

RainCity Housing and Support Society

Strategic Plan – 2008-2013

Vision

For people who occupy mainstream society, basic needs such as shelter, security, health and daily provisions are readily accessible. People who occupy the margins of society often do not have the same assurances. Homelessness, mental illness, substance use, and chronic physical health problems are often accompanied by poor nutrition, a lack of access to health care and housing, and a life of risk and vulnerability to violence and exploitation. Furthermore, stigmatization keeps these individuals removed from mainstream society and essentially disenfranchises them from addressing their basic needs and from enjoying their inherent right to human dignity. The recognition of this chasm has given rise to support for the need to provide services to these citizens in need – this is seen in organizations that are able to gather and distribute financial resources, and other organizations that are able to provide services. This is a fundamental premise in our work of supporting social equity – the equal opportunity for all to address their basic needs for shelter, food, services and to be treated with dignity.

RainCity Housing is an organization dedicated to providing the best possible services to those in need. The help we provide emanates from our model of best practices, both from case and business management perspectives, as a caring, thoughtful, well-researched, well trained and innovative service organization.

RainCity Housing's mission is to advance social equity by building upon the strengths of our community and of each individual. Through innovative practices we provide housing and support, promote health, and facilitate hope, opportunity and change for people living with mental health, substance use and other challenges.

Service Overview

RainCity Housing provides a range of services for individuals in Vancouver who are homeless, have a mental illness and/or suffer from addictions. Our services are complementary and fall within these three areas:

- *Health Related Support*
- *Community Building and Social Inclusion*
- *Security and Safety*

Health Related Support

Many of RainCity Housing's clients have complex health needs that are marginally treated, if at all. RainCity Housing provides on-site support as well as a close cooperative working relationship with existing community health resources. RainCity Housing services include:

- ⇒ Individualized service planning
- ⇒ Harm reduction and health promotion
- ⇒ Addictions interventions
- ⇒ Medication supports
- ⇒ Money management support
- ⇒ Food services
- ⇒ Clean healthy living environment

Community Building and Social Inclusion

RainCity Housing's clients are living at the margins of society. While shelter is a basic human need, without deliberate strategies to ensure these individuals are not simply warehoused, housing programs can become one more way of reinforcing the separation of these individuals from broader society. We are committed to assisting our residents achieve their maximum level of social inclusion, while providing the foundation for the development of community, both inside and outside our facilities. This is achieved through the following:

- ⇒ Community integration work
- ⇒ Community partnerships and supports
- ⇒ Social and recreational activities

Security and Safety

RainCity Housing is aware that our clients are vulnerable to being victimized and works to provide as safe a community as possible. At the same time, our clients often learn survival behaviours that can be disruptive to our community. Our programs address these concerns through:

- ⇒ Facility security policies and practices
- ⇒ Community integration policies and practices
- ⇒ Security and critical incident partnerships and supports

Organization Principles

Our services are anchored in key organization principles.

- *Our basic belief in people*
- *Services to our clients*
- *Our organization*

Our basic belief in people

- ⇒ We fundamentally believe that all individuals in our society have an inherent right to have their core needs of shelter, health, sustenance and security met.
- ⇒ Problematic or survival behaviour is an adaptive attempt by the person to cope with uncomfortable internal states or external circumstances.

- ⇒ We believe every individual has strengths and every environment has resources. These strengths and resources sustain people where they are and provide opportunities for them to move forward in their lives.
- ⇒ Individuals have the right to define meaning and recovery in their own lives.
- ⇒ We recognize that the quality of the environment people inhabit determines their achievement, quality of life, and success in living – our purpose is to make a difference in these areas for those in need.

Services to our clients

- ⇒ Everyone, no matter what their social, economic or health circumstances, will be treated with respect and dignity – we will remain flexible and ensure barriers are minimized so the most marginalized, in need and at-risk people will have access to the service.
- ⇒ The spirit of our services will be to provide a supportive and safe environment together with opportunities for recovery from homelessness, marginalization and poor health and ultimately to support their autonomous living.
- ⇒ Harm reduction and health promotion form the cornerstone of our services – we use an active, assertive approach that seeks to engage, inform, educate and motivate, with the goal of assisting the resident in reducing harm to themselves, others and the community.
- ⇒ Services are tailored to each individual's needs and specific circumstances with the understanding that the level of service required will vary with each client and that recovery will most likely happen in small increments over time.
- ⇒ The right of self determination for our clients will be balanced, as needed, by the need to ensure that clients, staff and members of the public are kept safe from harm.
- ⇒ We are committed to bringing training and best practices to bear on our assessments of client needs and our determinations of the most appropriate level of service.

Our organization

- ⇒ RainCity Housing strives for continual improvement in our organizational functioning, programs and service delivery by embodying the practices of a learning organization – professional development, planning and ongoing review.
- ⇒ We are committed to working with our staff with the same level of dignity and respect we believe is inherent for those we serve.
- ⇒ Our expectation of all RainCity Housing employees is an ongoing commitment to live by our principles regarding what we believe about people and the fundamentals of our services.
- ⇒ We strive to provide a satisfying and equitable work environment for all employees.

