



Calgary
Homeless
Foundation

Sustainable Supports for Adult Males: Effective Employment Models to End Homelessness

Research Report of Findings and Recommendations

Prepared by the
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Calgary Inter-Agency Council on Homelessness**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|----|
| Introduction..... | 1 |
| Background | 2 |
| Methods | 3 |
| Findings | 4 |
| Barriers to Obtaining Employment..... | 4 |
| Barriers to Maintaining Employment..... | 5 |
| Employment and Training Goals | 6 |
| Facilitators and Obstacles for Employment: Perspectives from Service Providers..... | 7 |
| Perspectives from Employers | 7 |
| Discussion and Recommendations..... | 9 |
| References..... | 12 |

INTRODUCTION

Homelessness poses considerable pragmatic obstacles to attaining and maintaining employment that can positively affect housing status. Barriers to obtaining employment largely stem from a wide range of factors that include the reality of not having contact information to provide to prospective employers; the absence of legal identification and financial bank accounts; discriminatory hiring practices which preclude individuals experiencing homelessness, who have a disability or substance abuse disorder; as well as restricted employment opportunities available due to limited vocational and life skills training, limited access to transportation and work equipment/tools (RRISH, 2010; Zuvekas & Hill, 2000). Limited education offers another obstacle to procuring and maintaining employment. In Calgary, for example, one shelter reported that for men ages 35 to 46, only 37% completed some high school, 32% finished high school, 10% had some post-secondary education and nine per cent completed post-secondary education. Similarly, another shelter reported that for men ages 25 to 64, 28% completed some high school, 26% finished high school, 12% had some post-secondary education, and only nine per cent finished post-secondary schooling. Thus the substantial barriers to accessing one of the most promising measures to end their homelessness – employment, self-sufficiency and income – indicates a serious gap in present strategies to end homelessness.

A body of literature is emerging that correlates employment, housing stability and recovery (Long, Rio, & Rosen, 2007). Supportive Employment (SE) has emerged as an evidence-based best practice for engaging chronically homeless and high acuity individuals into competitive employment through vocational training and individual support (Long et al., 2007). Strategies for long-term stability are key factors to consider in ending homelessness. Particularly, sustainable and adequate income in conjunction with appropriate, affordable housing and support where needed, are key factors in ensuring stability over time for those able to work.

The current project proposes to articulate a best practice framework for the development of an SE program in Calgary. In collaboration with members of the Calgary Action Committee on Housing and Homelessness' Interagency Sector, this research sought to uncover the needs of working-aged homeless men and understand the barriers experienced to obtaining and maintaining employment within the context of Calgary; a key player in the national and international economy. Key informants were interviewed from homeless-serving and private business sectors in order to better understand employment needs and barriers. In order to develop this framework, the following questions were investigated:

1. What are the most effective employment models for homeless¹ men with multiple barriers?²
2. For those who are not able to sustain employment due to chronic physical or mental health conditions, what interventions are most effective in assisting them to sustain stable housing?

¹ For the practical purposes of this study, 'homeless' is defined as those currently using emergency shelters and/or transitional housing as their primary sleeping location; that is, without permanent housing.

² For the practical purposes of this study 'multiple barriers' is defined as people experiencing a complexity of issues that may include serious mental health or addictions issues.

BACKGROUND

The intersection between homelessness and unemployment (or underemployment) is multifaceted and multidirectional. Individuals may fall into homelessness as a result of job loss, or conversely may lose their job due to difficulties experienced as a result of the onset of homelessness. Further, substantial systematic, programmatic and personal barriers exist for people experiencing homelessness to re-enter the job market. Over the last three decades important economic and social policy shifts have occurred resulting in astronomical growth of working-aged adults among the homeless and those at risk of homelessness. Macro level changes that have negatively impacted labour participation among low-income and marginalized populations include: increasing trends of the globalization of capitalism; growth of temporary labour; altered tax policies; the growth of non-regulated service sector largely comprised of part-time and precarious labour; processes of deindustrialization; and institutionalized racism and sexism putting particular populations such as Aboriginal people and women at risk of unemployment and a life of poverty (Benzies, Rutherford, Walsh, Nelson, & Rook, 2008; Lyon-Callo, 2004; Morrell-Bellai, Goering & Boydell, 2000; Rows and Wolch, 1990). The radical transition towards reducing government deficits was accompanied by substantial reductions to federal social assistance including the abdication of Canada's federal social housing program, which left a growing number of people without means to reliable, stable employment that provided a living wage and who were unable to secure affordable housing. The City of Calgary (2012) advocates that for an individual earning minimum wage to afford a one bedroom apartment in Calgary (i.e. one that does not put an individual into core housing need by spending more than 30% of their income on shelter), the minimum wage must be \$17.31. Currently in Calgary, minimum wage is \$9.75.

