

# Preventing Homelessness among Mental Health Patients Discharged from Psychiatric Wards to “No Fixed Address”

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## Pilot Study BACKGROUND



A recent study revealed that discharges to shelters or the street occurred at least 194 times a year in London, Ontario, Canada (Forchuk, Russell, Kingston-MacClure, Turner, & Dill, 2006).

### THE PROBLEM

- Individuals with mental illnesses are being discharged from psychiatric wards to shelters or streets “no fixed address”
- Hospitals and shelters do not systematically collect data on the issue of discharge to the shelter or the streets
- This is not a simple matter of poor discharge planning on the part of the hospital. The issue is far more systematic

### WHY IS THIS HAPPENING?

#### SYSTEMIC ISSUES

- Shorter hospital length of stay
- Difficulty accessing funds
- Low/poverty level pension benefits
- Affordable housing shortage

#### INDIVIDUAL ISSUES

- Housing history
- Previous/current psychiatric history
- Level of income
- Ability to manage independent living

### TRYING TO MAKE THE SYSTEM WORK

- Finding affordable housing
- Assistance in paying for first and last month's rent
- Navigating the hospital/housing/income support systems

### PLANNING WITH PARTNERS

- Hospital Referral Sources
- Income Support Providers – Ontario Works (OW) and Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP)
- Research and Support Providers – Community University Research Alliance and Canadian Mental Health Association

### SUPPORT PROVIDED

- Immediate response to identified consumer need
- Assisted access to housing information and resources
  - Housing assessment and goal planning
- Advocacy to coordinate services and accessing financial resources
- Support in accessing housing

### INCLUSION CRITERIA

- Psychiatric diagnosis for at least one year
- Stable and able to live independently
- Secured source of income

#### INTERVENTION GROUP

- Participants received immediate social support and assistance in securing housing
- Participants received assistance in paying for their first and last month's rent through OW or ODSP
- n=7

#### CONTROL GROUP

- Participants received usual discharge care
- n=7

### RESULTS

- All participants were interviewed prior to discharge, at three months and six months post discharge, in order to track information such as housing status, housing cost, and quality of life
- All individuals in the intervention group attained housing prior to discharge and maintained housing when interviewed at the three and six month period ( $p < .001$ )
- All but one individual in the control group did not attain housing and remained homeless when interviewed at the three and six month period
  - The exception in the control group joined the sex trade to avoid homelessness
- When working with individuals in the intervention group, an average of two to three hours of advocacy work was needed to prevent homelessness from discharge

### CONCLUSION

- Discharges from psychiatric wards to shelters or the street is a problem.
- There is a need for systemic solutions related to income support and assistance in finding housing to prevent homelessness among people being discharged from psychiatric wards

### REFERENCES:

Forchuk C., Russell G., Kingston-MacClure S., Turner K. & Dill S. (2006). From psychiatric ward to the streets and shelters. *Journal of Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing* 13, 301-308.