
ABORIGINAL VOICES ON HOUSING NETWORK (AVOHN)

Final Report
Shining Mountains Living Community Services



MARCH 28, 2018

HOMELESSNESS PARTNERING STRATEGY (HPS) GRANT / CITY OF RED DEER

Shining Mountains Living Community Services

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FINAL REPORT

Aboriginal Voices on Housing Network (AVOHN) Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS) Grant

Introduction

The Aboriginal Voices on Housing Network project is a structured and disciplined attempt to bring cross-sector housing organizations together with the City of Red Deer to focus on decreasing the level and severity of homelessness experienced by Aboriginal people and to address the systemic barriers that continue to make Aboriginal people vulnerable with an eye to long lasting social change.

The Aboriginal Voices on Housing Network (AVOHN) project is bringing forward a Strategy / Recommendations to the cross-sector housing organizations together with the City of Red Deer to focus on decreasing the level and severity of homelessness experienced by Aboriginal people and to address the systemic barriers that continue to make Aboriginal people vulnerable with an eye to long lasting social change.

AVOHN works with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Agencies, along with members of the Aboriginal housing community and stakeholders in the creation of a common agenda for change including a shared understanding of the problem and a joint approach to solving it.

Program Description

The network works with stakeholders in the creation of a common agenda for change including a shared understanding of the problem and a joint approach to solving it, collecting data and measuring results consistently, open and continuous communication to build trust, skills and capacity, assure mutual objectives, and create common motivation. The Aboriginal Voices on Housing Network Project is an important example of Indigenous led initiatives with strong community support and an evidence-based approach.

Program Activities

- *Gap Analysis/ Research Report.*
- *On-going monitoring of housing stock.*
- *Monthly stakeholder's and Community Engagement Meetings.*
- *Aboriginal Housing Strategy.*
- *Aboriginal Housing Protocol / MOU with working groups.*
- *Culturally Appropriate Assessment Tool / Workshop of SPADT working with Aboriginal People.*
- *Building Collective Impact to address housing for Aboriginal people in Red Deer.*

Program Results

AVOHN along with its partners have a shared vision to work in a good way to understand and define roles and responsibilities on matters that relate to housing for Aboriginal people within the City of Red Deer. This has been completed by coordinated meetings, a commitment to work together under a partnership agreement and a Memorandum of Understanding signed March 15, 2018. and with the understanding that with the completion of the Aboriginal Voices on Housing Network under Shining Mountains Living Community Services as of 31 March 2018 it will transfer over to Urban Aboriginal Voices Society as the Housing Domain and will continue to operate as Aboriginal Voices on Housing Network as of 1 April 2018. Therefore, Urban Aboriginal Voices Society will continue to maintain the partnership agreement's set-in place with all parties named on this Memorandum of Understanding going forward.

By reclaiming our Aboriginal Culture and way of life, while still understanding the relationship between the non-Aboriginal Community and Aboriginal Community with the mutual respect, we can return to our values and traditional teachings in an effort to bringing back what was once our way of life and the understanding of the past on how it has affected our Aboriginal People and Communities. Provide good leadership to provide services, and access to facilities that are necessary to maintain a safe viable community that fosters and protects the community.

Outcomes

Describe how you met the following outcomes as outlined in the Agreement:

1. Increased housing access and housing stability for Aboriginal people experiencing homelessness with the Aboriginal Housing Strategy.

AVOHN is unified in response to housing for Aboriginal people in Red Deer. AVOHN has consolidated Aboriginal organizations involved in housing and has had some limited success in obtaining buy in from non-Aboriginal housing service providers. This will need to be a continued work in progress.

Housing stock on available one, three and four-bedroom units are very low and hard for Aboriginal people to obtain.

2. Improved housing service delivery to Aboriginal people experiencing homelessness through appropriate Aboriginal (protocols.) MOU.

Memorandum of Understanding represents the shared commitment between Urban Aboriginal Voices Society, the members of the Aboriginal Voices on Housing Network, along with community partners, Shining Mountains Living Community Services, Red Deer Native Friendship Society and Métis Urban Housing Corporation.

Parties will endeavor to engage and communicate with members potentially affected by projects in a fair, transparent and open manner.

3. Increased knowledge and cultural understanding transfer between organizations including increased liaisons with Non-Aboriginal organizations. This will lead to a reduction of barriers to Aboriginal people experiencing homelessness.

The Red Deer Aboriginal Gap Analysis: Towards an Aboriginal Strategy on Housing.

By: Dr. L.M. Manyguns. This report was handed out to working group and Community Housing and Support Agencies in Red Deer. There is a link on Shining Mountains Living Community Services web page to download a copy of this report.