A continual decline in affordable rental stock across Canada, and particularly in Calgary (Federation of Canadian Municipalities, 2012) has led to a growing subset of the homeless population who are working and still unable to secure safe, affordable housing. While Canadian literature on the relationships between homelessness and employment is scarce, there is evidence disclosing the complexities of securing and maintaining employment without permanent housing. For the working homeless, attaining affordable housing in a tight and highly competitive rental market is exacerbated by the circumstances characterized by one's condition of homelessness (RRIHS, 2010; Radey & Wilkins, 2011). Research indicates the everyday living conditions of street life, including stressors associated with struggles over daily survival, can negatively contribute to mental health concerns, severity of substance use, criminal activity, and chronic health conditions including disabilities and impairments (RRIHS, 2010; Radey & Wilkins, 2011). Not only are these factors made worse by the onset of homelessness, but a great number of people come onto the streets with pre-existing conditions including chronic health problems and substance use, which can affect their ability to obtain and maintain employment. Canadian research on the health of the homeless indicates that the homeless are at increased risk of tuberculosis due to alcoholism, poor nutrition and AIDS, and suffer from chronic conditions including seizures, affective disorders and obstructive pulmonary disease (Frankish, Hwang, & Quantz, 2005). Adult homeless men are not only at increased risk of premature death, but exhibit health disabilities that are seen in their domiciled counterparts who are decades older (Frankish et al., 2005). Health challenges are intensified as people who are homeless often face challenges obtaining prescription medications, accessing health services and adhering to medical recommendations including rest or dietary needs, which all can affect their ability to maintain employment (Frankish et al., 2005).

The barriers faced by people experiencing homelessness are substantial. There is now significant research demonstrating the role of permanent housing in aiding people who are homeless to overcome a number of the challenges associated with homelessness. The Housing First (HF) model has produced

ample evidence demonstrating how housing and support services increase quality of life through improved health conditions, reduction of substance use, and increased social reintegration, social support and income (Atherton & Nicholls, 2008; Padgett, Gulcur & Tsemberis, 2006; Stefancic & Tsemberis, 2007; Tsemberis, Gulcur, & Nakae, 2004). Recently, SE has emerged as an evidence-based model for promoting recovery and self-sufficiency through vocational training (RRIHS, 2010). Similarly to the HF program, which sought to dispel assumptions that clients had to be “housing ready,” SE challenges traditional vocational programs who assumed some clients were not ready for employment (Cambell, Bond, & Drake, 2009). SE improves quality of life and reduces the symptoms and negative impact of depression, psychosis, substance use, as well as increases positive social support, use of public services, employment and income (RRIHS, 2010). Other studies have found improved self-sufficiency and enhanced physical and mental health among samples of co-occurring disorders (Lam & Roseneck, 2000), as well as improvements in community reintegration as employment increases self-esteem and self-support (RRIHS, 2010).

The central tenants of SE promote: (a) competitive employment outcomes; (b) openness to anyone who wants to work; (c) rapid job search; (d) client preferences in services and job searches; (e) individualized and long-term supports; (f) collaboration between employment and treatment teams; and (g) personalized counselling and public benefit advocacy. A multi-year evaluative study conducted by Cambell et al. (2009) of an SE program utilizing principles of Individualized Placement and Support (IPS) found over half of all participants enrolled in ES had become steady workers, employed at least 50% of the time over the ten-year study period. An outcome study conducted by RRHIS (2010) found employment success rates of 40 to 60% and even higher rates (85%) for participants in permanent supportive housing (PSH), with 77% of participants still employed at the end of the program. LA’s HOPE SE program saw comparable results with 84% of 147 clients participating in employment related activities and 54% working full or part time in competitive employment (Urban Institute, 2007).

