



## Vancouver At Home/Chez Soi Update

July 2010

### VANCOUVER PROJECT TEAM

- Sue Baker  
MPA Society  
Housing Lead
- Althea Crawford  
Peer Coordinator
- Liz Evans  
Portland Hotel Society  
Congregate Lead
- Jim Frankish  
UBC  
Co-Lead Researcher
- Catharine Hume  
Vancouver Site  
Coordinator
- Michael Krausz  
UBC  
Co-Lead Researcher
- Michelle Patterson  
SFU  
Research Coordinator
- Greg Richmond  
RainCity Housing  
Assertive Community  
Treatment Lead
- Tracy Schonfeld  
Coast Mental Health  
Intensive Case  
Management Lead
- Julian Somers  
SFU  
Lead Researcher
- Verena Strehlau  
UBC  
Field Office Coordinator

### Bosman Hotel Community by Jeff West and Liz Evans

The PHS Community Services Society (the PHS) is proud to announce the opening of the Bosman Hotel Community (the Bosman) on June 30. We will move about half of the 100 new residents into this supported and stable housing in the first month. The remaining residents will be moved into the building over the course of the summer when they become part of the At Home/Chez Soi project.



The Bosman will provide on site primary care, psychiatric programming, harm reduction education, medication management, family reconnect, and group programming such as yoga, art and music therapies, life skills training and field trips.

The PHS is confident this model will build a strong community and a sense of ownership for residents while also promoting health and well-being. We are committed to community building within the Bosman and throughout the broader community. Every interaction with residents is based on the philosophy that a safe and secure community can promote health and well-being.

We are excited to partner with the Mental Health Commission of Canada, the local community, and residents to provide a valuable service in Vancouver.

### Vancouver Site Visit by Mental Health Commission Chair

The Vancouver team welcomed Mike Kirby, Chair of the Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC), Vice-Chair David Goldbloom and CEO Louise Bradley in May. Mike, David and Louise met with each of the teams and heard from members about the day-to-day realities of implementing At Home/Chez Soi in Vancouver.

Team members shared their reflections on the work underway and spoke about the early successes as well as the challenges encountered as they work together to provide strong Housing First supports to people with mental illness who experience homelessness.

The visit provided Mike, David, and Louise a strong sense of how the At Home/Chez Soi project is rolling out in Vancouver and the experiences of teams as they work together to provide Housing First services and supports.



Mike Kirby (left) talks with Michael Krausz, Catharine Hume and Julian Somers

*"Thanks to all the terrific staff we met today. It was nothing short of inspiring, and we conveyed our enthusiasm to the Minister of Health, Deputy Minister, and Assistant Deputy Minister this afternoon - telling them how proud they should be of this BC gang! Today made me very proud to be part of the MHCC and very hopeful that the work you and your colleagues are doing will make a real difference to the lives of people with mental illness." David S. Goldbloom, Vice-Chair, Mental Health Commission of Canada*

## Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) Team Update by Colin Sanders

To date, Vancouver's RainCity Housing First ACT team has welcomed 39 participants into its program and expects to be working with and housing 100 people by March 2011.

ACT is currently offering participants three group opportunities, including a narrative therapy influenced "insider knowledge" group, where participants come together to share their knowledge and stories of resiliency with one another. It is led by ACT counsellors Barbara and Brian. Kim (nurse) and Mona (Aboriginal Coordinator Specialist) facilitate an Activity Group which features outings to Science World, bocce ball games and hikes. They also lead a Women's Wellness group.

ACT has a new Peer Specialist, Heather Gilmore, who joins us from the Canadian Mental Health Association. Our original Peer Specialist, Julia Weisser, left the team to take up an exciting research associate position. We also recently hired a Supported Employment Specialist, Sacha Medine, as we currently have a number of participants interested in looking for work. We expect our team to be fully hired by this summer.

The ACT team provides services to ACT participants who want them, including:

- Integrated substance use treatment and counselling.
- Ongoing assistance with physical and psychological wellness.
- Vocational and educational counselling using an individual placement and support model.
- Social and family networking and reconnection support.
- Peer lived experience knowledge and supportive counselling.
- Psychiatric assessment and treatment.

We have a committed team that is compassionate and dedicated to collaborating with the participants. We are looking forward to the next few years!

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## ACT Team Aboriginal Supports by Mona Woodward

Currently, 21% of ACT participants are of Aboriginal descent. Many have expressed a desire to connect with their Aboriginal identity. One of the main goals indeed is to promote reconnection with traditional approaches to health. We do this through smudges and sharing of their own sacred teachings. We are using medicine wheel teachings and medicine cards to reflect on the connection to animals, land and self. The sharing of oral traditions and spiritual knowledge allows participants to speak with meaning and confidence.

The birth of oral tradition lies deep within Aboriginal history of storytelling and witnessing. One participant had not cried since his mother passed on. He requested to speak to an Elder. A Ceremony was held on a beach with words of validation and support from the Elder. The participant was instructed to go in to shrubs and hold on to the tree and offer tobacco and to let go. He was able to cry and came back and thanked the Elder. The ceremony ended with a song.



Spring equinox was acknowledged with a pipe ceremony. In our common space hangs a green tobacco tie with a white eagle feather and this will stay until the change of seasons. Summer equinox and National Aboriginal day were honoured with a talking circle and with bannock recipe sharing.

Aboriginal healing practices assist with breaking cycles of substance abuse and violence. So far our participants have self-directed what they needed and wanted for their cultural healings. Aboriginal context within the ACT team approach has increased self-awareness and new learning.

