

BUILDING KNOWLEDGE



The purpose of this case study series is to highlight housing providers and programs that serve Indigenous women, youth, and families who are in need of housing support and facing child welfare intervention. The case studies, developed Summer 2016, provide information on program components and support. They also examine key practices, program highlights, challenges and successes. It is hoped this information may inform practices of other housing providers looking to create or expand wrap around support services to help families stay together.

Indigenous Housing Series: Vancouver Native Housing Society Kwayatsut

Vancouver Native Housing Society (VNHS) provides property management and 24/7 resident support to 30 youth and 73 adult residents at Kwayatsut (K-why-ah-sote). Of 30 youth beds, some are designated for youth most vulnerable to homelessness: Indigenous youth, LGBTQ youth, and youth leaving foster care. Additional programs, supports and services are provided to youth residents through partnership with the Pacific Community Resources Society (PCRS).

PROGRAM COMPONENTS AND SUPPORTS

- › **Housing:** Supportive housing
- › **Education and skills:** Literacy and education programs, career planning, tenant rights and responsibilities, budgeting and money management, healthy meal planning and cooking
- › **Personal development:** On-site youth and tenant support worker provides support services such as life-skills training, connecting residents to the community-based addictions, mental and physical health services; plus other agencies offering work-related workshops and employment
- › **Cultural:** Smudging, beading, arts, drumming, tea with Elders, talking circles
- › **Other services and activities:** Meal programs, beauty and wellness, movie nights, field trips, massage therapy program, yoga, bingo and volunteer programs



KEY PRACTICES

Working with Broadway Youth Resource Centre (BYRC), which is operated by PCRS in the same building as Kwayatsut, youth have access to programs and supports provided by BYRC and VNHS. Youth can access community-based mental and medical health care, addictions services plus financial management, education, and living-skills workshops at BYRC.

VNHS and BYRC identify client needs on a case-by-case basis to tailor supports and referrals. Each resident is assigned a support worker who helps with goal setting and life-skills development. Support workers meet with residents regularly ensuring they are progressing in life skills development, such as maintaining the unit, consistently paying rent, program participation, etc.

Programs are optional but encouraged though purposeful communication with residents. For example, monthly events and activities are posted in common areas and a monthly event newsletter is well-circulated. Program engagement strategies are ongoing and VNHS is looking at alternative ways to gain resident program commitment, including offering participation incentives to long-term attendees.

VNHS recognizes it is crucial for residents to connect to their community and to access services and programs that meet their needs. VNHS holds biannual community meetings to address concerns and connect with community partners. Community partners include:

KWAYATSUT: YOUTH DESIGNATED UNITS STATISTICS

| | |
|---|---|
| Housing units | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 30 youth-designated units |
| Estimated clients per year (#) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 43 participants per year • Age: 16-24 years old • Average age: 20 years old |
| Length of stay | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maximum: 2 years • Estimated average: 30% stay for full 2 years |
| Estimated Indigenous clients (%) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 25% Indigenous |
| Referrals, intake | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Referrals: Ministry of Child and Family Development (MCFD) |
| Staff | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schedule: 24/7 staffing; 3 people on at all times: 2 front desk staff, 1 tenant and/or youth support worker • Other: Youth worker 5 nights a week |
| Key funding sources | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government: BC Housing • Other: Grants and private donations |
| Key partners | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government: Province of BC, City of Vancouver, MCFD • Other: Pacific Community Resource Society, Broadway Youth Resource Centre, Streethome Foundation |

BC Housing, Community Policing, local businesses and support services agencies, such as Mount Pleasant Neighbourhood House and Vancouver Coastal Health.

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

- › **Youth stability:** In partnership with BYRC, VNHS works to address youth program maintenance requirements, and when possible and appropriate, transitions them into an adult unit in the building. VNHS prioritizes youth placement into familiar neighborhoods to help maintain community connections and supports for youth. This practice provides greater stability to youth as they transition into adulthood.
- › **Case management:** VNHS implemented the Homelessness Services System database for case management across supportive housing sites. The database allows VNHS to better track and share supports and services offered to tenants, and helps ensure that residents and staff are more familiar with case management expectations and benefits.

