



# Homeward Trust Edmonton

## Edmonton, Alberta

PROGRAM TYPE: Housing First

As the first province in Canada to develop a ten year plan to end homelessness, Alberta is beginning to see a decline in the number of homeless people. Edmonton's 10th Homeless Count saw continued decrease in the homeless population, building on the 9th Count, which reversed a decade of increases in the homeless population. From 1999 to 2008, the Count had shown a steady increase; 2010 was the first to see a decrease since the Count began.

Conducted on October 16, 2012, the 10th Homeless Count found 2,174 Edmontonians experiencing homelessness. This is a decrease from 2,421 found in 2010, and the lowest number since 2002 when 1,915 individuals were counted. Overall, it is a 30 percent decrease since 2008, which was the last count conducted before the implementation of the 10 year plans (Homeward Trust, 2012). However, many people remain at-risk and are still struggling to overcome poverty. Approximately 47,000 households are living in precarious situations – either paying too much for housing relative to their incomes or living in housing that requires significant repairs or is not suitable for their needs (Community Plan Committee, 2011).

While the community celebrates the decrease in homelessness, the push is on to continue to prevent and get people out of homelessness permanently. Both the provincial government's plan - A Plan for Alberta: Ending Homelessness in 10 Years (The Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness, 2008) - and the Edmonton community's 10 year plan - A Place to Call Home (Edmonton Committee to End Homelessness, 2009) - have the goal of ending homelessness by 2019.

Alberta's plan changes the way homelessness is addressed in order to end - rather than continue to simply manage - homelessness. First and foremost, in order to keep people off the streets and out of emergency shelters, homeless people need housing. The community has therefore embraced the housing first approach to ending homelessness. This means getting people into housing as quickly as possible. The plan also recognizes that housing someone is not enough, and that people also need support to address the challenges that led them to homelessness, in order to avoid a return. The plan calls for long-term solutions rather than maintaining the status quo.

### KEY MESSAGES

- HOUSING: THE KEY INGREDIENT
- WRAP-AROUND SUPPORT
- ABORIGINAL FOCUS



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edmonton

opening doors. building hope.

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The 10 Year Plan also lays out the potential cost savings of addressing homelessness. Moving 11,000 people province-wide out of homelessness would cost \$3.316 billion; managing those same people in their current state would cost \$6.65 billion. Therefore, ending homelessness would result in approximately \$3.3 billion in reduced costs to taxpayers over 10 years (The Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness, 2008).

## Aboriginal Homelessness in Edmonton

Alberta's capital city, Edmonton, is relatively culturally diverse. The city has the second largest urban Aboriginal population in Canada, with 5% of its citizens being First Nations, Métis, Inuit or non-status Aboriginal peoples (Statistics Canada, 2006); some estimates have projected that it will pass Winnipeg to become the largest in Canada in the coming years. The City adopted an Urban Aboriginal Accord in 2006 (City of Edmonton Aboriginal Relations Office, 2006). While the city is committed to honouring Aboriginal traditions, Aboriginal people continue to struggle with poverty and are over-represented in the homeless population. The 2012 Homeless Count identified that 46% of the overall population of homeless people in Edmonton is Aboriginal (Homeward Trust, 2012).

The attempts to rid Indigenous peoples of Canada of their land and culture are well known. In particular, the Residential Schools system and '60s Scoop saw children separated from their families, punished for practicing or taking part in cultural traditions, and many suffered physical, sexual and emotional abuse at the hands of school staff. Despite this knowledge, these aspects are often ignored in the way that social services are delivered to Aboriginal people.

Edmonton's 10 Year Plan acknowledges the need to build further capacity amongst Aboriginal service providers in order to meet the needs of this population. This would enhance the sector's overall capacity to deliver culturally-appropriate services. Creating a space for Aboriginal agencies, Aboriginal service providers, as well as providing safe, culturally-sound supports for individuals were important next steps.

## PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Homeward Trust provides a range of services to the community including housing development, housing first and support services, and research and community planning.

