



HOME TO STAY

an initiative of *Stella's Circle*

Home to Stay: Preventing Homelessness
through Aging in a Community for Seniors
with Complex Needs

FINAL REPORT

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 4

STELLA’S CIRCLE..... 4

BACKGROUND INFORMATION..... 5

HOME MODIFICATIONS OF 10 STELLA’S CIRCLE SUPPOTIVE HOUSING UNITS..... 6

HOME MODIFICATIONS AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT TOOLKIT 6

TRAINING AND CURRICULUM..... 7

HOME MODIFICATION SOCIAL ENTERPRISE..... 9

CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED.....10

CONCLUSION.....11

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The opinions and interpretations in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the Government of Canada.



INTRODUCTION

This report is the final deliverable in the agreement between Stella's Circle and the Government of Canada's Homelessness Partnering Strategy's Innovative Solutions to Homelessness to implement the Home to Stay project. The 15-month project had an overarching goal to develop knowledge, skills, capacity, and intervention to help prevent homelessness among seniors with complex mental health needs and enable them to age in the community. This final report will outline the results of the Home to Stay project as well as the challenges and lessons learned throughout its implementation.

STELLA'S CIRCLE

Stella's Circle is a not-for-profit community organization in St. John's, NL. It offers programs and services to over 1000 adults annually who face barriers to fully participating in their community. These barriers include mental illness challenges, addictions, trauma, poverty, homelessness, criminal justice involvement and long periods of unemployment.

A variety of participant-focused programs are offered in three core areas:

Real Homes - emergency shelter as well as supportive and affordable housing to help people find a home to call their own,

Real Help – residential, community, and correctional-based counselling services to support people through life's challenges, and

Real Work – education, training, and employment opportunities to help people with minimal or broken employment histories enter the workforce.

As an award winning organization Stella's Circle has been recognized provincially, nationally and internationally for its innovative and responsive approaches in the fields of housing, mental health and employment and its quality programming and services.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Newfoundland and Labrador has the oldest population in Canada. It is estimated that by 2036, 33% of the population will be aged 65 yr. and above (Government of NL, 2016). This aging comes with significant societal, demographic and financial implications. Over recent years, Stella's Circle has experienced a subset of the aging population - seniors with complex mental health needs. Additionally, the challenges to meet the unique needs of this specific group have been identified, i.e. how to support seniors with complex mental health needs to age in community. With first-hand experience of the challenges that seniors with complex mental health needs face, Stella's Circle received funding in part by the Government of Canada's Homelessness Partnering Strategy's Innovative Solutions to Homelessness for a project entitled *Home to Stay: Preventing Homelessness through Aging in a Community for Seniors with Complex Needs*. Through a multi-pronged approach, the Home to Stay project focuses on supporting seniors with complex mental health needs to age in place and prevent homelessness. Specifically, the Home to Stay project outputs were as follows:

- Home modifications for the senior residents of 10 Stella's Circle supportive housing units, ensuring opportunities for independent living and aging in community,
- Home Modification and Community Supports Toolkit to assist individuals and service providers in identifying the environmental and personal care supports needed to age in community,
- Training and curriculum for Stella's Circle employees to deliver to stakeholders (such as colleges, personal care home staff, home support providers and community organizations) regarding the process of aging with complex mental health needs, to enhance service provision and understanding, and
- Establishment of a Home Modification Social Enterprise which provides employment and skills training for 10 participants of Stella's Circle Employment Services program and has the ability to modify the built environment to support aging in St. John's and the wider community.

HOME MODIFICATIONS OF 10 STELLA'S CIRCLE SUPPORTIVE HOUSING UNITS

Throughout the course of the Home to Stay project, 10 Stella's Circle supportive housing units were modified to increase the opportunity for independent living and aging in community. Each home modification was based on an individualized assessment of the participant's specific needs. There was no 'one-size-fits-all' approach when addressing the participant's accessibility. Each participant was evaluated individually to assess their own needs within their unique context, i.e. each participant required unique home modifications and adaptations. Some common home modifications included:

- Lever door handles on interior and exterior doors,
- Lever/décor light switches,
- Lever tap handles,
- Brighter lighting, and
- Grab bars in the bathroom.

