



PARTNERING WITH LANDLORDS: GETTING PAST THE FEAR

Presenters:

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Housing First Partnership Conference

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Getting Past the Fear

❖ Introduction to **MPA Society**

- ❖ MPA is a non-profit organization founded in 1971
- ❖ Started by persons with lived experience of mental illness and as a reaction to psychiatric treatment at the time
- ❖ MPA takes pride in providing safe, supported and community-based housing to people living with a mental illness and those at risk of homelessness in the Metro Vancouver, British Columbia



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❖ Introduction to MPA Society (Continued)

- ❖ Our goal is to let each person live in the neighbourhood of their choice, while empowering their independence
- ❖ Neighbourhood choice helps individuals retain existing family relationships, community connections, and other support networks
- ❖ Currently, MPA provides supports and housing to over 850 individuals throughout Metro Vancouver
- ❖ More information about the services we provide is available at: www.mpa-society.org



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- ❖ **Introduction to the Mental Health Commission of Canada**
- ❖ **At Home/Chez Soi**

In 2008, the Canadian federal government allocated \$110 million to the Mental Health Commission of Canada to undertake At Home/Chez Soi, a 5 year research demonstration project.



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❖ **At Home/Chez Soi (Continued)**

- ❖ the largest study of its kind in the world
- ❖ providing evidence about what services and systems best help people experiencing serious mental health issues and homelessness
- ❖ based primarily on the “original” Housing First model
- ❖ a collaborative project committed to involving people with lived experience throughout the project



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❖ **At Home Overview**

- ❖ 5 sites / 5 years / 5 specific focuses
 - ❖ Vancouver – addictions
 - ❖ Toronto – the multi-cultural community
 - ❖ Winnipeg – the aboriginal community
 - ❖ Moncton – the rural community
 - ❖ Montreal – partnering with social housing providers



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❖ **Core study:**

- ❖ Randomized control trial
- ❖ Criteria for inclusion:
 - Homelessness
 - Mental Illness
- ❖ Housing first for high needs and moderate needs
- ❖ Vancouver alternative intervention – congregate housing



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❖ **Project Goals:**

- ❖ Implement research demonstration projects in Canadian settings
- ❖ Provide policy and program relevant evidence
- ❖ Discover what service and system interventions achieve the best health and social outcomes for people who are homeless and mentally ill



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❖ **Early Findings**

❖ As a result of At Home/Chez Soi:

- ❖ hundreds of Canadians who were homeless and living with mental health issues, are housed and receiving supports - 280 just in Vancouver.
- ❖ we are learning about what service and system interventions best achieve housing stability and improved health and well-being
- ❖ a significant willingness to do 'business differently' has produced unique collaborations and improved system integration
- ❖ people with lived experience are providing valuable advice and input on project implementation and design
- ❖ project has the goal of sustained long term funding for the homeless



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❖ **MPA's Role**

- ❖ Our role back in 2009, at the start of At Home/Chez Soi, was to secure 200 units of market rentals for persons who were homeless and had a mental illness
- ❖ Collaborative effort in Vancouver- three other Non-profit agencies providing service to the participants - this type of partnership had never existed prior to this project - cooperation rather than competition
- ❖ In 2009, homelessness was a “buzz word”- pre- Olympics - we were unsure if we would be able to secure any units at all for the participants



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❖ **MPA's Role (Continued)**

- ❖ 0.2% occupancy rate in Vancouver
- ❖ Positive social environment - community desire to help the homeless
- ❖ Landlords wanted to be a part of the solution - wanted to be engaged
- ❖ Housing procurement as a separate entity is new to Vancouver and mental health/ homeless agencies
- ❖ Since the At Home/Chez Soi program we are now doing similar work for two different Housing First programs in Metro Vancouver



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❖ Aspects of Housing Procurement in Vancouver





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- ❖ **Housing Procurement in Vancouver**
- ❖ **Typical landlord concerns**
 - ❖ **client**
 - ❖ not this housing
 - ❖ not this area
 - ❖ obvious mental health issues
 - ❖ obvious substance abuse issues
 - ❖ no housing references
 - ❖ unemployed /unemployable
 - ❖ no credit references





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❖ **What are typical landlord concerns? (Cont'd)**

❖ **funding**

- ❖ rent comes from outside agency, not from tenant
- ❖ separation of funding and tenancy means that enforcement of tenancy rules or payment can become problematic for the landlord
- ❖ person whose behaviour needs to change is not accountable to those paying the rent
- ❖ lack of control
 - ❖ landlords may believe they have to take all tenants who apply
 - ❖ landlords may believe they cannot evict for cause