### Housing Development

Homeward Trust funds and coordinates the development of new housing units for individuals and families who are homeless, at risk of homelessness, or in need. In addition to the construction of new housing units, Homeward Trust works hard to access market housing units for clients. They work with landlords and property management companies to secure rental units for participants in the housing first program. When required, Homeward Trust operates and manages properties in need of improvement and support.

### Housing First and Support Services

#### Housing First

Homeward Trust embraces the principle of housing first—that every person has the right to a safe, secure home. This principle is at the core of both the Government of Alberta and City of Edmonton's 10 year plans to end homelessness. Homeward Trust officially began the Housing First Support Program on April 1, 2009. It is intended that participants be a part of the Housing First Support Program for 12 months and then be transitioned to a reduced level of support. The final stages of the program involve preparing the client for independent living by increasing their self-sufficiency. The program is presently delivered through nine community agencies across Edmonton.

#### Training and Support for Housing First Teams

Homeward Trust is committed to helping its partners and funded agencies succeed. An essential component for success is training and education for Housing First workers. Regular sessions cover topics such as the core concepts of housing first, Aboriginal culture, and motivational interviewing.

#### Rental Assistance Program

With support from the Government of Alberta, Ministry of Human Services, Homeward Trust coordinates a rental assistance program for Housing First clients in need. While clients pay the majority of their costs, many need assistance for a period of time while they transition to independence and thus receive partial funding towards their rent. Clients are currently living in more than 800 supported units across Edmonton and the Capital region.

### **Find: A Furniture Store**

To better support clients when they move into housing, Homeward Trust operates a furniture market. Relying primarily on donations from citizens and corporations, Find provides essential furnishings free of charge to clients. By eliminating start-up costs, the financial stress that would otherwise accompany the move is reduced. In 2011 Find became a social enterprise. It continues to serve clients, but also sells furniture to the public, re-investing the proceeds into housing and support programs.

## **Research**

### **Efforts to Outcomes (ETO)**

Edmonton's 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness calls for Homeward Trust to serve as the central resource to collect data from its funded organizations in order to provide real-time community-level data, with documented service outcomes to public and private service providers and policy makers. Efforts to Outcomes (ETO) is a case management and data collection system that tracks client progress and information, enabling Homeward Trust and its partners to better meet the needs of clients in the Housing First Support Program and to report to Human Services, Government of Alberta, on the progress being made locally to end homelessness. In addition to reporting, ETO provides Homeward Trust with a better understanding of client demographics, needs and how they can be better served.

ETO is one of many data management systems available. The program was chosen by a Data Committee, made up of approximately 12 organizations. The Committee reviewed and tested several systems before deciding on ETO.

Homeward Trust coordinates community initiatives such as the bi-annual Homeless Count, which provides a snapshot of the population experiencing homelessness; and the Winter Emergency Response, which provides extended services and access to drop-in centres for people in need.

## **Aboriginal Focus**

Through its governance structure, Homeward Trust works closely with Aboriginal communities and stakeholders, including Aboriginal groups within government, as well as community based organizations that work with Edmonton's Aboriginal community. Four of the nine directors on Homeward Trust's Board of Directors are chosen from within the Aboriginal community by Aboriginal stakeholders. These four directors are recommended through an Aboriginal

Nominating Committee. The Committee is comprised of a member of the Homeward Trust Board, one appointee each from the Métis Nation of Alberta, Treaty 6 First Nations of Alberta, Treaty 8 First Nations of Alberta, and the Canadian Native Friendship Centre. The work of Homeward Trust is also informed by an Aboriginal Advisory Council, comprised of community leaders. The Council advises Homeward Trust on matters relating to Aboriginal issues and projects by:

- Encouraging innovative solutions to promote the building of Aboriginal organizations, groups, and communities in Edmonton;
- Providing awareness of the Urban Aboriginal experiences, knowledge, and cultural perspectives;
- Ensuring Aboriginal-focused projects are led by or supported by organizations that have a proven track record of serving Urban Aboriginal people in a productive and successful manner.