Two-day SPADAT training held on 16 and 17 of November 2017. To enhance service deliverer by honoring Indigenous knowledge, experience and wisdom past, present and moving to the future. How the SPDAT can Complement our Way of Engaging work shop was a success there was 38 people from as far away as Lethbridge, Fort McMurry, Grande Prairie, Edmonton and our local community agencies in attendance.

Guest speakers / presenters Betty Edel and Paula Hendrickson from Winnipeg, shared on how the SPDAT can complement our way of engaging our Indigenous community in assisting on finding the right placement for housing in a respectful manner. We are very pleased to see and be a part of this on-going collaboration with other agencies within the community, by sharing ideas and by coming together we can work towards decreasing homelessness in our communities.

Aboriginal Strategy on Housing report, was shared with working group and community housing agencies. There is a link on Shining Mountains Living Community Services web page to download a copy of this report.

Other Aboriginal agencies such as Shining Mountains Living Community Services, can providing cultural training. Some of Shining Mountains Living Community Services the training they offer consists the following.

- *Overview of Aboriginal People in Canada and Alberta.*
- *First Nations.*
- *Metis People.*
- *Values, Ethics and Beliefs.*
- *Elders, Traditions and Protocols.*
- *Working with Culture.*

4. Improved understanding of Aboriginal homelessness in Red Deer. This includes an increased understanding and application of OCAP principles (ownership, control, access and possession) with regards to Aboriginal Housing.

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The Housing Strategy and Gap Analysis developed under AVOHN can be used to assist future plans, funding expectation and priorities. Use of this gap analysis has led to a new project being funded by the province to provide Culture training to Landlords / Management Companies and aid in assistance with information and workshops to education tenants on roles, responsibilities and rights as tenant.

5. Improved collaboration and relations with all organizations providing housing and wrap around services to Aboriginal people experiencing homelessness.

This has been achieved by open and transparent meetings on a monthly basis, although not all agencies have been able to attend an effort has been made to reach out to address a few ongoing issues.

- *Presentation in Winnipeg at the Seven Cities Conference on Housing.*
- *Workshop in Edmonton on Indigenous Off-Reserve Affordable Housing Program Engagement.*
- *Community Engagement: 9 Meetings 6 average in attendance.*
- *Partners Meetings: 15 Meeting 4 average in attendance.*
- *2 Day Workshop (SPADTA) Building Relationships with Aboriginal Clients.*

This understanding and cohesiveness between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal service providers can be utilize to address gaps and lead to systemic change in housing responses for the Aboriginal community of Red Deer.

Lessons Learned:

There is no one answer to ending homelessness, it's only by working together as a community with the understanding that each person has a unique story on how they became homeless.

Getting everyone involved was challenging, for example ability to attend agreed upon time and day for meetings. This is and will need to continue to be a work in progress.

Understanding that the SPADAT is a tool, and the worker can adapt it for Aboriginal people. It's building a relationship with the client and an understanding on where they have come from and giving them the ability to move forward.

It is challenging to have what may be agreed to or supported as a politically correct response, actual result in actions by some stakeholders.

AVOHN had an Issue with an unexpected staff change half way through the project, on where was it left off at and then moving forward to completion.

7. Recommendations:

Developing an Aboriginal Strategy on Housing.



Aboriginal Voices on Housing Network

*Developing an Aboriginal Strategy on Housing.
Aboriginal Voices on Housing Network.*

Aboriginal Peoples, (meaning) Inuit, Métis and First Nation.

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Memorandum of Understanding:

Urban Aboriginal Voices Society, Aboriginal Voices on Housing Network, Red Deer Native Friendship Society and Métis Urban Housing working with the City of Red Deer share in the vision to work toward ending homelessness for Aboriginal people by creating a strong collaborative community that embraces its diversity improves well-being while maintaining a good quality of life in a good way.

Urban Aboriginal Voices Society exists to act as the voice for Aboriginal people that works collaboratively and cooperatively with government and other organizations such as Aboriginal Voices on Housing Network, Red Deer Native Friendship Society and Métis Urban Housing on issues with regards to housing for Aboriginal people, within the City of Red Deer that are unable to obtain a home, facing homelessness or are homeless at this point in time. AVOHN will become the name of the Housing Domain with UAVS as of 1 April 2018.

Short Term Strategy, short term is easier and least expensive.

Racism, the unwritten barrier:

How to Eliminate the Stereotype.

Racism is a touchy subject for many of us. Most people have experienced it, talked about it, or at least thought about it. However, people often feel powerless when it comes to reducing racism. Luckily, there are many things you can do to help reduce racism in your personal life and in your community.

