

PROJECT LOTUS: A REALLY COOL COMMUNITY-BASED INITIATIVE ASSISTING WOMEN POST- HOMELESSNESS

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In Canada, recent conservative estimates report upwards of 235,000 individuals are homeless on a given night. Of those experiencing precarious housing situations, women make up approximately 30% and are among the most vulnerable. Their residential insecurity has been further exacerbated with the community and social restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic. Existing resources that assist women experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity are often stretched to the limit dealing with emergency and crisis housing situations, with less focus on post-shelter supports.

To address this issue, a community-based participatory research initiative 'Project Lotus - Hope Together' was established in Montreal. Grounded in the World Health Organization's Commission on Social Determinants of Health Framework, the overarching goal of this research is to co-design a housing supports program for women leaving a shelter stay. We created a cross-sectorial Advisory Committee consisting of women with lived experiences of homelessness, service providers, community leaders, and researchers.

To date, we have conducted preliminary research (literature review, interviews with women with lived experience of homelessness, stakeholder meetings) to identify what has assisted women through this transition, and what barriers exist. We have also held virtual community consultation meetings to discuss preliminary findings of recommendations of key components that should be in a post-shelter support program for women.

This presentation outlines the current findings and highlights the importance of participatory research. Implementing whole person care in the area of women's homelessness requires both a comprehensive and individualized approach to help women and children secure home, health, and a sustainable future. ■