

*A Place to Call Home:*  
Edmonton's 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness

# Update YEAR 2

APRIL 2011



## Homeless Commission

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## Two years into the implementation of our 10 Year Plan, we are achieving considerable success

All of the targets that we set for Year 2 are being met or exceeded:

- ✓ 956 permanent homes have been secured for 1,352 people who had been homeless.
- ✓ 83% of people who have been housed have kept their housing.
- ✓ The October 2010 Homeless Count found 2,421 homeless Edmontonians, 21% fewer than counted two years earlier. This is the first reduction in the number of homeless since the counts began in 1999.
- ✓ In the past two years, the number of Edmontonians staying in homeless shelters has dropped by 23% from an average of 1,244 per night in October 2008 to 939 per night in October 2010.
- ✓ Housing First clients live in 400 different buildings run by 160 different landlords

However, there are challenges ahead as we continue to implement our 10 Year Plan – primarily around sustainability. On an individual basis, there is concern about the level of on-going support that housing first clients need after graduating from the program. On a program basis, demand exceeds supply: our ability to house and support new people will be severely constrained in 2011. Support workers already have large case-loads. The availability of rent subsidies for new clients is also limited.

# Behind the numbers – making the Plan work

**Our organizational structure.** While the Homeless Commission champions the Plan, Homeward Trust is the Plan's management Agency, and contracts 10 Housing First teams:

- **6 Housing First teams** locate housing and provide onsite support services for people who are homeless.
- **2 Assertive Community Treatment** teams use a Pathways to Housing approach to assist high needs clients to find and remain successfully housed.
- **2 Housing First teams** offer specialized supports (e.g. addictions and clinical support, financial literacy and budgeting) to all Housing First clients after they are housed.

**Funding** Implementation of the Plan is primarily funded by the Government of Alberta, with contributions from the federal and municipal orders of government. The Plan works in coordination with the Province's Plan to End Homelessness. The Department of Housing and Urban Affairs funds and support programs through Homeward Trust, working collaboratively with Homeward Trust to further the strategies of both plans.

**The scattered approach.** Most clients choose not to live in the inner city. They prefer to make a complete break away from their previous lifestyle.

**Relationships with landlords.** Wherever possible our goal is to secure housing for clients in the private market. So establishing good working relationships with landlords is a priority. The Housing First teams provide assurances for landlords: rents will be paid in full and on time; issues

with tenancy breaches can be tackled and resolved. As a result, the willingness of many landlords to accommodate Housing First clients has been exemplary.

**Overcoming isolation and loneliness.** Many of the newly housed feel isolated in their new communities. The newly launched Welcome Home program involving faith communities across the city will help integrate people into their new neighbourhoods. Boyle Street Community Services has also hired an inner city recreation coordinator who will work with Housing First clients to reduce their social isolation through recreation.

**Avoiding the 'one size fits all' approach.** We recognize that some people's needs are so complex that they may never be able to live independently – hence the need for permanent supportive housing. Building such units can take several years. So the 10 Year Plan did not plan for new permanent supportive housing to become available until Year 3. We have, however, got a head start on working towards these targets.

**Supporting those leaving hospital or prison.** People being discharged from hospitals and prisons are particularly vulnerable to becoming homeless. The DiverseCity Housing First team's staff is seconded from Alberta Health Services to help these people find housing solutions. The team has strong relationships with discharging health institutions (emergency departments, acute care hospitals and Alberta Hospital Edmonton). At the provincial level a committee has been struck to figure out how people being discharged from institutions can be successfully transitioned into stable housing.



## BEYOND THE NUMBERS - STORIES OF HOPE

### Susan's story

Susan's childhood was traumatic. She was sexually assaulted repeatedly by her father over several years, and she became pregnant at 12. She had to give the baby up for adoption. From there, her life spiraled downwards into strip clubs, drugs and abusive relationships – life on the street.

A year ago, Susan made the courageous decision to start a new life. Through the YMCA Homeward Bound Program she got her own home. But at first she lived in isolation, staying inside, reluctant to let anyone into her life. Gradually though, with the help of her support workers, Susan gained confidence and began to go out. She likes taking her dogs to the dog park and meeting new people. She's passionate about darts, so she joined a dart league. And she's beginning to think about the future. She'd like to go to dog grooming school and eventually work as a dog groomer.