CHALLENGES

- › **Funding long-term stays:** Providing housing beyond a two year maximum would better support youth through the transition into independence and adulthood.
- › **Staff funding:** Staff are working at maximum capacity, and additional staffing would be valuable.
- › **Staff turnover:** Funding for more permanent staff positions would help eliminate casual-staff turnover.

SUCCESSES

- › **Housing and services partnership:** At Kwayatsut, VNHS empowers youth to pursue and access supports and services through its PCRS partnership. VNHS manages housing services, including tenant relations, while PCRS provides services and activities for youth through BYRC.
- › **Landlord or tenant relationships:** VNHS works to establish close landlord-tenant relationships. If difficulties arise, BYRC supports youth tenants. In addition, at Kwayatsut, youth are expected to follow the same rules as adults. This helps youth move towards independence, promoting life skills development in a safe and supported environment.
- › **Commercial tenants:** Revenue from commercial building units contributes funds towards common-area building maintenance expenses.
- › **Client tracking:** Documenting tenant assistance levels helps identify tenant barriers and support requirements to better maintain a balanced tenant population in the building.

SPOTLIGHT

SKWACHAYS HEALING LODGE

VNHS' Skwachays Healing Lodge is a social enterprise that combines employment, housing and Indigenous art with an Artist-in-Residence program. Selected applicants live in apartment studios at below-market rates. The Urban Aboriginal Fair Trade Gallery purchases Indigenous artwork from program tenants at fair prices, and profits from these sales help support program operations.

A portion of the building was converted into a hotel with rooms designed by Indigenous artists. Paying guests can join cultural activities such as sweat lodge purification or smudging ceremonies.

Skwachays Healing Lodge has 24 artist resident units, each providing a maximum stay of 3 years. To qualify as part of the program, potential residents must prove they are active artists, with a well-thought out plan for progressing their artistic professional development over the following 3 years.

Skwachays
Healing Lodge





SPOTLIGHT

ORWELL SUPPORTIVE HOUSING

Orwell Supportive Housing provides over 55 units of permanent subsidized housing with case management and 24/7 supportive staffing. Residents range in age from 19 to 78 years old. It is estimated that 10% of residents are between 19 and 25 years old. It is also estimated that 75% of residents identify as Indigenous.

Through Orwell, the society provides one-on-one supports and services based on individual needs. Mental health, addiction recovery connections, health care, life and employment skills, budgeting and personal finance training are available through referral. Meal programs are offered weekly to all tenants.

Staff members work toward an open, sharing environment tracking tenant needs and support requirements with the goal to improve and streamline tenant services and supports. An open door policy is maintained in the office to build trust with residents.

SPOTLIGHT

MARILYN MURA RESIDENCE

Marilyn Mura Residence provides 32 units of supportive social housing. This includes a care component and 24/7 supportive staffing for women with addictions and mental health issues. Residents must be 19 years or older, and it is estimated that 50% of residents identify as Indigenous. Housing is permanent, but the typical length of stay is 3 to 4 years on average.

As a designated heritage building, the Marilyn Mura Residence has some inherent physical and structural challenges typical of an older building. To address these, the building is scheduled to undergo a BC Housing Modernization & Improvement (M&I) funded project to replace the windows and cladding in 2018. These exterior upgrades, including new windows and cladding, will improve the building's thermal capacity and comfort.

Currently, staff members are developing small program activities to encourage participation from all residents.

In co-ordination with staff, residents publish an internal, monthly newsletter that includes a 'featured resident' section, resident's page, birthday announcements, building updates, pet of the month, plus things to do. The newsletter helps residents connect, fostering relationships through the sharing of stories, culture and art.

