

# homeless<sup>2</sup>home

What can YOU do to take action so that  
'housing first' becomes 'home at last'?

Look inside!



Inside this community action guide are the issues, ideas and innovations  
heard at the homeless2home exchange AND the strategies and ACTIONS

This community action guide was co-authored by the project team – people who know first hand what it takes to find housing and keep it, and what it takes to be at home:

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This guide is animated by the powerful images of: **Zanette Singh** (black ink drawings); **Victor Manuel** (painted tree on door frame); **Ronzig** (multimedia fusions of photography, computer manipulation and acrylic painting); and by the powerful poetry of **Robert Fitzgerald.**

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## What's Inside

<b>Introduction to homeless2home</b> .....	<b>4.</b>
What is homeless2home (h2h)? .....	4.
Who is h2h? .....	4.
Why is h2h unique? .....	5.
What came out of the exchange? .....	5.
How can you use this guide? .....	6.
<b>The Dialogue began...</b> .....	<b>7.</b>
The Opening Panel .....	7.
<b>And The Dialogue Continued...</b> .....	<b>8.</b>
Innovations in Moving the Message .....	8.
Collaborative Partnerships and Housing Models .....	10.
<b>Case Sessions</b> .....	<b>12.</b>
Youth Sessions .....	12.
Middle-aged Adult Sessions .....	17.
Older Adults Sessions .....	23.
<b>And the dialogue came to a close...</b> .....	<b>27.</b>
<b>And the Call to Action Began...</b> .....	<b>28.</b>
<b>Pull out Action Directory</b>	

## Introduction to homeless2home

### What is homeless2home (h2h)?

- The project was inspired by ideas that came from a group of people who had been homeless, worked on another project, and wanted to continue taking action toward better housing, supports and quality of life for people who live on the margins.
- The project has, from the beginning to middle to end, been developed by a team who has lived without permanent housing. The team wished to create a forum for the voices of those who are often silent. And for those who are consulted only after the decisions have been made.
- The project is funded by the Homeless Partnering Secretariat to share knowledge and solutions that prevent people from cycling back into homelessness.
- H2h was a development initiative that on November 6th, 2008, built an inclusive space and process for a daylong community exchange at Hart House, University of Toronto. We then broadcasted the best ideas put forward on that day back into the community so that participants' voices would be heard and their ideas put into action.

### Who is h2h?

During the h2h exchange: everyone was a participant; everyone was an expert; everyone had a voice but the majority voice was one of lived expertise.

- H2h was developed and delivered by a group of smart, compassionate and committed people who also happen to know what it is like to live without a home: Robert Fitzgerald, Inge Preston, Connie Harrison, Marcia Jarman, Malia Robinson and Nat Tesfa.
- H2h was thoughtfully and generously supported by the following advisory: Linda Coltman, Brenda Elias, France Ewing, Julie Maher, Chris Tiley, Beth Wilson and Carol Zoulalian.
- H2h was supported by a group of caring and chaos embracing individuals: Julia Janes, Mandi Hickman, Michel Jones, Susan Murphy, Nina Carlton, Dana Howse, Anthony Lombardo, Lynn McDonald, Lyn Rock, Andrea McPhail, Gly Prokos, Chris Bedwell, Kim Hinton, Stacey Bowen, Rae Bridgman, Becky McFarlane, Susan Gapka, Gabriella Micallef, Desmond Cole, Michael Shapcott, Ron Craven, St. Christopher House – The Meeting Place, Lysena Bertoli, Laura Cleghorn, Ester Nwanga, Naomi Wilson, Youth Artists from SKETCH, Brittany Persaud, Jacinta Cleary, Melissa Van Wert, Ali Kilbourne, Homeless Nation, Collaborators from Homelessness – Solutions from Lived Experiences through Arts-Informed Research and William Easter who moved silently among us in his blue sleeping bag.

- Others too numerous (more than 100) to list participated in h2h. On the day of the exchange there were people who had experienced homelessness, people who work with and for them, people who design the programs and policies, people who do the research and people who are just plain interested in taking action so that ‘Housing First’ becomes ‘home at last.’ We hope they hear their voices in this guide.

### Why is h2h unique?

- Because we know from the research, agency reports and from word on the street that most people who have been homeless have slipped back into homelessness more than once or live with the constant fear that they may lose their housing. Other forums focus on finding housing, h2h focused on keeping housing and finding home.
- Because h2h was created and led by and for people who know what it is like to live without a home. Most of the participants brought lived expertise of homelessness but no one was identified as such unless they wished to do so themselves. Participants wore tags with only their names—no descriptions, no affiliations—to promote frank discussion and to reduce the barriers of ‘us versus them.’
- Because homelessness and housing impact people of all ages in ways that are the same, are different, and are connected as people move through their lives, h2h looked at how age affects the experience of homelessness and the experience of and supports needed to find home.
- Because we believe that great ideas and movements need a space to develop. H2h turned that belief into a reality by creating a forum where lived expertise was engaged, valued and celebrated.

### What came out of the exchange?

- Ideas and Solutions: great strategies to keep people housed and support them in realizing their goals. The ideas collected in this guide come from the voices heard during the exchange.
- Connections: this guide offers testimony to the power of lived expertise and of coming together to bridge difference and build alliances.
- Actions: in this guide are a collection of actions individuals and communities can take to ensure that everyone can find home. In the final section of the guide is a call to collective action so we can act together to make our voices heard.

## How can you use this book?

- Read about the exchange as reported by the h2h working group so that you know what was said and done during the exchange and why creating an event that brings together people with lived expertise matters.
- Look at the case composite sections to read what participants thought were big issues and effective strategies for youth, middle-aged and older adults.
- Consider the ‘Take Action’ sections that offer you ways to address the issues as they affect your life and your community (a pull out action sheet provides a snap shot of the actions recommended throughout this guide).



