

# Building Knowledge: Research Highlights

## Effective Strategies for Relocating Residents: SRO Renewal Initiative Temporary Resident Relocations Case Study



### Introduction

Since 2007, the provincial government has purchased or leased 24 Single Room Occupancy hotels (SROs) in the Downtown Eastside (DTES) and surrounding area to preserve this important source of affordable housing for low-income people who are at risk of homelessness. SROs provide accommodation in single rooms, usually with shared bathrooms and kitchens. Rent is typically set to the shelter allowance portion provided by income assistance. In partnership with non-profit operators, the SROs owned by the Province offer onsite supports such as 24-hour staffing and referrals to community support services to help residents maintain their housing and move along the housing continuum.

Many of these government-owned SRO hotels needed substantial repairs. In 2011, BC Housing announced the SRO Renewal Initiative (SRORI) and work began in 2013 to renovate and restore 13 of them. BC Housing is working with the SRO operators to support the residents during the renovation process. Residents in buildings under renovation are provided with temporary accommodation and supports. Efforts are made to relocate residents nearby to minimize interruptions to their daily routines.

### Project Management Approach

With many stakeholders involved in the resident relocation process, BC Housing put in place a resident-centred and housing-operator-driven project-management approach to ensure project requirements were met.

### Project Requirements

- No resident should be evicted due to renovations.
- Supports to residents must be maintained while residents are in temporary units.
- Relocations should occur through a resident-centred approach.
- No onsite staff should be laid off as a result of the renovations.
- Units must be vacated on schedule to avoid additional costs related to delaying renovations.
- Residents get the first right of refusal when it comes time to return to their buildings. Best efforts will be made to return them to their original units (though change requests will be considered).



## Coordination Structure

1. BC Housing coordinated the temporary resident moves.
2. BC Housing allowed flexibility in how each housing operator approached their move processes and provided the level of support and involvement requested by each housing operator.
  - o Each housing operator was given a budget to coordinate the moves as they saw fit.
  - o Housing operators reported strong appreciation for the flexibility and trust that was given to them to manage the moving process in their own way.
3. BC Housing dedicated two full-time positions to coordinate the resident relocation process.
  - o SRORI Coordinator responsible for planning move processes and logistics with housing operators.
  - o SRORI Project Support responsible for tracking budgets, assisting with move logistics, and securing floors/buildings that have been vacated.
4. Original plan was to hire professional movers to assist with the moves, but residents felt more comfortable getting assistance from the onsite staff who they know and trust.
  - o Onsite staff positions were temporarily backfilled while regular staff helped residents purge, pack, and prepare for the move.

## Communication Structures

- BC Housing's dedicated staff communicated with housing operators' site staff almost daily.
- Resident relocation team was onsite at SROs preparing for moves most days to answer questions and address concerns from residents and staff.
- Habitat Housing Initiative (the contractor performing the renovations) hired a third-party coordinator, GreenRoots, to engage residents in the moving process and provide regular updates to residents about the moving process.
- Onsite staff reminded residents about the move on a regular basis through informal and formal communication.
- BC Housing communicated with Habitat Housing Initiative around when the sites would be ready for renovations to begin.

## Risk Mitigation Strategies and Lessons Learned

There were several inherent risks associated with temporarily relocating residents for the SRORI. A number of strategies and lessons learned were identified by housing operators and BC Housing staff to mitigate these risks. These strategies and practices can be applied to future resident relocation practices to facilitate a smooth process.