The Aboriginal Advisory Council reviews and provides input into capital and support program applications for funding that are focused on serving Aboriginal peoples. The Council also assists in monitoring and evaluating changes in need, and serves as a 'sounding board' for projects in the development stage. Additionally, Homeward Trust staff, housing workers, and funded agencies participate in an Aboriginal Diversity Training workshop to enhance their understanding of Aboriginal culture. This training supports the delivery of housing support services that are culturally sensitive and appropriate.

In 2010, Homeward Trust engaged Blue Quills First Nations College to conduct a study of Aboriginal clients' experiences with the housing first program in order to assess its success. The report, entitled *Perspectives on the Housing First Program with Indigenous Participants* is a qualitative look at the successes and challenges Aboriginal people face in accessing Housing First and what impact being housed has had on their lives. The study included 25 Indigenous Housing First participants and included those with varying degrees and lengths of homelessness. One immediate development resulting from this project was the creation of an Aboriginal-specific Housing First team. Operated by the Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society, this team has been active since March 2012.

# EVIDENCE OF EFFECTIVENESS



Homeward Trust uses the Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool (SPDAT), a 15 point web-based assessment for acuity and point-in-time experiences of clients. The tool is used to anticipate level of service need for each client and to collect data on client outcomes.) SPDAT is integrated into ETO, the data management system, so all services using ETO are using the same tool. The data presented here are drawn from Homeward Trust's Annual Community Service Delivery Data and Financial Report (Homeward Trust Edmonton, 2012).

## Housing Development

Since 2001, Homeward Trust has:

- Funded the creation of more than 1,900 new units.
- Provided \$82 million in funding to 84 housing developments. The total value of these developments is \$215 million: a 2.5:1 return in additional investment from other funders, orders of government, and community partners.
- Helped clients access more than 1,237 supported units in the marketplace.

## Housing First

Since 2009:

- More than 1,750 people have found housing through the Housing First Support Program.
- Clients are living in more than 800 supported units across Edmonton and the Capital Region.
- Find has provided furniture, at no charge to clients, in more than 2,000 units.

## Housing Retention

- Of clients who have been housed since 2009, 79% have maintained housing.

# USER PERSPECTIVE



The following comments are from Aboriginal clients involved with Homeward Trust's Housing First program and who were involved in the research for the report on *Perspectives on the Housing First Program with Indigenous Participants*:

"I didn't want that life anymore...I knew I had to break the cycle some way or another. This program gave me a way to step away from it all. To take me away from downtown and not have to see those people who don't want to make the change."

"I never could have imagined that this was what they were talking about...when Housing First said they'd help me get an apartment and furniture. It's been incredible. It's nice, it's not a crack-shack or a dive. HF, they treat people equally. It doesn't matter if you've just come off the street, they'll help you. Their attitude doesn't change, they don't judge, 'cause a lot of people out there, they judge right away."

"Being able to grow roots somewhere, to stabilize yourself, so you can break the pattern, you can't do that without help. It's impossible to do that without help."

"I always dreamed I'd have my own place. So I could attend services and participate in volunteer activities. Now that I've got a place, things are starting to happen."

"I think the best part of the program is that it allows you to get stabilized in one place."

"I think this program offers a lot of stability and allows people to get comfortable where they're at and have a place to go while you look for employment and other resources."

"I know now I don't have to worry about being out on the streets again. I feel comfortable here. It's a sanctuary sort of thing being stable. You helped me get things done, like get my id together finally. Get those little things together. Those little things that are very important."

"I get support from my worker. She's not judgmental. She listens, she helps."

"It's been a wonderful program. I don't know where I'd be without it to be honest. It's overwhelming a little bit because well I have a very nice home now and I'm very happy, and none of this would have been possible without HF. I would recommend this program to anybody."

# RESOURCES & ORGANIZATIONAL MODEL



## Staffing

Homeward Trust employs more than 35 staff in its main office, with an additional 15 at Find: Furnishing Hope. A senior management team reports to the Chief Executive Officer, and is responsible for implementing programs and initiatives and ensuring their success.

