Evaluation of the Housing Support Worker Initiative

Prepared for the Housing Supporter Worker Initiative Host Agencies

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by

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with

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Housing Support Worker (HSW) initiative was started as a pilot project in 2011. This initiative is a partnership between the Department of Community Services and agencies in the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) which offer support to individuals who are homeless or are at-risk of becoming homeless. The agencies included in this initiative are:

- Adsum for Women & Children
- Shelter Nova Scotia
- Salvation Army Centre of Hope
- Metro Non-Profit Housing Association
- Tawaak Housing
- Mi'kmaq Friendship Centre
- Phoenix

This evaluation of the Housing Support Worker Initiative was conducted between April and December 2013. The method used for this evaluation included both primary and secondary research to collect qualitative and quantitative data. Data was collected through: an internal document review; a literature review; a stakeholder questionnaire; and stakeholder, staff and client interviews.

This evaluation was designed to address the following key questions:

- What has worked well in terms of the implementation, process, and activities undertaken to date? What could be improved?
- How successful has the initiative been in contributing to the achievement of the stated outputs / outcomes?

Based on the data gathered from all sources the HSW initiative has been successful in its efforts to achieve positive outcomes for its clients including finding and maintaining housing. The program has been effective because of its decentralized design in which HSWs are located in agencies as front-line service providers able to adapt and provide flexible on-one-one supports. Indeed, the HSW initiative has served more clients and with more complex needs than it was originally designed. Therefore, the sustainability of its success depends on strengthening the model internally through improved administration and support across all seven agencies.

The following key findings have been identified:

KEY FINDING 1: CLIENTS OF THE HOUSING SUPPORT WORKER INITIATIVE ACHIEVE POSITIVE OUTCOMES

HSWs have been able to find housing for clients with a long history of homelessness and significant barriers to finding and maintaining housing. Staff and stakeholders all referenced the sheer number of people who have been housed as clear evidence of the success of the program. HSWs are also able to address issues early and prevent evictions because they maintain a relationship with clients and property owners / managers. HSWs also help clients maintain housing by connecting them with other services and supports. HSWs report that many of their clients are living successfully out of the shelter system and their need for supports has decreased over time. Clients

talk about gaining confidence and skills to maintain housing on their own and thus, being able to make other life decisions including volunteering, and getting into education or skills-training programs.

Positive outcomes achieved by clients include:

- finding and maintaining appropriate housing;
- overcoming barriers to accessing services; and
- living independently, feeling empowered and having increased stability.

KEY FINDING 2: THE SUCCESS OF THE HOUSING SUPPORT WORKER INITIATIVE IS RELATED TO THE TYPES OF SERVICES PROVIDED

The positive outcomes achieved by clients are related to the types of services the HSWs are able to provide. HSWs are able to be flexible and provide individualized supports. They develop strong, personal relationships with clients that allow them to understand client needs, issues, and barriers and provide ongoing support to clients after they are housed. It is important that the HSW is a dedicated staff position focused only on finding and maintaining housing. The one-on-one relationship allows clients to talk to HSWs about issues they don't feel comfortable talking about with landlords or other service providers which allows the HSWs to better serve them.

KEY FINDING 3: THE RELATIONSHIPS BUILT WITH PROPERTY OWNERS, OTHER AGENCIES AND GOVERNMENT SERVICE PROVIDERS INCREASE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE INITIATIVE

HSWs have dedicated time to establish and maintain relationships with property owners, property managers, other agencies and government service providers. These relationships have also resulted in increased trust, cooperation and efficiency in connecting clients with needed services and supports. Referrals to the HSWs are now coming from more sources including clients referring other clients, referrals from Income Assistance workers, the prison system and hospitals. The HSWs also report that it is getting easier to work with landlords as more landlords know about the work they do.

KEY FINDING 4: THE MODEL USED BY THE HOUSING SUPPORT WORKER INITIATIVE HAS IMPORTANT STRENGTHS

In addition to the type of work being done by the HSWs the model employed by the initiative is also a strength. The strengths of the model have to do with the way the agencies function and have fit the HSWs into their work. The HSWs are able to adapt the initiative to the missions of the organizations in which they work. For example, HSWs may be situated within women-centred organizations or ones focused on finding housing and supports for Aboriginal clients. The strengths of the model as one that is decentralized include:

- Having focused, dedicated HSWs located in specialized community agencies
- The ability to focus on the needs of specific populations
- The ability to draw upon the network of supports, services and programs, as well as expertise within each agency

Additionally, the agencies involved have sought to ensure there is coordination and communication across the agencies. The HSW initiative has regular meetings which include meetings with just the HSWs as well as meetings

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involving agency representatives and the HSWs from all organizations involved. This network is a critical component of this work.

KEY FINDING 5: THE HOUSING SUPPORT WORKER INITIATIVE ALSO HAS IMPORTANT CHALLENGES TO BE ADDRESSED

Although the HSW Initiative has been very successful to date in enabling positive outcomes for clients, the Initiative does have some challenges that need to be addressed if that success is to be sustainable over the long term. These challenges are:

- A lack of clear, common goals across the initiative
- Insufficient resources for the program to work with high need clients
- Inadequate support for HSWs professional development and networking opportunities
- A need to improve the quality, efficiency and consistency of program administration

KEY FINDING 6: EXTERNAL FACTORS WILL AFFECT THE ONGOING SUSTAINABILITY OF THE HOUSING SUPPORT WORKER INITIATIVE

The success and ongoing sustainability of the HSW Initiative will also be greatly influenced by a number of external factors that are beyond the control of the organizations involved including:

- The need for more acceptable, affordable housing options; The HSWs are competing to ensure their clients get housed in an environment where there are an insufficient number of safe, affordable apartments available because of the high rents and the limited number of landlords willing to agree to rent to their clients.
- The need for ongoing, adequate funding for the HSW initiative; The HSW initiative is currently being supplemented by in-kind contributions made by host agencies because of cost of living increases, administrative requirements, and the need for other resources required for the HSW to support their clients. Adequate, stable funding will allow the program to plan and invest time and effort more strategically.
- The need to address structural and systemic challenges, as well as navigating and accessing current services and resources such as income assistance, rental subsidies and mental health and addictions supports.

RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations relate only to those areas within the scope of the Housing Support Worker Initiative and are not directed to the funders or external service providers or other partners. Recommendations have not been made with regard to issues beyond the control of the Initiative and its partner agencies.

The recommendations are mainly focused on how to maintain and further strengthen the model. There are variances which can be attributed to the need to be flexible considering the agency where the HSW is located and the specific client group served. However, continued success depends on understanding how to maintain the differences among the agencies which have enhanced the model, while also recognizing that the initiative relies too heavily on the individuals employed in the HSWs positions. In other words, leaving all aspects of the Initiative

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open to interpretation puts the long-term sustainability of the program at risk as the HSWs attempt to do and be everything to everyone.

RECOMMENDATION A: THE ORGANIZATIONS CURRENTLY HOSTING HSWS NEED TO DEVELOP AND ARTICULATE A CLEAR, SHARED UNDERSTANDING OF THE PRINCIPLES FOR THE HSW INITIATIVE

There are risks in the model as it has been developed that need to be addressed. The HSW initiative has been successful at achieving results beyond those included in the initial planning both in terms of the numbers of clients who have found stable housing and the complexity of the needs of the client load.

Establishing core principles and a clear mandate are not meant to limit the flexibility of the program but rather, to provide some focus and ground rules for longer term planning and decision-making. These principles and guidelines are intended to protect the HSWs from burn out, increase the clarity of roles and responsibilities across agencies and ensure the Initiative is able to meet the needs of its clients.   For example, for agencies to fully implement the principles of a Housing First approach, the individual agencies and HSWs would need to look at their practices to determine if they were in keeping with that approach and make decisions based on how to best implement that model.

RECOMMENDATION B: DEVELOP A COMMON SET OF GUIDELINES TO DEFINE THE WORK OF THE HSWS. THESE MUST INCLUDE GUIDANCE AROUND CLIENT SCREENING AND SELECTION, CASELOADS, SCOPE OF PRACTICE AND SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS

Any guidelines developed at the Initiative level need to:

- Continue to allow individual HSWs to have flexibility and autonomy in terms of providing flexible support tailored to the individuals they work with; and
- Balance the best interests of the client and workers themselves.

RECOMMENDATION C: IF THE DECISION IS MADE TO CONTINUE TO WORK WITH CLIENTS WITH COMPLEX NEEDS THE HSWS WILL REQUIRE ADDITIONAL RESOURCES AND SUPPORTS

In order to continue to work with clients with complex needs using a Housing First approach, the initiative requires secured and dedicated additional resources both internal to the functioning of the program and externally via public services. The HSW Initiative is not currently capable of sustaining this level of case management and some HSWs are feeling stretched to provide the support their clients require. Based on a review of Housing First best practices, additional resources required would include:

- additional staff to enable HSWs to provide 24 hour case management;
- access to a range of mental health services, addiction services, and independent living skills training for clients;
- additional staff and capacity to engage clients in program planning and service delivery; and
- effective data management systems and funds or capacity to engage in ongoing monitoring and evaluation.

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The HSW initiative needs to better align its services with the resources available, or/and work to secure additional resources as required for the services provided.

RECOMMENDATION D: DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLANS FOR HSWS

The HSWs are becoming subject matter experts in the areas of homelessness and housing supports. This will be strengthened through the implementation of professional development plans.

RECOMMENDATION E: CONTINUE TO STRENGTHEN COMMUNICATION AMONG HSWS AND ACROSS AGENCIES

Opportunities for HSWs to share their knowledge base as a group are another means of increasing the overall quality and efficiency of the initiative.

RECOMMENDATION F: THE HSW INITIATIVE REQUIRES THE INVESTMENT OF MORE TIME AND RESOURCES TO INCREASE THE QUALITY, EFFICIENCY AND CONSISTENCY OF PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION

In order to be able to report on the outcomes of the initiative and meet basic requirements around the ethical collection, use and storage of client data there will need to be some investment of time and resources into program administration at the initiative level. It is recommended the HSW Initiative develop a simplified and more efficient means for collecting, analyzing, and reporting on program and client information.

CONCLUSIONS

The HSW initiative is designed to enable a Housing First approach to be implemented. In order for the best practices of the Housing First model to be realized both internal and external changes are required. The internal changes must address the need to ensure the HSWs understand the goals of the HSW initiative and are supported (financially and otherwise) to realize them within their own agencies. Fundamentally, the clients need to be supported to be successful in their search and maintenance of stable, secure and safe housing. However, service providers and other stakeholders need to understand how this initiative fits within the continuum of housing and homelessness services and supports required. The external challenges relate to existing gaps in supports and services outside of the control of the agencies including mental health and addictions support, income supports for clients, affordable housing, and other systemic and structural barriers that prevent addressing the root causes of homelessness.

To increase the number of individuals safely and securely housed in HRM will require a continuum of services and support and the commitment of all levels of government to addressing the root causes of homelessness. However, given the achievements to date, and the strength of the model itself, the HSW Initiative is well positioned to make the necessary changes to best align its services with the resources available and ensure its ongoing success.

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INTRODUCTION

This report contains the findings of an independent evaluation of the Housing Support Worker Initiative conducted between April and December 2013. The method used for this evaluation included both primary and secondary research to collect qualitative and quantitative data. Data was collected through: an internal document review; a literature review; a stakeholder questionnaire; and stakeholder, staff and client interviews. Methodological detail including the initiative logic model and analysis of each data source is available in a separate background document.

