

# Regeneration Community Services - Step Up Program

## Case Study # 8

### Promising Practice

- Partnering with high support housing providers to transition tenants into lower support housing.
- Facilitating tenant-directed moves by supporting tenants to make an informed choice and providing the necessary supports needed for the transition.

### Background

Regeneration Community Services is a mental health and addictions agency in Toronto that provides supportive housing, case management services and peer support. They have a wide range of supportive housing programs across the housing continuum. The Step Up program consists of 20 supportive housing units located in a large high rise building for tenants transitioning out of High Support Housing. The program began as a response to the need to create “flow” in high support housing in order to move ALC (alternate level of care) patients from the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) into the community. In other words, tenants in high-support housing could be helped to move to other supportive housing and thereby free up high-support units for people in need. At the same time, this enables tenants to live more independently. Through the ‘High Support Consortium,’ a group of 14 supportive housing and service providers in Toronto come together

along with CAMH. They worked to match ALC patients into the best suited high support housing program, and identify current tenants in that program to invite into the Step Up program.

### Population Served

People with mental health and addictions issues. For Step Up - it is specifically for people who have relatively high support needs but no longer require the levels of support provided from agencies within the high support consortium and are interested in moving.

#### High Support Housing Partners:

- Cota
- Good Shepherd (Toronto)
- House of Compassion
- LOFT Community Services
- Madison Community Services
- Margaret’s Housing and Community Support Services
- Pilot Place
- Regeneration Community Services



### Housing

The Step Up Program consists of 20 self-contained units in a high rise building owned and operated by a private landlord. Regeneration has a headlease with the landlord and sublets units to their clients. Strengths of the headlease model includes giving Regeneration staff more ability to enter units when needed, greater flexibility when tenants are late with their rent, and providing the agency more leverage to mediate between the tenant and the landlord if there are maintenance concerns.

When designing the program, it was recognized that the housing must be equal to or better than the units in the High Support Programs where the tenants are moving from. Each unit has a



self-contained kitchen, large bedroom, ample storage and a balcony. Units are completely furnished including household items, and an air conditioning unit.

A benefit of the 20 units being clustered in the same building is that Regeneration is able to have an office and a community room on site. Tenants are able to drop in and use the common space and meet with staff, and staff are able to more easily run group programming.

## Support

***Facilitating tenant-directed moves by supporting tenants to make an informed choice and providing necessary supports needed for the transition.***

Regeneration provides an extensive support program to facilitate tenants' transitions from high support housing to living independently and maintaining their own housing. Because moving into the Step Up program is a choice of

each tenant, the first step for the support staff is engaging with potential tenants in the high support program and providing information and education about the housing and supports available.

Below are the key steps to inviting tenants to move into the Step Up program:

- **Give presentations about the program to tenants and staff at the High Support buildings.** Staff from the Step Up program give formal presentations to potential tenants (and to staff) to provide information about the Step Up program. The presentation includes a description and pictures of the building, and the apartment units. It also lists what is included in the furnishings and the types of supports and programs that are available.
- **Give tours of the building, units and community space.** Tenants who are interested in the program are invited to visit the building and are given a tour. On this tour they see the common areas of the building, the Regeneration office and community space, any vacant units, and get to meet staff and potentially tenants of the program.

Once tenants move into the Step Up program, supports are in place to help the tenant with whatever they need to live independently and maintain their housing. Supports are flexible and individualized to each tenant.

Below are key learnings from supporting tenants transitioning from high support housing:

- **Residential Support Workers on site.** RSWs are onsite 7 days a week from 8am to 9pm. RSWs can assist tenants with activities of daily living with the goal of gradually increasing living skills and independence. RSWs are often the first line of support for the tenants and

can assist tenants navigating other services. Each tenant is connected to a specific RSW but staff will work with any tenant and are available for drop in meetings.

- **Peer support.** Peer Support Workers (PSWs) are available for one-on-one and group supports. Group sessions that PSWs have run at Step Up include: WRAP (Wellness Recovery Action Plan), Pathways to Recovery, art groups and guided meditations.
- **Medication offering program.** Tenants are able to participate in a voluntary medication offering program through Step Up. In this program, a pharmacy delivers participating tenants' medications to the office where it is stored and distributed. Clients can come to the office for their medication where staff provide their medication to them and track it on a sign out sheet. There is a separate count sheet for narcotic medication. Tenants may take their medication in the office, or they may take it with them to take elsewhere. If tenants do not come down to the office for their medication at their usual time, staff will go to the person's unit to check in with them. If the tenant misses their medications staff will work with them to find out why and troubleshoot concerns that they have. Staff may also bring this up with the tenants' case manager or other supports. Staff only offer medications and do not administer.
- **Maintained connection with CAMH.** Tenants in the Step Up program may maintain their connection to CAMH through an Interdisciplinary Transition Team (ITT). This is a community based ACT team that includes nurses, a behavioural therapist, a social worker, an occupational therapist and psychiatrist(s).