Evicting Chris, art by Ronzig

### The Opening Panel

**We all need some help from time to time...** The panel included a variety of experts: academics, service providers, advocates, but mostly people whose expertise came from the streets. A facilitated discussion invited the panel to reflect on what helped them or the people they work with stay housed and what ‘home’ meant to them. The panel advocated that regular check-ins by housing/support workers, direct payment rent arrangements, other kinds of financial planning and general life skills supports are essential to transitions from homelessness to home. Sometimes these supports were provided by a good worker and sometimes these supports were provided by an even better friend. All of these supports had to be provided in a context of respect and valuing the individual and always with the ultimate goal of maximum self-sufficiency. People highlighted systems that work against self-sufficiency like generic employment supports and rules that restrict people from saving the money they need to realize their goals. Hope was stressed as the essential ingredient to being at home in your housing, your community – and your life.

**One big problem**—governments tell us that they are ‘not in the housing business.’ People talked about the problem of governments telling citizens that they are ‘not in the housing business’ to avoid long term commitments to a national housing strategy and to the affordable units that would be the building blocks of that strategy. The panel spoke of the enormous amount of money that the government has put forward to secure mortgages and ensure that homeowners do not lose their housing. So the panel argued that the government clearly is in the housing business but just not the affordable rental housing business. The panel encouraged participants to ‘shame’ the government into action, demand more money and more accountability to ensure it gets spent in a way that really makes a difference.

**How to make a difference with what we have?** The panel members spoke of the need to support real partnerships based on open communication and collaboration with real resources (time and money) to make a long term investment in community building. Other participants talked about ‘meeting people where they are at’ and working with them to get what they want. Relationship building was again championed as a way forward but in a context that supports self-determination of individual goals and of the timing and quality of support. A resounding theme was that every level of program and policy development must include and attend to the lived expertise of people who have been homeless.

## And The Dialogue Continued...

A total of 14 sessions were held during the day—each focused on a particular theme. The majority used ‘case composites’ which were developed by the project team to highlight specific issues relevant to different age groups. The composites wove together the team’s lived expertise with the stories of others who have struggled to keep their housing. Using composites ensured that no one on the team was subject to the risk and exploitation that often accompanies what one team member refers to as the ‘poverty minstrel show.’ Other sessions were focused on particular topics and facilitated by advocates and service providers who worked with the team to create a focus. Still other sessions were, in fact, ‘unsessions’ that only took shape over lunch the day of the exchange. Borrowing from the format of ‘unconferences’ or ‘open space technology’ the team created an opportunity for participants at the exchange to nominate and then facilitate a session on a topic of their choice. This allowed everyone a chance to build the agenda. Although the team planned for months and months to realize these distinct sessions, the day of the exchange was open, flexible and dynamic. The following pages provide a glimpse of the issues, ideas and innovations that emerged as the dialogue continued, as well as ways to take action to ensure that no one is without a home.

### Innovations in Moving the Message Session

**Finding the courage to be catalysts of change rather than victims of circumstance...** Members of ‘Voices from the Street’ facilitated this session. Voices is a grass roots community-based training and leadership program that supports people with lived expertise in realizing their voice as powerful advocates of the change. They highlighted that there is not one homeless experience or identity, and that their training program helps people to dig into their experience and develop a way of looking at and talking about it that works for them. One graduate of Voices spoke about how she was tired of being part of the silent majority and living quietly, bearing stigma of her past alone—it started to affect her both physically and emotionally. ‘Voices’ helped her speak openly and constructively about her lived expertise to communicate how systems create ‘poverty traps’ and how we transcend those traps by working together.

**It is hard work being poor...** Another graduate spoke of how the ‘poverty trap’ not only limits your future but consumes your present by describing the “hard work” of living in poverty where **“all your energy is used up just trying to survive.”** She also highlighted that it is essential to recognize the racialization of poverty. Poverty is coloured, gendered, disAbled and unhealthy, and the solution is not one thing but rests with governments becoming “stakeholders in our lives and in our well-being.” Another participant in the session reflected that when people come into to Voices “they are broken; have been broken by the system” and that **the work begins with a “process of rebuilding people,**



**rebuilding their confidence in themselves and others.”** Another participant added that “social services silence people so that they are fearful of speaking out.” People become “homogenized,” she continued, so that they are not seen as a “unique person with talents and abilities.”

**The web is a medium for another kind of ‘voice’...** Other participants, such as representatives from Homeless Nation, championed the medium of the internet as a critical tool for collaboration and showcasing ‘personal voice.’ Another participant championed web-based portals (e.g. Ronzig’s site <http://downbutnotout.synthasite.com/>) as a way for people to have direct access and control, as well as the opportunity to connect with other voices.

### **Recommendations Put Forward by Participants:**

- Create a clearinghouse or communication network so people/groups can join forces to take advantage of key moments/events.
- Demand that agencies and organizations hire people with lived expertise in real jobs (not just peer volunteer work).
- Get air time on the local radio stations (e.g. Ryerson or University of Toronto) for ongoing collaboration and discussion.
- Develop a real street newsletter written by and for people who have experienced homelessness with information they can use.

Take Action<sup>1</sup> to Make these Recommendations a Reality

### **Individuals can:**

- Inquire about joining a peer advocacy group such as **Voices from the Street** 416-504-1693 X. 228 or the **Dream Team** 416-516-1422 X. 263.
- Join and post on **Homeless Nation** (<http://homelessnation.org/>) or create your own blog or facebook to connect with others working to ‘move the message.’

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<sup>1</sup> Inclusion of an organization and information about its programs and services in this community action guide does not imply endorsement by the authors, nor does exclusion indicate lack of endorsement. The community action guide is for information purposes only and reflects the issues, recommendations and actions put forward by the h2h participants. We have done our best to check the contact information included in the guide but please be aware that groups/programs are often housed within larger organizations and may have different contact points.

- If you know something or someone that helped you SPREAD THE WORD! Tell people you know and post information on community boards in agencies, grocery stores and libraries.
- Write a letter to the editor of a local paper and tell them what you think in response to an article on housing or homelessness.

**Communities can:**

- Check out the **homeless hub** (<http://www.homelesshub.ca/>) or **Raising the Roof** (<http://www.raisingtheroof.org/>) for information, events and organizations related to homelessness and housing across the country.
- Check out the **Wellesley Institute's** (<http://www.wellesleyinstitute.com/>) blogs and wiki for the latest in housing and homelessness news in the GTA.
- Watch out for **Homeaction** a new network for national collaboration to end homelessness.