2018 and on-going:

Develop and maintain a campaign to eradicate racism in the City of Red Deer. Maintaining racist perceptions in the community is costly to all. To remove the persistent racist impressions of the Aboriginal people is to remove many barriers to their success.

Cultural Education and Teaching programs:

Provide a variety of Aboriginal cultural and history knowledge programs. Available to community, Landlord's, Rental Management companies, colleges, employment training services and non-Aboriginal agencies. Sessions are developed in a series of levels focusing on general history, traditions and protocols, legal issues, cultural and Métis specific knowledge.

The benefit to changing the perception of Aboriginal people in the City of Red Deer cannot be understated. It would be reducing the fear of renting homes and apartments to Aboriginal people.

A few solutions:

- *Speak up if you see racism in action.*
- *Support and attend events that celebrate different cultures.*
- *Organize a vigil or protest.*
- *Celebrate differences instead of being colorblind.*
- *Acknowledge differences among communities.*
- *Refuse to support any business or organization that permits racism.*
- *Maintain a positive cultural Identity.*

Efforts should also be directed to educate educators and school systems of the damage racism has on the community in accelerating the costs of addictions, suicide, social dysfunction, unemployment and homelessness.

Invitations to the general Red Deer public of open house of Aboriginal agencies, would be another strategy to enable the public to meet the services and know more about the goals and needs of the Aboriginal population in Red Deer and what services the agencies provide in the community.

Develop an Aboriginal Entry Point to Access Housing:

The current single-entry housing model needs to be redesigned to include an Aboriginal entry point housed with Aboriginal organizations and services. While the current system has made efforts to indigenize, it remains a system difficult to navigate for many Aboriginal people - therefore their needs are not being met. Successful Aboriginal agency structures are supported by elders and staff aware of the history endured by Aboriginal people that have faced and lived the traumas of the Reservation period, the Sixties Scoop and Residential school.

Aboriginal people are struggling to improve their lives while re-discovering their traditional values after years of oppression.

Non-Aboriginal Canadians are becoming more aware of the injustices that have and are occurring to Aboriginal peoples as well as the richness of Aboriginal cultures. Non-Aboriginal people can further support the healing process by continuing to learn about the experience of Aboriginal people in order to promote mutual understanding and respect.

Intermediate Goals 2020 on-going Rent Banks:

Prevention of Homelessness, Rent Banks have been developed to lend money to Aboriginal tenants to help prevent evictions and possible homelessness resulting from those gaps. They're typically funded by governments and philanthropic organizations and are almost always interest-free.

There are no Rent Banks in Alberta, however there is no legal constraint to this type of development. Therefore, it may be possible to develop a rent bank in Red Deer as a means to prevent increasing numbers of homelessness. This option is only available if a person can demonstrate that they normally have a paycheck.

The operational terms for these banks are unique. A renter pays the money back when they return to work with little or no interest.

Rent Banks have no hidden strings and can also help keep people out of the clutches of loan sharks. Many people earning low incomes nonetheless make just a little too much to qualify for social assistance. Some turn to payday loan companies that charge high interest rates for quick cash. It's a path that can quickly lead to bankruptcy and homelessness.

Rental Issue:

Alberta Government policies permit percentage increases to rental units which causes rental costs for units to move out of reach of the most in need of affordable housing.

Current affordable housing can quickly become unaffordable within a few years or for the next generation of renters. Provincial law allows landlords to increase rent two per cent annually with no cap on rent increases.

Rental Cap or increased Subsidies for people living on fixed incomes?

Funding:

Ensure Aboriginal Representation at All Levels of Decision Making, any project with Aboriginal people must include Aboriginal people in the decision making. Improve Collaboration, there are multiple local opportunities that have not been tapped into. Knowing which funders are likely to give in the future starts with understanding why your current funders give.

Explore Funding Opportunities that encourage us to think outside of the box. Focus on developing a long-term funding strategy. Understand who your key funding decision makers are and what motivates them. List specific organizations that may serve as potential funding strategy role models. Big individual donors, foundations, government agencies.

Refine and Adapt Municipal Policies:

Municipalities usually contributed land for housing projects but internal departments need to work together and improve their communication to minimize barriers for Aboriginal non-profit organizations. Alberta's non-market housing system. The programs can involve operational support or capital funding for new construction or renovations of non-market housing units.

What type of Support's are needed and issues?

On site supports for people to learn how to keep house, cook/clean up, pay bills.

Learning differences from Reserve to Urban lifestyle. Not having support to assist in going through all the paperwork & steps to achieve housing.

