



An initiative of the Mental Health Commission of Canada

## Research Demonstration Project in Mental Health and Homelessness: Toronto Site

### Quick Facts:

- On any given night in Toronto, about 5,000 people are homeless.<sup>(1)</sup>
- Homeless people are extremely vulnerable to serious physical and mental health problems.<sup>(2)</sup>
- Between 1/4 and 1/3 of homeless people have a serious mental illness like schizophrenia, major depressive disorder, or bipolar affective disorder.<sup>(3,4)</sup>
- 1 out of every 3 homeless individuals in Toronto is an immigrant. 10% of homeless people in Toronto are recent immigrants, meaning they have lived in Canada for less than 10 years.<sup>(5)</sup>
- In Toronto, it can take up to 10 years for a 1 bedroom subsidized apartment to become available in social housing: there are over 135,000 people on the waiting list.<sup>(6)</sup>

References on back page. For more information on homelessness, housing, and health in Canada, go to [www.crich.ca](http://www.crich.ca).

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April 2010 Update

Hello and welcome to the second issue of the *At Home/Chez Soi* Toronto Site Update!

I'm part of the Toronto Persons with Lived Experience (PWLE) Consumer Caucus and the Site Operations Team. My work on this project has been fruitful, and I am a consumer survivor.

We started the Caucus in June 2009, to provide a voice for PWLE in *At Home/Chez Soi*. Our goal is to ensure consumers have meaningful roles in all aspects of the project, including governance, services, research, and communications. One of our goals is to help identify peer workers for services and research. We also speak out and advocate for PWLE. Recently we gave talks at the *At Home/Chez Soi* Launch, the Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association, and the "Into the Light" conference in Vancouver.

For all of the people being housed, to have a safe secure place to live for the first time can be the best.

All the best in the greatest time of your lives!

Heather C.

### What is *At Home/Chez Soi*?

*At Home/Chez Soi* is a national research project to find the best way to provide housing and services to people who face mental illness and homelessness. A total of 2,285 people will participate across Canada, in Vancouver, Winnipeg, Toronto, Montreal, and Moncton.

- About half of participants will be provided with an apartment plus specialized support services, following the "Housing First" philosophy (see page 3 for definition). About half will use existing services available in their cities.
- The study will generate evidence about client outcomes. It will also ask whether it costs less to provide marginalized people with real housing and services, compared to having people stay in hospitals, prisons, and shelters.
- *At Home/Chez Soi* has funding to provide services for 4 years.

### The Toronto Site

In Toronto, 560 individuals will participate, and about half (300 participants) will receive apartments and specialized support services. 60 people have already been enrolled, and 500 spaces are still available. We aim to enroll about 35 more people every month until March 2011.

The Toronto team includes:

- Across Boundaries: [www.acrossboundaries.ca](http://www.acrossboundaries.ca)
- Centre for Research on Inner City Health, St Michael's Hospital: [www.crich.ca](http://www.crich.ca)
- City of Toronto: [www.toronto.ca/housing](http://www.toronto.ca/housing)
- COTA Health: [www.cotahealth.ca](http://www.cotahealth.ca)
- Toronto North Support Services: [www.tnss.ca](http://www.tnss.ca)

To learn more about *At Home/Chez Soi*, please go to: [www.mentalhealthcommission.ca](http://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca)



## Perspectives From Participants

Some of our *At Home/chez Soi* clients have offered to share their experiences with you:

### Definitions:

#### Housing First

- A recovery model for people who are experiencing homelessness and mental health problems.
- Provides good, quality housing as the first step to recovery.
- Guided by two important beliefs: housing is a basic right for all people, and people should make their own decisions about their lives.

#### Assertive Community Treatment (ACT)

- A recovery-focused treatment approach for people with serious and persistent mental illness, and **high needs for support**.
- **Multidisciplinary teams** of service providers (comprised of social work, peer support, counseling, nursing, and psychiatry) provide support.
- Outreach model (service providers visit clients).

#### Intensive Case Management (ICM)

- A recovery-focused treatment approach for people with serious and persistent mental illness, and **moderate support needs**.
- **Individual case managers** provide or coordinate support.
- Outreach model (service providers visit clients).

**After George (not his real name) had a workplace injury, he ended up facing serious health problems, addiction, and homelessness.** For nearly 20 years, he's been living in shelters and on the street. The *At Home/chez Soi* ACT Team helped George find an apartment, and connected him with the right support services. Before *At Home/chez Soi*, he had a hard time getting health care. Now he's got an OHIP card and he's visiting a family doctor through the Inner City Health clinic at our Church Street site. He's even getting a scooter to help him with mobility problems, and has started addressing his addiction. Last time we visited George, he was cooking meatloaf and reading the newspaper in his new place. A really important development he wanted to share is that he's recently reconnected with his family, after many years apart. "My favourite song is *Turning the Page*," George told us, "and now I feel like I am turning the page."

**Brandon (not his real name) had been homeless ever since getting out of prison.** When he was referred to the *At Home/chez Soi* ICM team he was excited to move into his new home - it was the second apartment he looked at. As they stood in the living room for the first time, Brandon said "this is a golden moment." He then disappeared for a few days, which worried his support worker. When his worker caught up with him again, Brandon proudly displayed what he'd been busy with - buying dishes and setting up a TV for his new home.

