Housing First in Canada

Stephen Gaetz
President & CEO, Canadian Observatory on Homelessness
Professor, Faculty of Education, York University, Toronto
about what Housing First is, is a crucial first step . . .
“Housing First is a recovery-oriented approach to homelessness that involves moving people who experience homelessness into independent and permanent housing as quickly as possible, with no preconditions, and then providing them with additional services and supports as needed. The underlying principle of Housing First is that people are more successful in moving forward with their lives if they are first housed.”

(Framework for Housing First, 2013)
Housing First supports people who are homeless and living with mental illness by combining the immediate provision of permanent housing with wrap-around supports.
Treatment as Usual

- Homeless
- Shelter placement
- Transitional housing
- Permanent housing

Level of independence vs. Treatment compliance + psychiatric stability + abstinence
Housing First
CORE PRINCIPLES

1. Immediate access to permanent housing with no preconditions.
2. Consumer choice and self-determination.
4. Individualized and client-driven supports.
5. Social and community integration.
Housing First Framework

What kinds of **SUPPORTS** are needed?
Key Supports

**Housing Supports**
- Help finding housing
- Negotiate with landlords
- Build relations with landlords
- Obtaining rent subsidies
- Setting up apartment
- Landlord mediation
- Develop skills for independent living

**Clinical Supports**
- Health
- Mental health
- Addictions

**Complementary Supports**
- Life skills
  - Relationships
  - Conflict resolution
  - Meaningful activities
  - Volunteering
- Income supports
  - Finding work
  - Education
  - Training
- Community engagement
HOUSING FIRST housing options

Transitional Housing

Scattered Site
- Independent living
- Tenant holds the lease
- Mostly private sector but could be social housing

Permanent Supportive Housing
The Application of Housing First

Integrated System Approach

Program Models

Team interventions

Assertive Community Treatment
Intensive Case Management
Rapid Rehousing
Part 2

Housing First comes to Canada
Housing First

Sam Tsemberis
Pathways to Housing
New York
A short history of Housing First in Canada

- Pathways to Housing – New York, Sam Tsemberis – 1990s
- Toronto – Streets to Homes 2004
- Calgary, Edmonton, Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, Red Deer, Province of Alberta – 2008 - Present
- At Home / Chez Soi
THE EVIDENCE:

Does it work?

• Huge body of evidence that says it does work.
• Between 70-90% of those who receive Housing First are still housed after a year
• The At Home / Chez Soi project has ended more than 6000 person years of chronic homelessness
Does it lead to less use of homeless related services?

Significant differences between Housing First and Treatment as Usual (TAU) in 12 months of service use (per 1,000 people)

- 7,497 fewer nights in institutions (largely residential addiction treatment).
- 42,078 fewer nights in shelters.
- 6,904 fewer nights in transitional housing or group homes.
- 732 fewer emergency department visits.
- 460 fewer police detentions.
- 1,260 fewer outpatient visits.
- 34,178 fewer drop-in centre visits.
Is Housing First expensive?

• HF requires an additional investment of about $4000, per person, per year

• For the group as a whole, there is a return of $7 for every $10 spent

• For the high service user group, there is a saving of $22,000 per year!
It Works!
Part 3
Key considerations for implementation
Planning and implementation is a **change management** exercise.
Shifting to *Housing First* means doing things differently . . .
Work in a chaotic environment often results in rules-based approaches as a means of keeping things under control.

Housing First is a *client-centred* approach ...
Context Matters!
3 Key **planning** challenges
Partnerships are Key

“So get everybody and anybody together. If you aren't sure whether they should be involved, invite them anyway. One of the greatest advantages of collaboration, especially in the early stages, but is important throughout, is that those at the table and part of the development now have a vested interest, when they feel like they are part of something bigger than they are and have influence they become supporters instead of antagonists.”

