


Growing Homes!

End Homelessness St. John's

BACKGROUND

January 27, 2016

New program to help end long-term homelessness in St. John's by 2019

Front Step will make a difference in peoples' lives

On behalf of Chair Shawn Skinner, End Homelessness St. John's and its partners are pleased to announce the launch of our community's new program - Front Step - which will provide housing and supports to individuals experiencing the longest and most frequent episodes of homelessness in our community.

The aim of the program is to help end chronic and episodic homelessness in St. John's by 2019, making ours the first community in Atlantic Canada to do so. Named Front Step - which signifies arrival home, and a new beginning - the program is part of the 2014-2019 St. John's Community Plan to End Homelessness which will also provide a range of new supportive housing, prevention services, and greater coordination.

Developed by End Homelessness St. John's, the program is jointly-led by Choices for Youth and Stella's Circle, and delivered by a team based at these two organizations and Iris Kirby House, serving eligible clientele across St. John's. The \$1.1 million first phase of the program runs until March 2017, when it will be reviewed, lessons learned incorporated, and then extended to 2019.

Thanks for putting our community on a path to end homelessness:

We'd like to take this opportunity to introduce you to Front Step and our partners, and to thank everyone who assisted us in designing a program to best meet the needs of our community - and for working together with us to end homelessness in St. John's. Front Step will fulfill a key commitment under the 2014-2019 St. John's Community Plan to End Homelessness by providing housing and tailored, individualized services for an estimated 160 persons who are experiencing chronic and episodic homelessness.

Embracing 'Housing First' solutions:

The Community Plan and its Front Step program are based on the principles of 'Housing First', which is a consumer-driven approach that provides immediate access to permanent housing for people experiencing homelessness, without requiring psychiatric treatment or sobriety as determinants of "housing readiness". The underlying principle of Housing First is that people are more successful in moving forward with their lives if they are first able to access housing that meets their needs. It is a rights-based intervention rooted in the philosophy that all people deserve housing and that adequate housing is a precondition for recovery.

A study of homelessness responses in four Canadian cities shows that institutional responses to homelessness including prison and psychiatric hospitals can cost as much as \$66,000-\$120,000/person per year, compared to the cost of actually ending homelessness by providing housing with supports (\$13,000-\$18,000/person

annually).¹ The Mental Health Commission of Canada's national study of Housing First, *At Home/Chez Soi*, estimates that about \$9,250² per person per year is saved when clients received housing and supports compared to those who did not.

Not only does Housing First make sense from a human rights perspective, it has well documented economic benefits as well. Across the US, Europe and Canada, communities have reported significant success using this approach.

Front Step - a key pillar in a larger Community Plan to End Homelessness:

End Homelessness St. John's Front Step program will work alongside other elements of the overall Community Plan - which include permanent supportive housing, homelessness prevention and rapid re-housing, and greater coordination of systems - to prevent and end homelessness for 460 people in St. John's who are experiencing homelessness or are at imminent risk. Together, these initiatives will put St. John's on a pathway to be the first community in Atlantic Canada to end chronic and episodic homelessness by 2019.

Who will the Front Step program serve?

The target population for End Homelessness St. John's Front Step program is individuals (youth and adults) who are currently chronically or episodically homeless according to the Canadian Homelessness Partnering Strategy definitions:

- **Chronically homeless** refers to individuals, often with disabling conditions (e.g., chronic physical or mental illness, substance abuse problems), who are currently homeless and have been homeless for six months or more in the past year (i.e., have spent more than 180 cumulative nights in a shelter or place not fit for human habitation).
- **Episodically homeless** refers to individuals, often with disabling conditions, who are currently homeless and have experienced three or more episodes of homelessness in the past year (of note, episodes are defined as periods when a person would be in a shelter or place not fit for human habitation, and after at least 30 days, would be back in the shelter or uninhabitable location).

Once 90% of the aforementioned target population are in housing, the program will extend its services to those who fit the following definitions (developed by the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, and adopted by End Homelessness St. John's):

- **Chronic:** Those who have either been continuously homeless for a year or more, or have had at least four episodes of homelessness in the past three years. In order to be considered chronically homeless, a person must have been sleeping in a place not meant for human habitation (e.g., living on the streets) and/or in an emergency homeless shelter.
- **Episodic:** A person who is homeless for less than a year and has fewer than four episodes of homelessness in the past three years.

¹ Pomeroy, S. (2005) *The Cost of Homelessness: Analysis of Alternate Responses in Four Canadian Cities*. Ottawa, ON: National Secretariat on Homelessness.

² This figure is from the Moncton, NB project site.

Introducing our program team and partners:

End Homelessness St. John's Front Step team will include an Advisory Committee to guide the initiative comprising the program leaders and critical service delivery and funding partners. End Homelessness St. John's Community Development Worker, Bruce Pearce, will convene the Advisory Committee.

