

Cambridge STEP Home Collaborative

Case Study # 1

Promising Practice

- Using a three phase approach to transition homeless individuals into housing.
- Supporting tenants to maintain their housing following a five stage work plan to recover from homelessness.
- Partnership between the Region and four organizations with experience in outreach, housing and support.

Background

The Region of Waterloo in collaboration with service providers have been taking a systematic approach to eliminating chronic homelessness. In 2007 the Region developed its All Roads Lead to Home homelessness and housing stability strategy that set the ground work for policy and action frameworks to reduce homelessness across Waterloo Region. Out of this strategy the first STEP Home (Support to End Persistent Homelessness) program was initiated that consisted of a group of services specifically to support people experiencing persistent homelessness. Most recently, the Region joined the 20 thousand homes campaign, a movement dedicating to ending homelessness in 20 communities across Canada. At this time, the Region conducted a point-in-time count of people experiencing homelessness across the region and used the SPDAT (Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool) to measure each person's chronicity of homelessness and the complexity of issues that may be affecting their housing

stability. This list formed the region's PATHS list (Priority Access to Housing Services). To house people from this list, expanding on the STEP Home program, the Region of Waterloo funded four organizations to collaborate and run a two-year pilot, with the goal of housing 50 individuals from that list who have the highest chronicity and acuity. The pilot design was strategic. It involved a systematic approach, to engage participants from the by-name list and transition them into housing. The plan also included a work plan for supporting tenants to recover from homelessness once they have moved in.

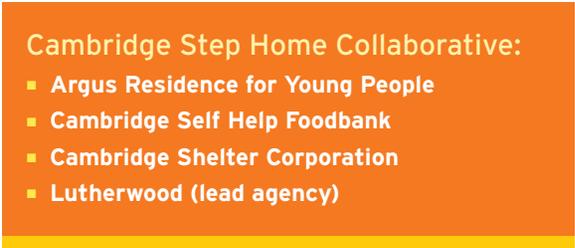
Population Served

Anyone from the PATHS (Priority Access to Housing Services) list, a by-name list of people experiencing homelessness in Waterloo Region. Cambridge Pilot serves people from that list who have experienced chronic homelessness and who have the most complex co-occurring issues that impact housing stability often including mental health and addictions issues.



Funding Model:

- Funding is administered through the Region of Waterloo.
- The Region receives federal funding through the Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS) and from the province through the Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative (CHPI) and the Investment in Affordable Housing (IAH) Program.



Cambridge Step Home Collaborative:

- Argus Residence for Young People
- Cambridge Self Help Foodbank
- Cambridge Shelter Corporation
- Lutherwood (lead agency)

Housing

Using a 3 phase approach to transition homeless individuals into housing.

Cambridge Step Home uses portable rent supplements to house people in units of their choice. Most of the units are with private landlords, although some are in non-profit housing. Tenants sign a lease directly with their landlord. Cambridge Step Home follows a three-phase approach to engage people experiencing homelessness, find them housing, and support them upon move in.

Below are the 3 phases to their housing first approach along with key learnings:

- **Phase 1 - eligibility, invite to service and document readiness.** Eligibility is first determined by identifying individuals with highest acuity and chronicity from the PATHS list. An outreach worker will contact that person, inform them about the program, and offer them housing and support services. If a person agrees to engage services, they sign a consent form and a service agreement. The outreach worker will then work with the participant to get “document ready” to find housing. Documents that are gathered include proof of income (outreach workers will assist participants in securing financial assistance if needed), identification, and ensuring that program documents are completed (full SPDAT, service agreement, consent forms). The participant and worker will also discuss the participant’s housing needs and preferences.
- Staff have not had difficulty finding participants who are named on the list and attribute this to the existing linkages many of the people on the list already had with local services. When individuals are added to the list, they are asked to provide their contact information including any services/workers that they are involved with.
- **Phase 2 - housing search, lease signing, move in.** Housing liaison workers connect with landlords in order to find housing for the tenants, balancing tenants’ needs and preferences with unit availability and landlords who are willing to participate in the program. When a unit becomes available, the housing liaison worker will take the participant for a viewing and to meet the landlord or property manager. If the participant accepts the unit and is approved by the landlord, they sign their lease and the housing liaison worker assists them through move in.
- With low vacancy rates across the region, finding landlords has been a challenge. To combat this, Cambridge Step Home utilized a landlord marketing strategy that included distributing posters and business cards in community spaces across the region (churches, businesses, community centres, etc). They also met with their regional apartment managers association, giving a presentation with information about the Step Home program and surveying landlords to ask what they would need to agree to participate in the program.
- Housing liaison workers complete a bylaw and fire code check of each unit and will not move someone in if there are infractions.
- For efficiency, when scheduling viewings they will bring two to three participants to view the unit at the same time.
- **Phase 3 - move in.** When a person physically moves into the unit, they transition to receive supports from a support coordinator who implements the 5 stages to recovery from homelessness work.

