has been ensuring a constant supply of units available for rent across the city to ensure clients have a range of choices. Significant resources go into recruiting new landlords, to help avoid saturating any particular building or area of the city.



A final challenge is championing a change in service models: from managing homelessness to ending it.

A number of components have helped secure the program's success, although we continue to learn, improve, and test new approaches.

One success factor has been political will for the program to succeed. The program has had strong support from the Mayor and City Council. There has also been strong strategic and monetary support from senior management.

Access to provincial and federal funding has also been critical to the program's success, especially for street outreach services, housing follow-up supports and specialized projects.

One final success factor is that the project has one clear goal — to end street homelessness. It is a unifying goal for staff and all partners, and has focused our efforts.



3.1 Impact of the program on residents

Clients served through the program show improvements in eight quality of life indicators:

- 72% report an improvement in personal safety
- 70% report an improvement in their health
- 69% report an improvement in their sleep
- 65% report an improvement in the amount of food that they eat
- 63% report an improvement in the quality of the food
- 60% report an improvement in their stress level
- 57% report an improvement in their mental health
- 40% report an improvement in their social interaction (with 35% reporting no change in this indicator).

Clients served through the program also show a decrease in their interaction with emergency services:

- 75% decrease in the use of police detox ("drunk tank")
- 71% decrease in involvement of fire department in responding to their emergency calls
- 68% decrease in involvement with jails
- 58% decrease in involvement with courts
- 56% decrease in arrests
- 38% decrease in ambulance responses
- 35% decrease in calls to 911.

Clients served through the program also show changes in how they use health care services:

- 40% decrease in the use of emergency rooms
- 28% decrease in the use of walk-in clinics
- 25% decrease in the use of hospitals
- 32% increase in the use of family doctors
- 71% increase in the use of psychiatrists
- 233% increase in the use of specialists (e.g., oncologists).

Overall, 82 per cent of clients indicate the future looks better. Also, 60 per cent of clients indicate that their life has improved a lot since being housed and 31 per cent report it has improved somewhat.



3.2 Resident satisfaction

A recent study of clients housed through the program demonstrated that 50 per cent of the clients were very happy with their housing and a further 37 per cent were mostly satisfied.

The reasons for being satisfied were the size of the unit, specific amenities, such as a balcony or air conditioning, privacy, the simple fact of being off the street, and the location.

There were two variables that seemed to have the greatest impact on satisfaction. People who felt they had a choice in their housing were more satisfied than people who did not feel they had a choice or only somewhat had a choice; and persons living alone were more satisfied than persons with roommates.

3.3 Reasons for success

The reasons for the success of the Streets to Homes program are:

- The hard work and dedication of clients to want to make the transition from the street and work with their follow-up worker to address issues
- The willingness of landlords, especially the private sector, to work with the Streets to Homes program from a business perspective (not from a social or philanthropic perspective)
- The commitment of all program partners to end street homelessness in Toronto.

3.4 Lessons learned

- Housing homeless people directly from the street is a good business decision for private sector landlords.
- Follow-up supports are needed to support the client, the landlord and the community.
- Keep the street outreach question focused on “How can I help you get housing?” which provides a permanent solution to their homelessness, not “How can I help you?” which may meet an immediate need, but doesn’t address their homelessness.
- Use available services and programs, and especially mainstream services, to their maximum.
- Add program components only after careful analysis to ensure it is meeting a need and is not duplicative in any way.
- Having a steering committee to provide ongoing advice and suggestions to a very senior manager, and host frequent meetings with partners and act upon their suggestions.

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