



An initiative of the Mental Health Commission of Canada

Summary of the report on the Planning and Development Phase of the At Home/Chez Soi Project – Moncton and rural communities of South East New Brunswick

The Planning and Development Phase of the At Home / Chez Soi Project documented in this research report is about the sequence of events taking place between January 2008 and June 2010, events that led to the housing of the first homeless persons participating in the Project. Overall, 250 persons living with a mental illness will take part in the Project. Out of that number, 125 will be housed and receive a range of services all through the program up to March 2013. One hundred and twenty-five will receive treatment as usual (i.e. treatment usually offered in Moncton and in the rural areas). In the Moncton area, the participants pay a portion of their rent and are visited at least once a week by the program staff. The Project offers various options for lodgings in various Moncton neighbourhoods and in the rural areas of South East New Brunswick.

Results of the research – Collaboration between government departments and community agencies was perceived as being exceptional during the Planning and Development Phase; this has facilitated greatly the setting up of the At Home/Chez Soi Project at the Moncton site. This cooperation has been made possible thanks to the Site Coordinator who, in a short time and in a dynamic fashion, gathered the key players of the government and of the non-profit sector. A research project subsidized to take up this challenge was perceived as coming at an opportune time; a large group of stakeholders contributed significant time and effort, and compromises were made from all sides to make the developmental phase easier.

However, the new *Housing First* approach goes against the historical tradition of division among the participating sectors in the project. In the field, establishing a multidisciplinary team, whose players have differing (and at times contradictory) disciplinary backgrounds and values attached to those backgrounds, have created obstacles to the good will, communication and desire to go beyond what one has learned and practiced in one's professional life. The possibility of going beyond these obstacles often depends on each individual's motivation.

The withdrawal of the University of New Brunswick team of researchers that had been initially approached to lead the research aspect has also created a delay in the setting up of the Project. This transition has forced the Moncton team to increase their efforts in order to catch up with the other sites. Consequently the rural arm has been neglected, which caused problems in terms of recruitment. The service team and collaborators had difficulties understanding some choices that had been made, particularly the diagnostics that had been selected and the distribution between participants coming from nursing homes and participants coming from families. These difficulties were further compounded by the constant adjustments being made to the Program. The service team, whose members had been working in Moncton

since the beginning of the project in November, had to admit that the rural arm would not be a carbon copy of the Moncton project.

Finally the Moncton idiosyncrasies proved to be numerous and touch on fundamental aspects of the research, such as the very definition of *homelessness*. In a context characterized by a lack of services, setting up a control group was difficult to accept. In the same context, employees leaving mental health community centres and hospitals to form the ACT teams also created a crisis which, even though it had been anticipated by the two Regional Health Authorities Directors, has not been easy for the field staff to experience.

Nearly one year after the launch of the Project, we can say that together all the players, researchers, collaborators, partners and service teams have progressed tremendously; right now, in September 2010, recruiting for the rural arm is over and the Moncton site has caught up with the other sites.

One lesson that has been learned and that will need to be applied in case the Project expands is how important it is to take the time to know the communities with which we will be working, and to have a team composed of the Site Coordinator, one researcher and one person from the ACT team to explain the various facets of the project to the main players involved, thus ensuring that the information that is being conveyed reflects the complexity of the project.