- ⇒ We expect RainCity Housing employees to engage in continuous learning both from their own experiences, other staff and best practices in the fields in which they work.
- ⇒ We will ensure that there is diversity in RainCity Housing employees to assist in our commitment to serve clients with a wide range of needs and backgrounds.

5 Year Target

Our overall five year targets (by 2013) are:

A home for every person

Through our own programs and leadership and through the efforts of partners, there will be a home for all those living in Vancouver. Our leadership will raise the profile of homelessness and contribute to the commitment of resources to address this problem and the development of best practices.

Opportunities for every person

Through our leadership and programs, there will be considerable improvement and comprehensive access to services, experiences and opportunities for our clients and other disenfranchised people in Vancouver. Improvements in public perception will lead to a greater integration of people of all means. Our work will raise the issue of the reciprocal benefits to the entire community when all people have equal social opportunities.

We recognize that these are both very ambitious and that neither of these are in our direct control. However, they both speak to the very heart of our purpose and recognize both the need for both goals as well as the current situation where many sources are recognizing and beginning to act on various aspects that contribute to the lack of housing and social equity. RainCity Housing is uniquely placed in terms of our successes to date and a growing recognition of our leadership in best practices to use these in helping to integrate efforts to accomplish, together with partners and others working in this area, both of these bold and audacious goals over the next five years. To set a lower target at this time is to us not acceptable.

Key Result Areas

The following Key Result Areas provide the framework for organize our goals and actions towards making our five year targets a reality. These are:

- A. *Increasing our housing portfolio*
- B. *Expanding our service areas*
- C. *Raising awareness and creating change*
- D. *Strengthening and remodeling our organization*

Overall measurements for each of the goals have been noted. However, it is important to note that the intent of this strategic plan is to provide clarity on what our intents are over the next five years but not the details. Each goal will be addressed with significantly more detail in an annual business plan with a corresponding budget.

A. Enhancing housing opportunities

A housing portfolio is a range of housing communities able to respond to the needs of individuals who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. The housing needs of our clients are quite diverse, ranging from minimum barrier accommodations to facilities where individuals can be provided an atmosphere that is supportive of their recovery from substance abuse. While the housing needs of the homeless in Vancouver are greater than we are or will be able to meet, in addition to raising awareness and creating change (see Key Result Area C), we will be enhancing the housing opportunities within our direct control.

Our current housing portfolio has evolved to answer the needs of our clients. As RainCity Housing has grown, we recognize the need to review how we are conceiving of our overall portfolio and ensure that we offer the types and levels of supports that meet need of the people being served by our programs. Our clients need to have opportunities and an environment to nurture their desire to grow, to move past substance abuse and high-risk life styles towards maximizing their potential and enjoying increased independence. We acknowledge that the ability to be self-managed will differ in each housing community. People outgrow minimal barrier housing and those who are not well matched become further marginalized in those communities. Our current housing portfolio has gaps in levels of support that are too large, with the result that some people's potential is limited due to the lack of more appropriate housing. We need to develop opportunities to access different kinds of communities, communities that will help people realize the potential to which they aspire. This will result in a greater range of housing based on the specific needs of the clients we serve. We aspire to provide choices for our clients to self select what type of life they want to live while reserving the right to define what will be tolerated in each community.

Our current portfolio can be characterized as follows:

- *rehousing* - support focused on stabilization, basic needs, community building
 - ⇒ short term low barrier (Triage Shelter)
 - ⇒ transitional low barrier - tolerance for extreme behaviours; high level of support provided (Princess Rooms, Vivian, 65 East Hastings high support units—in development)
 - ⇒ long term minimal support (65 East Hastings low support units—in development)
 - ⇒ Concurrent Disorders Outreach Team: high support - no housing attached, but supports people in securing housing and assists in stabilization and recovery
- *recovery* - support focused on building community and enhancing opportunities to allow people to thrive after stabilization and their basic needs are met.
 - ⇒ low support (Windchimes, Neighbourhood Housing Partnership)
 - ⇒ high support: mental health focus (Killarney)
 - ⇒ high support: abstinence based concurrent disorders (Fraser Street)

By 2013, the following goals will be realized:

1. A women-focused recovery project will be established to address the needs of women coming out of the Vivian or for those who need housing but are not served by our rehousing project.
2. A “pre-Fraser Street” focused recovery project will be established in an area outside of the Downtown Eastside to provide support for those who are in recovery but not yet able to sustain abstinence.
3. A co-ed focused recovery project will be established to address the needs of those coming out of rehousing projects or for those who need housing but are not served by the rehousing projects.
4. An additional abstinence-based, concurrent disorder facility will be under development in an area outside of the Downtown Eastside. This project may be supported housing or a support recovery program.
5. There will be an increased capacity for recovery opportunities through re-purposing current facilities and/or partnering with other organizations and/or working with access systems.
6. A rehousing project for young adults (19-25 yrs. old) will be established.
7. An additional rehousing project for women will be established.
8. There will be increased capacity for supported independent living (SiLS) opportunities for our clients.