## RISKS

## MITIGATION STRATEGIES

## LESSONS LEARNED

Residents who refuse to move, thereby causing costly delays

- Provide a financial incentive to all affected residents to support move
- Clearly communicate to residents the benefits of the initiative
- Reassure residents that best efforts will be made for them to get their original unit back once it is renovated
- Identify solutions to issues raised by residents on the spot, so they are not left to worry
- Hold regular meetings with residents to discuss logistics/concerns

- Inform construction crews of potential hold outs, so they can plan to work around affected units

Securing appropriate temporary units

- Get a range of temporary unit types to provide residents with choice and help secure buy-in to the temporary move
  - o Nearby privately owned affordable housing
  - o Units in other buildings operated by non-profit providers to give residents the option of staying in a non-profit-operated unit while they wait for their renovated unit
- Use the move as an opportunity to help residents who are ready for more independent housing to move along the housing continuum
- Ensure buildings of temporary units have space to provide supports (e.g. space for office hours or group meetings)

- Have spare temporary units in case some units are not ready on moving day or if an assigned unit does not meet the resident's needs upon moving in
- Roles need to be clear in terms of who is responsible for preparing temporary units to ensure they are in an acceptable condition on moving day
- Create a checklist to clearly define the condition in which a temporary unit will be considered acceptable for occupancy
- Re-inspect temporary units two weeks before moving day to ensure units are in an acceptable condition
- Inspections could also take place on a regular basis leading up to moving day to ensure cleaning and renovations are on track
- Set deadline for temporary units to be in an acceptable condition two weeks in advance of the moving day
- Secure storage space for residents' belongings that will not fit in temporary units



## RISKS

## MITIGATION STRATEGIES

## LESSONS LEARNED

Residents assigned to temporary units that do not meet their needs or facilitate success in their tenancies

- Ensure residents' physical needs can be accommodated in temporary units (e.g. no stairs and close to washrooms if residents have mobility issues)
- Individual consultations should be conducted with residents to understand needs before assigning units
- Accommodate neighbour preferences (e.g. residents who want to be close to each other or residents who do not want to be near each other)
- Assign residents to temporary units in neighbourhoods where they feel comfortable, safe and close to social networks and community supports
- Maintain relationships between site staff and residents while in temporary units, as trusting relationships have developed over time
- Supports can happen through several models or combination of models:
  - o Onsite office hours at temporary locations
  - o Hotline for residents to reach staff
  - o Outreach model
- Ensure community supports are informed about residents' temporary relocation

- Assign residents to temporary units that are no smaller than their current unit to reduce the need for storage, as residents' belongings may not fit in smaller units

Security of buildings once vacated

- Start renovations shortly after moving day

- Hire security guards to monitor vacated sites 24 hours a day until renovation team takes over the buildings
- Lock floors as they are vacated, including boarding up elevators

Safety of staff assisting with packing and moving

- Work with residents in advance and on day of move to safely dispose of sharp objects, such as needles
- Ensure staff movers have proper moving equipment to prevent injuries

- A dolly that can manage stairs can help move larger items safely



## RISKS

## MITIGATION STRATEGIES

## LESSONS LEARNED

### Bringing bugs or pests to temporary units

- Offer laundry services to residents in advance of move
- Put residents' belongings through bedbug sauna
- Position move as an opportunity for a fresh start to encourage residents to leave behind furniture and other belongings in poor condition
- Offer free recycling services to encourage residents to purge items they do not need or that are in poor condition/infested
  - o New furniture can be offered to residents to replace furniture in poor condition as encouragement to purge

- Start bedbug treatments well in advance to help reduce scheduling pressures

### Theft or loss of residents' belongings

- Ensure all boxes have clear labels
- Take Polaroid pictures of boxes and get pictures signed by residents
- Provide gift certificates to residents to replace items they believe went missing during move

- Clearly document where residents' belongings go to reduce anxiety of residents while their belongings are at the laundry or bedbug sauna

### Moving belongings of residents with hoarding issues

- Have staff trusted by residents work with them to purge belongings
- Discourage residents with hoarding issues from bringing in new belongings during packing process
  - o If residents insist on bringing in new items, ask them to purge an equal amount of existing belongings

- Ensure moving day is not delayed or packing and purging efforts will have to be repeated