EVALUATION QUESTIONS

This evaluation was designed to address the following key questions:

- What has worked well in terms of the implementation, process, and activities undertaken to date? What could be improved?
- How successful has the initiative been in contributing to the achievement of the stated outputs / outcomes?

HOUSING SUPPORT WORKER INITIATIVE PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The Housing Support Worker initiative was started as a pilot project in 2011. This initiative is a partnership between the Department of Community Services and agencies in the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) which offer support to individuals who are homeless or are at-risk of becoming homeless. The agencies included in this initiative are:

- Adsum for Women & Children
- Shelter Nova Scotia
- Salvation Army Centre of Hope
- Metro Non-Profit Housing Association
- Tawaak Housing
- Mi'kmaq Friendship Centre
- Phoenix

The Housing Support Workers (HSWs) work directly with individuals, currently living in emergency shelters and those potentially at risk of entering the shelter system, to help them secure and maintain appropriate housing. The HSW is described as follows: "utilizing predominantly a Housing First philosophy, the Housing Support workers work directly with individuals currently residing within the emergency shelter system or individuals potentially at risk of entering the shelter system to secure and maintain appropriate housing." (Housing Support Worker Initiative, 2013a) The initiative was "designed to target individuals who, with some limited and basic support, could transition into an independent living environment" (Housing Support Worker Initiative, 2013a).

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The initial discussion about the need for this kind of program was held at the Shelter Provider Committee where all shelter Executive Directors in HRM, Senior Department of Community Services staff, and officials from Addiction and Mental Health Services had been meeting regularly. At that time (2009), many shelter programs were reported to be operating at capacity. This group undertook a survey of shelter users, which gave them a better sense of who was at the shelters. One of the gaps identified was the need for targeted help for those who required fairly limited support and guidance to become independently housed. It was thought that this would help decrease the numbers of individuals relying on emergency shelters.

When the original funding proposal was made to the Nova Scotia Provincial Government it was focused on moving people with light and medium support needs from shelters to independent housing. In 2009, there were 1,718 individuals who spent at least one night in a shelter in the HRM. Of these individuals, 27% were considered to require light support and who had been homeless less than one year (464), 54% were considered to have medium support needs, and had been homelessness between one and three years (928) and 20% were considered to need a high level of supports (344) (Affordable Housing Task Force, 2010). The original proposal suggested each HSW would have a caseload of 30 clients with light support needs to be housed in the private market with the help of rental subsidies. Clients with medium support needs were assumed to require expanded services and the caseload was to be 15 per HSW. Clients with high support needs were assumed to require a different response with supportive and small option homes (Affordable Housing Task Force, 2010).

Based on the proposal and data supporting the HSW Initiative as a cost effective solution, the Affordable Housing Task Force made a presentation to government requesting funding in July 2010. In May of 2011, the NS Department of Community Services announced $400,000 in funding for the agencies to hire Housing Support Workers (Department of Community Services, 2011). Once the funding envelope was finalized all HRM shelter providers plus Metro Non-Profit Housing Association, Tawaak Housing and the Mi'kmaq Friendship Centre came together to discuss the division of the funding. An equal share of the financial support provided by the Department of Community Services was transferred to the seven organizations. Each agency receives $57,143 in total grant money dedicated to the work of the HSW initiative.[1] It is left to the discretion of each agency to proportion the money between salary and benefits for the HSW, and other expenses (for overhead and administration to client support); salaries range from $35,000 to $45,000 for HSWs.

There is no standard job description for the HSWs across the initiative with education and skills requirements ranging from an undergraduate degree in Social Work or similar human sciences degree, to requiring education and/or experience in health education/promotion, human services, social work or related field. In the job descriptions the main duties are also described differently across the agencies from "Create effective housing plans" to "provide a broad range of services for individuals who are in need of housing placement/eviction prevention, on-going follow-up and outreach services to obtain and retain safe and affordable housing." In the job descriptions, suggested case load varied from 30 to 60.

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[1] Shelter Nova Scotia receives double the amount because it has two HSWs; one for each of its two shelters -Barry House and Metro Turning Point.

DIFFERENCES AMONG THE HSW HOST ORGANIZATIONS

Before receiving funding for HSWs, most of the host organizations were doing some form of housing support work aimed at helping people living in low-income to find stable housing. Several of the organizations had program staff that did some of this work prior to the HSW initiative, but none had staff dedicated to only do this work. The Halifax Housing Help federally-funded program at Metro Non-Profit Housing Association is the most similar to the HSW Initiative. Some of the partner agencies are direct providers of affordable, long term supportive housing.

Some of the HSWs have access to supports within their own organizations that facilitate their ability to help clients find housing and maintain housing. For example, some organizations can provide trusteeships where a landlord is paid directly by the organization. Other organizations provide programs that build life skills and help clients who need additional support such as life-skills training to stay housed.

Most of the HSWs focus on finding private, for-profit housing for clients in a 'scattered' supported housing model. The HSW at Tawaak Housing focus first on finding available housing within their own stock of supportive housing. Tawaak Housing has rent geared to income requiring 25% of income and has 148 units across the province[2] including housing for Aboriginals transitioning from prison. Some of the Aboriginal clients that come into Halifax are post-secondary students who are being supported by their Band Councils.

The organizations involved each have their own specific mandates and their client base. For example, Phoenix is geared to providing housing and supports to youth aged 16 to 24, whereas Adsum for Women & Children works with women, trans individuals, girls and children providing a range of housing and supports. Tawaak Housing provides housing and services to the off-reserve Aboriginal population.

HSW CLIENTS

Most clients of the HSW are referred either by the organization's shelter or other program staff. Some clients self-refer. Other clients are referred by Department of Community Services Income Assistance workers, staff at a Correctional Facility, MLA offices, Addiction Services, hospital social workers or by other health or social service providers including the Mobile Outreach Street Health service.

The organizations that refer internally from their shelters or other programs often have another layer of client intake and review before the client reaches the HSW. Therefore clients may vary depending on whether they are walking in off the street and self-referring or whether they have been screened first for fit with the HSW Initiative.

An analysis of internal client intake forms completed between 2012 and 2013 was used to produce a demographic profile of clients. This data does not necessarily reflect total intake for this time period. For the purpose of this evaluation, intake data was provided for a total of 418 individuals. A previous report prepared by the HSW Initiative agencies indicated HSW's had helped 591 men, women, youth and children into secure stable housing, but had served 1170 individuals between April 1st, 2012 and March 31st, 2013 (Housing Support Worker Initiative,

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[2] Tawaak is the only HSW Initiative organization serving clients outside of the HRM.

2013b). To put these numbers in some context: there were 1,860 individuals who stayed in shelters in HRM in 2012.[3]

The client demographic data is in-line with other data on the homeless population in Halifax, in that there was an over-representation of African Nova Scotians and an over-representation Aboriginal people even excluding those who accessed Aboriginal-specific services. Most of the clients were unemployed. One key different between the clients of the HSW Initiative and the homeless population in Halifax is the proportion of men and women. According to a 2013 report by the Affordable Housing Association of Nova Scotia, 64% of adults in shelters were men and 36% were women. Women make up 46% of clients of the HSW Initiative. Full information about this analysis can be found in the background document for this evaluation report.

UNDERSTANDING HOUSING FIRST

'Housing First' is a specific approach to addressing homelessness developed and implemented by Pathways to Housing, a program that provides services for homeless adults with severe mental illness in New York. The main feature of the Housing First approach that differentiates it from other models is that housing is provided immediately, based on client choice, with minimal entry requirements. The idea is that, once individuals have safe, secure housing they are better positioned to begin to address other challenges they may have. The Housing First approach is established in contrast to a housing ready approach which starts with treatment and / or intensive service provision and support and moves through a number of less intensive support options providing permanent housing when the individual is seen to be 'ready' (Schiff 2000).

A report by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development defines the key features of the Housing First approach as:

- Direct placement of homeless individuals into permanent housing;
- Supportive services made available but not required; and
- Ongoing case management (Pearson 2007).

In Canada, the Mental Health Commission has adopted the Housing First approach for its At Home / Chez Soi project launched in 2009. The Commission defines Housing First as:

- Providing immediate access to permanent, independent housing options through rent subsidies and mental health supports;
- Providing access to housing that is not conditional on housing readiness or engagement in treatment beyond regular visits by a support team and case manager;
- Providing treatment and support that are voluntary, individualized, culturally appropriate, and not tied to a particular housing option or location;
- Offering clients a choice of housing options; and

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[3] The Affordable Housing Association of Nova Scotia, 2013 Report on Housing and Homelessness in HRM (AHANS, November 2013). http://www.ahans.ca/2013ReportHousingHomelessnessHRM.pdf

- Requiring clients to pay a portion (less than 30%) of their income for housing.

Housing First programs operate on the principles of harm reduction and the importance of social integration. Harm reduction means the policies, supports and services provided aim to reduce the risk to the individual associated with substance use and addiction without requiring absolute sobriety. Rather than focusing on the prevention of drug use, practices are focused on the prevention of the adverse health, social and economic consequences of the use of drugs (Gaetz 2013, International Harm Reduction Association 2010).

The focus on social and community integration is related to research that identifies social support networks and social environments among the determinants of health (Public Health Agency of Canada 2011). Social isolation is often linked to poor health and wellness outcomes. Housing people in communities and helping them become integrated into those communities through meaningful activities is intended to reduce social isolation and increase housing stability (Gaetz 2013).

WHAT IS THE RESEARCH SUPPORTING THE USE OF A HOUSING FIRST APPROACH?

Although the Housing First model is relatively new there is some evidence regarding the effectiveness of this approach. However, this data is limited. In his article for Homelessness Hub in 2012 Gaetz pointed out that the majority of evidence has come from Pathways to Housing, a single program based in New York. Much of the existing data is in the form of case studies produced internally by agencies operating Housing First programs.

The Housing First literature is formative and largely based on qualitative, mixed method and comparative research associated with the *Pathways to Housing* project in New York City (Kertesz et al., 2009). Housing First literature in Canada is restricted to the findings of Raine and Marcellins (n.d.) Toronto report entitled *What Housing First Means for People – Results of Streets to Homes 2007 Post-Occupancy Research*. (Bodor et al. 2011)

The At Home / Chez Soi program undertaken by the Mental Health Commission of Canada is the first large scale Housing First project in Canada to be producing evaluation data which may provide more insight into the effectiveness of this approach.

Within the existing evidence there seems to be agreement that Housing First approaches can be effective in meeting the needs of homeless individuals, long – term shelter dwellers and those with mental illness. Studies point to preliminary evidence of:

- Increased housing stability;
- Reduced use of emergency services;
- Improved health outcomes;
- Reduced involvement with the criminal justice system; and
- Improved quality of life including social and community engagement (Gaetz 2013, Palermo et al. 2006, Mental Health Commission 2012).