*With the right supports in place people can often move to independent living. You can make adjustments for what each person needs. Maybe they don't have the best cooking skills, or they're afraid of the stove then you get creative and organize meals on wheels. There are always ways to make it work."*

Program Manager

## Partnerships

### **Partnering with high support housing providers to transition tenants into lower support housing.**

The Step Up program was born from partnerships between high support service providers and CAMH. The High-Support Housing Consortium was in existence before the Step-Up housing program and unites representatives from the supportive housing, hospital, and community case management sectors within the TC-LHIN for the purpose of promoting and examining the need for high-support housing for individuals with complex mental health issues and co-occurring needs. From the High Support Housing Consortium a smaller group of agencies came together to develop a system response to ALC at CAMH. The ALC High Support Housing Initiative was funded by the TC-LHIN in 2013 and included four elements: the Step-Up Housing program, new high support

housing, the Interdisciplinary Transition Team and the Flex Fund. Through collaboration and successful partnerships, several innovative system practices have evolved, including but not limited to, matching meetings, community support planning meetings, Steering Committee for the implementation of the ALC Initiative, and the Step-Up Housing program. The Step-Up housing program was to create "flow" within the supportive housing sector for those tenants in high support housing who were wanting and able to move to the newly funded program. To date, over 80 complex ALC clients, who have been in hospital on average for 4 years, have moved into the community.

Below are key learnings from the partnerships involved in the Step Up program:

- **Matching meetings.** When a client is ready to transition out of hospital into a high support program, the matching table (representatives from each agency and CAMH staff) reviews the tenants support needs and determines which of the high support programs would be most suitable. Key factors in the decision-making process include what types of supports are needed, vacancies and/or current tenants that may be able to move into the Step Up program. If vacancies are needed in a particular building, staff from the Step Up program will begin engaging with the tenants and providing them with information about the program.
- **Developing support plans.** All supports involved discusses case planning for tenants transitioning into the Step Up program.

Through this coordinated effort, Step Up can start facilitating the specific supports needed based on the tenants needs and strengths. Support plans are regularly reviewed and updated if needed.

- **Coordination with Central Access.** The matching table has an agreement with The Access Point (coordinated access to supportive housing in Toronto) to consider transfers from the high support agencies involved in the partnership to Step Up as internal. This way, the selected tenants have priority regardless of others on the waiting list; the matching table advises the Access Point but tenants do not need to apply there.
- **Ongoing connections to services.** Step Up tenants may remain connected to CAMH through their transition to high support housing and through their transition to the Step Up program if that level of support continues to be needed.
- **Flex Fund.** As part of their funding agreement, the consortium receives \$40,000 annually that acts as an available flex fund. Regeneration administers the funds, but any of the providers in the partnership can apply to use the funds for extra costs associated with transitioning and supporting tenants in their housing. 3 members from the consortium review requests and make a decision on whether to administer the funds.

## Outcomes

Overall, the Step Up program has been successful at transitioning tenants out of High Support Housing, enabling other clients to move from the hospital into high support housing in the community. It has created “flow”, with benefits to the entire system. Since its inception, 26 individuals have moved into the Step Up program. Staff from Step Up check in regularly with each other and have regular supervision meetings where they talk about how each of the clients are doing, including their mental and physical health. Step Up also formally tracks outcomes as part of their Common Data Set reporting to the LHIN including number of mental health hospital admissions and days spent in hospital. Hospital admissions for mental health issues have remained relatively low except for 2 clients who each had lengthy hospital admissions in 2016 and in 2017. Staff are in regular contact with the clients and many of them participate in programming and use the community space. Staff are able to see first-hand how the clients are doing through these observations and speaking with the tenants.

## Replication and Advice

- Having strong partnerships is essential. Need to have a group of high support providers who are willing to come together and be part of a coordinated working group.
- Need to have a strong partnership with the hospital. It is important that tenants remain connected to the hospital for quick re-establishment of supports as needed.

- Medication offering program is useful when transitioning clients into lower support housing as these tenants may have had their medications managed for a long period of time. This program can be voluntary and, over time, tenants may decide they no longer need it. Staff work with clients to help them transition off the medication offering program slowly.
- Apartments located near each other. Having the units located in the same building has served as an important feature of the program. In this model, staff can be located on site giving tenants easy access to supports needed and community programs.

## Shared Resources

- Medication Offering Form

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