- *Mind-set.*
- *Poor budgeting.*

- *No identification, No references.*
- *More Community support workers.*
- *Home visits.*

Build more low-income houses:

Waiting lists are too long; there are not enough low-income homes in the community.

- *Housing units in different areas of town.*
- *Keep rent levels / damage deposits affordable!*
- *Drinking & drug problems.*
- *Never lived on my own.*
- *Lack of personal responsibility.*
- *Financial issues & the lack of financial know-how.*
- *Unable to get employment or training for employment due to not having a fixed address.*

Moving forward:

When Aboriginal people have access to education, the higher the education and training, the faster the gap between Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal peoples disappears. Assurances and commitments by the participants and for their children in home to pursue education and continued support. To enable and support educational funding to ensure success would be part of building a strong community.

Indigenous Housing Ombudsperson / Advocate / Housing Liaison:

The Housing Ombudsman Service looks at complaints about registered providers of social housing, for example housing associations, and other landlords, managers and agents. The service is free, independent and impartial. The Ombudsman can also look at complaints about the handling of housing issues by local councils.

Build and maintain housing partnerships with landlords, property management companies, and housing programs in the community that will enhance and strengthen housing resources available to survivors

Provide support services for participants working on overcoming their housing barriers and connect participants with appropriate information, referrals, co-advocacy, emotional support and safety planning.

Connect participants to resources that supports their goals for economic stability, including employment support and financial empowerment.

Maintain regular communication, consultation, Investigate complaints of anti-social behavior.

Long Term Goals

2022 and On-Going

CMHC Policy Changes:

There are two CMHC policies that are creating extreme barriers to accessing and/or retaining housing for Aboriginal peoples and their families.

The first CMHC policy, that creates barriers to services in providing housing is regarding to their ridged regulation of requiring Aboriginal people to provide specific identification, which often is unattainable this alone, may cause homelessness.

**Unit's may be available but cannot be provided due to this policy.*

Possible solution: Affidavits of Identification that are notarized by a lawyer. This ID does not replace government-issued ID but is intended to help people access basic services while replacing their proper ID.

The second CMHC policy that causes homelessness is regarding requiring eviction if other family or extended members stay in the units whose name(s) are not on the lease. This policy requires staff to remove families if other family members not on the lease are staying in the unit. This is contrary to the foundational social and cultural values Aboriginal people live by.

Moving forward, is there a way to change and is CMHC willing to look at these issues and make provisions to its current Policy?

The Indigenous Housing Ombudsperson/Advocate/ Housing Liaison person can work with CMHC on looking at changing this Policy.

Mapping strategy

On-Going:

Mapping current housing and low rent options. Offer incentives to the population to register illegal basements suites and to register rooms for rent.

Incentives: Low interest home improvement loans to build new spaces into current homes.

Mapping all new resources available and develop a set of goals, such as 10 new spaces per year of apartments and 10 more rooming spaces and 10 more Elder's spaces.

- *Keeping track of housing stock, is there growth?*
- *Older Home Restoration Purchases.*

The Government of Canada provides funding to the Government of Alberta to design and deliver a range of non-market housing programs in Alberta. The programs can involve operational support or capital funding for new construction or renovations of non-market housing units.

Alberta municipalities can be funders and/or owners of non-market housing depending on the approach used in each community. Many municipalities have a requisition partnership with a housing management body that operates a lodge housing facility in the local or nearby community. In addition, many municipalities choose to own or directly fund other types of non-market housing in the community in order to respond to resident needs.

Alberta Housing Act:

The purpose of the Alberta Housing Act is to enable the efficient provision of a basic level of housing accommodation for persons who because of financial, social, or other circumstances require assistance to obtain or maintain housing accommodation. The Act allows for the establishment of housing management bodies and the Alberta Social Housing Corporation and includes the following regulations:

Alberta Mortgage and Housing Corporation Loan:

- *Housing Accommodation Tenancies*
- *Loan Insurance*
- *Lodge Assistance Program*
- *Management Body Operation and Administration*
- *Rent Supplement*
- *Social Housing Accommodation*

Aboriginal peoples are finally being offered opportunities out of poverty. Non-Aboriginal Canadians can support this process by linking with others who are working to support Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal reconciliation, lending financial or other forms of support to Aboriginal organizations, lobbying the government for Aboriginal self-government, or advocating for greater funding for specific programs related to inequality and Aboriginal peoples.

We would like to thank the Government of Canada, City of Red Deer, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Agencies, along with members of the Aboriginal housing community (working group), for their help and participation in this project. AVOHN will be continuing and providing updates on the housing strategy to ensure progressive outcomes are met. Features of housing successes, introductions of success stories about house clients and their success stories.

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