Some literature suggests a housing ready model may be more appropriate for individuals who have a history of conflict with the law and substance abuse issues (Schiff 2000). Bodor et al. point out the foundation of the Housing First discussion excludes an aboriginal world view:

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There is no Housing First literature that explores the disproportionate representation of Indigenous persons in the research design or findings...Housing is also noted as a promising fundamental building block for ontological security marked by "constancy, daily routines, privacy and having a secure base for identity construction" (Padgett, 2007, p. 1925). Both treatment first and Housing First models derive from a Western world view aimed at integrating individuals and families into the mainstream economic, political, social and cultural milieu. (Bodor et al. 2011)

It is also important to note that Gaetz raises a number of questions that have not yet been answered in the existing literature:

- How can programs adopting a Housing First model ensure the key principles are upheld as the model is adapted to fit community realities?
- What is the relationship between Housing First programs and the existing supply of affordable housing? Can Housing First be effective without a concurrent investment in affordable housing?
- Can a Housing First model meet the needs of diverse populations?
- How long are Housing First programs expected to provide services to an individual and how are these services funded?
- How do we ensure people have enough income to meet their basic needs after they pay rent? (Gaetz 2013)

FINDINGS

Key findings have been identified based on the data gathered from all sources. The findings were developed out of the analysis comparing and contrasting major interview themes (and quantitative responses). Major themes were clustered and the data triangulated to confirm, or disconfirm the themes. All the material was grouped according to six key findings. For each finding, the finding is presented with its supportive evidence; each finding includes one or more illustrative client story or story of how the initiative has had a significant impact (most significant change stories), incorporates questionnaire data, and illustrative quotes (from clients and stakeholders). Comments attributed to Stakeholders include external stakeholders (including other service providers, property owners, property managers), host agency representatives, and Housing Support Workers.

Where challenges have been identified, recommendations for improvement have been made. These recommendations relate only to those areas within the scope of the Housing Support Worker Initiative and are not directed to the funders or external service providers or other partners. Recommendations have not been made with regard to issues beyond the control of the Initiative and its partner agencies.

KEY FINDING 1: CLIENTS OF THE HOUSING SUPPORT WORKER INITIATIVE ACHIEVE POSITIVE OUTCOMES

Positive outcomes achieved by clients include:

- finding and maintaining appropriate housing;
- overcoming barriers to accessing services; and
- living independently, feeling empowered and having increased stability.

Most significant change story (participant 3)

A few years ago my Dad passed away and I got totally side tracked. I lost my job and started fooling around selling drugs. I ended up spending time in Federal jail.

When you get out of jail and you're on parole you have a parole officer, a social worker, and a psychologist, but then your parole ends and you are back to square one. The support team you had is no longer there. Thank goodness the Housing Support Worker was there to take over.

The Housing Support Worker helped me find a place to live. Having a criminal record doesn't make it easy to find a place to live. The Housing Support Workers have connections with landlords so people are willing to look past the criminal record and give you a chance.

The Housing Support Workers don't just treat you like a client, they develop a relationship, treat you like someone important. S/he not only helped me find a place to live, s/he is always there for me, a friend to me at the same time. When you get out of jail you don't have a lot of friends left – people have forgotten about you. You feel quite alone, like you have nowhere to turn.

Working with Housing Support Worker helps you rebuild yourself and get your confidence back. You feel like life is against you and there is no chance. Then you come across the Housing Support Worker and things you thought you couldn't do they help you achieve. S/he got me involved in volunteering speaking to students about the realities of being in jail. The Housing Support Workers give you confidence and support. They are more like an extended family.

HSWS HELP CLIENTS FIND AND MAINTAIN APPROPRIATE HOUSING

Throughout the interviews and questionnaire there was ample evidence that the HSWs have helped clients find and maintain appropriate housing.

Figure 1 Stakeholder questionnaire data: The HSW initiative meets clients' rights to safe and secure housing

The HSW initiative meets clients' rights to safe and secure housing

Response	Value
Very Successful	37% (10)
Successful	44% (12)
Unsuccessful	7% (2)
Very Unsuccessful	0
Unsure	11% (3)
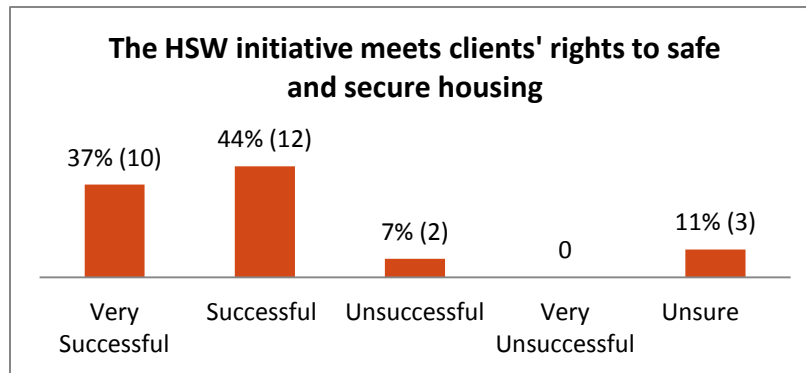
The majority of stakeholders who responded to the questionnaire thought the Initiative had been successful or very successful meeting clients' rights to safe and secure housing.

The HSW Initiative has been able to provide support and find housing for clients who are street homeless as well as those in the shelter system and those at risk of being evicted. Staff and stakeholders all referenced the sheer number of people who have been housed as clear evidence of the success of the program.

HSWs have been able to find housing for clients with a long history of homelessness and significant barriers to finding and maintaining housing. One of those barriers is the willingness of property owners to rent to HSW clients. This can be due to a lack of positive references, a lack of previous rental experience, poor credit, or previous arrears. Some clients also face discrimination because of their age, education, addictions, criminal record, or socio-economic status and status as an income recipient.

Once they help clients find and secure suitable housing the HSWs continue to work with clients to ensure housing is maintained. This was identified as a strength of the initiative. It is an important part of the overall success of the program and housing stability is a significant positive outcome for clients.

The HSW helped get me furnishings, dishes, pots and pans. They actively tried to find me a place to live and went with me to view apartments – **Participant**

The volume [of clients served] proves the initiative makes sense – **Stakeholder**

A lot of landlords are hesitant to rent to a 19 year old or to somebody who hasn't had previous rental experience – **Stakeholder**

A few places wouldn't rent to me because I was on social assistance – **Participant**

Individuals are facing the stigma of having to pay rent with income assistance, not being clean, not having credit, no references, not able to read and write – **Stakeholder**

Figure 2 Stakeholder questionnaire data: The Housing Support Worker Initiative has helped participants maintain appropriate housing

The Housing Support Worker Initiative has helped participants maintain appropriate housing

78% (21) — Agree
0 — Disagree
22% (6) — Unsure
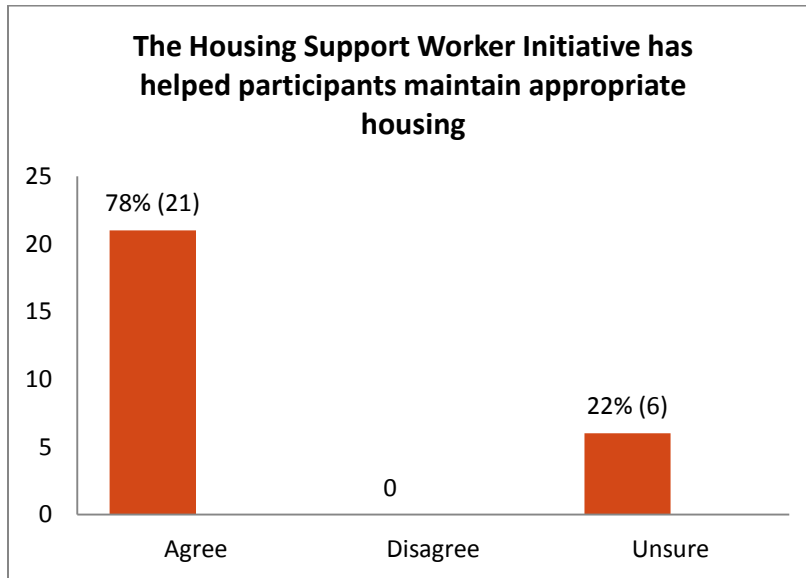
The support provided once the clients were housed includes HSW visits with clients, either in the HSWs office or in the client's apartment, phone calls and ongoing communication with property owners and property managers.

HSWs are able to address issues early and prevent evictions because they maintain a relationship with clients and property owners / managers. The HSW is also able to ensure clients are aware of their rights, duties and responsibilities of being a tenant, and help them understand landlord rights and responsibilities as well.

HAS THE HOUSING SUPPORT WORKER INITIATIVE EASED PRESSURE ON THE SHELTER SYSTEM?

Although the HSWs have been successful finding housing for clients this has not necessarily decreased the number of individuals using the shelter system.

According to the Affordable Housing Association of Nova Scotia (2013), there have been relatively small changes in shelter use over the past four years.

The HSWs are providing resources that encourage and support individuals to experience success living independently - **Stakeholder**

People are being housed and staying housed due to the long term support we can provide - **Stakeholder**

What justice are we doing if clients are in a cycle of being housed, being evicted and being housed again? – **Stakeholder**

The landlords are our clients as well – if they are staying housed and being good tenants then we can send more people - **Stakeholder**

Because the HSW does repeat visits it allows them to see problems before a tenant gets evicted. Also landlords feel like they have a place to call before proceeding to eviction - **Stakeholder**

S/he [HSW] helps me to maintain my apartment and keep that stability through the home visits, checking in, helping me get into programs, going through budgeting – **Participant**

Figure 3HRM Shelter Use

HRM Shelter Use 2009 - 2012

—◆— # of individuals who stayed in a shelter

—■— # adult men

—▲— # adult women

	2009	2010	2011	2012
# of individuals who stayed in a shelter	1718	2052	1973	1860
# adult men	869	1096	1087	1018
# adult women	574	596	588	570
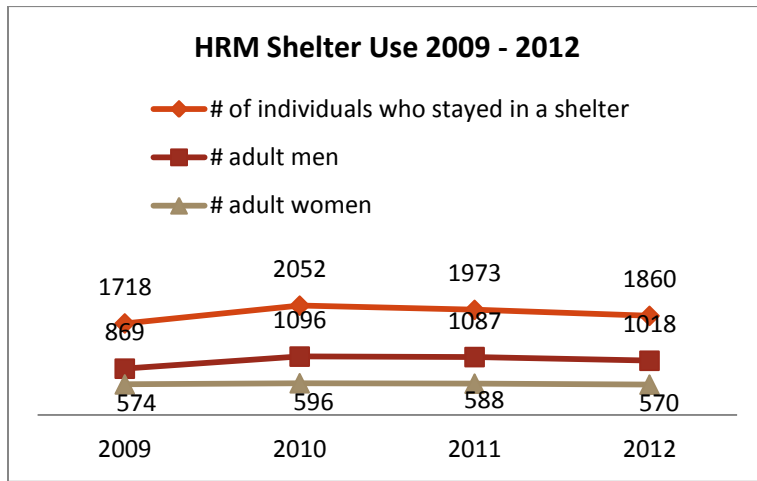
There are not necessarily fewer people in the shelters, but there are fewer repeats...you're not seeing the same people coming back anymore – **Stakeholder**

Stakeholders who completed the questionnaire were divided on whether the program has eased pressure on the shelter system.

Figure 4 Stakeholder questionnaire data: The Housing Support Worker Initiative has contributed to easing pressure on the emergency shelter system.

The Housing Support Worker Initiative has contributed to easing pressure on the emergency shelter system.