A number of case studies and evaluative reports have emerged providing robust data to demonstrate that people who are homeless, have extensive histories of homelessness and exhibit physical disabilities, mental illness or co-occurring substance use can achieve successful employment outcomes given appropriate training and support (Long et al., 2007). Supportive housing programs are increasingly recognizing the value and potential of SE programs in promoting financial self-sufficiency, improving self-esteem and reintegrating into communities. The social benefits of employment and vocational training are widespread; there are also substantial cost savings demonstrated in SE programs that can provide important insight to policy makers and program developers. Employment and training support services were piloted as part of the Next Steps programs in New York, Chicago and San Francisco between 1996 and 2000 where the programs offered basic and life skills training, General Educational Development (GED) and ESL classes, vocational training and onsite employment, as well as job development and placement services. The evaluation found substantial cost savings and positive return on investment concluding that the benefits of the program exceeded the costs of program delivery (Long et al., 2007).

Methods

A comprehensive review of existing research from Canada and internationally was conducted to identify effective alternative employment and housing models for homeless men over the age of 40. Interviews were conducted with 40 men currently experiencing homelessness, eight service providers and four employers. An advisory committee was also formed of key stakeholders in Calgary to oversee the project.

This research report presents findings from the interviews and offers recommendations towards the development of an effective evidence-based SE model for men experiencing homelessness.

Findings

Homelessness causes a wide range of barriers to attaining and maintaining secure employment. As will be discussed in the following sections, the homeless men, service providers and employers who took part in the present study provided support for these obstacles, while offering insight into which best practices should be included in a comprehensive SE model.

Barriers to Obtaining Employment

The central obstacle to employment for participants was simply not having a permanent address. Residing at an emergency shelter or living outdoors posed real challenges to accessing employment such as maintaining personal hygiene through limited access to showers and hygiene products; sustaining good health; having adequate nutrition and sleep; and most critically, having an address and telephone number for potential employers. Participants were in consensus that disclosing their homeless status would automatically disqualify them for a position. Furthermore, providing a shelter address on an employment application constituted a source of shame and embarrassment and hindered some to look for work while they were in the shelter. In addition to not having a permanent residence, participants also identified a number of challenges directly related to the experiences of being homeless including: absence of legal identification and accumulation of fines that prevented them from regaining their ID; not having a bank account; and the presence of a criminal record, some of which were the result of crimes of survival.

A lack of adequate access to transportation was another barrier to obtaining employment faced by one-third of participants. This barrier was twofold. First, interviewees indicated that certain locations were inconvenient to access using the city's transportation system, primarily outside of the city's downtown core. Additionally, if emergency shelters are located in an area of the city with limited transit access and operating hours, this makes shift work difficult to sustain. Second, participants reported a frequent inability to purchase transit passes, which further limited their employment opportunities, or compelled them to illegally access transit and risk acquiring a fine.

The availability of employment opportunities was also identified by participants as a challenge throughout the course of the interviews. The forms of work predominantly available to the homeless are insecure, low paid, precarious work through temporary work and physical labour. Temporary work was discussed in a number of interviews with participants, where they implied that engaging in temporary work was actually a barrier to finding more meaningful, permanent work. In addition, because temporary work provided daily cash compensation, participants felt it was difficult to save money for housing as their income was used on more immediate daily survival necessities. For some participants, daily cash was alluring to engage in substance use which negatively impacted their ability to maintain their employment. One participant's opinion was that temporary employees were desirable to employers because they did not have to commit to providing them with union, medical or dental benefits. Additionally, several interviewees stated that they felt it was easy to hire homeless employees in a temporary capacity, pay them lower than average wages and forego providing them benefits as the homeless are in a vulnerable and desperate position, with little support and advocacy to deter such behaviours. For example, one man stated that his need for easy, fast money and his lack of support from family and friends made him "easy to take advantage of."

