

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: Aboriginal Mother Centre Society Transformational Housing

The Transformational Housing program (the program) serves Indigenous mothers, and up to three of their children under age nine, who are at risk of homelessness, have lost, or are at-risk of losing, custody of their children. The program provides 16 housing units and culturally-focused supports and is part of a broader network of services offered at the Aboriginal Mother Centre Society (AMCS).

PROGRAM COMPONENTS AND SUPPORTS

- › **Housing:** Transitional family housing, tenancy coaching, housing search assistance, rental housing deposit, housing start-up packages
- › **Education and skills training:** Life skills, finances and budgeting, employment and training
- › **Personal development:** Each week a nurse provides on-site support through BC Women's Hospital, parenting workshops
- › **Cultural activities and support:** Cultural workshops, intergenerational sharing, Elder advisor, smudging, drumming, healing circles, medicine walks, cedar bark and sage collection
- › **Other services and activities:** Advocacy, referrals to outside services



KEY PRACTICES

Advocacy and support are two key tenets of the AMCS approach. AMCS recognizes that with the right supports and resources, a woman can develop the strength needed to rebuild her health, self esteem and skills to regain and retain her child.

AMCS requires workshop participation three times per week. Participants decide which workshops they want to attend, with AMCS approval, they may attend workshops held by other agencies. Community and inter-agency partnerships and communications are integral to successful programming and service outcomes.

Creating community-oriented spaces are key. AMCS supports a safe and open cultural environment, recognizing shared values across different First Nations and Indigenous cultures. Shared cultural values are threaded throughout AMCS’ programs and workshops incorporating traditional knowledge using the medicine wheel (mental, emotional, physical and spiritual health) in its Family Wellness program.

“We have to get women thinking about their housing plan almost right away, when they arrive.”
[Speaking on the challenges of helping program participants connect to affordable, stable and adequate housing].

TRANSFORMATIONAL HOUSING STATISTICS

Housing units	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 16 units
Estimated clients per year (#)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 44 participants per year • Estimated average age: 25 • Age range: 18-37
Length of stay	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Estimated average: 12 months • Maximum: 18 months + 1-2 month extension if housing is arranged
Estimated Indigenous clients (%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indigenous-specific program: 100% • If a mother is non-Indigenous, children must be Indigenous
Referrals, intake	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Referrals: self-referrals, Ministry of Child and Family Development (MCFD), other agencies • Intake: based on need and interview • Waitlist: 5 people (on average)
Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schedule: 24/7 staffing on site, 3 shifts of 8 hours each • 2 Staff minimum at all times, periodically only 1 staff at night • Full time: 20 • Casual: 10 • All staff identify as Indigenous
Key funding sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government: City of Vancouver, Aboriginal Housing Management Association/BC Housing, MCFD, community gaming grants • Other: Lu’ma Native Housing Society, foundation grants, anonymous donations
Key partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government: Aboriginal Housing Management Association/BC Housing, MCFD • Other: BC Women’s Hospital, Lu’ma Native Housing Society



PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

- › **Reconnecting through stable housing:** An estimated 30-40% of women entering the program have lost custody of their children. AMCS ensures that program housing meets MCFD's stable housing requirement, necessary for mothers to regain custody of their children.
- › **Indigenous staff:** AMCS hires Indigenous staff, which helps build strong connections between staff and participants through shared values and history.
- › **Licensed daycare:** A 25-space daycare is located on site. Daycare use is by application. Women in the program may be provided with a daycare subsidy and space to support employment or housing searches.
- › **Community kitchen:** Stocked with commercial grade appliances, the kitchen is open to the community to purchase affordable healthy meals. Profits from the kitchen help support the program. Program participants receive daily meals during the work week and cook for themselves on weekends.
- › **Adjustable suites:** Larger families can be accommodated, in two sets of suites. These larger suites can be combined and enlarged by opening up a central access door.
- › **Outreach program:** The outreach office is located in the same building as the program, allowing AMCS easy resident referral to market housing funding processes after program completion.

CHALLENGES

- › **Core funding:** AMCS does not have core funding. Instead, staff pool funding from multiple sources, spending considerable time identifying funding sources.
- › **Drug and alcohol treatment:** Waitlists for drug and alcohol treatment are long. Space is typically unavailable 'on-demand' when a potential client feels ready to access treatment.
- › **Staff funding:** Limited staff funding makes it difficult to offer competitive wages, contributing to high staff turnover. AMCS identified a significant need for a full-time in-house

counsellor, lack of secured funding has prevented filling this position.

- › **Variability of need:** AMCS works to address participants' individual needs, but limited program resources make it challenging. The intake of high-risk individuals is managed to ensure AMCS meets MCFD 'stable housing' requirements.
- › **Lack of affordable market housing:** Metro Vancouver's competitive and expensive rental housing market coupled with landlord discrimination makes securing affordable housing difficult. AMCS is currently working with other agencies to develop a 'friendly landlord' network.

SUCCESSES

- › **Family:** AMCS helps women reunite and maintain custody of their children.
- › **Follow-up:** AMCS follows-up with former participants at 3, 6, 9 and 12 months to confirm if they have 1) maintained stable and adequate housing, 2) retained custody of children, 3) avoided substance issues, 4) not returned to an abusive situation, and 5) maintained employment.
 - › For those AMCS was able to reach, 80% met all 'success' factors.
 - › AMCS uses Facebook and other social media to maintain connections with prior participants.

SPOTLIGHT

FAMILY WELLNESS PROGRAM

The Family Wellness Program accessed through AMCS is open for all community members. AMCS offers 5-10 workshops a week focused on Healthy Living, Parenting Skills, and Traditional Knowledge. Workshops provide an opportunity for participants to make connections and build community.