Agree	Disagree	Unsure
48% (10)	29% (6)	24% (5)
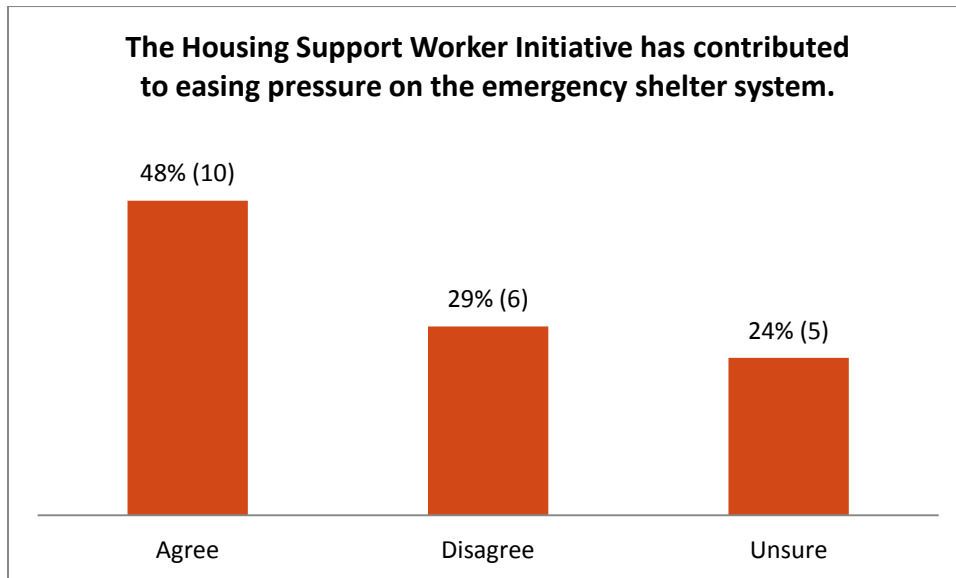
There was insufficient data to enable the evaluators to answer this question. Consideration of this question should figure into the planning of this initiative, so as to ensure shelter providers are appropriately resourced to deal with their client needs. If the shelters are left only with clients who have higher needs, this does not necessarily ease the pressure on the shelters. Should there be a decrease in numbers, these should not be misinterpreted to necessarily mean there should be a concomitant decrease in funding to shelters.

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HSWS HELP CLIENTS OVERCOME BARRIERS TO ACCESSING SERVICES

HSWs also help clients maintain housing by connecting them with other services and supports. HSW clients experience multiple barriers to accessing the services and supports they need. It is challenging for individuals to find out what resources are available and navigate the systems that provide them.

The majority of stakeholders also thought the Initiative had been successful or very successful assisting clients to navigate the system and address systemic issues.

Figure 5 Stakeholder questionnaire data: Use expertise to assist clients in navigating the system and address systemic issues

Use expertise to assist clients in navigating the system and address systemic issues

- Very Successful: 33% (9)
- Successful: 63% (17)
- Unsuccessful: 4% (1)
- Very Unsuccessful: 0
- Unsure: 0
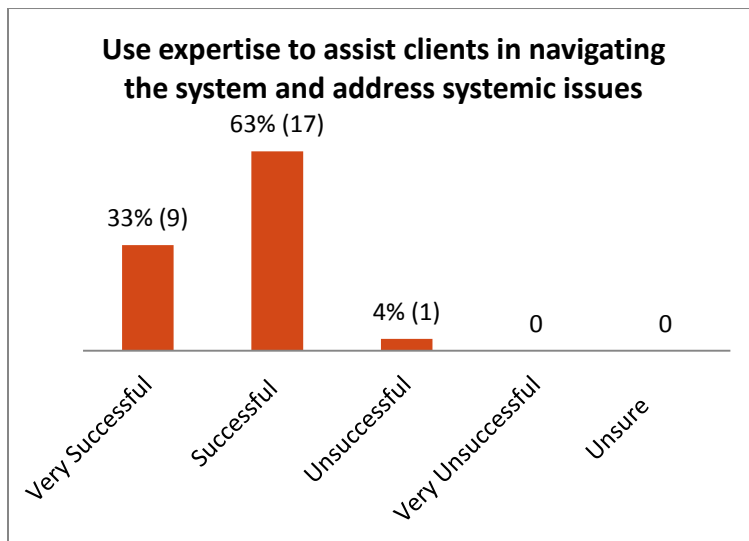
HSWS HELP CLIENTS LIVE INDEPENDENTLY, FEEL EMPOWERED AND HAVE INCREASED STABILITY

Through the work of the HSWs clients are able to achieve positive outcomes. HSWs report that many of their clients are living successfully out of the shelter system and their need for supports has decreased over time. Clients gain confidence and skills to maintain housing on their own.

The system makes it hard to get what I need or know where I need to go. It took 4 years for me to get hearing aids and only after going to my local MLA - **Participant**

The Department of Community Services is not open about what is available, so clients need to fight for what they're eligible for. By the time people get to the shelter they don't have the strength to put up with the barriers and road blocks to get the supports they need - **Stakeholder**

The biggest change being in an apartment is that I can manage my life like an adult. I can eat what I want, when I want. I can sleep when I want. I have my own space. I can leave my toiletries out. All that good stuff - **Participant**

At first they come in once a week, then once a month. We see they've gained skills, like buying groceries, and budgeting – skills they didn't have before – **Stakeholder**

Now I have the support I need. I am able to show I am capable of taking care of my son. Children's aid is not involved anymore which is a big difference - **Participant**

This increased independence and success achieving goals helps clients feel empowered.

Achieving stability in housing also contributes to increased stability in other areas of clients' lives.

Even when issues arise, situations change or current housing situations break down, the HSW is able to ensure clients continue to be housed. The HSW can help re-house clients sometimes with the same landlord but in a different building or with a different superintendent.

The majority of stakeholders who responded to the questionnaire agree the HSW Initiative has contributed to increased stability in the lives of clients.

Figure 6 Stakeholder questionnaire data: The Housing Support Worker Initiative has contributed to increased stability in the lives of participants.

The Housing Support Worker Initiative has contributed to increased stability in the lives of participants.

95% (20)

0

5% (1)

Agree   Disagree   Unsure
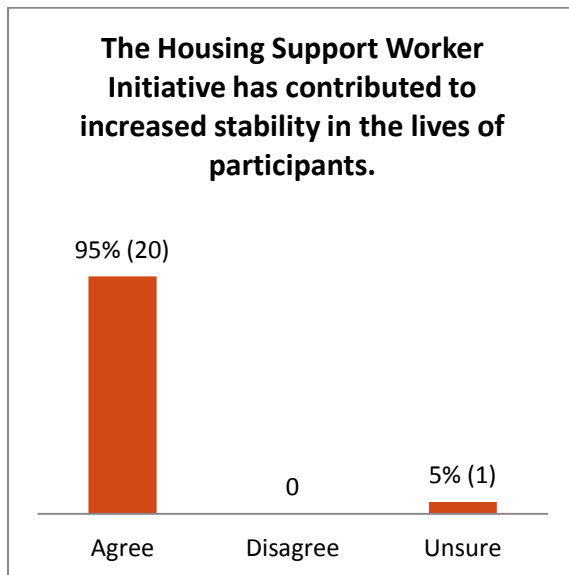
The HSW is able to help people get the foundation where they can be encouraged to believe in themselves – **Stakeholder**

The HSW helped me find a place to live and got me involved in volunteering speaking at high school law classes about the realities of being in jail – **Participant**

The housing stability is allowing clients to be able to make other life decisions such as about education or employment, getting their finances stable. It has allowed clients to do better parenting, and we have seen less child welfare involvement...Clients are feeling hope – **Stakeholder**

Now that I have a stable place to live I have been able to focus on getting back on my feet. I am self employed, and work from home, so now I can generate some income. I am much more stable now than I was - **Participant**

I feel like my life is more stable. This is the longest I've ever stayed in one place. I haven't broken my lease. I am able to do different things, work on other issues like my mental health and addictions. I can go to programs and keep myself on track – **Participant**

I'm not living the street life. I don't sell drugs anymore, don't do drugs. I'm in programs and going to school - **Participant**

Absolutely, a lot has changed. I have my own place. I'm not homeless anymore, which has helped me stay sober longer. I got my son back – **Participant**

KEY FINDING 2: THE SUCCESS OF THE HOUSING SUPPORT WORKER INITIATIVE IS RELATED TO THE TYPE OF SERVICE PROVIDED

The positive outcomes achieved by clients are related to the types of services the HSWs are able to provide. HSWs are able to be flexible and provide individualized services. They develop strong, personal relationships with clients that allow them to understand client needs, issues, and barriers and provide ongoing support to clients after they are housed.

Most significant change story (staff 7)

The Housing Support Worker Initiative has helped people get off the streets. Those who are homeless know they can talk to the Housing Support Workers; they can build trust and a relationship with somebody who is going to help them find housing and supports. It has been important to have an Aboriginal woman as a Housing Support Worker. Clients see somebody who has lived in that world and understands it. It makes it easier to make connections and build relationships. Because of that relationship I know my clients feel they can be honest about everything that is going on in their lives, which helps them get housed and stay housed because there are fewer conflicts with landlords. For example if they do perform smudging ceremonies at home and they do not tell the Housing Support Worker and the worker finds them housing that is non-smoking this can be a problem. One of my clients had been prescribed medical marijuana but was embarrassed to say so. If I hadn't built a relationship with her so she felt safe disclosing that we could have had a situation where she was evicted for drug use. Building relationships with landlords is also really important. Now I have landlords who call to let me know about openings and I have a better understanding of how to meet landlord's expectations and which landlords can work with which clients.

There was a man in his late 40s who was considered habitually homeless who came to me last year and told me he felt he was too old to sleep outside in the winter time anymore. He told me that in the past had had committed petty crimes so that he was put in jail just to stay warm and get fed. I was able to successfully house him three times. He is an alcoholic and refuses treatment, but he has not been on the streets or in jail since I started working with him.

POSITIVE CLIENT OUTCOMES ARE ACHIEVED BY PROVIDING FLEXIBLE, INDIVIDUALIZED SERVICES

This ability to meet the diverse and complex needs of clients was identified as a strength by stakeholders who completed the questionnaire. The HSW are able to adapt the way that the service is delivered so it works best for the clients they serve. They are available on-site as front-line workers to do client intake but also to provide aftercare once housing is found. It is important that the HSW is a dedicated staff position focused on finding and maintaining housing.

POSITIVE CLIENT OUTCOMES ARE ACHIEVED THROUGH STRONG RELATIONSHIPS WITH HSWS

Working one-on-one with clients allows HSWs to develop strong, personal relationships with them. This allows the HSWs to have a deep understanding of client needs, issues, and barriers.

This personal relationship allows clients to talk to HSWs about issues they don't feel comfortable talking about with landlords or other service providers.