## Board of Directors and Sub-Committees

The aforementioned Board of Directors operates through a governance board model, making funding decisions and setting strategic direction. Its four sub-committees are responsible for bringing forward recommendations to the Board.

- Audit and Finance Committee, which recommends a budget, audited financial statements, and financial policy and procedure for approval.
- Governance Committee, which recommends changes to bylaws, policies, and the Board nomination and recruitment process.
- Government Relations Committee, which reviews government and stakeholder relations strategy.
- Human Resources Committee, which oversees the recruitment, hiring, and performance of a Chief Executive Officer.

## Indentured Committees

Three committees which inform the work of the Board are identified in the organization's Indenture of Trust.

- The Project Review Committee, comprised of the three orders of government and business and philanthropic communities, serves as an impartial group of stakeholders and partners that provides advice to administration as required and makes recommendations regarding applications for funding.

- The Aboriginal Advisory Council acts as an advisor to Homeward Trust Edmonton on matters relating to Aboriginal issues and projects by providing awareness of the urban Aboriginal experience, knowledge and cultural perspective, and ensuring Aboriginal focused projects benefit predominantly, disadvantaged urban Aboriginal people. The Council is comprised of leaders in the Aboriginal community.
- The Community Plan Committee is responsible for recommending, for Board approval, a Community Plan, developed based on planning, research, community consultation, and other means it determines appropriate. In addition, it monitors progress, and sets priorities for implementation, throughout the duration of the plan. More than 20 stakeholder groups participate on the Committee.

## Non-Indentured Committees

Several non-indentured committees serve to advise Homeward Trust administration, and to aid in the planning and implementation of programs and initiatives.

The Homeless Connect Steering Committee, comprised of more than 15 stakeholders and partner organizations, plans and coordinates the semi-annual event, which provides more than 70 services to people experiencing homelessness or at-risk for free.

The Homeless Count committee organizes the biennial event, ensuring that appropriate agencies and stakeholders are engaged, and that the street count component captures all the areas where people may be counted.

The Housing First Advisory Council is comprised of Executive Directors and Senior Managers of the agencies delivering the program. It discusses challenges, opportunities, and reviews progress.

The Youth Services Committee provides advice and expertise on Homeward Trust's initiatives targeting youth who are at-risk or experiencing homelessness.

## Funding

Homeward Trust receives its funding from the three orders of government, and the private and not-for-profit sectors. The Government of Canada, through the National Homelessness Initiative (NHI) then the Homeless Partnering Strategy (HPS), has contributed over \$79 million to Homeward Trust – and previously the Edmonton Housing Trust Fund – since 2001. The City of Edmonton has contributed over \$26 million in funding during that time. The Government of Alberta has provided over \$43 million as part of the 10 Year Plan implementation since 2009. HTE staff also work to secure a significant amount of money from philanthropic, corporate and public donations to fund all the activities outlined in the Community Plan.

## Key Partnerships

Alberta is one of the leading provinces when it comes to integrating services across the homeless sector in order to adequately meet homeless people's complex needs. Some communities are a part of what is referred to as a 'system of care', whereby homeless-serving organizations work together, using a common intake, referral and data collection system. As such, HTE is connected to a variety of services. Some of the key partners in the HTE system are:

### **Edmonton Coalition on Housing and Homelessness (ECOHH)**

ECOHH raises awareness and advocates on housing and homelessness issues in Edmonton, through events such as the annual HomeFest concert, and the Homeless Memorial.

### **Wichitowin**

Wichitowin is a voice for urban Aboriginal peoples, and works with Homeward Trust on issues that affect housing and homelessness in the Aboriginal community.

### **Reach Edmonton**

Reach focuses on prevention issues, and works in collaboration with Homeward Trust to help the most vulnerable citizens. For example, the two organizations co-fund a Crisis Diversion Service Team, which provides 24/7 response to help people in need.