Examples of more specialized home modifications and adaptations were:

- A bath lift,
- Wheelchair accessible shower,
- Purpose-built shelving units,
- Automated door openers and entry phones,
- Riser recliner chair, and
- Bathtubs modified to be accessible (walk-in).

Through an independent evaluation conducted by Goss Gilroy, a Canadian management consulting firm, all of the participants reported that their homes better met their accessibility needs post-renovations. More specifically, all participants felt that there had been a positive impact on their physical and mental health as well as their capacity to stay in their own homes as they age. All participants also felt as safe or safer in their homes post-renovations.

HOME MODIFICATIONS AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT TOOLKIT

A Home Modification and Community Support Toolkit was developed to assist individuals and service providers in identifying the environmental and personal care

supports needed to age in community. The toolkit was intended to provide individuals, families, advocates and service providers with resources to support seniors with complex mental health needs to age in community and improve their quality of life. The toolkit has applicability for people who have experienced trauma, involvement in the criminal justice system, institutionalization, experienced homelessness or lived in poverty. The Home Modification and Community Support Toolkit is available on the Home to Stay website (www.HometoStayNL.ca) with public access.

TRAINING AND CURRICULUM

As outlined in its outputs, the Home to Stay project also generated training and curriculum. The training and curriculum had two primary goals:

1. To improve Stella’s Circle capacity to assist aging individuals to remain in their homes and prevent them from becoming homeless.

Within this goal, Stella’s Circle furthered our capacity through the Train the Trainer program, the identification of our training needs and competencies as well as curriculum development.

As part of the Train the Trainer program, six new Trainers completed the following courses:

- Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST),
- Mental Health First Aid – Seniors (MHFA-Seniors), and
- Crisis Prevention Intervention (CPI).

Since the completion of their training, the trainers have offered multiple courses and trained 74 Stella’s Circle staff to improve their skills to support individuals to age in their home and prevent homelessness.

Additionally, the following training needs and competencies were identified to better serve individuals who are aging:

- Falls Prevention and Safe Transfers - This training focuses on practical strategies to prevent falls and complete safe transfer with participants over 45 years old,
- Elder Abuse - This training identifies the signs and impact of elder abuse, the Neglected Adults Act and strategies to respond to elder abuse,
- Age-related medical issues - This training explores the relationship between common pathologies with seniors and the functional implications. It will discuss issues related to conditions such as osteoarthritis, diabetes or cardiovascular conditions.

Curriculum was also developed for the students with the Home Modifications Social Enterprise. In partnership with Academy Canada, a nationally-accredited CCAP (Career Colleges Accreditation Program) college based in St. John's NL, the curriculum was designed to provide students with an understanding of the skills and tools required to support seniors to age in their homes. The nine-module curriculum included topics such as hand and power tools, universal design, grab bars, handrails and how to widen doors and frames.

2. To deliver training to stakeholders regarding the process of aging with complex mental health needs, with the aim of enhancing service provision and understanding.

Also in partnership with Academy Canada, eight key areas of relational-based service provision and mental health were identified: trauma-informed, goal setting, active listening, respectful & non-judgemental, communication, boundaries, relationship focused, and competency based. These eight key areas provided the foundation for the *Aging with Complex Mental Health Needs* curriculum. Within its curriculum, four modules were created to provide Home Support Workers (HSW), Personal Care Attendants (PCA), health care providers and other housing agencies with foundational skills to work with seniors with complex mental health needs. The *Aging with Complex Mental Health Needs* training outcomes are:

- To attain a better understanding of mental illness and the impact that poverty and mental illness can have on the aging process,
- To develop strategies to meet the needs of seniors with complex mental health needs, and
- To improve self care strategies for care givers.