## 'Collaborative Partnerships and Housing Models' Sessions

This session was co-facilitated by representatives from St. Clare's Multifaith Housing and Family Services Toronto who partner with a broad range of community agencies to create individual support packages for tenants. The facilitators introduced a spectrum of collaboration models and principles grounded in an equitable partnership between providers and tenants. Participants discussed the 'who' and 'what' of collaboration with an emphasis on barriers and solutions.

**Recommendations Put Forward by Participants:**

- Build collaboration on "bottom-up expertise (tenants) as opposed to top-down expertise."
- Manage the partnership (e.g. designate a key coordinator) or it will break down. Look at partnership as a long-term investment with specific short, mid and long-term goals. Create partnership agreements; be clear on who does what. Share all information in plain language, accessible documents. Follow-up with people who fall out. Evaluate the partnership activities and its outcomes. People must feel that their voices are being heard or people vote with their feet.
- Use inclusive language and job descriptions. Get rid of thinking of tenants and clients as "cases to be managed" and think, instead, in terms of partnership and peer-based programs.

## Take Action to Make these Recommendations a Reality

### Individuals can...

- Start connecting geographically and functionally with people nearest to you who share a common interest/objective. “Ensure the watering hole mentality.” Create opportunities to hear as many voices as possible not just the loudest and most frequent ones. “Use personal outcomes (as determined by clients) as opposed to town hall outcomes” so that partnerships are measured by their real impact on the quality of people’s lives.
- Be flexible – go out into the community – see what is already happening and consider joining in or joining forces.
- Some examples of advocacy groups: **Housing Action Now** 416-924-4640, X. 3482; **Toronto Disaster Relief Committee** 416-599-8372; and the **Women’s Housing Advocacy Group** 416-961-8100 X. 350.
- Create consent forms and invite tenants to agree to share certain types of information with certain partner agencies. Be clear on the ‘who’s and why’s of consenting to the release of personal information.

### Communities can...

- Demand that funders fund partnership not just request it but create budget lines and timelines to do the work. Funders who are ‘partnership’ and housing focused: the **Wellesley Institute** 416-972-1010, **City of Toronto** 416-397-4830, and the **Homelessness Partnering Secretariat** 416-954-7744.
- Call the Access and Privacy Office of the **Ministry of Health and Long-term Care** 416-327-7040 and let them know that it is important to interpret the Provincial Health Information Privacy Act (PHIPA) in a way that allows information to be shared across agencies and across partners.



## Case Composite Sessions

Each of the 8 case sessions featured composites written and presented by members of the project team working group. These case composites highlight key challenges that confront youth, middle-aged and older adults struggling to keep house and home. A facilitated discussion followed where participants identified how systems of support had failed and what strategies could address these challenges. The following are summaries of 6 of the 8 case sessions.

### Youth Sessions

#### Alahandara's Story

“16 years young, Alahandara was abandoned by her family without any social, emotional, or financial support. Her internalized trauma resulted in substance abuse, and emotional instability. She felt she had no available options, and supported herself by prostituting on the streets. Years of abuse led to overdose. Overdose led to hospitalization and afterwards, the courageous decision to enter Detox where she began the gruelling process of breaking free from her dependency. Soon, Alahandara was left to find herself a livelihood. Financially, her only viable option was to be pushed back into the very same neighbourhood where her troubles had all begun—the only place she, and so many like her, can live: where the rent is cheapest—the poor neighbourhoods, teaming with drug connections and tribulation.”

#### Challenges and Recommendations Put Forward by the Participants

- **Ghettoized neighbourhoods and clusters of disadvantage:** youth seeking affordable housing are forced to choose between living in communities without a positive social structure OR living in isolation in ‘safe’ neighbourhoods (places with fewer triggers but also fewer resources). **Recommendation A:** Create more youth specific transitional housing with a broad menu of support options and locate services across the GTA so that youth can remain in their communities, if they choose, and still access services. **Recommendation B:** Develop a ‘community watch’ mechanism (could be a youth specific or a general community ombudsman) to protect individual rights and access to services. Hold police and service providers accountable for unjust treatment of individuals especially within so called ‘taboo’ neighbourhoods.
- **Youth zero-tolerance policy on substance use:** when support services and housing providers adopt strict abstinence policies they set youth up for failure. **Recommendation A:** Housing, shelters, and transitional housing should formally adopt a harm reduction policy so that no youth

is excluded from accessing safe and affordable housing; and consider piloting a ‘no eviction’ policy modeled after the Portland Hotel Society in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside. **Recommendation B:** Pilot and promote ‘Safer Shoot’ sites so that a ‘using’ resident’s housing is not jeopardized if drug paraphernalia, and/or controlled substances are found within their units. Possibly provide lockers to store these things within the Safer Shoot site and ensure sensitive security and trained medical staff are on-site. Locate sites in neighbourhoods or apartment buildings where ‘users’ live. **Recommendation C:** Develop youth ‘mental wellness centre’ geared towards youth in crisis, recovering from crisis/overdose, etc. Have staff available on a temporary, as well as an ongoing basis to connect youth with the supports/services they want and to accompany them (if requested), as advocates, to those services.