Another participant described temporary work as a "trap," stating that the income earned is "gone daily." The lack of more permanent and meaningful employment opportunities had led some participants to alternative income generating activities including drug dealing, theft, sex trade and panhandling.

For the older men interviewed, their age posed as a prohibitive factor to employment, assuming that employers wished to hire younger men due to their increased physical ability to complete labour intensive tasks, as well as the increased likelihood that they would remain with the company for a longer period of time. Some of these interviewees expressed that they were unable to complete the physical tasks at hand and wished to obtain less physically demanding work. However, a lack of training or experience in alternative industries, and with few prospects for future training, left the men hopeless of attaining alternative employment. One participant described his experience as follows: "I only have experience with construction...my back is out now and I can't do it anymore...but all the jobs want experience and I don't have any...it is discouraging." Another participant described his experience looking for work as "disheartening," stating that people felt there were certain "homeless" jobs, which did not align with his employment goals. He expressed that he wished people would stop categorizing the homeless as "fit" for certain jobs and "unfit" for others.

Additional barriers identified included lack of vocational and life skills including level of computer literacy required to complete an online job application. Several men referred to their lack of computer skills as an obstacle to the job search process, especially when attempting to contact potential employers and submit resumes electronically. Those who did have basic computer literacy skills did not always have convenient access to a computer. One participant indicated that even when basic training and minimal access to computers are available; it was out of his comfort zone to use them for every step of the application process. He stated that, "Everyone is using gadgets to do everything nowadays. I liked it when things were personal. Like, you could go up to people and talk about the job and yourself. I always got jobs that way; I don't like how things are now."

Barriers to Maintaining Employment

A great deal of the barriers identified to obtaining employment persisted once employment was attained. Primary factors highlighted by participants included untreated substance use, high levels of stress, poor interpersonal skills and a lack of positive support. Two-thirds of the participants alluded to substance abuse and addiction as barriers to maintaining employment. For the large number of clients that struggled with drug use and addictions, the fact that the jobs they were most likely to procure were "hotspots" for the sale and use of drugs was especially challenging. This was inter-related to the issue of particular "homeless jobs" as articulated by one client, which referred to certain organizations that had a reputation within the homeless community for hiring individuals known to be homeless or with known addictions or mental health problems. Substance use was common in these environments, which presented a temptation to those struggling with addictions, especially when attempting to reduce or abstain from use. For instance, one participant said:

You've got a new job and you're pumped so when you get your paycheck you celebrate with a drink. Before you know it, you just fade away. I know it is my fault but sometimes I go out and get high or drunk because I feel great without even thinking about the consequences. Before I know it, I'm getting high or drunk because I feel like shit. I just feel hopeless and embarrassed. I know what people are saying about me, I used to say the same thing ...

Poor, conflict ridden relationships with employers was denoted as a catalyst for termination for almost one-third of participants. A lifestyle of high stress, poor anger management and problem solving skills was the prevailing reason this barrier was present. In some situations, fellow employees were also facing many of the struggles that homelessness presented. In these cases, empathy amongst coworkers was high. However, stress levels were also high, increasing the likelihood of conflict. Conversely, in environments where coworkers were not battling the stresses of homelessness, the fact that others did not understand the struggles participants were facing was an issue. One man stated: "When nobody understands you, it feels lonely. I know I have to have a job and make money but when I'm depressed, I just don't want to try." Another man stated: "In the beginning, it is easy to keep to yourself but after a while, you want to make friends and you don't know how to tell people you are homeless...they'll judge." In some cases, proper anger and stress management skills and support counselling were suggested to prevent conflict. As indicated by a young, newly homeless participant, having someone to debrief his daily stress with, at least some of the time, would help with his struggles:

"I just want to talk to someone who actually believes me when I say that it is hard to be homeless and be like 'yay' I just got a shit job somewhere just to keep a shit roof over my head...I'll do it, but sometimes I just want to get shit off my chest to someone who at least pretends to care."