Now in her early 40's Susan is ready for a more meaningful life – to make new friends and become part of a new community.

### Steve's story

Steve grew up in a home with an abusive, alcoholic father. And there was no escape at school. There he was mocked and ridiculed. His childhood wasn't easy.

As an adult, Steve suffered a serious back injury on his work site as a metal worker. He was put on morphine for the pain. Over time, Steve became addicted to the morphine, and eventually lost his job and ended up on the street for 10 years. Steve relied on shoplifting and theft to support his morphine habit. He contracted several forms of hepatitis.

But Steve decided that his life could be different. He's now in a program that gives him a set amount of morphine per day, gradually reducing the amount with the goal of stopping it altogether and going back to work. Steve has had his own home for four months; he keeps his apartment clean, and has had virtually no complaints from the landlord.

But, like many of the newly housed, he's found the transition from his old lifestyle challenging. He spends his days picking up litter around his apartment, walking, going to the library, listening to music and reading. He often attends inner city church services. Physically, Steve feels much better.

But Steve gets bored – and he often feels lonely. Steve has almost no close friends, since he left most of them behind when he got his apartment. He's waiting to feel part of a new community.

# Goals

## YEAR 2 Targets & Strategies

## FUTURE Targets

1 Provide permanent housing options for all people living on the streets and in public places



**Coordinate with existing agencies** to provide outreach and support programs across the city.



**Develop Aboriginal capacity** and ensure services are relevant, respectful and effective.

2011

- All people living on the streets or in public places will have been given the option of permanent, supported housing

2 Ensure an adequate supply of permanent, affordable housing with appropriate supports for people who are homeless



**956 UNITS**

956 **existing housing** units were secured. Exceeds Year 2 target of 450.

**27 UNITS**

27 units of **permanent supportive housing** ready to open this summer



**Housing First teams** are responsible for moving clients into their new homes, and ensuring they are adequately furnished. They continue to access the Furniture Bank.



**Scattered approach:** by end 2010, Housing First clients lived in 400 buildings run by 160 landlords throughout the city. No more than 20% of units in any one building houses Housing First clients.

2012

- Secure 800 supported housing units, in partnership with private landlords

2014

- Develop 1000 units of permanent supportive housing

2019

- Secure 1650 modestly sized units



**171 UNITS**

171 **modestly sized** units have been developed: 114 currently occupied; 57 opening this summer.



**58 UNITS**

58 **transitional housing** units completed

3 Ensure emergency accommodation is available when needed, but transition people quickly into permanent housing



**198 clients successfully housed** through Hope Mission's Rapid Exit program.



**Collection of data** to determine average shelter stays is still in development: scheduled to begin later in 2011.



**Immigration Hall** has 44 units for clients transitioning into permanent housing.



Oct 2010 **Homeless count:** 939 sheltered homeless. On track to achieving sheltered homeless target by 2012

2012

- Decrease the number of sheltered homeless to 2006 levels

2014

- Decrease the average length of stay at an emergency shelter to less than 7 days.

4 Prevent people from becoming homeless



**DiverseCity Housing First** staff work to house people being discharged from health institutions.

2015

- Reduce the need for emergency shelter capacity by 50%

5 Establish a governance structure and an implementation process for the Plan that builds on the strengths of the community; develops capacity; promotes collaboration, innovation and cost-effectiveness; and measures progress



**Efforts to Outcomes** is a customized software program developed by Homeward Trust for Housing First partners to track clients' progress and outcomes



The Homeless Commission produces an **annual update**, documenting progress on implementing the Plan, to be submitted to all orders of government.