The training was designed for small group delivery. Each module is delivered in two or three hour sessions and participation from group members is encouraged to make it an engaging and informative experience. The modules are facilitated by various professionals including social workers and experienced facilitators.

HOME MODIFICATION SOCIAL ENTERPRISE

As part of its project initiative, Stella's Circle wanted to establish a home modification social enterprise to offer home modification services to the public for a fee and Stella's Circle students would be provided with training to complete the modifications. As the Home to Stay project progressed, the Home Modification Social Enterprise successfully accomplished its project milestones:

- In partnership with private consultants, a business plan was developed. The business plan provided a roadmap for the social enterprise that outlines its social aims, marketing and operational plans, risk analysis and financial operations,
- The van, tools, uniforms and safety equipment was purchased,
- A Home to Stay logo and website was developed,
- In partnership with Academy Canada, the home modification curriculum was developed, and
- 10 participants of Stella's Circle Employment Program attended the Home to Stay training and developed their skills to modify the built environment to support aging in St. John's and the wider community.

The social enterprise is now marketing its home modification services and launched to the public and wider community.

CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

Throughout the course of the Home to Stay project, several challenges and lessons learned were identified:

1. Selecting an appropriate home safety checklist

As each Stella's Circle participant required an individualized home modification, the home safety checklist played a key role in the assessment process. Through an interactive process with the senior, the checklist identifies the areas of the home that are safety concerns and require home modifications. Although a variety of checklists were available, it was challenging to find a home safety checklist that was appropriate for our demographic group. Many home safety checklists contained information or specifics that were not applicable to our seniors or appropriate for their needs. In moving forward with the Home Modification Social Enterprise, a safety checklist that is specifically designed for seniors with complex mental health needs must be designed/created to ensure an accurate assessment of their unique needs is completed.

2. Managing expectations

For many Stella's Circle participants, the Home to Stay project provided one of the first opportunities to discuss aging at home and home modifications. As a senior's awareness and understanding of home safety increased, it was essential to manage their expectations. Expectations of all home modifications required open communication and clear understanding of the home modifications to be completed. For the Home to Stay project, each proposed home modifications was outlined in a document that used accessible language and visual aids. The document was discussed at length and signed by the participant prior to starting the home modification. This process ensured that the senior had an understanding of the home modifications to be completed.

3. Positive engagement with Home to Stay participants

As the Home to Stay Social Enterprise progressed, one of the lessons learned was the importance of 'hands on' learning for the 10 students who took part in the social enterprise. Although the modules provided great classroom or conceptual learning, it was through the 'hands-on' approach that the Home to Stay participants developed

their practical skills further and learned new techniques. In the evaluation process conducted by Goss Gilroy, several participants identified that the training was the 'perfect balance' between classroom and hands-on learning.

4. Relationship-based engagement

Another positive lesson learned was the value of relationship-based engagement. Many Stella's Circle participants have experienced varying levels of trauma and it was imperative that a relationship-based approach was implemented throughout the home modification process. Throughout the home modification process, there was a focus on open communication, respect and active listening that allowed opportunity for the participant to express their concerns and perspective. As a result, there was a high level of engagement from the Stella's Circle participants with the home modifications having a positive impact on their lives.

CONCLUSION

The Home to Stay project was an innovative intervention that was designed to prevent homelessness among seniors with complex mental health needs by enabling them to age in community. Throughout the 15-month process, the project completed home modifications for 10 Stella's Circle supportive housing units, designed a Home Modification and Community Supports Toolkit, implemented training and curriculum for Stella's Circle employees to deliver to stakeholders about the aging with complex mental health needs and enhancing service provision. It also established a Home Modification Social Enterprise which provided employment and skills training to modify the built environment to support aging at home. Overall the Home to Stay project demonstrated exceptional success and is offering home modification services to the community.