



HOUSING STARTS HERE

Volume Two : March 2010

MESSAGE from the Minister



Jonathan Denis, Q.C.
Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs

Welcome to Volume Two of Housing and Urban Affairs', *Housing Starts Here* newsletter. In this issue, we recognize and celebrate the first anniversary of Alberta's 10-year plan to end homelessness and highlight a few of the community partnerships propelling us forward. March 16, 2010 marks the one year anniversary of the plan and I am encouraged to report that with your support, Alberta's Plan is working.

A tremendous amount of work has been done over the last 12 months. All of the major cities are implementing multi-year plans to end homelessness – and each complements the provincial 10-year plan. Communities are moving forward with the "Housing First" model. Most importantly, at-risk people are being housed and receiving the help they need to change their lives and become independent.

To paraphrase Ian DeJong, founder of Toronto's highly successful Streets to Homes program, "Alberta has become the leader in Canada in addressing homelessness." Alberta remains the only Canadian province to adopt a 10-year plan to end homelessness and Alberta's leadership on this important issue is getting noticed.

As the new minister of Alberta's housing portfolio, I am proud of all that we have accomplished over the past year. We have a clear and realistic approach that addresses the needs of individuals, families and taxpayers. If you have feedback or thoughts on the plan, or any aspect of what we do, feel free to share them with me at: housingandurbanaffairs.minister@gov.ab.ca



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HOPE MISSION PROVIDES HOMES TO EDMONTON'S HOMELESS

by Billi-Jean Murray

After celebrating its 80th anniversary last year, Hope Mission continues to provide support and assistance to Edmonton's most vulnerable people.

In January, Housing and Urban Affairs

and Hope Mission announced \$7.3 million for a 52-unit building in Edmonton to be located at 106 Avenue and 107 Street.

The new building will be developed using modular concrete construction.

This form of construction is more fire resistant, will have less noise transfer between units and is quicker to complete than a traditional build, so residents will be able to move in

In the first year of Alberta's 10-Year Plan, more than 1,300 homeless people have been housed and provided with the supports they need to stay housed.

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sooner. The agency's Rapid Exit program will provide the support services that assist these individuals in addressing their barriers to permanent housing.

Immigration Hall is another Hope Mission initiative that provides an opportunity for a new life and a fresh start.

Late last year, Hope Mission and the Homeward Trust Foundation opened Immigration Hall as an exciting affordable housing project specializing in transition and recovery. Immigration Hall was redeveloped and renovated with more than 40 apartments for those who need long-term housing, and are looking to break free from the cycle of homelessness and poverty.



Immigration Hall is focused on responsibility and accountability. All tenants pay rent and are expected to respect their property and neighbors.

Housing and Urban Affairs, the City of Edmonton, the Government of Canada, Alldritt Developments and the Alberta Real Estate Foundation made this initiative possible and, by working together, redeployed an impressive landmark in Central Edmonton.

ALBERTA'S PROGRESS ON THE 10 YEAR PLAN TO END HOMELESSNESS

When *A Plan for Alberta – Ending Homelessness in 10 years* was released and endorsed by the Government of Alberta, we set several targets for the first year of implementation. In the first year, Alberta has met or exceeded many of these targets.

TARGET	RESULT
Develop 700 housing units for homeless Albertans	Exceeded: 933 new housing units supported
Provide permanent housing and outreach services to house 1,000 Albertans	Exceeded: More than 1,300 formerly homeless people have permanent homes
Develop standards for data collection about homelessness	Met: Alberta has developed an information management system to collect reliable and standardized data from providers across the province
Establish a research arm to inform policy development and share best practices	In Progress: The Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness has adopted a research model that includes Alberta's post secondary institutions. This model includes a research agenda that will help form policy development and share best practices for ending homelessness
Simplify personal identification requirements for accessing programs and services	In Progress: Housing and Urban Affairs and Service Alberta have developed a new approach to simplify identification requirements for the homeless
Support community plans to end homelessness	Met: All seven major municipalities are implementing multi-year homeless plans
Reduce shelter use over 10 years	In Progress: Emergency shelter use is decreasing in all major cities

DOAP VAN MAKES A DIFFERENCE IN THE COLD WINTER MONTHS

by Francesca MacNabb

One of Housing and Urban Affairs funded support services is DOAP (or the Downtown Outreach Addiction Partnership). The DOAP team members drive Calgary's downtown area throughout the evening, providing a variety of support services to homeless people. Francesca MacNabb, a Housing and Urban Affairs Shelter Advisor, recently spent an evening with the team. This is her first person account of the ride along.



After spending a night with members of the Downtown Outreach Addiction Partnership (DOAP) it was easy to

understand why people living on the street refer to them as angels. Despite some of the harsh realities that I witnessed, I also saw the best side of the human spirit. The team shares warmth and respect with the homeless and with Calgary's shelter staff.

On this particular night, the DOAP Team members were Patricia from Alpha House and Nicole from Calgary Urban Project Society. DOAP always sends two members out on their mission, to drive around the Calgary inner city in a van equipped to transport clients to shelter or detox facilities, or to provide them with supplies.

We took Len to a shelter, and along the way listened to his story. I was reminded how one of the most important things we can do is listen.

It was easy to see how well recognized and how welcomed the van and the DOAP team members were. Len, a long time shelter client, warmly greeted Pat and Nicole. He referred to them as angels. The amount of appreciation Len had for the DOAP team was evident with every street person we met. We took Len to a shelter, and along the way listened to his story. I was reminded how one of the most important things we can do is listen. Tonight, all Len needed was a warm-up, transportation and a bit of conversation. He needed and deserved to connect with someone.