## Take Action to Make these Recommendations a Reality

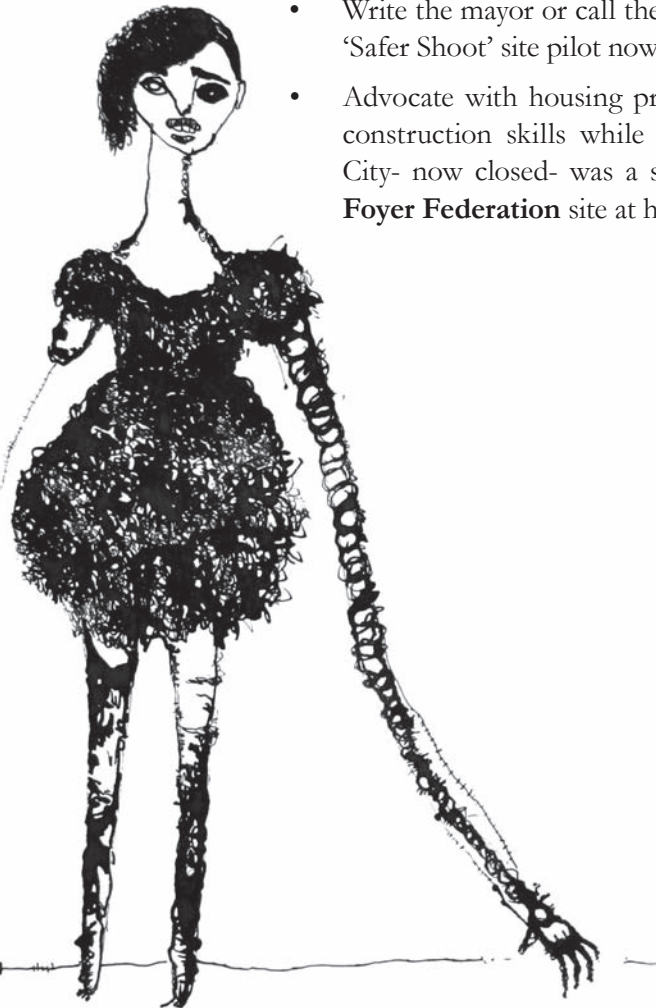
### Individuals can...

- Access available transitional and permanent housing such as:
  - Eva’s Phoenix** 416-364-4716 X. 236
  - Youth without Shelter** 416-748-0110
  - Sprott House** 647-438-8383
  - Turning Point Youth Services** 416-925-9250
  - Touchstone youth centre** 416-696-6932
  - Covenant House** 416-598-4898
- Access safer use services such as:
  - The Works’** main office 416-392-0520 and mobile units provide a needle exchange service and distribute safer crack kits.
  - Youthlink Inner City** 416-703-3361
  - Youth Addiction Outreach Service** 416-535-8501, X. 1730
- Access youth appropriate support such as:
  - SHOUT** 416-927-8553
  - Reconnect Mental Health Services** 416-248-2050
  - Dufferin Mall Youth Services** 416-535-1140
  - Griffin Centre Y-Connect** 416-661-8119

- Access safe places to connect with other youth such as:  
**Evergreen** 416-977-7259  
**The Meeting Place** 416-504-4275  
**St. Stephen's Augusta Centre** 416-964-8747 X. 0  
**Youth link Skills Zone** 416-595-9902

#### Communities can...

- Support the work of the **Toronto Harm Reduction Task Force Network** 647-222-4420.
- Write the mayor or call the **Toronto Drug Secretariat** 416-338-3585 to voice your support for a 'Safer Shoot' site pilot now!
- Advocate with housing providers to pilot a 'foyer model' of youth housing where youth learn construction skills while building housing for themselves (e.g. Homes First Society's Street City- now closed- was a similar local model). For more information on foyers check out the **Foyer Federation** site at <http://www.foyer.net/mpn>



“Daniel faced bigotry, and constant verbal, physical, and psychological abuse based on his sexual orientation. He was in and out of the child welfare system for most of his life. Without family and community support, he blundered down a lonely path of self-mutilation. He desperately sought counsel, and friendly support from his peers and social workers etc. Feeling alone, and facing a looming eviction, he saw less and less options available. Daniel didn't feel safe at the drop-in centers or at A.A meetings – he feared the other clients' reactions. With declining mental health, and rapidly weakening self-esteem, he became more and more isolated, and unable to help himself even though he desperately wanted to, if only given a helping hand.”

### Challenges and Recommendations Put Forward by the Participants

- **Social service delivery systems**, as well as individual **service providers** (i.e. law enforcement, hospital workers, paramedics, social workers, and housing workers, etc.) **are NOT held accountable to the real needs of youth. Recommendation A:** Sensitivity training for staff so that they support the realistic goals of youth in a respectful and productive partnership that does not impose ‘cookie cutter’ rules that set youth up for failure. **Recommendation B:** Ensure continuity and flexibility of support (e.g. eliminate the school attendance criteria to receive welfare) and eligibility (e.g. provide alternate options to individuals who are no longer youth once they finally get housing; remove inconsistencies in age limits for youth). **Recommendation C:** Create more peer-based programs, especially targeted to outreach and connecting with informal communities—youth connect on the street and therefore supports have to connect to the street!
- **Lack of specialized programs and housing for LGBT (and other ostracized youth).** **Recommendation A:** Create safe zones to support emotional well-being and empower LGBT youth by building self esteem; develop and deliver a public education campaign by youth and for youth to create a culture of respect for and engagement of difference. **Recommendation B:** Deliver more programs designed specifically for LGBT and ostracized youth including dedicated detox, skills training and wellness programs.
- **Limited support for youth transitioning out of care. Recommendation A:** Extend the maximum age for extended care from 21 to 24. **Recommendation B:** Implement transitional programs and supports for youth exiting care including financial assistance and supports for continuing education and training.

## Take Action to Make these Recommendations a Reality

### Individuals can...

- Ask agency staff for their Annual Reports and other internal documents that outline what they are doing for youth (in particular LGBT youth) and how they are evaluating their work.
- Request that agencies conduct regular sensitivity training with staff, youth and volunteers; offer your help to make it happen.
- Consider starting a community hub where youth pitch in (i.e. money or food to the host) and then share meals and stories.
- Contact the **Toronto Youth Cabinet** 416-392-8975 or a youth organization like **Sketch** 416-516-1559 to get connected with other youth.
- Get connected locally and globally online @ <http://www.tigweb.org>
- Contact existing programs for marginalized LGBT youth including:  
**Supporting Our Youth** program at Sherbourne Health 416-324-5077  
**Lesbian Gay Bi Trans Youthline** 1-800-268-9688  
**Positive Youth Outreach** Phone 416-340-8484 X. 281  
**Youth Employment Partnerships** 416-504-5516  
Various groups and supports at the **519 Community Centre** 416-392-6874  
**CAMH Rainbow Services** 1-800-463-2338 ext 6781 for LGBT youth concerned about their use of substances/alcohol  
**LOFT Street Outreach Services** 416-979-1994  
**Hearing Youth through Every Youth (HEYY)** helpline 416-423-4399.

