

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 Children's Village

Lu'ma Native Housing Society (Lu'ma) operates the Aboriginal Children's Village, a mixed-use 24-unit housing complex that includes 13 units dedicated to Indigenous youth in the care of Vancouver Aboriginal Child & Family Services Society (VACFSS). The housing program works in conjunction with the Youth Mentorship program, a year-long program providing wrap-around, holistic supports helping youth develop the skills to successfully transition from foster care to adulthood.

PROGRAM COMPONENTS AND SUPPORTS

- › **Housing:** Supportive youth housing, tenancy coaching, housing search assistance
- › **Education and skills training:** Twice per week skills building workshops, employment support, financial literacy
- › **Personal development:** One-on-one mentorship and goal setting via the '12 key areas of personal development', wellness and relationship building skills
- › **Other services and activities:** Family dinners, field trips (kayaking, guided medicine walks, hiking), transportation to appointments, cultural activities, community connection activities, external referrals, justice and legal aid

*Lu'ma Aboriginal
Children's Village*





KEY PRACTICES

A unique practice at the Aboriginal Children’s Village is to place Indigenous youth in housing units with foster parents. If issues arise between them, the youth remains in the housing unit and the foster parent moves. This system provides Indigenous youth with a safe, stable, consistent environment to live, grow and learn in.

Lu’ma prioritizes developing trust and relationship-building with youth. Providing a non-judgmental environment where youth feel safe enables them to develop the skills needed to manage their own independence. Lu’ma tries to replicate the gradual development of skills and independence that occur naturally when youth live with their families as the abrupt loss of support and services can be catastrophic. Luma’s programs provide youth with a gradual adjustment and transition into adulthood.

Lu’ma emphasizes tailoring programs and services to a youth’s specific needs, goals and barriers, while empowering youth to direct their own lives and goals. In the program, youth utilize a goals board, identifying three ‘key areas of personal development’ to work on from the 12 holistic, program areas.

Cultural components such as the Indigenous cultural-based graduation ceremony for completing the mentorship program are central to the program and widely incorporated. However, youth participation in cultural components is not mandatory to the program. Through

ABORIGINAL CHILDREN’S VILLAGE STATISTICS	
Housing units	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 13 designated-youth units • 3 are aging-out units
Estimated clients per year (#)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mentorship Program: 13
Length of stay	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing Program: 12-18 months • Mentorship Program: 1 year
Estimated Indigenous clients (%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indigenous specific program: 100%
Referrals, intake	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Referrals: VACFSS designates youth to units • Unit management: Lu’ma maintains tenant relations and manages the building • Intake: decision based on need
Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full-time: Mentorship Program Coordinator and Housing Coordinator • Various support and services staff
Key funding sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government: VACFSS, City of Vancouver, Vancouver Coastal Health • Other: Vancouver Foundation, Vancity, BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres, private foundation donations, proposal calls
Key partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government: VACFSS, Ministry of Child and Family Development, First Nations Health Authority, Vancouver Coastal Health • Other: Hollyburn Family Services, Transformative Justice, Lu’ma Medical Centre

youth engagement it was discovered that some youth from the foster care system were forced to engage in certain cultural activities, whether or not they wished to make it a part of their lives. Lu’ma aims to provide an open and safe cultural environment by threading cultural activities with a ‘gentle practice’, allowing youth to self-determine their degree of cultural engagement and practice.



PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

- › **Housing stability:** This housing model provides stability for Indigenous foster youth.
- › **Preventative approach:** Addresses the transition from foster care prior to the loss of youth supports and services at 19.
- › **Cluster model:** Youth housing and supports are located in one building.
- › **Unique tenant-landlord relationship:** Ability to communicate directly with VACFSS over tenant-landlord issues and collaborate on solutions.
- › **Open-door policy:** Former participants frequently drop-in to attend family dinners, creating mentorship opportunities and the creation of community connections.
- › **Financial support:** Youth are provided with a 'Financial Passport' for program attendance and completion, a small financial reward up to approximately \$1,000. The reward is allocated and spent with help from the program coordinator. A local bank matches the reward, further financially supporting youth post-program.
- › **Relationship-building with landlords:** The program housing coordinator is building relationships with 'friendly landlords' to better connect youth to viable market housing.

CHALLENGES

- › **Operational funding:** The Mentorship Program portion is currently funded to 2017 when renewed funding will be required to continue.

- › **Increased Capacity Funding:** An open-door policy for prior participants to join family dinners means that funding, and physical space, frequently needs to be stretched. The current physical space cannot accommodate a growing community. Lu'ma would like to expand their housing and program capacity to better-enable community supports.
- › **Unaffordable market housing:** It is extremely challenging to find affordable market housing for youth, especially Indigenous youth who often face additional barriers such as landlord discrimination. Lu'ma has over 5,000 people on its adult social-housing waitlist.

SUCSESSES

- › **Success is specific to the individual:** Lu'ma emphasizes a tailored, individual view of success. Youth define their own goals and priorities, developing the confidence and self-advocacy skills to achieve their goals. Lu'ma hopes their youth achieve stable and adequate housing on a long-term basis, but long-term tracking of youth can be difficult.
- › **Education:** between 6 and 7 of the youth who participated in the first intake of the program will be entering college in the fall.
- › **Partnership:** Lu'ma provides and manages housing, while wrap-around services and programs are available through partnerships with other community organizations. For example, on the ground level of the same building that houses the youth housing units, there is a clinic which partners with Lu'ma and is easily accessible to youth and other building tenants.