Support

Supporting tenants to maintain their housing following a 5 stage work plan to recover from homelessness.

Once participants are moved into their housing unit they are connected with a support coordinator and a peer support worker. Support coordinators work with each participant to work through a guidebook consisting of 5 steps to recover from homelessness. The guide was developed by the Region of Waterloo in consultation with a housing-based case management consulting company. Peer support workers (PSWs) are available to help people become a part of the community, and accompany them to appointments. PSWs are also available to support other activities that come up while the participant is going through the workbook. Although tenants’ journey through these 5 stages vary, tenants typically take about 18 months to work through each of the stages and complete the associated activities.

Below are the 5 Stages of Recovery from Homelessness:

- 1. Housing** - In this stage support is focused around move in and basic needs. Support coordinators meet with tenants in their new homes, talk about what their role as support coordinators will be, and what responsibilities the participant has as a tenant. During this stage, the support coordinator will go over the lease agreement, complete a crisis plan, talk about budget, and complete a full SPDAT assessment.
- 2. Individualized Housing Support Coordinator Plan** - Once tenants are stable in their housing, the support coordinator and tenant will take an in-depth look at the SPDAT assessment and determine what areas to work on to support greater housing stability. Examples of areas to consider include self-care, mental health, social relationships, addictions, money management, legal issues, abuse and trauma etc.
- 3. Promoting Self Awareness** - In this stage, tenants and support coordinators work to implement the support plan by focusing on areas identified by the tenant as affecting their housing stability.
- 4. Recognizing Self-Management** - Tenants in this stage continue to work through their housing support coordination plans. This stage focuses on changing behaviours that may affect maintaining housing including self-control, accountability, and outlook about the future. In this stage, tenants complete a quality of life survey and make plans for their future.

5. Reframing/Rebuilding - This is the phase where participants have completed the activities in the workbook and focus on transition planning. Tenants in this stage may still be connected to ongoing supports such as a mental health nurse, ongoing case manager or other support person but will disconnect the housing stability services from the support coordinator.

Partnerships

Partnership between the Region and four organizations with experience in outreach, housing and support.

The Cambridge Step Home pilot is a collaborative of four different organizations supervised by the administrative committee members of each organization in collaboration with the Region of Waterloo and the team lead of the project. The agencies came together as a collaborative in order to systematically bring together all of the organizations who were previously providing housing supplements individually. In this model, the four organizations each have staff who come together and work under one roof. Although overall this model has worked well some challenges have included inconsistencies with human resource matters such as vacation time, sick time, and performance appraisals as each organization came to the program with different policies in place. Upon evaluation of the one-year pilot and through a series of community consultations, the Region of Waterloo

decided to fund two separate frameworks across Waterloo Region to provide a continuation of the permanent program, with a clear division of responsibilities. One framework will provide the housing based outreach workers and housing liaison workers for phases 1 and 2 of the housing approach; the other framework will handle the phase 3 component, supporting the tenants to complete the 5 stages of recovery from homelessness to after move in.

The collaborative also works closely in partnership with the regional housing service manager who participates on planning tables for the project. The service manager and staff from each of the organizations involved in the collaborative come together to do knowledge sharing and guide direction of the project. These planning tables also provide opportunities to ensure that the work fits within larger housing planning frameworks from the region.

Outcomes:

- 62 Individuals housed
- 11 People went back to homelessness. Of these 11, 8 were re-housed through the program.



Replication and Advice

- The tools developed to engage tenants and transition them into housing, in addition to the 5 stages of recovery from homelessness workbook could be utilized by many other supportive housing service providers.
- Strong leadership is essential. Need to have someone to oversee the work who believes in its usefulness and its benefits for the entire system.
- Staff need to receive a housing first orientation to understand the underlying principles.
- Need a strong outreach team that understands how to work with a housing focus.
- Understand that this program has three key stakeholders: participants, landlords and the community. It is impossible to operate in a silo. The needs of the participants are the main priority but you must also consider the needs of landlords and the needs of the wider community.
- The program's role is to support participants to be responsible tenants and sometimes it also requires support for landlords to be responsible landlords.
- Have a repair fund if possible. Damages do happen and being able to fund the necessary repairs is key to maintaining positive relationships with landlords.
- Consider a landlord marketing strategy.

Shared Resources

- Housing Support Coordination Document Check-List
- Housing Support Coordinator Guide (5 Stages of Recovery)

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