I know folks here [participating agency] tried to do that type of work but to have someone do that on the side as well as their normal functions is next to impossible – **Stakeholder**

The more rigid a program is the harder it is for each organization to make it work for their specific clients with specific needs. The flexibility allows the initiative to work with each organization's own mandate and goals – **Stakeholder**

The HSW initiative allows workers to use their imagination and do anything that needs to get done to keep people housed, from buying a cat carrier, to getting a cat neutered as a landlord had insisted, to helping with bed bug spray preparation – **Stakeholder**

The HSW has helped me with everything I can think of. S/he helped me find an apartment, helped get me all of the stuff I needed – furniture, toaster, coffee maker, you name it, it was all ready by the time I got my apartment. S/he helped me out when I had a bed bug situation. S/he is helping me get back to school. When I was sick and had surgery s/he brought me food because I couldn't carry groceries - **Participant**

The key is to have the time to spend with the youth, help point out their strengths and not just help them do what they need to sign a lease. The more you know about an individual's strengths and the barriers in their lives, the better I am able to assist them to climb out of the hole – **Stakeholder**

Not only do they look at you as a client, they develop a relationship, treat you like someone important. S/he not only helped me find a place to live, s/he is always there for me, a friend to me at the same time – **Participant**

PERSONAL, INDIVIDUALIZED SUPPORT CONTINUES AFTER CLIENTS ARE HOUSED

This ability to build relationships with clients was identified as a strength of the Initiative by stakeholders who completed the questionnaire. Stakeholders all thought the HSW Initiative was very successful or successful in providing non-judgmental, face-to-face supports to individuals.

Figure 7 Stakeholder questionnaire data: Provide non-judgmental, face-to-face supports to individuals

Provide non-judgmental, face-to-face supports to individuals

Unsure	0
Very Unsuccessful	0
Unsuccessful	0
Successful	56% (15)
Very Successful	44% (12)
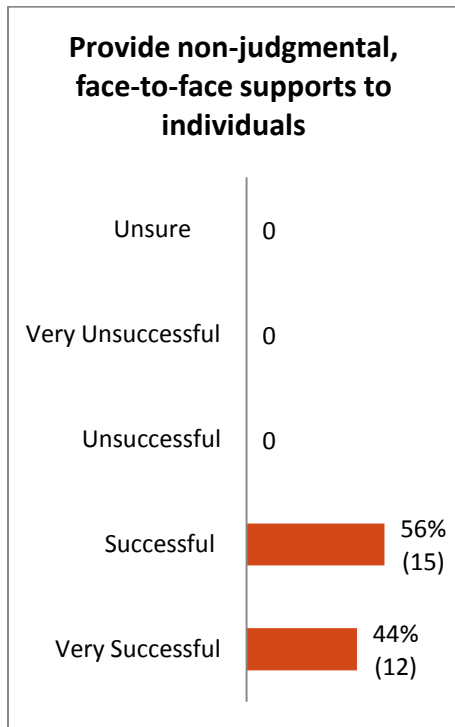
The HSW is a great person to answer any question I have. I appreciate the home visits every 2 weeks. It gives me a chance to talk about anything I need to in private - **Participant**

I am recovering. I was raped at 16 and gave the baby up for adoption. I lived on the street. I never ask for help. I always rely on myself – never want to depend on anybody else. When I did get support, I didn't know how to deal with it. I didn't know how to ask for help. The system failed me so many times, I just hid or ran. The HSW was so comforting; s/he always seems to have the right thing to say. Other professionals are too dressed up and it is hard to be comfortable. I always felt the HSW was a phone call away, s/he never said "I told you so." The HSW always gave me lots of information about other resources and where to get help. I had to do a lot of work myself too. The HSW never gave up on me. – **Participant**

There are fewer conflicts with landlords because the clients are more open about what is going on in the lives and what their daily lives are like. For example, if they do perform smudging ceremonies at home and they do not tell the HSW and the HSW finds them housing that is non-smoking this can be a problem - **Stakeholder**

The HSWs do a lot a positive work just maybe not in the way initially envisioned. The fact that HSWs are doing eviction prevention and building relationships with landlords is what is really keeping people from going back to shelters – **Stakeholder**

The case management has meant that these tenants have better success rate at tenancy than their regular tenants because people are getting the support they need. We experience fewer issues with these tenants than with regular tenants – **Stakeholder**

Keeping communication open with the property managers is important. When I have issues with the super the HSW can advocate for me. S/he makes my voice more credible. I feel like they take me seriously – **Participant**

KEY FINDING 3: THE RELATIONSHIPS BUILT WITH PROPERTY OWNERS, OTHER AGENCIES AND GOVERNMENT SERVICE PROVIDERS INCREASE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE INITIATIVE

Most significant change story (participant 6)

There was a buzz among the residents at the shelter that you could talk to shelter staff about housing and then book an appointment with the Housing Support Worker.

Once I met with the Housing Support Worker things really started to improve for me. There are not many housing options for $535 a month in decent areas. Many of the housing options available for that price are in areas with high crime. Just because you are homeless or living in a shelter doesn't mean you're willing to live in those areas. I didn't want to put myself in that situation. The Housing Support Worker knew what areas of the city to look in and was able to suggest a number of different property management firms that would accept the subsidy. S/he printed off information and gave it to me and told me to work on it every day. Once I did that things started to happen.

Working with Housing Support Worker was my only hope. S/he is the only decent thing about the shelter. The conditions at the shelter are very poor and they have little to offer people. It is draining and emotionally hard to stay there. Whatever your issues are, living there is just more likely to push you backwards.

Now that I have my own apartment I can think clearer. I sleep better. I feel safer. The biggest change is that I can manage my life like an adult. I can eat what I want, when I want. I can sleep when I want. I have my own space.

In addition to developing strong relationships with their clients, HSWs have dedicated time to establish and maintain relationships with property owners, property managers, other agencies and government service providers. Most stakeholders agreed the HSWs have been successful doing this.

Figure 8 Stakeholder questionnaire data: The Housing Support Worker Initiative has been successful in *developing* strong partnerships

The Housing Support Worker Initiative has been successful in *developing* strong partnerships

50

79% (23)   0   21% (6)

0

Agree   Disagree   Unsure

Figure 9 Stakeholder questionnaire data: The Housing Support Worker Initiative has been successful in *maintaining* strong partnerships

The Housing Support Worker Initiative has been successful in *maintaining* strong partnerships

40

72% (21)

20   0   28% (8)

0

Agree   Disagree   Unsure
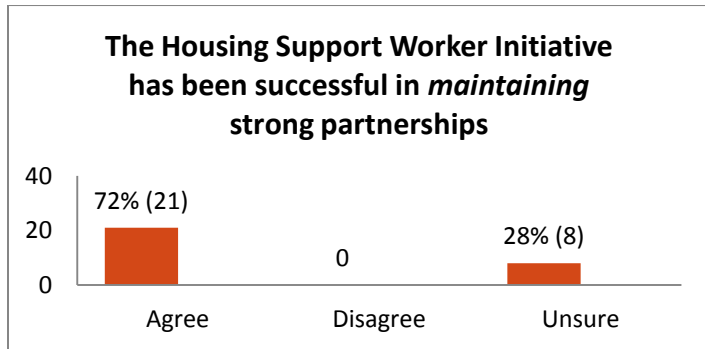
> *HSWs' strong relationships with landlords/superintendents has been of great benefit to program clients* – **Stakeholder**
>
> *I like the way all the HSWs meet and discuss important issues regarding clients and barriers* – **Stakeholder**

This ability to build relationships and share information across agencies and organizations was identified as a strength by stakeholders who completed the questionnaire.

These relationships have also resulted in increased trust, cooperation and efficiency in connecting clients with needed services and supports. The HSWs have gained knowledge of existing services and supports, which makes it easier to connect clients with the resources they need. The HSWs are also able to identify trends in policy or program delivery that could result in negative outcomes for their clients. One example provided was that the intake policy for Addiction Services was unintentionally preventing individuals without fixed addresses from accessing those programs.

The HSWs themselves are gaining expertise through working with other agencies and government service providers and have begun to develop a shared knowledge base. This has made them an important resource among others working in the areas of homelessness and housing supports.

As they work in the community the HSWs are gaining a higher profile and increased respect for the work they do. Referrals to the HSWs are now coming from more sources including clients referring other clients, referrals from Income Assistance workers, the prison system and hospitals. The HSWs also report that it is getting easier to work with landlords as more landlords know about the work they do.

External organizations now have a better understanding of the role of the HSW and that is making working with these organizations easier. This common understanding improves the ability of the HSWs to access the services their clients require. Most stakeholders agree the HSW Initiative has contributed to increased coordination across agencies and services.

Figure 10 Stakeholder questionnaire data: The Housing Support Worker Initiative has contributed to increased coordination across agencies and services.

The Housing Support Worker Initiative has contributed to increased coordination across agencies and services.

81% (17)

10% (2)   10% (2)

Agree   Disagree   Unsure
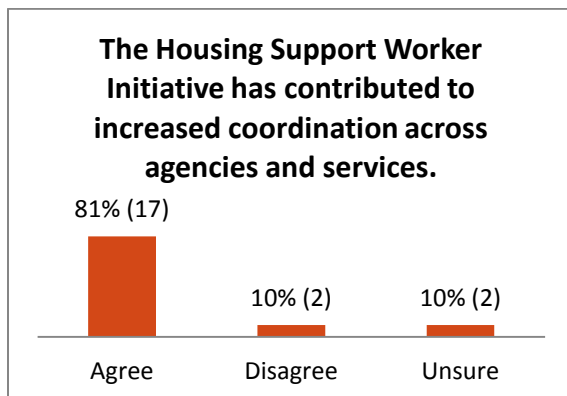
We've opened up a dialogue, and started to be able to identify policies that are acting as road blocks for people. Small changes lead up to less barriers in the future – **Stakeholder**

The HSW serves an important role as the person to call and ask; they are getting to really know the systems, developing important relationships with external partners and knowing who to call – **Stakeholder**

We had to fight quite a bit to get recognition from other landlords, but now we have good relationships with most of the larger property management companies – **Stakeholder**

There is a difference between having this kind of case manager versus a Community Services social worker. If a landlord gets in touch with the Department of Community Services they are told that is your problem, take the client to the tenancy board. The HSW works as a true partner. If we run into a problem they are there to help and that might mean there to help these tenants move out to more appropriate housing – **Stakeholder**

I've been able to build relationships with landlords. Now I have landlords who call me to let me know about openings. I have a better understanding how to meet landlord's expectations and which landlords can work with which clients – **Stakeholder**

Department of Community Services workers are beginning to understand the role of the HSWs and we have to spend less time explaining what the HSWs do – **Stakeholder**

KEY FINDING 4: THE MODEL USED BY THE HOUSING SUPPORT WORKER INITIATIVE HAS IMPORTANT STRENGTHS

In addition to the type of work being done by the HSWs, the model employed by the initiative is also a strength. The strengths of the model as one that is decentralized include:

- Having focused, dedicated HSWs located in specialized community agencies
- The ability to focus on the needs of specific populations
- The ability to draw upon the network of supports, services and programs, as well as expertise within each agency

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Most significant change story (participant 2)

Because of the Housing Support Worker I have been in the same apartment since 2011. This is the longest I've ever stayed in one place. It is a great apartment – the building is clean and secure, the area is child-friendly and it is close to a grocery store. When I was trying to find a place to live on my own property managers would hang up on me as soon as they found out I was on welfare. There is still that stigma – that people on welfare are bums and drug addicts. Being young is also a barrier. Having the Housing Support Worker as an advocate was so important. S/he supported me through all the steps of finding my apartment.

Having the apartment has provided a stable home for my son. I had two other children who were placed in foster care by Child Welfare. They've both been adopted now.

Now I have the support I need. I am able to show I am capable of taking care of my son. Child Welfare is not involved anymore which is a big difference.

If the Housing Support Worker hadn't helped me find my apartment I would still be going from slum to slum. When there are issues the Housing Support Worker can advocate for me. That makes my voice more credible. I feel like I am taken seriously.