### **Seven Cities of Alberta**

The Seven Cities of Alberta is a collective of Community-Based Organizations (CBO) in each of the cities working to end homelessness across the province. It is a forum for sharing ideas, working with government, and building capacity in each community.

### **Edmonton Homeless Commission**

The Commission is tasked with championing Edmonton's 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness and monitoring its progress. As the organization tasked with implementing the Plan, Homeward Trust works with the Commission to advance matters related to the Plan's success.

# KEY MESSAGES

## HOUSING: THE KEY INGREDIENT

Housing is the key to breaking the cycle of homelessness. When people have a home, they feel safe and secure and are better able to address the other problems that are keeping them homeless. In Alberta however, higher construction and land costs, gentrification and condominium conversions, among other factors, have led to a lack of affordable housing. The high demand for rental accommodation makes it hard for those leaving emergency shelters to find accommodation. By providing housing, HTE is fulfilling one of the key mandates of Edmonton's plan to end homelessness – helping to ensure an adequate supply of permanent, affordable housing with appropriate supports for people who are homeless.

## WRAP-AROUND SUPPORT

Each homeless individual or family has a unique set of circumstances that contribute to their homelessness, and requires a unique set of supports and guidance to overcome the challenges they face. Homeward Trust provides the basics: housing, furniture, and financial support, and then provides essential social support that focuses on life skills, connecting with the community, accessing training and employment opportunities, dealing with any outstanding health or criminal justice issues, help with family reconnections, money management and psychiatric or substance abuse treatment.

Once they leave the Housing First program, clients can receive support for up to 18 months. The level of support will vary. Some individuals and families may need only a little support to help with their new housing situation. Some may require modest levels of support from time to time. Others will need robust, ongoing support in order to remain stable in their housing and avoid a return to homelessness.

## ABORIGINAL FOCUS

The homeless population is not a homogenous group – there are several sub-groups that require a targeted response. The response required to effectively serve Aboriginal peoples experiencing homelessness requires a culturally-appropriate model that differs from that required to effectively serve other populations. A key part of this is engaging Aboriginal communities and service providers, and raising awareness of Aboriginal cultures and history amongst all agencies and stakeholders serving Aboriginal clients.

In addition to incorporating an Aboriginal Advisory Council into its leadership, Homeward Trust provides a range of services not only for Aboriginal people, but also for those working with Aboriginal people. HTE provides workshops, including Aboriginal Diversity Training, where a community elder gives a cultural lesson, introduces cultural artifacts, talks about protocols, what to expect and what you might experience in serving some community members.

Existing models of housing support services that combine intervention with the provision of safe, affordable, and appropriate housing often do not adequately deal with core needs associated with the negative consequences of colonization, including the intergenerational trauma from Residential Schools, the 60s Scoop, and other hallmarks of systemic marginalization and oppression of Aboriginal peoples in Canada.

The housing first model, due to its client-centered and harm reduction approaches, is evolving towards the adoption of a decolonization process in the way it is delivered. HTE provides training on indigenous culture, history, colonization and decolonization to staff in funded agencies and throughout the sector.

# CONCLUSION

Generally speaking, the causes and experiences of homelessness are different for youth than for adults, for women than for men, and for racialized groups than non-racialized groups. In Canada, one subgroup of the population that struggles significantly with homelessness is Aboriginal people, who have experienced significant historical, social and political events that have contributed to the increased prevalence of poverty and homelessness among the Indigenous community.

Homeless-serving organizations must promote and support the healing of Aboriginal people in order to address their other needs related to homelessness. The approach to ending homelessness must also acknowledge and honour the unique history of Indigenous peoples in Canada. Having staff, Board members, and stakeholders who identify as Aboriginal is a key component. The approach must also be in collaboration with other inclusive services that are effectively addressing the needs of Aboriginal people.

HTE's focus on building on the strengths of the Aboriginal community will support the organization in its efforts to be a positive force in the plan to end homelessness in Alberta. Other communities across Canada should adapt this positive and proactive approach that celebrates Aboriginal culture and in turn addresses Aboriginal homelessness.

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