But Pat and Nicole's job goes beyond providing a ride and sharing conversation. They are also ready to help individuals like Sara, who decided that night she wanted to enter detox in order to deal with her addiction. The team knew this was a critical decision for her and they needed to respond quickly.

Because the Alpha detox centre doesn't take new clients until the morning, they made arrangements with Alpha's emergency shelter to have Sara stay the

night so she could enter the addictions program in the morning. I'm not sure if she made it to detox, but even if she didn't, the DOAP team is always there to help her get the support she needs to deal with her drug addiction.

The team also works closely with the city police. The officers we met up with that night said they appreciated that they can count on the DOAP Team to come and take someone to shelter, detox or hospital, rather than to jail.

Even though I was told it was a slow night, we found plenty to do. We were able to deliver a prescription to a client who is in detox and can't leave the facility. We also spent some time looking for Jim, a long-time homeless fellow who had recently been housed but hadn't been seen for a few days.

Whether it was a fast night or a slow night, this DOAP team ride-along gave me an opportunity to see first hand how it truly is on the front line and to meet and work with people that are making a difference.

As the province moves towards ending homelessness through Housing First, we will continue to rely on our shelter agencies and outreach services, like the DOAP team, to care for those who fall into homelessness. After my ride-along, I know they are in good hands.

HOUSING SUPPORTS HELPS PEOPLE SUCCEED

Housing and Urban Affairs helps low- to moderate-income Albertans with rental assistance in a number of ways, including the development of new affordable units and providing rent supplements to tenants and landlords. Each month we help pay the rent for almost 80,000 people and on average, we help 800 new people every month as others leave our programs and move on with their lives. The thumbnail stories below describe some of the housing successes from the

Grande Spirit Foundation in Grande Prairie. The following names have been changed to ensure anonymity.

June, a single parent received help under the Private Landlord Rent Supplement program. Having a stable home helped her to improve her employment situation. She eventually worked her way up to a good paying job and no longer needed rent support.

In 2003, James and Jane were tenants in an affordable housing unit. They were

struggling with credit issues and had to file for bankruptcy. Having affordable rent helped them while they sorted out their financial problems. In July 2009, they were able to buy their own home.

Mike and Sandra were tenants in an affordable housing unit. Living in affordable housing offered them the stability they needed to improve their situation. She completed her nursing degree and he worked his way up to a management position. They no longer need affordable housing.

*Since the 10 year plan was implemented,
emergency shelter use has decreased in all major cities.*

GUNN CENTRE CHANGES LIVES ONE STEP AT A TIME

by Susan Huberdeau

The Gunn Centre is a short-term transitional housing facility for men facing homelessness. It is situated approximately 50 minutes west of Edmonton overlooking scenic Lac Saint Anne. Located on 45 acres it has the capacity to deliver supports and services to 115 men.

Residents are referred to the Gunn Shelter through emergency shelters across the province. Most who are referred here have addictions that they are ready to address and the location of the centre, away from the triggers of the inner city, is a place where they can truly begin to start this important work.

Each resident is provided with a private bedroom in a cottage shared with three to six men. The centre provides meals in a common kitchen and has a central recreation hall.

“My best moment in Gunn has been when I heard the words ‘you have motivated me’”

In keeping with the Housing First approach, residents receive coaching and support related to mental and physical health, recovery from substance abuse, household maintenance, basic literacy and vocational skills, as well as leisure and social activities. In



addition to providing this support, the staff assesses the capabilities and needs of each resident and develops an individualized case management plan.

In the first year of the implementation of the provincial plan to end homeless, the Gunn Centre has also become a teaching facility. Recently, the Centre formed a partnership with the Grant MacEwan University nursing program to offer students practical experience in working with people who are coping with addiction, mental health issues and homelessness.

These groups (1 instructor- 8 practicum students) spend eight-weeks on site, performing nursing tasks and getting to know and understand their clients and their unique needs. They work one-on-one with a resident to develop a nursing care plan. The residents are given the opportunity to select which nurse they would like to work with. This is when the magic starts to happen.

One resident admitted that when he agreed to participate, he was skeptical that this “tiny little girl”, the same age as his daughter, could teach him anything. He openly admitted that she was able to break through his gruff exterior and taught him to trust her and talk about his feelings.

When asked to reflect on her time there, one of the students, Paulette, notes that she learned that nursing is more than just needles, wound care and call bells. It is about listening and building trust. She said, “My best moment in Gunn has been when I heard the words ‘you have motivated me’”. Paulette has written about her experiences at Gunn and has since been selected to present her findings at a symposium sponsored by the **Mayo Clinic**.

The Gunn Centre is pleased to take part in the nursing practicum program and looks forward to hosting many more future health care professionals and making a difference in the lives of both residents and the health care providers and staff that provide care to them. For more information on the Gunn Centre, please visit: http://www.housing.alberta.ca/Gunn_Centre.cfm

2009-10 APARTMENT VACANCY AND RENTAL COST SURVEY

Each year, Housing and Urban Affairs conducts an Apartment Vacancy and Rental Cost Survey for smaller Alberta communities. The results of the survey provide government and the housing industry with essential information about private market vacancies and rental rates for multi-family rental homes.

The 2009 survey results showed:

- The average rental rate increased for most types of units but at a slower pace than those seen in 2007 and 2008.
- The overall apartment vacancy rate increased from 3.8 per cent in 2008 to 8.1 per cent in 2009.

Further information is available on the Housing and Urban Affairs' website: <http://www.housing.alberta.ca/535.cfm>

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