Wally Czech, CAEH
Planning issues

Clarity of roles
Sorting out who does what
Planning issues

The importance of rent supplements
Nurturing effective working relations with landlords
The importance of Good Case Management

- Client driven
- Trauma informed
- Effective assessment
- Family reconnection
- Goal setting
- House visits
Matching supports to client acuity
The **first three months** are a crucial transition period.
Avoid ...
Does Housing First work for everyone?
Consider the needs of the fifteen percent for whom housing stability continues to be a challenge. Don’t give up on them.
A central tenet of the Infinity Project is “Zero Discharge into Homelessness”, meaning that if housing breaks down due to a crisis, behavioural challenges or other issues, young people will not find themselves on the streets, but rather alternative accommodations will be secured.
Part 4

Adapting Housing First
Helping youth **exit homelessness for good!**
The importance of developing a response based on the needs of developing adolescents and young adults.

Promoting housing stabilization, well-being, social inclusion and positive transitions to adulthood.

The Core Principles of HF4Y

1. A Right to Housing with No Preconditions
2. Youth Choice, Youth Voice, and Self-determination
3. Positive Youth Development and Wellness orientation
4. Individualized, Client-driven Supports with no Time Limits
5. Social Inclusion and Community Integration
The importance of developing a response based on the needs of developing adolescents and young adults

Models of Accommodation

- Homeless Youth (or "at risk youth")
- Crisis Housing
- Return Home (Family Reconnect)
- Independent Living (Scattered Site)
- Supportive Housing
- Transitional Housing
The importance of developing a response based on the needs of developing adolescents and young adults

The Range of Supports

1. Housing Supports
2. Health & Well-being
3. Access to Income & Education
4. Complementary Supports
5. Social Inclusion
Case loads

**Recommended:**

7-10

“Caseload numbers should be carefully balanced. When considering the impacts of including family and natural supports, complexities of targeted groups (LGBTQ2S, Indigenous) and the potential of managing crisis, caseloads in excess of 7 should be avoided.”

Kim Kakakaway – Indigenous Housing First for Youth Expert
Housing First 4 Youth

1. Currently homeless youth
2. Early Intervention: youth leaving care
3. ENDAAYAANG Supporting Indigenous youth
Adapting Housing First for Youth to better support Indigenous youth
Hamilton: Endaayaang

Target:
- Indigenous-identifying youth, aged 16-24
- Exiting systems (care, justice, hospital, etc.)

Goals:
- Indigenous-led
- Infusing the program model with culture
- Drawing from the Medicine Wheel, Circle of Courage, and Seven Grandfather Teachings
Adapting HF4Y for Indigenous Youth

Indigenous issues cross cut all themes and aspects of the project due to the social context homelessness; all MTS partnerships strive to build relationships with Indigenous communities at multiple levels.
“So many of our Indigenous young people have been impacted by various systems creating self doubt, low self esteem, insecurity, and a sense of worthlessness. Making the Shift has enabled us to focus on these areas to create a sense of community, an understanding of Indigenous Culture and identity and empowerment to know and feel they are not what the systems have dictated them to be”.

Sheryl Green, Indigenous Youth in Transition Worker, Hamilton Indian Resource Centre
The importance of cultural reconnection:

• Learning about culture including cultural practices - smudging, gift blanket
• Places to feel safe and practice culture
• Engagement with elders
• Indigenous ways of knowing – Medicine wheel, Circle of Courage, 7 Grandfather teachings
• Brought into ceremony
• Healing

“Endaayaang is infused with culture from day one. Making the Shift has been very supportive in the development from grounding the project in ceremony to how the research will be captured in order to reflect a true Indigenous view.”

Sheryl Green, Indigenous Youth in Transition Worker,
Hamilton Indian Resource Centre
Community & Practical Cultural Components

Relationship Building – authenticity, it’s okay to share pieces of your story, community events

Wrap around supports - FNS, Elders, Service Providers

Humor/Laughter is healing

Be a learner/student to your young person - ask questions

Different language instead of “client” – Guest, Relative, Friend, Path-walker

Cultural Connections to consider:
- Ceremony Opportunities
- Land based Healing
- First set of keys for their house. Keychains – beaded, Metis sash
- Gatherings with the families at holidays
- Teaching young people how to make frybread
- Smudge kits available
- Blanket gift at graduation

From: Kim Kakakaway, A Way Home Canada
Indigenous Innovation

Combining:

• Medicine Wheel
• Circle of Courage
• 7 Grandfather Teachings
  - with -
• 5 core principles of HF4Y

VIDEO
Any Questions?