### Communities can...

- Support/join the **Young Decision Makers** 416-597-8297 who have done important work on youth in and transitioning from care and youth poverty for the Ministry of Children and Youth Services. You could call the Ministry – e.g. the **Child Welfare Secretariat** 416-314-9462, too, to tell them why youth transitioning from care are vulnerable and need ongoing support to transition into housing, employment or education etc.
- Document why the available services do not adequately support the needs of LGBT youth and then present your findings to the City of Toronto **Community Development and Recreation Committee** 416-392-8032 or your local City Councillor.



“Marsha is an Aboriginal woman in her early 40's who has survived a long history of abuse. She has 3 children, but only her severely disAbled son lives with her. Marsha receives ODSP and limited support for the care she provides for her son, but it is not nearly enough to meet their needs. Marsha lives in constant fear that child welfare will take her son away from her and place him in a group home. Marsha is so afraid of losing her child that she begins to 'gift' her worker with art that she has been given in the hope that the worker will protect her and her child. But when Marsha is raped by a security guard at her housing unit she can not tell her worker since she knows that the worker is a friend of the guard. She is also afraid to call the police as she has seen first hand how they treat assaulted women. Instead, the only thing anyone suggests is counselling but Marsha has no time to talk—she needs to move. Given the limited affordable housing available, Marsha is forced into insecure housing and then finally into a shelter. Without permanent housing, she has no choice but to place her son in a group home. The pain of this loss drives her to cycle in and out of addiction and self-abuse until a friend helps her. She finds housing again but is exhausted by years of instability and fighting the system.”

### Challenges and Strategies Put Forward by the Participants

- **Inadequate income support and housing subsidies:** extremely low rates of income assistance make it difficult to maintain decent housing and punitive claw backs to earned income and other entitlements, as well other barriers (e.g. lack of support for education and training leading to meaningful employment) prevent people from successfully transitioning into the labour force. **Recommendation A:** Immediately raise income assistance (at least 40%) and minimum wage to levels in line with the Low-income Cut Off which will meet Ontario's poverty reduction targets and provide 'economic stimulus' as lower income individuals spend out their disposable income. **Recommendation B:** Revisit claw backs to earned income and make extended drug and other health benefits easier for people to access (e.g. lower the threshold for 'high health costs') as they re-enter the work force, as well as create a 'transition grace period' prior to adjusting Rent-Geared-to-Income (RGI) level. **Recommendation C:** Invest in individualized long-term training and education supports so that people are able to successfully re-enter the labour force (e.g. remove the barriers to receiving income assistance and funding through the Ontario Student Assistance Program).
- **Difficult to navigate social service systems:** information is challenging to access, the types of services and entitlements available are not clear, and people are asked to tell their stories over and over again to 'qualify' for support. **Recommendation A:** Information needs to be broadcasted into the community and into people's housing (i.e. using television, radio and mail). If a worker is relaying information it should be in a focused and easily understood way so that people are not overwhelmed.

Alternatively, all supports and entitlements should be documented in various ways (e.g. written brochures, web postings, and orally at community meetings/forums) so people don't get too little information (i.e. by having to rely on a single worker's discretion). **Recommendation B:** Ask the City to pilot a peer advocacy program (with appropriate compensation for advocates) to provide assistance to individuals accessing entitlements.

- **No options for appeal when systems fail:** support systems need to move from a perspective of exclusion to one of inclusion, 'policing' and 'interrogation' of people's lives has to end, 'poor bashing' can not be tolerated, and concentrating too much power in a single worker is dangerous. **Recommendation A:** Develop an 'arms length' mechanism to register a complaint against a worker that protects the claimant and offers transparent reporting of processes of inquiry. **Recommendation B:** Extend the protections available to recipients of social assistance to prevent housing discrimination to other areas covered by the Ontario Human Rights Code.
- **Top-down policies and programs do not reflect the real challenges people experience nor do they make long-term investments in individual lives:** policies and programs often are disconnected from lives of service users (e.g. income assistance rates that put families at risk of division and eviction) and are short-term and short-sighted (e.g. offering counselling support rather than support to secure safe housing). **Recommendation A:** Include people with lived expertise in every aspect of program delivery and policy development.
- **Remove policies that punish women with insecure housing by taking away their children:** lack of options to support women with children who are faced with insecure housing creates a double-jeopardy of risk: loss of housing and children. **Recommendation A:** Child welfare agencies and agents need to partner with women to find and maintain affordable decent housing. A focus on prevention not triage is necessary to keep families together and safely housed.

## Take Action to Make these Strategies a Reality

### Individuals can...

- Access **housing subsidies:** to inquire about housing allowances or rent supplements in general call **Municipal Services Office** 416-585-6226, to apply for a supplement or add the request to your existing application call **Housing Connections** at 416-981-6111 (you may contact other non-profits providers directly such as the **Community Resource Connections of Toronto** 416-955-1267 but they may have specific eligibility requirements such as a history of low risk criminal offences); and organizations such as **RENT** and **landlordconnect** 416-686-3390 X. 9981 can assist housing workers and provide support to tenancy.

- Access emergencies funds to maintain your housing: the provincial **Rent Bank** 416-924-3862 offers interest-free loans for last month's rent deposits and for rental arrears to low-income households not receiving OW, ODSP, OSAP and not living in subsidized housing; for households (with children) receiving OW or ODSP the City of Toronto has an emergency fund which can be accessed through the program case worker; and for assistance with energy bills inquire about 'Share the Warmth' and 'Winter Warmth' funds through your local housing help centre (e.g. in **Toronto East** call 416-698-9306 and in **Toronto Central West** call 416-531-0841).
- Apply for **ODSP** 416-325-0500—it takes time and money to make the application but it will ultimately give you more money; if you have been turned down the first or even second time don't give up—**APPEAL**—more than 40% of appeals overturn the initial rejection. Call **ARCH Disability Law Centre** 416-482-8255 to find out more about access and appeals to ODSP.
- Appeal decisions made about entitlements that are associated with your income assistance benefits: call the **Social Benefits Tribunal** 416-326-0978 for more information. Also, **Community Legal Information Ontario** 416-408-4420, has many good resources that outline entitlements available under OW and ODSP.
- Ask your worker to tell you everything that you might qualify for and request it in writing. If you have developed a decent relationship with your worker, loudly protest if you are re-assigned to someone else. Alternatively, if you and your worker are a poor fit, request a re-assignment.
- Use email or letters to get a written response from a worker who you feel is treating you badly. It is important to document what happened. Although a lot is at stake if you ask to speak to a supervisor or make a complaint, the worker may have a lot to lose, too (sometimes just asking to speak with a supervisor can shift things for better or for worse). If you do complain and nothing happens follow up or complain to someone else; go to your local legal clinic to see if they can help or call in the press to talk about it.