The most important thing is that the Housing Support Workers really provide support. They care and they do their best to make things work out. As a young person you need people who are truly in your corner, not just for their jobs but for you.

HAVING STAFF FOCUSED ON HOUSING IS A STRENGTH OF THE INITIATIVE

The ability for HSWs to focus specifically on housing needs is changing the culture within shelters. Stakeholders reported a change in the thinking among individuals in the shelter system that the shelter could no longer be seen as a permanent solution to their housing needs.

HAVING HSWS LOCATED IN COMMUNITY AGENCIES ABLE TO FOCUS ON THE NEEDS OF SPECIFIC POPULATIONS IS A STRENGTH OF THE INITIATIVE

Having staff located in specialized community agencies provides the opportunity to address the needs of specific populations. The HSWs are able to adapt the initiative to the missions of the organizations in which they work. For example, HSWs may be situated within women-centred organizations. Some external organizations refer clients to HSWs based on the mandates of the specific organization the HSWs are located in. For example, anyone under 19 would be referred to the HSW at Phoenix and women with children to the HSW at Adsum or Barry House.

The best example of why this aspect of the HSW Initiative model is important is the services provided in the two Aboriginal organizations. Most of the Aboriginal clients are moving to Halifax from Reserves, adjusting to living off-reserve and in a big city without their friends and family. The Aboriginal HSWs are able to help clients access the services they qualify for and navigate a system that non-Aboriginal organizations may not have expertise in.

BEING ABLE TO DRAW UPON EXISTING EXPERTISE AND NETWORKS IS A STRENGTH OF THE INITIATIVE

An additional benefit of being located within existing community organizations is that the HSWs are able to

There has been a huge change in the shelter culture. It is clear we want to talk to people about housing – **Stakeholder**

Emergency shelters should be emergency shelters – **Stakeholder**

It is helpful that we're all working with different populations, groups of people. It is helpful to be able to focus on a specific population and know there are other people taking care of others – **Stakeholder**

I can help Aboriginal clients make the city their home – **Stakeholder**

It is important that services are specific to First Nations. It is more comfortable. There are family connections. We have a shared understanding - **Participant**

I used to live on reserve and I didn't know how to get an apartment or how to apply for social assistance. The HSW helped me do that and told me where I could go for other services. I had tried to find a place on my own but I didn't know how to go about any of it. On reserve we don't have to do that. You'd just move in with family. So I was really frustrated, trying to organize to go view apartments, remember which is which. Then I just met the HSW at the office and s/he drove me. That was really important because I didn't know my way around - **Participant**

draw upon the existing network of supports and expertise within each agency. This is further strengthened by networking among the HSWs who regularly meet as a group along with representatives of the host agencies.

LEARNING FROM STRATEGIES THAT HAVE BEEN IDENTIFIED AS HOUSING FIRST BEST PRACTICES FOR WORKING WITH SPECIFIC DEMOGRAPHIC GROUPS

When using a Housing First approach it is important to note that adaptations may need to be made in order to meet the needs of specific population groups. For example, in research on transitional housing for women in Calgary it was found that clients identified the community of women and safety of transitional housing as important parts of the support provided. This suggests that an immediate move from homelessness to independent living may not meet the needs of some women, particularly those with histories of trauma (Walsh 2011).

Homes for Women recently made the following recommendations for ensuring Housing First initiatives meet the needs of homeless women and girls:

- Existing programs for homeless women not lose funding in order to implement Housing First programs
- A gender analysis of the Housing First approach be conducted prior to implementation and the approach adjusted accordingly
- Entry criteria for Housing First programs reflect women and girls experience of homelessness
- Shelters for abused women be connected to Housing First programs
- Women-only and girl-only spaces be included in Housing First programs
- Housing First programs meet the needs of families including access to quality child care and housing close to schools
- Recognize that Housing First programs will not be appropriate for everyone, particularly for survivors of violence who may need additional security or in areas where a shortage of housing is a barrier to success
- Addressing homelessness requires attention to income support programs, minimum wage policies and affordable housing stock (2013)

A 2006 review of research on the relationship between family violence and homelessness also identified policies and practices shown to improve outcomes for individuals experiencing homelessness. These include:

- access to quality child care;
- early intervention in cases of child abuse and neglect;
- improved effectiveness of the foster care system;
- spousal violence legislation that facilitates the removal of the abusive partner from the home;
- the availability of both short-term emergency shelter and subsidized housing for victims of violence;
- the availability of shelters designed to accommodate the needs of older adults, including the needs of a couple who may be escaping abuse together;
- services and facilities to serve homeless people that are sensitive to the realities and consequences of family violence;
- services that are culturally appropriate; and

- the availability of adequate, long-term, affordable housing options (National Clearinghouse on Family Violence).

With regards to Aboriginal groups, Bodor et al. argue that:

> 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 Sixties Scoop, and other hallmarks of systemic marginalization and oppression of Aboriginal peoples in Canada. The Housing First model, due to its client-centred and harm reduction approaches, is evolving towards adoption of a decolonization process in the way it is delivered.
> (2011)

In order to ensure programming meet the needs of Aboriginal groups Bodor et al. recommend interventions be holistic and include:

- Indigenous and non-Indigenous life-skills training;
- Opportunities to connect with mentors;
- Ongoing partnerships with other Aboriginal organizations; and
- Opportunities for peer mentoring (2011).

Stergiopoulos et al. also suggest that, "[a]dapting Housing First with anti-racism/anti-oppression principles offers a promising approach to serving the diverse needs of homeless people from ethno-racial groups and strengthening the service systems developed to support them" (2012). They further recommend that agencies ensure:

- Services are provided in physical spaces which are inclusive and welcoming of ethno-racial communities;
- Programming provided are linguistic and culturally appropriate;
- Oppression and mental health are addressed concurrently; and
- Families and peers are involved in the recovery process (2012).

For youth who have experienced homelessness along with mental health and addiction a Housing First approach may not be particularly well suited. Forchuck et al. found in their Ontario-based study that not all clients were comfortable with the independence the Housing First model provides (2013). They suggest the inclusion of life and living skills development may make the model more acceptable to youth (ibid.).

Some literature suggests a housing ready model may be more appropriate for individuals who have a history of conflict with the law and substance abuse issues (Schiff 2000). Even when a Housing First approach is employed, it is important to match the type of housing to client need:

> Some people do fine with the scattered site model, and prefer it to being in housing that is identified with homelessness, mental health problems or other marginalizing statuses. Other people may prefer institutional or congregate models and find them to be less stigmatizing. Again, it comes down to client choice, a core principle of Housing First.
> (Gaetz et al. eds. 2013)

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KEY FINDING 5: THE MODEL USED BY THE HOUSING SUPPORT WORKER INITIATIVE ALSO HAS IMPORTANT CHALLENGES TO BE ADDRESSED.

Although the HSW Initiative has been very successful to date in enabling positive outcomes for clients the Initiative does have some challenges that need to be addressed if that success is to be sustainable over the long term.

Most significant change story (staff 5)

The Housing Support Worker Initiative has changed the whole dynamic of the facility – the culture of the shelter. It has lessened this idea that you can live in the shelter. It is clear we want to talk to people about housing. Housing is now front and centre. People are thinking maybe if their buddy can move out that so can they. For some people, all they need is help to navigate the system, help with subsidy applications. Before we would print the apartment list and that was it. We were stuck inside the four walls of the shelter. Now we go on viewings with people – if you want me to go with you on the bus to Sackville to meet with a landlord that's what we'll do. The ability to work outside the facility makes a big difference.

The low number of evictions and number of people who have moved out and stayed housed speak to the success of the work. Those who have maintained housing are so proud to show you their place. One individual who we thought would not be able to maintain housing decorated his place with all sorts of things and has made it beautiful. There have been some issues but once they are brought up he corrects them. The program has impacted the lives of many people who would otherwise still be in the shelter.

You could see a change in the workers too when they became Housing Support Workers. They were more proud. People come to this work because they want to help people. This position allows them to do that. Their increased satisfaction impacts clients. Though I do worry about them and the toll this work can take.

THERE IS A LACK OF A SET OF CLEAR, COMMON CORE POLICIES ACROSS THE INITIATIVE

As a multi-site program the HSW Initiative has developed and evolved differently within each partner agency. These differences are, in part, responses to the different working environments and populations being served. The ability of the HSWs to adapt their work to meet the needs of their clients is a critical strength of the Initiative and should be maintained. However, in order to ensure the initiative continues to produce positive results and is sustainable over the long term there is a need for a set of clear, common core policies across the Initiative to guide the work. Presently, the organizations involved in the Initiative lack a clear, shared understanding of the principles behind the HSW Initiative and the mandate of individual HSWs.

There are a lot of needs that need to be taken into consideration – the cost of living, food security, tenant insurance, access to a telephone. There aren't really any rules for how we deal with that – we're all just making it work - **Stakeholder**

We are only capable of doing so much but our clients think we're superheroes – **Stakeholder**

RECOMMENDATION A: THE ORGANIZATIONS CURRENTLY HOSTING HSWS NEED TO DEVELOP AND ARTICULATE A CLEAR, SHARED UNDERSTANDING OF THE PRINCIPLES FOR THE HSW INITIATIVE

These principles and guidelines are intended to protect the HSWs from burn out, increase the clarity of roles and responsibilities across agencies and ensure the Initiative is able to meet the needs of its clients.   At present, the HSW Initiative has been left open to interpretation by each agency and individual. In general, this flexibility has been a strength of the Initiative which should be maintained. However, leaving all aspects of the Initiative open to interpretation puts the long-term sustainability of the program at risk as the HSWs attempt to do and be everything to everyone.

Establishing core principles is not meant to limit the flexibility of the program but rather, to provide some focus and ground rules for longer term planning and decision-making. For example, for agencies to fully implement the principles of a Housing First approach, the individual agencies and HSWs would need to look at their practices to determine if they were in keeping with that approach and make decisions based on how to best implement that model.

There is growing evidence on best practice for Housing First initiatives. Based on the experiences of agencies working with Housing First programming some core principles or elements of success have been identified. These include:

- Providing a continuum of housing and support services to address homelessness;
- Making a range of housing options available for individuals to choose from;
- Ensuring services are flexible and client-centered;
- Identifying and removing barriers to accessing services;

- Employing qualified staff who are well trained and client-focused;
- Providing opportunities for clients to participate in social activities;
- Establishing collaborative partnerships across sectors, agencies and service providers;
- Securing stable, ongoing funding;
- Engaging in ongoing monitoring and evaluation to ensure quality and effectiveness;
- Identifying clear program goals;
- Having strong leadership and an effective organizational structure;
- Developing organizational capacity to work with individuals with multiple needs;
- Providing intensive case management with 24 hour availability;
- Maintaining caseloads at a ratio of 1:20-25;
- Ensuring case managers are supported by relevant health care professionals;
- Engaging clients and former clients in program planning and service delivery;
- Providing services focused on the specific needs of diverse population groups including Aboriginal peoples and women;
- Providing services to meet the range of client needs including mental health services, addiction services, and independent living skills;
- Having access to a supply of appropriate, permanent housing;
- Developing strong working relationships with landlords and property managers; and
- Maintaining effective data management systems (City Spaces Consulting Ltd. 2008, Burt 2004, Patterson 2008, Gaetz et al. eds 2013, Mental Health Commission 2012, Pearson 2007).