**Michelle (not her real name) was our very first At Home/chez Soi client.** She got her apartment and connected with ACT support workers in November 2009. Before that, she had lived rough for 20 years and struggled with substance use for nearly 30 years. At first, living in the apartment alone was tough for Michelle, because she wasn't used to being indoors, and she felt isolated. For the first few weeks, she went back to the street, but her apartment was still there for her when she decided to come back. Now she's living in her own place full-time, and she decided to quit alcohol, even though that's not a requirement for *At Home/chez Soi*. The main requirement is that clients should be allowed to make their own decisions, and that's what Michelle is doing. These days, she's taking great care of her apartment, and she's reading everything she can about the philosophy of "Housing First". "This program is revolutionary," she says. "It's avant-garde."

**Hans (not his real name) asked his worker on the ICM team to take his photo before he moved into his new apartment last month.** He wanted a "before and after" shot. Then he went to get a haircut. "It's time I didn't look homeless anymore!" he said. He has since obtained all his ID, opened a bank account, set himself up with a cell phone, and is looking into going back to school and working again.

### Is This Program For You?

*At Home/chez Soi* is for adults over the age of 18, who live in Toronto, have a significant mental health issue, and are currently homeless. About half of the people enrolled in *At Home/chez Soi* will receive the study services and the other half will continue to use services that are available from other Toronto programs. Everybody will participate in research interviews, so that together we can identify what kinds of services are most helpful. Referrals to the study must be made through a health or social service provider. If you think you are a good fit for *At Home/chez Soi*, or know someone who is, then talk to a social worker or health care provider about getting a referral.

**To make a referral, contact Vivian at (416) 864-6060 x3394.**

## Project Updates

### The Research:

After enrollment, participants are interviewed every 3 months for a period of 2 years. Our research will look at participants' physical health, mental health, social well-being, housing stability, life stories, and life goals. We will also look at program costs. The research results will be shared widely with the community, to build a better foundation for addressing homelessness and mental illness.

### Housing:

Our main focus over the past few months has been working with landlords to identify suitable apartments for clients in Toronto, Scarborough, and Etobicoke. In keeping with the "Housing First" philosophy of client choice, clients can choose the location of their apartment, based on availability. However, we're finding that in high-demand areas like downtown and Parkdale, affordable, available units are scarce. To prevent delays, we've widened the search to include bachelor units that meet our strict criteria for quality.

All participants are now covered by the Social Housing Services Corporation's tenant insurance program. A new emergency furniture policy is helping ensure that participants can move in quickly and easily. We've also developed a service for *At Home/chez Soi* staff to give them easy access to information on available rental units, tips and resources, and all forms needed for the process.

### Services:

We provide different services, depending on clients' mental health and social support needs. Right now, our Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) and Intensive Case Management (ICM) services are focused on helping new clients choose their apartments, and adjust to a new living situation. We're also asking our clients what kind of support groups they would find most helpful and interesting. We've collected some great ideas, and are looking forward to putting them into practice in the months ahead.

### Anti-Oppression:

1 out of every 3 homeless individuals in Toronto is an immigrant. 10% of homeless people in Toronto are recent immigrants, meaning they have lived in Canada for less than 10 years. Racism, discrimination, and stigma are barriers that make their health and economic problems even worse. *At Home/chez Soi* participants from racialized communities are offered services from an anti-racism/anti-oppression framework. This program emphasizes social inclusion, individual strengths, recovery, and the validation of experiences of racism, discrimination, and other forms of oppression.

Right now we are at the early stage of helping clients settle into their apartments and carry out daily tasks. We're also providing support around goal-setting and empowerment. For example, some of our clients are very keen to begin vocational training, so we're helping them with that process. Clients are also telling us what kinds of holistic programs and initiatives they'd like to participate in, like dinners in our community kitchen, and evening ESL classes. In response to these and other requests, we are looking at establishing new partnerships in the community - such as teaming up with the Toronto District School Board to offer advanced ESL.

### Coming Soon... New programs for *At Home/chez Soi* clients:

- Peer Worker certification
- Social recreation group
- "Talking Circle", based on Aboriginal healing principles, but open to all clients (both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal)
- Aboriginal crafts/arts group
- Vocational preparation
- Classes in drumming and creative expression
- Outings in the community

## References:

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3. Fischer P, Breakey W. The epidemiology of alcohol, drug and mental disorders among homeless persons. American Psychologist. 1991;46:1115-1128.
4. Koegel P, Burnam M, Farr R. The prevalence of specific psychiatric disorders among homeless individuals in the inner city of Los Angeles. Archives of General Psychiatry. 1988;45:1085-1092.
5. Chiu S, Redelmeier DA, Tolomiczenko G, Kiss A, Hwang SW. The health of homeless immigrants. J Epidemiol Community Health. 2009 Nov;63(11):943-8. Epub 2009 Aug 3.
6. Centralized Waiting List, Housing Connections. Shelter, Support and Housing Administration (SSHA) Division, City of Toronto



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