### Communities can...

- Get involved with **25 in 5 Network for Poverty Reduction** 416-351-0095 X. 214, **the Colour of Poverty** 416-971-9676, **the Stop's Civic Engagement Program** 416-652-7867 X. 235; the **Recession Relief Fund Coalition** through the **Community Social Planning Council of Toronto** 416-351-0095 or the **Toronto Disaster Relief Committee** (and Housing not War) 416-599-8372.
- Make a deputation or sit in on a meeting of the City of Toronto's **Affordable Housing Committee** 416-397-7769.

- Contact the **Ontario Human Rights Commission** 416-326-9511 and ask them why protections to persons receiving social assistance only apply to housing?
- Make your voice heard in many ways and many venues. Become a community agitator/ animator. Consider starting your own group (e.g. a caucus developed and led by people with lived expertise of homelessness and exclusion). With an organized and mobilized caucus you will have the leverage to demand a seat at the decision-making table. Ask for some space at the agencies you frequent but if it is not available meet in coffee shops or pubs (where many a great social movement was born!)



art by Zanelle Singh

“Hermine is in her late 20's. She came from St. Vincent about 5 years ago and still does not have status. She has had 3 children. She thought she might get married but each time she got pregnant the father left her without child support and without status. The fathers' know that she will 'put up and shut up' because she is afraid they will report her and she will be deported (and lose her children!). Hermine just barely survives by babysitting in the 'underground economy.' The family she works for knows that she is illegal and outside of the protection of labour laws. They pay her a very low wage and allow her only a few days off knowing that the threat of deportation will keep her coming back and silent. Her kids are in a private daycare and all her money goes to their care and to paying her rent. She is constantly moving from one over priced apartment or rooming house to another in an effort to find a school that will keep her kids even though they do not have ID.”

### Challenges and Strategies Put Forward by the Participants

- **Not enough 'don't ask don't tell' zones:** people without status are afraid to come forward and are not aware of the safe zones that exist. **Recommendation A:** The City of Toronto should formally adopt a 'don't ask, don't tell' policy as outlined and advocated for by No one is illegal-Toronto. A 'Don't Ask Don't Tell' (DADT) Policy would ensure that ALL city residents, including people without full immigration status, can access essential services (e. g. housing, health, education, social services, and emergency services) without fear of being detained or deported. **Recommendation B:** Ensure that those sites where a DADT policy is in place outreach to the community and post it clearly at each site. Create an accountability framework that addresses gaps between policy statements and implementation so that Sanctuary Zone policies are not violated.
- **Lack of penalties to employers who exploit workers without status:** the penalty is typically imposed exclusively on the worker who faces deportation. **Recommendation A:** Enforce fines and/or other legal consequences to employers of non-status workers as outlined in Section 125 of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA). **Recommendation B:** Develop a public education campaign so that employers are aware of the legislation that governs hiring individuals without status. Care should be taken to ensure the campaign works to minimize exploitation through understanding of shared consequences but does not unduly reduce options in the underground economy, until a full and inclusive regularization program is in place.
- **Insufficient recognition of universal human rights to health care, education, food, legal remedies and shelter:** Canada is a signatory to the United Nations' Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ESCR) which explicitly states that humans, regardless of citizenship, have entitlements to basic economic, social and cultural rights. **Recommendation A:** Use the Ontario Human Rights Code and the Charter to challenge refusal of services, support and housing

to individuals without status. **Recommendation B:** Amnesty should be mandatory in cases of criminal and civil violations so that women, who have been assaulted, abused or who are seeking child support, will come forward to pursue legal remedy.

## Take Action to Make these Strategies a Reality

### Individuals can...

- Get a copy of a guide to services and supports available to people without immigration status: contact the **Community Social Planning Council of Toronto** 416-351-0095 X. 219 to request a guide (multi-lingual) to supports and services available in Toronto to people without immigration status. You can also download an online version at <http://socialplanningtoronto.org/reports/toronto-community-services-resource-guide-for-non-status-immigrants/>
- Call the **Workers' Action Centre** 416-531-0778 to find out about your rights and your employer's obligations.
- Engage a lawyer from a legal aid clinic to challenge barriers and exclusions you have experienced based on your non-status. For eligibility details and a list of legal clinics near you call **Legal Aid Ontario** at 416-979-1446. Contact the **Family Law Centre** at 416-327-2064 for advice on collecting child support or drop by the **Ontario Law Help Centre** (393 University Ave) which is a self help resource centre for low income people with civil matters.
- Access support at **Sojourn House** 416-864-0515 or at **Romero House** 416-763-1303 (both agencies provide counselling and shelter to refugees).
- Contact **Justice for Children and Youth** 416-920-1633, if you are having difficulty enrolling your child(ren) in school.

### Communities can...

- Join No one is illegal-Toronto and get connected with other people fighting for and with people struggling without status.
- Propose a DADT policy at your workplace or volunteer organization (to the executive director or to the board).
- Ask your city councillor to advocate for the return of the Toronto Police Services DADT policy which was revoked in 2008.

“Joe, is 58 years old, an ODSP recipient, and living with cancer. He was hospitalized for ongoing treatment. After three months, his shelter allowance was discontinued and his rent was left unpaid. While Joe lay in his hospital bed his landlord evicted him; he knew he had no home to go back to and only the clothes in his hospital bag. Not wanting to end up in either a nursing home or a shelter and still sick he is discharged to a park bench.”