This picture is from one of the cultural activities. A participant shared the Ojibway or Anishinaabe (original people) story of the dream catcher as told by his Nokomis (Grandma). The dream catcher was made from boughs cut from trees near his house and he showed me how to make one and shared his teachings from Nokomis.

## Peer Coordinator Introduction by Althea Crawford

My own odyssey of chronic addiction, homelessness and learning to cope with mental health issues was an excruciatingly difficult time in my life. Surviving this inspired me to leave my career in the arts and to begin a new career providing support to individuals living with mental health issues, exacerbated by addiction and homelessness.

I strongly believe in the Housing First philosophy, and came to this through firsthand experience and by the experiences of individuals I have worked with. So it is an honour and with great enthusiasm that I recently accepted the role of Peer Coordinator for the At Home/Chez Soi Project in Vancouver.

Peers are people with lived experience in mental health issues and/or homelessness (PWLE) and are a valued resource for the At Home/Chez Soi Project. There are a variety of forums for meaningful peer participation throughout the project. On May 18 Vancouver's Working Group for People with Lived Experience transitioned into a Peer Reference Group.

The Peer Reference Group is a practical mechanism that ensures PWLE remain engaged for the duration of the project. Requesting local and national peer representation on committees and working groups, research assistance, peer/research consultation and being informed of project developments and related community events, are current opportunities being made available for PWLE. As Peer Coordinator, I will advocate on behalf of PWLE interests and will bring forward peer insights and concerns to the project team.

I look forward to facilitating the continued engagement of PWLE for At Home/Chez Soi and would like to thank everyone who so warmly welcomed me. If you have any questions regarding peer participation, please feel free to contact me at: [acrawford@thevancouverfoundation.ca](mailto:acrawford@thevancouverfoundation.ca)

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## Vancouver Research Update – June 2010 by Dr. Julian M Somers, RPsych

Over 250 participants have been recruited to the At Home/Chez Soi study in Vancouver, representing more than one half of the total sample. The current rate of recruitment is consistent with the milestones established by the research team at the beginning of the project, and places us on track to achieve full recruitment by March 31, 2011.

As we pass this milestone it is worth pausing to reflect on the key agents responsible for the recruitment of participants in Vancouver. The members of the Vancouver field research team deserve recognition. We have a strong team of interviewers, and our success recruiting and retaining participants is a credit to their outstanding efforts. Referral sources have been vital partners in the process of recruitment, and have invested time to understand the At Home/Chez Soi study so they can make informed referrals. Ongoing recruitment is dependent on the work carried out by our three project service teams (RainCity Housing, Coast Mental Health, PHS Community Services) as well as our Vancouver housing portfolio manager (MPA). The readiness of these teams to receive clients ensures that there are no bottlenecks that constrain recruitment.

Our success to date with recruitment is due to the coordinated efforts of these groups. We will build on this success as we complete the task of recruitment and complete the large number of follow-up interviews that are specified in our research design.

To date, Vancouver's two groups of participants ("Moderate Need" and "High Need") are similar in most demographic dimensions. Both groups consist of about 25% females, 15% Aboriginal people, and 44% have completed at least a high school education. About 23% of the total participants reported having children under the age of 18 years. Roughly 25% of the participants had been held in a police cell within the past 6 months.

There are some interesting differences between the two groups. The High Need group is significantly younger than the Moderate Need cohort (average of 39 years of age versus 45), and was also significantly younger when they had their first experience of homelessness (average of 25 years of age versus 37). These preliminary

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## Housing Update by Mark MacDonald

We have now secured 113 housing units and have housed 79 participants. Seventy-seven participants are living in furnished apartments. Single Room Occupancy (SRO) units make up the remainder.



### Examples of buildings with units in the At Home/Chez Soi project

After some months of housing people, our teams realized it would be useful to have temporary SRO units on reserve as a back-up to our regular housing. Our goal is to provide housing as soon as possible to new participants. At times this is challenging because the housing may be new and not yet furnished or in need of renovations. Furnishings or repairs can sometimes take time and it's great to have alternate safe, clean, temporary housing available so people can get in off the street until their apartment is ready. There are instances where people who are already housed experience setbacks in their physical or mental health. A respite stay in a safe, clean place with the security of 24-hour desk staff can mean the difference between keeping an apartment and being evicted.

Participants' right to choose the neighbourhood they live in is an integral part of the Housing First philosophy. We have housing units in neighbourhoods such as Marpole, Jericho Beach and North Vancouver as well as SRO units in the downtown areas.

We were making our own quota of 13 new housing units per month until May when a flurry of intakes ate away at the surplus we had built up. There has been a softening in the condo sales market which caused the rental market to tighten up. We will step up house-hunting and advertising to try to get back the surplus so we can continue to offer participants choice.

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findings provoke important questions about the interaction between homelessness and mental illness. Are people with higher needs more likely to become homeless at a younger age? Or are people who become homeless at a younger age more likely to have significantly higher needs as years unfold? Perhaps a combination of the two forces is at work. Vancouver's At Home/Chez Soi project will explore these questions through our qualitative and quantitative methodologies.

The central goal of our research is to produce evidence that can guide improvements in services, and changes in policies. The results so far from over 250 participants confirm the need for dramatic change. Unmet health needs, concerns about safety, and frequent crises are alarmingly common within the sample. However, it is noteworthy that nearly three quarters (73%) report that despite all else, they are hopeful about their future. Members of Vancouver's At Home/Chez Soi research project may draw inspiration from this result, and match the hopefulness of our participants with our own belief in the transformative ability of our work.

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