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- ❖ **Likely assumptions about such tenants?**
 - ❖ bugs
 - ❖ traffic
 - ❖ property damage
 - ❖ loss of money
 - ❖ risk to the safety of other tenants or building staff
- ❖ Need to be proactive
- ❖ Address concerns before marketing your program



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- ❖ **Aspects of Housing Procurement in Vancouver:**
- ❖ **Separate housing officer**
 - ❖ separates housing from support
 - ❖ service providers focus on support, not housing stock
 - ❖ another venue for landlords to express concerns
 - ❖ trust from landlord - familiarity with landlord's concerns



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❖ **Separate housing officer (Continued)**

- ❖ reduce “us vs. them” thinking
- ❖ go-between with support and housing
- ❖ landlords need to be made into partners in housing



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❖ **Market yourself and your program**

- ❖ local rental industry groups
- ❖ trade shows
- ❖ real estate developers
- ❖ brochure
- ❖ handout
- ❖ mail-outs
- ❖ advertise in trade magazine – they may do it for free



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❖ **Holding Fee Agreement**

- ❖ guarantees “rent”
- ❖ single payer
- ❖ payment independent of tenant and circumstances
- ❖ sets boundaries
- ❖ all relevant housing laws apply to the landlord and client



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❖ **Holding Fee Agreement – (Continued)**

- ❖ not actually giving up anything - gaining something.
- ❖ funding continuity
- ❖ “exclusive “housing market”
- ❖ double damage deposits



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❖ **Furnishing the unit**

- ❖ local supplier
- ❖ standard set of furniture
 - ❖ pre-furnishing
 - ❖ bedbug risk
 - ❖ unit more liveable



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❖ Furnishing the unit





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- ❖ **Suite Damage**
- ❖ **Obtain tenant insurance**
 - ❖ seek socially-conscious home insurer
 - ❖ \$189/year cost
 - ❖ \$15,000 contents
 - ❖ \$1 million property damage liability
 - ❖ \$1,000 deductible
- ❖ selling tool



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- ❖ **Letter of support for clients**
 - ❖ with consent,
 - ❖ letter identifies client and specifies that:
 - ❖ subsidy
 - ❖ service team supports
 - ❖ subsidy guaranteed
 - ❖ rent in one cheque from housing to landlord
 - ❖ signed by housing officer
 - ❖ outside agency on letterhead
 - ❖ START of housing search
 - ❖ landlord attaches to lease application



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- ❖ **What do you already do?**
- ❖ Already have great relationships with one or another housing company or landlord and not even know how they did that.
 - ❖ Which landlords seem more flexible?
 - ❖ Who talks to landlords on a regular basis?
 - ❖ Which support workers seem adept at resolving a housing problem?
 - ❖ Which landlords are comfortable calling when there's a problem?
- ❖ **These are the people you want to talk to and encourage.**



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- ❖ **What have we done in Vancouver?**
- ❖ **With clients**
 - ❖ ongoing tenancy maintenance groups for clients
 - ❖ delayed moving in
- ❖ **With service providers**
 - ❖ weekly heads of service meetings
 - ❖ weekly housing/support service meetings
 - ❖ monthly stakeholder meeting with social housing



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❖ **With landlords:**

- ❖ landlord appreciation nights
 - ❖ talk to each other
 - ❖ see that other landlords are doing it too
 - ❖ landlord information sessions
 - ❖ landlords to lunch
 - ❖ cards and boxes of chocolates at Christmas
 - ❖ certificates of appreciation
- ❖ **You want the landlords to know that you appreciate that they have taken a risk, however slight, in order to do something different**



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- ❖ **How you leave your current stock may get you more stock**
- ❖ **Planned Moves over Evictions**
 - ❖ more time
 - ❖ more thought by client and service
 - ❖ re: what happened
 - ❖ re: follow-up housing
 - ❖ more flexibility from landlords
 - ❖ more collaborative



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- ❖ **Planned Moves (Continued)**
 - ❖ learning experience
 - ❖ less punitive
 - ❖ less landlord-client hostility
 - ❖ landlords feel heard
 - ❖ landlords appreciate responsiveness
- ❖ Cannot be done in isolation – must be initiated with an eviction notice – then talk



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❖ **Housing Learnings from Evictions**

- ❖ discretion is the better part of valour
 - ❖ just because you can, doesn't mean you should fill them all
 - ❖ using up all vacancies in a building at once is dangerous
 - ❖ you can overwhelm the community
 - ❖ you can overwhelm the landlord
 - ❖ "it's housing first, NOT housing right now"



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❖ **Housing Learnings from Evictions (Cont'd)**

- ❖ avoid knee-jerk opposition to an eviction
 - ❖ listen
 - ❖ pick your battles
 - ❖ work with client (and landlord) to find a new place