B. Expanding our service areas

Currently, RainCity Housing provides a range of services to support our clients in the areas of health, community building, social inclusion, security and safety.

As our organization has grown and our purpose and principles matured, we recognize that our success will require us to enhance the services we provide. It is important for us to extend opportunities for different roles, to improve power balances and to be proactive in advancing social equity. Rebalancing power is an extension of our strengths model and this can be enhanced through peer programming whereby we will actively reach out to our clients to contribute to and help shape some of the programs we offer. Two very specific areas where we recognize the need to bring a greater focus in advancing social equity are services oriented for women and for aboriginals, both whom suffer even greater marginalization than other clients. We need to offer more choices as a reflection of our principles of purposeful involvement and to contribute to each person’s opportunity for their own individual recovery process. We need to focus these additional services towards community building in order that our clients have opportunities to choose from in moving away from the stigmas and risks of marginalization towards integration.

By 2013, the following goals will be realized:

1. Peer programming will be incorporated into our projects and there will be regular mechanisms for client input to service for all projects.
2. Our purpose with regards to providing women specific services (i.e. recognizing the unique needs of homeless women within all of our current projects and programs as well as possible new programs) will be enhanced.

3. Our purpose with regards to providing aboriginal specific services - recognizing the unique needs of homeless aboriginal people within all of our current projects and programs as well as possible new programs - will be enhanced.
4. A program for linking our clients with volunteer and/or employment opportunities will be developed.
5. The level at which we offer social and recreational opportunities will be increased.
6. Project-specific food programs to ensure nutritional needs are being met will be established.
7. A community resource program (e.g. resource reference, staff roles, hub service, etc.) to enhance our clients access to these assets will be developed.

C. Raising awareness and creating change

It is axiomatic that what is noticed gets paid attention to. Increasingly we see the plights of the homeless and the conditions of street life in the Downtown Eastside exposed in the papers. Occasionally the media also focuses on the work being done by RainCity Housing and other organizations to address the needs of those most marginalized by society.

This media exposure helps raise general awareness but in itself, is not sufficient to create change or to develop the level of support required to address the needs of our clients. RainCity Housing has become a voice that has increased understanding of not only the plight of our clients but a reinforcement of their humanity and the application of best practices to working with our clients. We must continue to be proactive in raising awareness and increase our efforts in a number of arenas. We must look for and continue to speak out strongly through speaking engagements, committee work, corporate work, conferences and abstracts. We must develop more proactive public relations, media programs. We need to continue to conduct and report on research regarding best practices and the results we are attaining. This raising of awareness is vital to our clients in both enhancing public understanding and for raising funds that enable us to continue to do the work and to advance the cause of social equity. While staff have been engaged in raising awareness and need to continue to find new, potent opportunities, it is vital that the Board with their unique contacts and public profile also respond to this challenge.

By 2013, the following goals will be realized:

1. We will have sought out and acted on the most potent opportunities to leverage our mission of promoting social equity.
2. We will have participated in system level initiatives to further the development of best practices.
3. We will have initiated or participated in national and/or province wide symposiums to promote best practices in the area of homelessness.

D. Strengthening and remodeling our organization

An organization is a conglomerate of resources (human, financial, physical) as well as systems, values and goals. Organization effectiveness relies on these elements working together in a highly synchronized fashion.

Since its inception, RainCity Housing has grown considerably in its housing portfolio, staff and the breadth of its vision. This growth has been based on experience and learning from both our successes and failures. As we have grown in size, our systems have evolved but not always at a pace that has matched our needs. Periodically in any organization, it is critical to review and adjust the organization to ensure it is optimally prepared to not only meet today's challenges but to be prepared to be successful for what is coming. RainCity Housing is at the stage where it is important to make changes that will allow us to do that.

By 2013, the following goals will be realized:

1. Our delivery of current services (e.g. medication, financial administration, etc.) will be balanced with our expanded housing portfolio; this may or may not require a new model or extension of current delivery mechanisms.
2. Our human resource requirements (e.g. number, skill levels) will be balanced with our expanded housing portfolio; this will require a revision of current processes regarding human resources (e.g. recruitment, orientation, training and development, employee health, retention).
3. RainCity Housing management practices will support the high levels of performance required to achieve our 5 year targets and to retain our staff (e.g. effective supervision, coaching, performance reviews, etc.).
4. A volunteer program (opportunities for volunteers that further our capacity as well as to raise awareness of social equity) will be established.
5. Board governance will be restructured to create a refocused Executive function and working committees in order to provide enhanced support to the strategic plan.
6. Our organization structure, administration and management will be aligned to support our strategic plan.
7. A consistent program framework (i.e. purpose, principles, logic model, policies, procedures and program evaluation including client feedback) will be created and applied to each program.
8. Our external relationships will be nurtured and strengthened including service delivery partners, public funders, donors and other key stakeholders.
9. Our organization identity, including our name and other branding, will reflect our vision.
10. Fund raising campaigns to support RainCity Housing projects and programs will be developed.