### LEGEND



**Target Achieved**



**Strategy Developed**



**Strategy Under way**



**Strategy Not Met**

## LETTER TO OUR STAKEHOLDERS

# Ensuring sustainability

Over the last 2 years we have made important strides towards our goal of ending homelessness in Edmonton. Most significantly, 1352 people now have housing who didn't before. And they are receiving the supports they need to remain housed. These numbers are due to the hard work of the staff at Home-ward Trust and the social agencies, who have come together to form a formidable team. Their mandate may be simple – to house and support those experi-encing homelessness – but each client has her own complex set of needs that requires an intensive, personal approach. Our success is due to the commitment and skill of all of those involved in Edmonton's *10 Year Plan to End Homelessness*.

It's also due to the courage shown by newly housed people, who are making the difficult choice necessary to change their lives. The adjustment to life off the streets, breaking the patterns of behavior established over many years, establishing the foundations of a completely new life, take time and perseverance. It is not an easy transition to make.

Important though it is to celebrate the successes, we must remember that there are still at least 2421 Edmontonians living on the streets. And those are just the ones we know about. There is still much that we need to accomplish in the next 8 years of our Plan.

The Plan emphasizes the importance of preventing homelessness – closing the front door into home-lessness as we are opening the back door out of homelessness. While we are managing, inch by inch, to open that back door, we need to work harder to close the front door.

Fundamentally, though, we need to make sure that our Plan is sustainable. On a personal level, can we

ensure that people who are newly housed become permanently housed? Some may need on-going financial supports to help pay the rent, particularly as rents rise with declining vacancy rates. Others may benefit from employment readiness programs. Then on a systemic level, how do we build in capacity to maintain progress and expand the services we offer, as demand increases?

We have been extremely fortunate with the political commitment we've received, and continue to receive, from all orders of government, especially from the Mayor and Council as instigators of the Plan, and from the Province as the primary funder. We all acknowledge that ending homelessness is not just the right thing to do – it also makes economic sense. From a purely financial perspec-tive, it's far more effective to house somebody and give them the supports they need, than to fund the cumulative costs of responding to the crises endured by somebody living on the streets.

We need all of you, our fellow Edmontonians from across the city, to join with us and play a role in reaching our goal to end homelessness - whether it's by raising awareness about the Plan, donating to the Furniture Bank or volunteering for our Welcome Home program. In joining forces with the Interfaith community we saw the strength that can be lever-aged through diverse faiths and communities working together; the potential for constructive action. That partnership is just the first step. In order to maintain the momentum and reach our goal in the next 8 years, we need Edmontonians from across the city to become involved in our movement to end homelessness.

Anne Smith

CHAIR

EDMONTON HOMELESS COMMISSION

Jay Freeman

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

EDMONTON HOMELESS COMMISSION

## Welcome home

Brian was homeless for most of his life. He grew up on the streets of Toronto – an orphan, in between foster homes, orphanages, and reform school. As an adult, when he wasn't in jail he was living on the streets, battling addictions. A few years ago Brian moved to Edmonton to work. He soon became ill, ran out of money and ended up living in the river valley.

But in 2009 Brian got a home of his own – he was one of the first people housed through Housing First. Brian found, however, that the move into an apartment was just the beginning of his journey: he didn't have any of the skills he needed to build a new life – they weren't skills he'd learnt in prison. And he was lonely – he'd left behind the friends he'd had while living on the streets. He needed companionship.

Brian's Housing First support worker took him to her church – and there he found a friend in the congregation. He admits it was an unlikely friendship at the beginning, they really didn't have much in common; his new friend hadn't even had a speeding ticket, let alone seen the inside of a prison cell. But Brian says he wanted what that person had – a normal life – and his friend was willing to help him get there. Brian credits the congregation of that church with providing the new community he

needed – a network of support, behind him every step of the way.

Now that network of support for the newly housed is spreading across Edmonton. In March, the Capital Region Interfaith Housing Initiative joined forces with the Homeless Commission to announce the new Welcome Home program, funded in part by Enbridge in partnership with the United Way, with a \$100,000 donation for the first year. The Capital Region Interfaith Housing Initiative also released a Congregational Housing Action Guide, which offers people a variety of ways to get involved in ending homelessness.

Through partnerships with the faith and business communities, we are successfully building momentum: a community movement dedicated to ending homelessness in Edmonton.



Members of the Capital Region Interfaith Housing Initiative pledged their support for Edmonton's 10 Year Plan on March 17th, 2011.