Some participants referred to prior work related injuries as barriers to maintaining physically demanding jobs for a prolonged period; at times these prior injuries were exacerbated by the current labour tasks, a result of which was a more serious injury. Lack of adequate nutrition and hydration on the job site was also noted as a barrier to maintaining employment, discouraging men from returning to the job, especially when it was labour intensive. Finally, several participants alluded to certain work hours as obstacles to employment maintenance. Most stated that waking up at five o'clock in the morning in order to ensure that they would get to the 'cash corner' on time for a daily job was discouraging, especially given the inadequate sleep they got in shelter or a missed wakeup call from shelter staff. A small number of participants stated that late work hours posed a challenge to accessing accommodations as they had to return to their shelter by seven o'clock in the evening in order to obtain a bed for the night.

Employment and Training Goals

Many participants articulated their employment and training goals, with 40% expressing a desire to get out of construction and into a field with less labour intensive demands. Many of them indicated that rigorous manual labour caused them physical injury to begin with, and is the reason why they were not as physically capable as they would be otherwise. Most of the interviewees, who expressed a desire to exit manual labour, suggested they would be content working in any non-manual labour job, including truck driving, food services and fork lift operating. The primary factor in these cases was the physical demand of construction and other labour intensive work. Additionally, one third of the men aspired to find work that they felt would be more emotionally and intellectually fulfilling, including positions that would help either the elderly or youth in trouble. Finally, some men expressed a desire to get out of what they felt were considered "homeless jobs" and into something valued by themselves as well as society. These men sought work they could advance in and that is intellectually challenging and engaging. For example, one 30 year-old man who had some university level education expressed he was interested in reading and writing short stories in the fantasy genre. He recalled that during the application process to a retail job in a fantasy and comic store, his application was turned down after he provided the address to an emergency shelter. He expressed that he knew he had made poor choices in the past, and that they were in part, the reason for his current living situation but he "just wanted to be given a chance."

Facilitators and Obstacles for Employment: Perspectives from Service Providers

Structural facilitators to employment that benefitted homeless individuals included initiatives such as career fairs, resume building, computer literacy and intrapersonal skills management. In contrast, structural obstacles impeding employment procurement and maintenance ranged from formal government policies and procedures to informal societal perceptions of homelessness and homeless individuals. Service providers alluded towards many of the same concerns expressed by the homeless men themselves, including the inability to access transportation, the lack of identification and bank account, low computer literacy and lack of workplace skills outside of physical labour. Participants noted that clients were frustrated with the lack of access to a computer for sufficient time periods. The social stigma surrounding homelessness intersected with this factor as homeless persons felt heightened surveillance when using computer services in areas not designated for the homeless, including libraries and internet cafes. An additional barrier identified by service providers was the lack of knowledge of other service organizations offering employment assistance/training; service providers suggested greater levels of cooperation and collaboration.

Aspects of an individual's personality and experiences, including addictions and mental illness, posed barriers to several areas of employment. Service providers also recognized the need for continued support once clients attain employment to assist with managing life stressors so clients do not lose work due to workplace conflict or slip back into harmful substance use behaviors. Interviewees recognized patterns among the adult male homeless population where periods of depression and anxiety correlated with employment related problems. Negative interactions with members of the public as well as potential and actual employers served to diminish the confidence required for employment success. In addition, service providers felt that this stigma hindered potential employers from hiring homeless individuals. For example:

Social stigma can be a big obstacle to employment...to anything actually, when people go through adversity, they need support and understanding, not criticism and apathy. Sometimes, clients complain that even their worker... for example, seems judgemental and hostile. We are the people that are supposed to help; if we cannot refrain from judging, what does that say?

Almost all of the participants perceived a lack of co-operation between the non-profit and government service providers in terms of their intentions for their clients' future employment and housing goals. One government service provider stated that while his organization wished to see his clients obtain and maintain practical "survival" work, their non-profit support counsellor would push for the fulfilment of education "dreams." These, he indicated, in most clients' situations, was unrealistic in the face of immediate financial need and several "failed" attempts to follow such dreams. A lack of knowledge of other service organizations among their own organization was perceived, which hindered their ability to assist their clients. One participant suggested that organizations co-operate with others in order to obtain more information about their employment services. This co-operation could come in the form of liaison work, workshops or the circulation of information packages detailing the services of each organization.