### Challenges and Strategies Put Forward by the Participants

- **Withdrawal of shelter allowance during hospitalization:** older adults, who may experience poorer health due to years on the streets and poor access to health care, are more likely to be hospitalized and for longer durations. However, without the continued payment of their shelter allowance they may find themselves facing eviction and either returning to the streets and shelters or facing the often equally distressing threat of institutionalization in a nursing home. **Recommendation A:** Make immediate amendments to income assistance legislation to ensure that shelter allowance is maintained, regardless of the duration of hospitalization, until the client (or advocate on the client's behalf) indicates it is no longer required. **Recommendation B:** Add questions regarding income, housing and other needs to the hospital intake protocol, and ensure updates during and especially, at discharge as to the housing status and well-being. Discharge planning should also include such important details as transportation, and support needs particularly during the weeks after leaving the hospital. **Recommendation C:** Change relevant sections of the Residential Tenancies Act and the Ontario Rental Housing Tribunal policies to prevent evictions of hospitalized tenants and if housing is lost, provide supports to fast – track returns to housing.
- **Lack of support and advocacy for older adults during hospital stays:** infrequent access to hospital social workers is not enough to ensure that the complexity of needs within and outside of the hospital is met. **Recommendation A:** Hire peer advocates to provide continuous support. Ideally, the peers should be employed by an ‘arms length’ agency to act as patient advocates (i.e. so that they can act without conflict on the patients behalf).

Take Action to Make these Strategies a Reality

### Individuals can...

- Call your OW/ODSP worker to request direct payment of your rent to ensure your shelter allowance is not withdrawn should you become hospitalized.
- Request that a hospital social worker advocate on your behalf to your landlord and/or social assistance worker while you are in the hospital.

- Insist that a complete discharge plan (i.e. that takes into consideration your housing, income, transportation, and home care needs) be created before you leave the hospital. Hospitals are mandated to provide discharge planning for everyone.
- Call the **Advocacy Centre for the Elderly** 416-598-2656, which provides patient advocacy to low – income adults 60+, if you are not getting the support you need.

### **Communities can...**

- Join the **ODSP Action Coalition** 416-438-7206 which is a group of caseworkers, agency staff, community activists and ‘consumers’ working to raise awareness of the issues faced by people on ODSP and to act toward improving the program.
- Advocate at the **Local Health Integration Network (LHIN)** meetings 416-921-7453 for a peer based patient advocacy program modeled after that provided to psychiatric patients by the Psychiatric Patient Advocacy Office.





“Elena is in her late 50s and struggles with bulimia and obsessive compulsive disorder. Her son used to live with her in her two bedroom apartment and provide support to healthier eating and prevent her from stealing food. Her son gets his own place and the housing provider tells her that she has to move to a smaller unit. But without her son coming for short (and overnight) stays, she risks hospitalization and jail. Elena, with the support of her son and documentation from her doctors, is able to obtain a court order to keep her 2 bedroom apartment. Elena is okay for now but she is getting older. Her ongoing health issues are making her weaker and she worries that she will soon not be able to get up the stairs or into the bathroom. Her apartment does not have an entrance ramp or any grab bars.”

### Challenges and Strategies Put Forward by the Participants

- Lack of flexibility in social housing policies and of recognition of informal caregivers:** older adults are more likely to require space and other accommodations to meet their health and social care needs. Low-income older adults are more likely to rely on informal care giving from family and friends. However, universal housing policies disadvantage individuals with unique space and support requirements. **Recommendation A:** Housing providers need to adopt more responsive frameworks (i.e. not outdated and oppressive policies based on who is ‘most deserving’) to support housing stability. Housing policies must offer room for discretion and for accessible appeal so that tenants can easily present their unique housing needs for consideration. **Recommendation B:** Legislation and policy frameworks (e.g. Social Housing Reform Act, the Ministry of Health and Long-term Care’s/LHIN’s Aging at Home Strategy), should formally acknowledge the central role and value of care giving provided by family, friends and neighbours and fund initiatives that support their vital work (e.g. respite care, financial aid: direct payments, increased tax credits and improved access to Employment Insurance benefits). **Recommendation C:** Fund a program of tenant advocates that are outside of the housing system (i.e. not tenant reps accountable to the housing provider) that can help tenants negotiate complex housing policies. These advocates need not be lawyers tied to the legal clinics etc. but rather could be knowledgeable peers.
- Scarcity of rental housing (subsidized and market) that has appropriate structural supports to mobility:** as the population ages an increasing proportion of tenants may require ramps, grab bars and wider doorways so that they and their assistive devices (e.g. walkers or wheel chairs) can be accommodated. Without significant investment in structural supports (and in human support through home care!), many older adults may not be able to ‘age in place’ (i.e. they will lose their housing and be forced into long-term care institutions which are more costly and often the last place anyone would call home). Older adults who reside in social housing and are otherwise ‘marked’ as economically disadvantaged may be at greater risk of institutionalization. **Recommendation A:** Expand funding

for structural adaptations available through Home Adaptations for Seniors Independence (HASI) and Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program (RRAP) to prevent or delay institutional homelessness. Enhance hours, access and options available for home care (as well as the salaries paid to personal support workers). **Recommendation B:** Develop more resources and supports for tenants to understand and exercise their rights to structural accommodations under the Ontario Human Rights Code, as well as raise awareness among landlords of their responsibilities under the *Code*.

## Take Action to Make these Strategies a Reality

### Individuals can...

- Call or go online to get more information about your rights as a tenant. The Ontario Human Rights Commission has information on your rights covered by the Code and the **Human Rights Legal Support Centre** 416-314-6266 will provide advice on how to address housing discrimination. The **Federation of Metro Tenants Association** 416-413-9442 has information on your landlord's obligations under the Residential Tenancy Act.
- Call the **Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation** 416-944-0087 to get help with asking your landlord for structural supports to help you move around in your apartment.
- Get information on how you or your landlord can access financial support to make your housing more accessible. Call the **Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation** 1-800-668-2642 for information on the HASI and RRAP programs.