The \$1.1 million program has received the significant expertise and in-kind contribution of \$124,000 from our community-based service providers (Choices for Youth, Stella's Circle and Iris Kirby House), plus contributions from the following municipal, provincial, federal and regional health authority contributors who are providing funding and human resources to support the program: the City of St. John's (providing municipal non-profit housing apartments, \$15,000 in furnishings and \$27,600 for program evaluation), Eastern Health (providing 1 case manager and 2 housing support workers valued at \$213,000 from Feb 2016-Mar 2017), the Department of Advanced Education & Skills (providing \$88,000 for client supports and an estimated \$36,000 in rental assistance during 2015-2016), and Canada's Homelessness Partnering Strategy (providing \$739,700 for staff, client supports and program development between Sept 2015-March 2017). We also thank Goss Gilroy Inc.'s principal consultant Marie Ryan, and Jaime Rogers of the Medicine Hat Housing Society, who were instrumental in helping us develop the program model. And we sincerely thank the persons with lived experience of homelessness in our community whose voices have shaped the approach we are taking.

Front Step will have the following staff composition equipped to serve a total of 160 clients:

- A half-time Program Manager (in-kind). This position is shared between Choices for Youth and Stella's Circle, each of whom are contributing a .25 full-time equivalent senior staff to the position.
- One full-time Program Coordinator (new position)
- Five full-time Intensive Case Managers (new positions)
- Two full-time Community Mental Health and Housing Workers (new positions)

Program Management role will be responsible for the operation of the program, ensuring that all aspects are effectively implemented - ensuring fidelity to the 'Housing First' intervention, and that the program is effectively integrated within End Homelessness St. John's continuum of programs. Front Step's Program Management role is shared by Paula Soper of Choices for Youth and Gail Thornhill of Stella's Circle,

Program Coordinator will provide day-to-day leadership, mentoring and support to Front Step program staff, ensuring that the team works effectively together and delivers high-quality services to clients. They will also receive client referrals and conduct assessments for individuals who fit the program criteria. The Program Coordinator role is held by Janet Meaney, based at Stella's Circle.

Intensive Case Managers will provide individualized support services using a strengths-based approach to persons who have been referred to and are accepted under the criteria for the Front Step program in order to promote recovery, stability and independent living. Four Case Managers have already been recruited to help deliver the program: Kent McGrath and Amy Alexander are located at Stella's Circle, Kayla Noseworthy at Choices for Youth, and Jenni MacPherson at Iris Kirby House. One more Case Manager will join the program in the future, bringing the total to 5 Case Managers.

Community Mental Health and Housing Workers (CMHHW) will provide outreach services to all program clients using a strength-based approach. They will collaborate with clients and Front Step Case Managers to assist in the development and implementation of a client's individualized service plan and in finding housing for each client and supporting these clients to maintain their housing. Two Community Mental Health & Housing Support Workers will be recruited in the near future.

Who to contact:

If you would like to learn more about End Homelessness St. John's Front Step program - or if you wish to refer someone to the program - please contact Program Coordinator Janet Meaney at j.meaney@stellascircle.ca or (709) 738-0635.

About End Homelessness St. John's:

End Homelessness St. John's is a 15-member community-led, 'collective impact' Board bringing together all sectors to implement a plan to prevent and end homelessness in our city. Our Board is chaired by Shawn Skinner, and includes representatives from the federal government (Service Canada), provincial government (Department of Seniors, Wellness & Social Development, Department of Advanced Education & Skills, Department of Health & Community Services, and NL Housing), the City of St. John's (Community Services Department), the United Way of NL, Rotary Club St. John's Northwest, Choices for Youth, The Gathering Place, Iris Kirby House, and Stella's Circle. End Homelessness St. John's also convenes a regular Frontline Members Forum for all homeless-serving organizations in the city.

The 2014-2019 St. John's Community Plan to End Homelessness³ proposes a vision to end homelessness in St. John's by 2019. The Plan builds on, and is informed by, the experience gained since 2000 by EHSJ and its predecessor, the St. John's Community Advisory Committee on Homelessness. Over that period, the Committee has gained considerable expertise in developing partnerships and has channeled considerable government funding to improve the shelter and housing infrastructure and continuum of support services offered by community organizations and government, developing 63 emergency shelter beds, 37 transitional housing beds in 22 units, and 237 supportive housing beds in 163 units.

To end homelessness by 2019, the Community Plan will develop the necessary housing and supports to assist over 460 individuals – 160 of whom will be chronically and episodically homeless. This requires the coordinated efforts and resources of government, non-profit and business sectors, as well as the research and faith communities. The total investment required for implementing the Plan is approximately \$9 million. The federal Homelessness Partnering Strategy allocation will contribute about \$3.5 million - and our provincial, health authority, municipal and community partners have committed approximately \$1.7 million to date - but other government partnerships and private investors are needed to meet the Plan's resource needs. To find out how you can help, please contact Bruce Pearce at bpearce@nl.rogers.com.

The implementation of the actions outlined in the Plan will result in the following outcomes:

- 1. End chronic and episodic homelessness.**
- 2. Re-house and support 460 homeless persons: of these, a minimum of 160 will be chronically and/or episodically homeless.**
- 3. Reduce average length of stay in emergency shelters to 7 days.**
- 4. Develop a coordinated homeless-serving system.**
- 5. Enhance the integration of public systems to reduce exiting into homelessness**
- 6. Align resources and funding across diverse sectors to support the St. John's Community Plan to End Homelessness.**

³ For more information about the Community Plan, please contact Bruce Pearce, Community Development Worker, End Homelessness St. John's at bpearce@nl.rogers.com or (709) 689-9615. You can also access a copy of the Community Plan here: <http://www.nlhcn.org/PDF/YT-Community-Plan-2014-2019.pdf>.