Perspectives from Employers

According to the participating employers, many of the barriers they perceived to hiring homeless individuals were related to socially held stereotypes of the homeless population, such as the prevalence of addiction and mental health issues. All of the interviewees specifically stated that drug and alcohol use

while on the job was absolutely unacceptable. One employer indicated that he did not care what his employees did in their personal lives but that for safety issues, impairment at work was intolerable because alertness was required at all times to complete the tasks required. Another employer, who to the best of his knowledge did not hire any homeless people, indicated that any drug or alcohol abuse was undesirable, stating that it was indicative of a certain personality type that he did not want to have to deal with in a professional setting. Employers' indicated that a higher level of disclosure from potential employees would put them at ease if hiring people experiencing homelessness. Some employers felt trust issues would likely be the largest struggle, due to perceived drug abuse and mental illness.

Another participant stated that she would hire anyone known to be homeless as long as they met the criteria of her organization, stating her primary concern would be the ability to contact homeless employees. Indirect supervision and support from cooperating support agencies was identified as a factor that would give employers a sense of assurance. Employers generally agreed that there was often a communication barrier between them and certain employees with higher needs, which if overcome in the initial stages of employment may mitigate conflict and prevent termination. Employers however, indicated they were not equipped with the knowledge and experience necessary to overcome these barriers and as a result, came to conflict with their employees or terminated employment, despite the best of intentions. Support from the service provider may not only benefit the employee but the well-intentioned employer. They can obtain advice on how to handle common problems associated with their employee's lifestyle and circumstances.

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Findings from the present study complement existing research in the area of homelessness and employment. Interviews from all three sectors reinforced the understanding that substantial barriers exist for people experiencing homelessness when trying to obtain and maintain employment that offers an appropriate wage and duration to effectively end their homelessness. Findings demonstrate that homeless men in Calgary are in fact able to obtain paid employment. However, employment opportunities are often insecure, low-paying and represent the informal sector. These jobs can include independent day labour jobs, panhandling, 'binning,' sex work or various other illegal income generating activities. Informal employment opportunities provided immediate monetary gains required for daily survival necessities. Accessing informal employment opportunities also did not pose the same challenges as the formal sector, such as having identification, a bank account and home contact information, and interview participants did not associate the same level of prejudice to the informal sector. Data indicated that temporary labour intensive work was available to able-bodied men, but there is a demand for secure, long-term employment. Participants felt the availability of temporary work constituted a "trap" or "catch 22" as the work was necessary but posed a barrier to finding permanent full-time employment that aligned with their goals.

The relationship between homelessness and (un)employment is complex and multifaceted, grounded in the interplay amongst factors such as the absence of a permanent address, physical and mental health issues, addictions, criminal justice involvement, lack of transportation and access to means of communication, irregular employment histories and discrimination. The challenges faced by people experiencing homelessness that impede their ability to participate in the formal economy are summarized next.

- People experiencing homelessness often have extensive histories of trauma coupled with low levels of life skills including stress management and conflict resolution.
- Homelessness creates a survival mentality, and may limit one's ability to feel safe, experience privacy, and feel a strong sense of well-being.
- The experience of homelessness often leads individuals to need immediate gratification, stemming from the ongoing struggles of daily survival.
- Homelessness is an experience of being marginalized, oppressed and viewed with bias and prejudice.
- Many individuals who experience homelessness feel judged, criticized and scrutinized.
- Experience of homelessness can lead to or exacerbate mental illness (such as anxiety, depression or substance use).

Challenges directly related to daily experiences in the context of being homeless generated concerns for participants regarding their mental health, particularly involving anxiety and depression. Anxiety was linked to anger and stress management and would often lead to altercations on the job or an inability to complete tasks. Depression was considered a cause of truancy or absence and occurred co-morbidly with substance misuse. Participants advocated for prolonged support oriented towards mental health and proper self-care, which would aid in maintaining employment.