### Communities can...

- Organize the tenants in their building using the ideas suggested in the **Tenant Organizing Manual put out by R.E.N.T.** (Renters Educating and Networking Together) and available online @ <http://www.cleonet.ca/resources/575>. CLEO has a number of other resources related to housing law that you might want to check out.
- Attend the **Toronto LHIN** meetings 416-921-7453 to advocate for financial and other supports for informal caregivers; consider joining the LHIN's seniors or mental health and addictions councils to have an ongoing voice in health, social and housing issues relevant to older adults.
- Ask your MPP or City Councillor what they are doing to ensure that people get the housing they need and keep it. Tell your story and ask for help for yourself and for others you know who are struggling to keep their housing. Many participants told us that they finally got the support they needed when local political representatives advocated on their behalf.

## And the dialogue came to a close...

**One thing MAY lead to another...** During the case sessions participants not only highlighted what was unique to each stage of life but they also identified the important connections between the experiences of each age group.

**But it doesn't have to...** Participants challenged the inevitability of years of disadvantage but spoke of how each phase of life informed and intersected with another. They stressed that difficult family relationships and transitions from the family (or foster) home to independent living often led to housing insecurity and exclusion for many youth. These disruptions were attributed to early histories of abuse, neglect or other adverse family/foster contexts. Further, poor early relationships were linked to ongoing isolation and/or difficult partnerships. These tough transitions were seen by participants as limiting education and employment opportunities and creating risk for poor mental health and substance misuse. However, participants put forward program and policy interventions that could offset the effects of poor transitions (e.g. more peer programs that connect with youth culture on the street; transitional supports as youth leave 'care'; and youth harm reduction services and housing).

As youth become young/middle aged adults changes such as a job loss, pregnancy, or a sudden assumption of child care responsibilities were seen as critical events that could be worsened by limited education and employment histories (e.g. insecure contract jobs) and by poor social support arising from histories of trauma and exclusion. Interventions suggested to reduce the risks associated with such critical events included: long term and flexible support to training and education with subsidized child care that accommodates shift work and night classes and on-demand supports to develop more effective parenting skills.

As middle-aged adults transitioned into older age, participants identified a number of key events that introduce housing instability. For example, older adults are at greater risk of a sudden health crisis that may lead to hospitalization. Intersecting histories of episodic employment, lack of contributory pensions or health benefits may lead to greater risk of eviction or institutionalization. Finally, participants spoke of the turning point of losing independence through poor physical or mental health intersecting with a life time of poverty that leaves little financial or other resources to age with dignity. Interventions recommended by participants included immediate reforms to OW and ODSP legislation to ensure the continued stream of shelter allowance for the duration of hospitalization, as well as changes to the Residential Tenancies Act and the Ontario Rental Housing Tribunal to prevent evictions of hospitalized tenants; and more financial assistance to landlords and tenants who require ramps and grab bars, etc. that are essential to maintaining housing and independence.

After several more sessions of dialogue about hidden homelessness, the upcoming Mental Health Commission's Research Demonstration Projects in Mental Health and Homelessness, and of recommendations to improve housing and supports for young single mothers, the participants met to close the day with a call to action.

## And the Call to Action Began...

At the close of the exchange everyone was asked to write down a priority action for homeless2home participants. Although many important suggestions were made, the most resounding call to action was to significantly scale up portable housing subsidies. Housing subsidies addressed many of the fundamental principles participants identified as key to effective, empowering policies and programs such as self-determination, choice, age appropriateness, and flexibility.

Consequently, the project team invites everyone to take action together on two fronts: 1) to demand that the provincial government make a firm commitment to significantly expand the rent supplement program with clear benchmarks, timelines and ongoing reporting and 2) to partner with people with lived expertise in every aspect of our work to support people as they move from homeless to home.

### Save the date!

On our one year anniversary—**November 6th 2009**—we will take action together to demand more rent supplements and more inclusion of the people with lived expertise in policy, research and program development and delivery. Stay tuned for details. If you are not already on our email or phone lists contact [julia.janes@nicenet.ca](mailto:julia.janes@nicenet.ca) or call 416-978-7323 so we can include you in our broadcasts

### A Final Word...

In conclusion, h2h created a space to explore the real interface of policy and programs with the lives of people who have experienced homelessness and are transitioning toward home. AND h2h provided robust evidence of the capacity of people with lived expertise to set the agenda and develop comprehensive, clear recommendations for action.



Spring, art by Victor Manuel



## Homelessized and Traumatized

Here I go  
Heel and toe  
o'er the land  
through the snow

Homeless, hungry, cold, and poor  
there ain't no good in me no more  
oppressed, stressed, and messed  
feeling like I've never been blessed

Addicted, inflicted, restricted  
affected, effected, infected  
I'm at the bottom  
I've got lice on my scrotum

Dig deep, look inward  
look outward, look forward  
start climbin'  
keep on rymin'

It helps my sanity  
find my humanity  
break my chains  
and my traumatic pains

Agitate, activate, advocate  
get the lot off my plate  
clean it up  
suck it up

Spit it out  
scream and shout  
find my voice  
learn to rejoice

Let them know what I've been fed  
express my traumatized head  
my body and my soul  
walk them through my past Hell hole

Those that will listen  
and those who do the hissin'  
those that genuinely care  
and those that beware

Knowledge is power  
increase mine by the hour  
and I will be free  
I will be me.

Sound at last  
I Hope.

Robt.L.Fitzgerald



For further information about homeless2home or to reach members of the project team please contact the project coordinator Julia Janes @ 416-978-5616 or [julia.janes@nicenet.ca](mailto:julia.janes@nicenet.ca)

To contact the artists: Zanette Singh or Victor Manuel call Sketch 416-516-1559; Ronzig is best contacted through his website @ <http://ronzigsportfolio.synthasite.com>; and to contact Robt. L. Fitzgerald please call the project coordinator.

Design by Thursby & Associates [www.thursby.ca](http://www.thursby.ca)

**homeless2home** is a participatory project of the National Initiative for the Care of the Elderly, Institute for Life Course and Aging, University of Toronto, funded by the Homelessness Partnering Secretariat HRSDC-SC.



National Initiative  
for the Care of  
the Elderly

Initiative nationale  
pour le soin  
des personnes âgées

**NICE**

*We care together*

*Ensemble pour  
le bien-être des aînés*