



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Developing Community in a Hotel Shelter

**A Summary of the Evaluation of the Edward Hotel
Emergency Shelter Operated by Fred Victor**



In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Fred Victor was asked by the City of Toronto to operate the Edward Hotel as an emergency shelter to serve up to 300 people. The Edward Hotel Emergency Shelter welcomes women, men, and couples who are experiencing homelessness and barriers to housing. It offers on-site enhanced case management and housing services as well as harm reduction, health, and other services. **The goal of the Edward Hotel Emergency Shelter is to help clients find permanent, affordable, and safe housing with supports that meet their needs.**

Fred Victor commissioned an evaluation of the shelter by Hub Solutions, a social enterprise embedded in the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, one of Canada's leading homelessness research organizations. From March to May 2022 Hub Solutions conducted a literature review to explore the feasibility of hotel shelters before and during the pandemic. They also engaged with program clients, staff, and partners by means of a survey and interviews. This document is intended to act as a summary of the findings and recommendations from Hub Solutions' final report.

Although there was some opposition to the opening of the Edward Hotel Emergency Shelter, **this evaluation has validated a model that supports 300 people, providing them with access to embedded specialized services.** The model was adapted based on a client-centred approach to meet the community's unique needs. In this model, clients were offered rooms based on their needs: for instance, there were several floors open to people who use substances where they could also access harm reduction services. Similarly, women and people with disabilities were assigned rooms where they got specialized supports directly linked to their needs. This model of service allows for close monitoring, adequate service provision, and crisis intervention. **It has all the features of a successful supportive housing project, and this was validated by the evaluation.**

Key Findings

The Edward Hotel Emergency Shelter provided clients with opportunities to build their sense of community with other hotel residents and staff. Because of this community, staff and clients built trust with each other. This trust underpins all other aspects of the shelter.

Fred Victor successfully implemented an approach based on coordinated services, integrative care, and partnerships. The collaboration with site partners allowed for a higher level of client care. Research found that partnerships were what allowed Fred Victor to overcome the siloed nature of the housing and homelessness sector, and they were considered so essential that one provider said, *"If we don't have access to these partnerships and the services they provide, we actually don't have the shelter model."*



The evaluation found that clients were generally satisfied with the Edward Hotel Emergency Shelter and the services offered, with 64% of clients rating their overall experience as excellent. The provision of on-site specialized services is a key part of what made the shelter so effective, as about 80% of clients accessed enhanced case management and housing services.

Other services offered by partners at the shelter include harm reduction, with an on-site safe injection site, and health services that offered primary care, prescriptions and referrals. Experience with health services was overall quite positive, though it is noted that the safe injection site was underused, despite the overall effort to increase awareness about the service.

Clients consistently reported that they liked having a private space—a hotel room with its own bathroom. With 61.8% of clients having lived in a congregate setting previously, the privacy and autonomy afforded by the Edward Hotel Emergency Shelter was particularly valuable. The hotel meal service was also a major asset with some challenges regarding dietary restrictions.

Another identified area for improvement was to offer more culturally relevant programming, specifically for Black and Indigenous clients, and to also offer programs for the 2SLGBTQ community. This could be accompanied by ongoing training and by adopting hiring policies to make the staff of the shelter hotel reflect its clients.

Permanent Supportive Housing Recommendations

About two-thirds of clients at the Edward Hotel Emergency Shelter are experiencing chronic homelessness, and according to the Hub Solutions literature review, permanent supportive housing is the best model for meeting their needs. Considering that one of the main challenges the hotel shelter faced was the difficulty of finding appropriate housing for clients, the report included a number of recommendations for how the shelter could be converted to permanent supportive housing.

Fred Victor is encouraged to continue taking a strengths-based approach in its service delivery model and providing individualized support through on-site, specialized, and community-based services. These could be expanded to include legal, financial, and newcomer services, offered in a variety of forms and without time limits. On-site healthcare services could also be enhanced, with harm reduction still being used as an overall support practice and philosophy.



The shift to supportive housing would involve strengthening housing support services. To provide safe and stable housing, financial assistance should be provided to all clients, and all units should be subsidized. Housing would not be contingent on participation in services, in accordance with Housing First principles. Property management and service provision roles should be separated to provide clients with a greater sense of autonomy and control. Finally, the physical units would need to be enhanced to include private kitchens and appliances.

To maintain the Edward Hotel Emergency Shelter's integrated care approach, a high level of system coordination is required. Supports need to be coordinated across a network of partners to ensure consistency and fidelity to a Housing First approach. This coordination includes developing service plans, sharing client data, and monitoring outcomes. Partner organizations should develop protocols for complex service issues and also coordinate on discharge planning.

Finally, to achieve continuous program improvement, **there needs to be attention paid to partnerships and accountability. There should be a written policy stating that all partners agree to the goal of housing stability and requiring that they engage in regular training in service provision best practices.** Clients described sometimes being unsure about the roles of various partners, so keeping clients informed of their respective roles and responsibilities is crucial. Programs should be continuously reviewed through regular data collection and program evaluation, and this should be informed by clients' input and preferences.

Conclusion

Hub Solutions' evaluation, like many previous studies, **reveals that permanent supportive housing models demonstrate the most positive outcomes for people experiencing homelessness who require a home with adequate level of supports.** Fred Victor is well positioned to operate supportive housing provided this shelter site could be converted into a supportive housing delivery site. This will require support from various levels of government and potentially private funders to allow them to either acquire the building or extend the lease while making necessary renovations.



Reflection from Fred Victor on Moving Forward

Although the evaluation identified some challenges, these are a mirror of those present across the homelessness sector in Toronto. They include staffing shortages that impact the outcomes of programs and result in, specifically, a lack of culturally diverse services; insufficient affordable and safe housing units with proper supports; and the ongoing opioid crisis. Other systems, such as healthcare, are also feeling the strain, and when people experiencing homelessness are unable to access vital services, the result can be severe, including premature death. No one organization has the ability to resolve these systemic issues in isolation, but a shift to providing permanent supportive housing is certainly a step in the right direction.