The United States Department of Labour has developed a comprehensive best practice employment model which may be adapted and implemented in the Calgary area. The following components are deemed necessary (HUD, 2008):

- employment assessments and employability development planning;
- job training services including remedial education, life skills training, computer literacy, financial literacy, job search assistance, career counselling, vocational and occupational training;
- support for continuing education and upgrading;
- job placement services;
- case management and counselling services;
- post-placement follow-up and support services that may include additional job placement services, supplementary training, peer support and mentorship; and
- housing services.

Additional support services required may include:

- transportation through monthly bus passes for those employed or seeking employment;
- access to reliable communication systems including computers and private personal messaging systems;
- assistance regaining identification;
- facilitating access to bank accounts;
- legal aid support services and advocacy for labour and human rights violations as well as criminal justice involvement; and
- supplies necessary for employment including tools, apparel, etc.

As part of their roles, it is recommended that service providers and staff in a SE program should:

- utilize a strengths based model and individualized support services for clients;
- facilitate conflict resolution and support services to foster a healthy working relationship between employer and employee;
- ensure employers are aware of the support offered to the prospective employee;
- maintain communication and ongoing support as needed for clients;
- foster self-esteem and self-sufficiency among clients;
- promote client choice and autonomy;
- establish partnerships and collaboration among employment programs and private partners to facilitate access to competitive labour market; and
- provide comprehensive, flexible, long term supports.

A pilot SE program for residents in a local homeless shelter in Calgary, Alberta had enrolled 109 in its first eight months. The program has helped 41% obtain sustainable employment, meaning participants were meeting their projected financial needs based on an in-depth budget created during consultation with the shelter's housing team. Twenty seven clients had graduated from the SE program, where they have maintained sustainable employment with the same employer for 3 months. The dropout rate for the SE program was 27%, slightly higher than their projected 25%.

A SE model that tailors support to each client accordingly may increase chances of employment success. Support should be tailored to the individual's personal needs and preferences as they relate to employment, training, housing and support services. Homeless-serving agencies should increase efforts of collaboration and appropriately refer and connect clients to additional services within the community, including mainstream service systems, such as health services and local educational institutions. Participants in this study indicated that the initial period of searching for a job is often not as emotionally draining as the first few months of a new job, during which new skills are learned and new relationships are made. Intense support at the beginning of an employment endeavor, which immediately ceases shortly after successful procurement, effectively leaves a new employee overwhelmed with sudden independence that he may not be prepared for. Support throughout may allow a client the experience of independent decision making with assistance if necessary, in which interval periods between support meetings should be dependent upon each individual's needs. For example, it may be useful to explore peer support models, which could be a beneficial option for recently employed homeless men in need of extra support and encouragement.

Collaboration between employers and service providers will be a critical feature for successful SE programs to ensure employment success. Employers interviewed indicated they were hesitant to hire individuals known to be homeless due to their past and current experiences and preconceived notions about homeless employees. The employers interviewed in this study indicated that their fears of hiring employees who were homeless could be lessened if they were given some assurance through contact with clients' support workers and had access to employer mediation to resolve workplace conflict. Employer awareness and education efforts regarding members of the homeless population should be undertaken to address their concerns, which are currently acting as barriers to employing the homeless population. In particular, it is important to educate employers in order to increase their awareness of the barriers facing homeless individuals seeking employment, and to foster an empathetic and non-judgemental approach. Not only will this decrease the stigma associated with homelessness, but it may also reduce conflict or termination of employment that often arise from a lack of knowledge regarding the barriers facing homeless men.

In summary, a supportive employment model based on best practices must tailor support services to each individual in order to increase opportunities for employment and housing success. In particular, services should be tailored to address obstacles facing homeless men in such a way that increases self-efficacy, choice and autonomy; provides conflict and anger management skills; advocates and provides long-term support for clients based on individual needs; and places an emphasis on training to build skills in important areas such as computers. Further, a SE model should foster awareness regarding to overcome stigmas related to homelessness through the provision of adequate education, in order to increase empathy and openness amongst both service providers and employers.

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