RECOMMENDATION B: DEVELOP A COMMON SET OF GUIDELINES TO DEFINE THE WORK OF THE HSWS. THESE MUST INCLUDE GUIDANCE AROUND CLIENT SCREENING AND SELECTION,

The clients who can be helped must be those who can be enabled to 'graduate' from the program, where the amount of support needed declines overtime – **Stakeholder**

HSWs are best at supporting clients who need a boost but who can survive for the most part on their own, those who are not too intensive in terms of ongoing support needs. The HSWs are helping the middle group of clients who don't just need a printout of apartments but who also do not have very complex needs related to addictions, mental health or cognitive deficiencies – **Stakeholder**

While the HSWs can help some clients who are in crisis, those who have higher needs often related to mental health and addiction, the HSW is not appropriate. The HSW is one person and cannot deal with those who require more than weekly interventions. These clients are more often those who face challenges accessing mental health and addiction supports on an ongoing basis – **Stakeholder**

The HSW cannot assist the people who are the very most in need because this program is focused primarily on housing people in the private market which is sometimes not suitable - **Stakeholder**

The HSW cannot provide 24 hour care and should not be expected to do so - **Stakeholder**

Some clients may require weekly visits longer than others, but anymore than that is beyond the ability of this program. It is a limit that needs to be recognized - **Stakeholder**

CASELOADS, SCOPE OF PRACTICE AND SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS.

In addition to this set of common principles the HSWs themselves require a clearer, more focused mandate. During the development of the HSW Initiative, the organizations engaged in conversations around the clients who might be served by the program. Indeed, the initial presentation to government for funding of this initiative was focused on individuals who required light and medium supports. However, there are no agreed upon policies or guidelines to focus the work of HSWs. At this time, stakeholders believe the program is not suitable for high need individuals, particularly those with acute mental health and / or addictions issues.

It is important that any guidelines around client screening and selection consider the limitations inherent in the design of the program which, at present, involves a single HSW working one-on-one with individuals. With a clearer mandate the goal is that clients who are referred are the best fit for the program and the services offered.

Once guidelines are developed around the appropriate clients for the initiative it is also critical to establish reasonable case load guidelines. Literature related to Housing First programs suggests a case load ratio of 1:20-25. At present, HSW case loads vary significantly across organizations.

In addition to caseload guidelines the HSW Initiative requires policies about discharge planning. Currently, HSWs assist individuals to find and maintain housing, but there are no agreed upon mechanisms for discharging these individuals out of the program. Providing ongoing support to all individuals who have ever entered the program is

When the HSW Initiative first started we had to find people at the shelter who wanted help, now there is more to do than I can ever get done. We can't house people in the shelter forever and take care of the people I've housed…I can't spend time doing aftercare because I am working to house new people. There are so many people out there that people leave a message and it takes me 3 days to get back to them. I have to spend time on crisis management rather than regular maintenance – **Stakeholder**

Part of the struggle is case load – how can you continue to take on new clients and provide ongoing support? We can either cut the case load and maintain the level of ongoing support or increase the case load and stop providing or reduce the amount of ongoing support. We need more hands – **Stakeholder**

We need to do some planning as a group and as individuals – when do we decide to discharge? When do we send people on to other supports? – **Stakeholder**

Staff are all overworked. It is heavy work they do, heavy stories, heavy situations. This shows on them sometimes. There is going to come a point when they hit the wall. – **Stakeholder**

Safety is a big concern when HSWs make one-on-one visits. We use a buddy system or have people call in before and after which is administratively challenging. When you are working with people with challenging behavior it would be aood to have a team – **Stakeholder**

not sustainable over the long term given the current limitations in the initiative.

The nature of the work done by the HSWs also requires consistent guidelines around the health, wellness and safety of the workers themselves.

Any guidelines developed at the Initiative level need to:

- Continue to allow individual HSWs to have flexibility and autonomy in terms of providing flexible support tailored to the individuals they work with; and
- Balance the best interests of the client and workers themselves.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES WILL BE REQUIRED IN ORDER TO DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT HOUSING FIRST BEST PRACTICES

Additional resources are required in order to develop and adopt the standards outlined above. It is also important to note that it is the higher need, chronic homeless who will remain in the shelter system if their needs are not being met by the HSW Initiative. This suggests the need for a continuum of housing options and supports and additional resources for the shelter system as the population being served changes. The HSW initiative needs to better align its services with the resources available, or/and work to secure additional resources as required for the services provided.

RECOMMENDATION C: IF THE DECISION IS MADE TO CONTINUE TO WORK WITH CLIENTS WITH COMPLEX NEEDS THE HSWS WILL REQUIRE ADDITIONAL RESOURCES AND SUPPORTS

I may be the only one of their case workers that goes out to visit them – I can only do so much, I do a lot of after-hours calls. I need more of a team environment – **Stakeholder**

Team work works, not one person can do it...not everybody needs that team approach but the high needs people do – **Stakeholder**

There are different groups of clients with different levels of need. The HSW has tried to be everything for all people and is unable to do so – **Stakeholder**

Housing First elsewhere is much more intense and involves intensive teams that includes doctors, addiction workers and others. For the most part the clients that are helped here are those who are ready, not the people 'under the bridge' – **Stakeholder**

For clients who have serious cognitive deficiencies ...or who have serious addiction and untreated mental illness, very complex needs – it is very difficult to put in the supports that these clients need, which requires intense case management by a team. HSWs do not have the skill-set and supports to help these clients. These clients have been in the shelter system for 5 years or more and are not able to get out. This population is being forgotten by government and we aren't able to serve this population without a Housing First model that has intensive case management – **Stakeholder**

The HSW Initiative cannot be blamed for some people not being able to be housed. The government has a role to play in filling in the gap in services that exist for people who have complex needs – **Stakeholder**

While the HSW was designed based on a Housing First philosophy, it has not been implemented in a way that incorporates all of the key elements of this approach in a systematic and sustainable way. Should the organizations involved with this Initiative decide to continue to work with clients with complex needs using a Housing First approach, it requires secured and dedicated additional resources both internal to the functioning of the program and externally via public services. The HSW Initiative is not currently capable of sustaining this level of case management and some HSWs are feeling stretched to provide the support their clients require.

Additionally, as an initiative that is designed as a Housing First approach, there needs to be consideration to the additional resources required to implement best practices.

Based on a review of Housing First best practices, additional resources required would include:

- additional staff to enable HSWs to provide 24 hour case management;
- access to a range of mental health services, addiction services, and independent living skills training for clients;
- additional staff and capacity to engage clients in program planning and service delivery; and
- effective data management systems and funds or capacity to engage in ongoing monitoring and evaluation.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLANS AND NETWORKING OPPORTUNITIES FOR HSWS ARE KEY TO CONTINUED SUCCESS AND SUSTAINABILITY

The development and implementation of professional development plans for HSWs must be part of any future planning and funding requests. The HSWs come from diverse experiences and educational backgrounds.   As a group they bring many strengths to the Initiative. As the goals and mandate of the initiative are clarified this must be supported by identifying training needs to provide a more consistent knowledge and skill-base across the program.

RECOMMENDATION D: DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLANS FOR HSWS

As reported above the HSWs are becoming subject matter experts in the areas of homelessness and housing supports. This will be strengthened through the implementation of professional development plans.

RECOMMENDATION E: CONTINUE TO STRENGTHEN COMMUNICATION AMONG HSWS AND ACROSS AGENCIES

Opportunities for HSWs to share their knowledge base as a group are another means of increasing the overall quality and efficiency of the initiative. This can be done by continuing to hold regular in-person meetings.

It is also important for the HSWs to have opportunities to share their experience and knowledge with other stakeholder groups. Inter-agency communication and collaboration was identified as an area for improvement in the stakeholder questionnaire.

Increasing information sharing with other agencies could be accomplished through hosting information sessions about the HSW Initiative or a regular email newsletter.

THE HSW INITIATIVE CAN IMPROVE ITS ABILITY TO DEMONSTRATE SUCCESS BY INCREASING THE QUALITY, EFFICIENCY AND CONSISTENCY OF PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION

Program administration for the HSW Initiative includes gathering client data through regular interviews. Currently, interviews are conducted at intake, six months, 12 months and two years. At this time, different organizations collect different client data. The majority of client data is stored in hard copy files.

In order to be able to report on the outcomes of the initiative

The HSWs are starting to break down the barriers with landlords and other service providers, but need more people to understand how HSW fits into other services – **Stakeholder**

We need for more education of the broader community and service providers who might make referrals to the program about the actual services provided so that the most appropriate clients are referred – **Stakeholder**

Program administration hasn't been given the attention it needs. It is hard because we get busy with the day to day – not thinking about how best to do administration – **Stakeholder**

Some things we are still trying to sort out. There is no consistent way of doing statistics...We could be doing a better job of it – **Stakeholder**

We need to have some benchmarks and common reporting so that we can get to a final product we can consistently use to talk about the initiative - **Stakeholder**

We need to have an understanding that more information is not necessarily a good thing. It needs to be tied to what we want to report on - **Stakeholder**

and meet basic requirements around the ethical collection, use and storage of client data there will need to be some investment of time and resources into program administration at the initiative level.

RECOMMENDATION F: THE HSW INITIATIVE REQUIRES THE INVESTMENT OF MORE TIME AND RESOURCES TO INCREASE THE QUALITY, EFFICIENCY AND CONSISTENCY OF PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION

Based on the review of client intake data completed for this evaluation it is recommended the HSW Initiative develop a simplified and more efficient means for collecting program and client information. In order to improve accountability, clients who are providing their information must be able to provide their informed consent. This means clients must understand why the information is being collected, how it will be used and how it will be stored. Information collected during client interviews must be linked to outputs and outcomes defined in the Initiative logic model. It is recommended the interview questions be limited to:

- Client demographics (age, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, family status)
- Current housing situation
- Employment status
- Sources of income
- A single open-ended question about how the client perceives his / her current quality of life

A system must be established for entering this information electronically, and analyzing and reporting on it at the initiative level on an annual basis.

In order to be able to report on the true cost of the HSW Initiative it is also necessary to establish a common system for tracking in-kind support provided by host organizations and the number of hours worked by HSWs.

KEY FINDING 6: EXTERNAL FACTORS WILL AFFECT THE ONGOING SUSTAINABILITY OF THE HOUSING SUPPORT WORKER INITIATIVE

Most significant change story (participant 7)

I contacted the Housing Support Worker because I needed a two bedroom apartment but I couldn't afford one with the amount provided by Income Assistance. It was very stressful for me to live in a shelter with my child.

The Housing Support Worker helped me apply for a rental subsidy and arranged meetings with landlords. My new apartment is wonderful. It is safe and there is lots of space. It is close to my child's school and my workplace.

I immigrated to Halifax 3 years ago and the transition has been very difficult. Government services are difficult to navigate and I really appreciate the help the Housing Support Worker has provided. When I call her / him to talk about the challenges s/he is like a friend; s/he listens, s/he cares and s/he wants to genuinely help me.

The success and ongoing sustainability of the HSW Initiative will be greatly influenced by a number of external factors that are beyond the control of the organizations involved.

NEED FOR ACCEPTABLE, AFFORDABLE HOUSING OPTIONS

The need for more acceptable, affordable housing options was identified as an area for improvement in the stakeholder questionnaire. Most of the clients who are helped by the HSW receive Income Assistance (IA) from the provincial government. The shelter allowance provided by IA is $535 per month. The HSWs are competing to ensure their clients get housed in an environment where there are an insufficient number of safe, affordable apartments available because of the high rents and the limited number of landlords willing to agree to rent to their clients.

