

Evaluation of Housing First Programs for People with Severe Mental Illness and Involvement with the Criminal Justice System

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THE CONTEXT

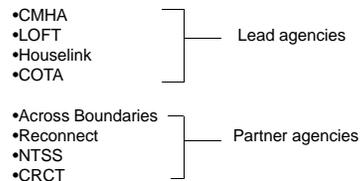
The Mental Health and Justice Initiative (MHJI) Funding

•The Ministry of Health and Long Term Care (MOHLTC) established the MHJI funding to provide community mental health support services and housing services for those who are involved in the criminal justice system.

Funding Details

•The funding allocation for Toronto created 395 housing spaces for individuals with mental illness and some criminal justice system involvement in the past two years.

Participating Agencies (Toronto)



•The majority of the spaces are allocated directly via the lead agencies (along with support services), and a smaller proportion—although brokered by the lead agencies and agency is landlord—are delivered through the partner agencies. Agencies serve different quadrants of the city; individuals chose agency, and thus location.

•All agencies have housing first philosophies, but with varying levels of support and oversight.

Tenancy Details

•The tenant placements consist of either supportive housing or scattered site housing subsidies with supports attached.

•Treatment is encouraged but not required.

•Agencies will house couples and families.

•Tenants have government supplemented rent and protection against arbitrary eviction.

THE STUDY

Background

•Anonymous donor in Calgary funds a feasibility study to ascertain whether Calgary researchers can conduct a comparison study of supportive housing with Toronto.

Objective

•Toronto's task was to determine the feasibility of partnering with service providers, the specifics of data acquisition, the outcome measures that provide the best information, and the limitations of using administrative data.

Method—Phase 1: Tenant Interviews

•Interviews were conducted with 20 tenants.

•Participants were selected randomly (and voluntarily) from a list of tenants healthy enough to participate.

•Tenants with support needs ranging from high to low were included.

Results—Phase 1: Tenant Interviews

•Tenants' opinions were overwhelmingly positive.

•A few of the many themes:

•The supportive housing units—unlike the shelter system—are places designed to assist recovery.

•Medication adherence is facilitated by a stable living environment.

•“Turning a new page” and “making a fresh start” were common phrases used by tenants.

•Feedback on the assistance and services provided by case workers was very positive.

•Tenants were often very far from actively seeking employment, but at the same time remarked that they were contemplating re-entering the workforce for the first time in many years.

Method—Phase 2: Administrative Data

•Two separate data sets were used:

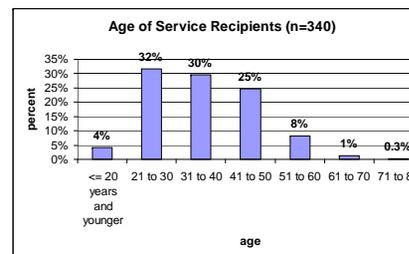
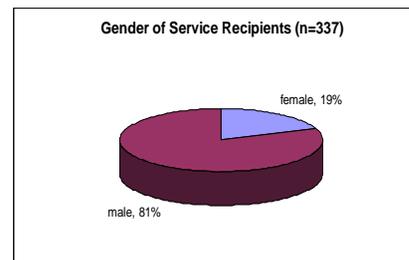
•CDS-MH (Common Data Set-Mental Health): Ministry-mandated clinical/administrative reporting system for community mental health agencies.

•Information was collected from the data entered routinely by agencies every 6 months.

•CDS-MH Plus: a supplementary package that includes the Camberwell Assessment of Needs, and additional questions on client legal system involvement, finances, and employment.

•Case workers completed this tool with each client at program intake and every 6 months thereafter.

Results—Phase 2: Administrative Data



Results—Phase 2: Administrative Data (continued)

"Have you recently felt very low or sad"? – Client scores			
		n	Percent
baseline	no problem	21	34%
	met need	15	24%
	unmet need	23	37%
	not known	3	5%
follow-up (6 mos. later)	no problem	20	32%
	met need	17	27%
	unmet need	23	37%
	not known	2	3%

Have you been arrested in the past 6 months?			
	No	Yes	
baseline	30	19	
	61%	39%	
Follow-up (6 months later)	45	4	
	92%	8%	

Conclusions

•Toronto has successfully implemented a Housing First program for clients with severe mental illness and legal system involvement.

•A high-risk population of clients is being served.

•Clients eagerly report the positive influence the program has had on their psychological well-being and avoidance of legal involvement.

•For research purposes, there are many challenges that need to be overcome with administrative data sets.

•Highly-qualified research teams and agency partners are eager to continue evaluation efforts and cross-city knowledge transfer.