### Comfort and safety for residents and construction crews if sites are only partially vacated

- Have a code of conduct for construction crews to ensure a respectful and non-judgemental environment is maintained for residents during construction
- Ensure any issues between residents and construction workers are addressed quickly

- Ensure all occupied units have window coverings
- Ask residents to sign an addendum to layout acceptable and unacceptable behaviour around the worksite to add a layer of accountability for residents



## RISKS

Residents are not packed and ready to move on moving day, thereby causing costly delays

Confusion on moving day

## MITIGATION STRATEGIES

- Assistance with packing should start well in advance of moving day (perhaps one month)
- Schedule moving assistance at times that are convenient for residents
- Provide boxes
- Provide customized supports to residents depending on their needs
- Provide residents with customized checklists to keep packing on track
- Hang countdown posters to encourage residents to stay on track with packing

- Allow the housing operators who know the residents best to take the lead on the moving-day logistics
- Have all residents' belongings moved for them
- Drive residents to their new units on moving day, so residents do not need to find their own way
  - o By the time residents get to their temporary units, their belongings should be there
- Host a breakfast on moving day to get residents up and ready for the move
- Provide food for staff to keep them energized
- Have floor coordinators at original sites and temporary units to manage moving-day logistics
- Have a team of greeters at temporary units so each resident is shown to their unit
- Use walkie-talkies to ensure smooth communications on moving day
- Not all residents will be able to move on moving day, so plan alternative times to accommodate these moves

## LESSONS LEARNED

- Cardboard boxes are preferred over rented plastic boxes, as funders will be charged if rented boxes go missing
- Check cardboard boxes are not packed with more weight than they can handle

- Be aware of time restrictions around when moves can happen when planning moving-day logistics
- It may be easier to move higher needs residents on a day that is less hectic



## Stakeholders

STAKEHOLDERS	ROLES/RESPONSIBILITIES
Residents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pack their belongings in advance of moving day</li> <li>• Move to their temporary unit</li> <li>• Sign paperwork for temporary unit</li> <li>• Respect construction crews and construction areas (in partially vacated sites)</li> </ul>
Housing operators of SROs under renovation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communicate the benefits of initiative and logistics of temporary moves to residents</li> <li>• Address concerns of residents</li> <li>• Help residents pack for the moves</li> <li>• Identify needs of residents and assign appropriate units from the stock of temporary units to meet those needs</li> <li>• Administer financial incentives to support residents with the move</li> <li>• Inform BC Housing in advance if any residents refuse to move</li> <li>• Ensure sites are vacated in accordance with renovation timelines</li> <li>• Help residents move their belongings to their temporary units on moving day</li> <li>• Ensure residents continue to receive supports in temporary units</li> </ul>
Housing operators of temporary units	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure units meet BC Housing standards</li> </ul>
BC Housing (funder)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Locate appropriate temporary units</li> <li>• Create standards for temporary units</li> <li>• Inspect units to ensure they meet the standards</li> <li>• Provide housing operators with appropriate funding to help residents prepare for the move and with moving-day logistics</li> <li>• Provide funding for moving incentive for residents</li> <li>• Support housing operators to ensure sites are vacated in accordance with renovation timelines</li> <li>• Communicate delays in vacating sites or units to construction crews</li> <li>• File residential tenancy paperwork if residents refuse to move</li> <li>• Find more independent affordable housing for residents ready to move along the housing continuum</li> </ul>
Habitat Housing Initiative (contractor performing renovations)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adhere to renovation timelines to ensure residents in temporary units can return to their renovated units when expected</li> <li>• For sites that are partially vacated, ensure construction crews receive training to maintain a non-judgemental atmosphere at the sites</li> <li>• For sites that are partially vacated, ensure safety and comfort of residents</li> </ul>
GreenRoots (firm hired to engage residents in moving process)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communicate the benefits of initiative and logistics of temporary moves to residents</li> <li>• Identify resident concerns and communicate those concerns to housing operators and BC Housing</li> </ul>