NEED FOR SUSTAINABLE FUNDING

Another external factor that will affect the sustainability of the HSW Initiative is the need for ongoing, adequate funding. Few stakeholders who completed the questionnaire agreed that the program has sufficient human and financial resources required to be successful.

Figure 11 Stakeholder questionnaire data: The Housing Support Worker Initiative has the human and financial resources required to be successful.

The Housing Support Worker Initiative has the human and financial resources required to be successful.

76% (16)

10% (2)   14% (3)

Agree   Disagree   Unsure
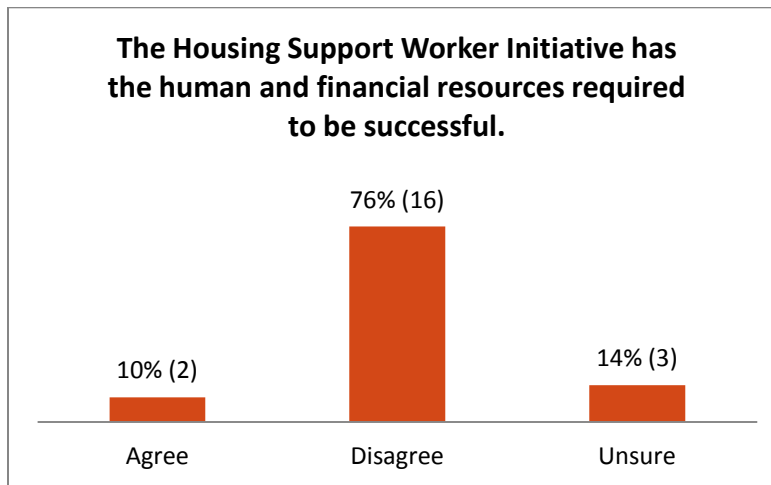
Increasing the resources of the program was also identified as area for improvement in the stakeholder questionnaire. The budget for the HSW Initiative has not increased since it began three years ago. Adequate, stable funding will allow the program to plan and invest time and effort more strategically.

Additional support is also required specifically for Aboriginal people. While Aboriginal students (college, university or adult learning) receive financial support from their Bands, that support isn't adequate to pay for all of the costs.

The Initiative needs to be supported with the development of adequate, safe and affordable housing stock – **Stakeholder**

People are not finding places because there are not places to find in their price range, we will see more change over time if we have both more affordable housing and people working to help people maintain housing – **Stakeholder**

There are not many housing options for $535 a month in decent areas. Many of the housing options available for that price are in areas with high crime. Just because you are homeless or living in a shelter doesn't mean you're willing to live in those areas. I don't want to put myself in that situation – **Participant**

The system is overloaded by people up against things they can't afford. The apartment I'm in now is affordable for me, but you've pretty much got to be willing to live in bad areas – **Participant**

It is almost impossible to find any rental at $535 and even a little more. Rents just keep going up – **Stakeholder**

In order to ensure programming meet the needs of Aboriginal groups Bodor et al. recommend interventions be holistic and include:

- Indigenous and non-Indigenous life-skills training;
- Opportunities to connect with mentors;
- Ongoing partnerships with other Aboriginal organizations; and
- Opportunities for peer mentoring (2011).

Tawaak Housing reports that it often does not have enough funding to maintain and fix rental units, which sometimes means they are vacant despite the need for housing.

IMPACT OF EXTERNAL GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

Navigating the Income Assistance system is also a challenge. HSWs have spent a substantial amount of their time helping their clients access supports available through the Department of Community Services.
Improving access to rent subsidies was an area for improvement identified in the stakeholder questionnaire. Given the low IA shelter allowance compared to the cost of available rental apartments, the rental subsidies have been a critical part of the success of this program. However, the rental subsidies have been approved primarily for shelter clients moving to private housing. Rental subsidies are not available for nonprofit housing providers. When HSWs are able to access subsidies for their clients there are still challenges related to affordability and the fact that rent subsidies cannot move with the client to a new residence.

While raising the income of clients would help them be able to afford rental apartments, stakeholders also expressed concern that this

We need more resources to give HSWs funds to bridge gaps in support (for moving charges, for example, or bus tickets, child care, etc.) - **Stakeholder**

The amount of work that can be accomplished in 40 hours/wk is maxed out and there are still so many clients/potential clients who could use support – **Stakeholder**

We need more eviction prevention supports- when clients are housed it can be difficult to maintain housing when circumstances change – **Stakeholder**

There should be 2 HSWs at the shelter. It is a lot of work for one person. S/he works hard but it took the HSW 4 months to get me a place. More people wouldn't be in shelter as long if there were more people doing this work. You wouldn't have the same people for months and months at shelter – **Participant**

Costs have increased in three years and the little bare bones budget is being squeezed - **Stakeholder**

The [host] organization is subsidizing the HSW initiative, it provides office space and pays for administrative costs, telephone etc. – **Stakeholder**

If we had more resources, we could house more – **Stakeholder**

We can't continue to house all those people, we will reach critical mass, the numbers can't be sustained – **Stakeholder**

The wages do not really match the effort and difficulty of the job, which can take quite a toll emotionally – **Stakeholder**

may result in rental increases. Though, as IA shelter rates are currently below real rental costs, this likely would have little effect on rental prices.

Stakeholders who completed the questionnaire identified the need for increased availability of services for individuals with mental health and addictions issues. Many clients with mental illnesses are housed. However, those clients with severe mental illness are not easily housed and it is very difficult for them to remain housed without the appropriate supports.

Many individuals engaged in the evaluation also pointed out that the HSW Initiative is one piece of the larger landscape of homelessness and housing support in the community. Like many other programs, the HSW Initiative is reactive and supporting individuals who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. It does not address the root causes of

Clients don't understand and are not told what they are entitled to - **Stakeholder**

The biggest challenge for the effectiveness of HSW is the complexities of the system of supports and not really knowing how to advocate and help clients get what they need. More communication among HSW is needed...and more transparency from other partners could help – **Stakeholder**

The subsidy should travel with the person if they decide to move - **Stakeholder**

A larger pool of rent subsidy dollars, even another $200,000, could make a huge difference given current vacancy rates in Halifax. The opportunity is so much larger than the investment in the initiative allows – **Stakeholder**

I am paying more than I really can, well beyond my shelter allowance, but I refused to go where it was cheaper because I felt it wasn't safe. I am sleeping on the floor, I have no money to buy clothes for myself...My boys' clothes don't fit. I am down to food essentials again and need to go to the food bank – **Participant**

Having the subsidy attached to a particular apartment can be a challenge. It would be good if there could be exceptions or make different options available – **Participant**

Sometimes there is nothing they can afford so there is not much I can do – **Participant**

Those who are working and don't need the supports beyond the rental subsidies should also be able to access the program. This is part of making housing affordable for more people – **Stakeholder**

We need more services for individuals with mental health and addictions that are responsive, mobile and flexible – **Stakeholder**

I had to go out to see a client in an emergency, he was in an altercation with police, I could settle him down but it was the last straw with the apartment – **Stakeholder**

Challenge is also long waiting lists for services such as addiction services. Even a waitlist of 6 weeks might mean that the client's mind frame has changed – **Stakeholder**

homelessness. The future of the HSW Initiative will be influenced by how government agencies and others choose to address these root causes.

CONCLUSIONS

This evaluation was designed to address the following key questions:

- What has worked well in terms of the implementation, process, and activities undertaken to date? What could be improved?
- How successful has the initiative been in contributing to the achievement of the stated outputs / outcomes?

Based on all data collected the HSW Initiative has been implemented as suggested in the initial proposal. However, over time, the scope of the work of the HSWs has expanded to include working with individuals who require higher levels of support. There is also a wide range of processes and activities across the various organizations. Implementing the recommendations detailed above will increase consistency of program delivery and improve the overall quality of the initiative.

The HSW initiative has been successful in contributing to the achievement of the majority of the stated outcomes identified in the program logic model. The programs' contribution to the achievement of the identified outputs is more difficult to assess given the challenges related to existing program administration and data collection processes. However, evidence collected through interviews with stakeholders, staff and clients suggests these positive changes are beginning to occur. Clients are achieving positive outcomes including:

- finding and maintaining appropriate housing;
- overcoming barriers to accessing services; and
- living independently, feeling empowered and having increased stability.

These positive outcomes achieved by clients are related to the types of services the HSWs are able to provide. HSWs are able to be flexible and provide individualized services. They develop strong, personal relationships with clients that allow them to understand client needs, issues, and barriers and provide ongoing support to clients after they are housed. The relationships built with property owners, other agencies and government services increase the effectiveness of the Initiative.

In addition to the type of work being done by the HSWs the model employed by the initiative is also a strength. The strengths of the model are:

- Having focused, dedicated HSWs located in specialized community agencies
- The ability to focus on the needs of specific populations
- The ability to draw upon the network of supports, services and programs, as well as expertise within each agency

The Initiative does have some challenges that need to be addressed if that success is to be sustainable over the long term including establishing policies and guidelines, investing in professional development and addressing issues related to program administration. The success and ongoing sustainability of the HSW Initiative will also be greatly influenced by a number of external factors that are beyond the control of the organizations involved including:

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- The need for more acceptable housing options
- The need for ongoing, adequate funding for the HSW initiative
- Addressing challenges at the system level

Increasing the number of individuals safely and securely housed in HRM will require a continuum of services and support and the commitment of all levels of government to addressing the root causes of homelessness. However, given the achievements to date, and the strength of the model itself, the HSW Initiative is well positioned to make the necessary changes to ensure its ongoing success.

EVALUATION SUMMARY

HSW Initiative Objectives	Results
To provide non-judgemental face-to-face support	✓
To use expertise to assist clients in navigating the system of available services and supports and addressing systemic issues	✓
To meet clients' rights to safe and secure housing	✓
Outputs	**Results**
Clients' self-assessed improvement in quality of life	✓
Clients' self-assessed increased sense of community	Data unavailable
Clients' self-assessed increased sense of hope	✓
Reduction in clients use of emergency health services	Data unavailable
Increase in clients' access to a family doctor	Data unavailable
Clients' self-assessed increased health	Data unavailable
Clients' achievement of stated goals	✓
Clients' increased independent living skills	✓
Total # of individuals housed	✓
Increased efficiency and ease of referrals	✓
Clients' increased length of stay in a dwelling	✓
Decreased client contact with the criminal justice system	Data unavailable
Clients make connections with education programs	Data unavailable
Reduction in clients' drug / alcohol use	Data unavailable
Clients paying bills	Data unavailable
Clients' increased access to family / family reunification	✓

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Short term outcomes	Results
Strong partnerships exist across agencies / services resulting in increased trust, increased coordination and increased efficiency	✓
Increased stability in the lives of clients	✓
Increased expertise and a shared knowledge based among Housing Support Workers and partnering agencies resulting in increased accountability and greater consistency of service	✓
Long-term outcomes	**Results**
Increase in the number of individuals safely and securely housed in HRM	✓
Increased awareness among government, service providers and general public of the reality of homelessness and systemic issues	✓
Changes in practice and policy to better meet the needs of those experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness	Data unavailable
Decreased burden on the emergency shelter system	Data unavailable

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