

## Project Background & Objectives

Transitional housing is 'an intermediate step between emergency crisis shelter and permanent housing' and assists individuals move toward greater autonomy and self-sufficiency thereby increasing the likelihood of housing stability. Only three agencies provide supported transitional housing specifically for people living with HIV/AIDS (PHAs) in Ontario. This pilot research study aims to generate preliminary findings on housing-readiness, service use, and changing support needs of PHAs.

### Study Objectives:

- To identify the factors (individual and structural) associated with 'housing readiness' of PHAs in the transitional housing program (THP).
- To better understand the practices and services of transitional housing programs.
- To explore the experiences and change in support needs and support structure of PHAs from intake into transitional housing to being successfully housed.

### Objectives of this Poster Presentation:

- Identify the specific needs and concerns expressed by HIV positive refugee claimants who sought shelter in one of the three transitional housing programs in Ontario, specifically for PHAs.
- To develop recommendations to strengthen the supports for refugee claimants accessing the transitional housing program.

## Methods and Participant Demographics

This study employed a purposive sampling strategy. Qualitative data were collected through in-depth interviews with 25 residents of the transitional housing programs at Fife House, Bruce House and John Gordon Home, at the time of intake. Interviews were conducted by Peer Research Assistants (PRAs) trained in qualitative interviewing skills and located at the sites.

### Participant Demographics

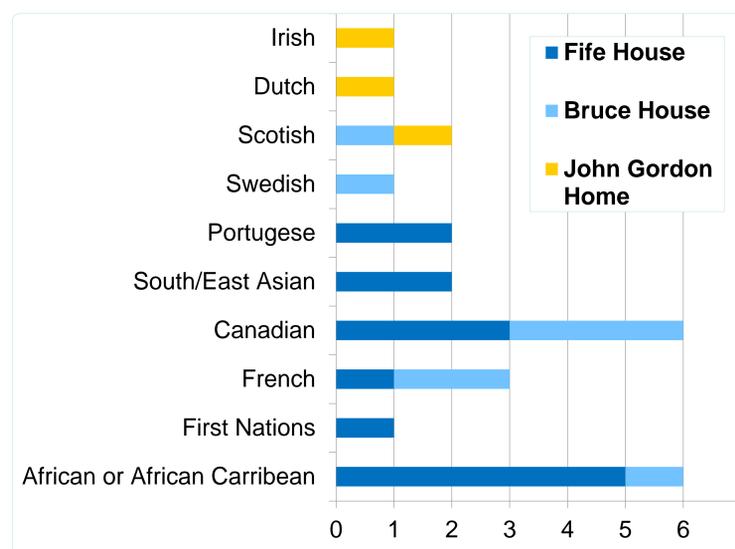
	Fife House	Bruce House	John Gordon Home	Total
<b>Participants</b>	14	8	3	25
<b>Age (in years)</b>	Avg: 42 Range: 26-62	Avg: 49 Range: 35-62	Avg: 47 Range: 43-55	Avg: 46 Range: 26-62
<b>Gender</b>	Male: 11 Female: 3	Male: 6 Female: 2	Male: 2 Female: 1	Male: 19 Female: 6
<b>Refugee Status</b>	5	0	0	5

## Findings

Participants enter into transitional housing program (THP) with a range of needs though unarticulated by participants. They rely greatly on allied social services to obtain (needed) health and social services. Most participants come to THP through referrals from hospitals and community-based organizations.

## General Findings

- Participants are centrally focused on 'getting my own place', 'getting a job', 'getting better', but are unaware of the concrete steps needed to achieve these goals.
- Greater housing instability negatively impacts physical and mental health.
- Most participants identified assistance with medications adherence as a need.
- Participants also identified nutrition and access to nutritious food as an urgent need.
- There is a considerable overlap of needs of refugee and non-refugee claimants in respect to housing, health services, and social services.
- Refugee claimants expressed higher level of vulnerability due to concerns about disclosure, safety, and isolation.



## Findings Specific to Refugee Claimants

### Transitional housing has positive impact on the well-being of refugee claimants

Refugee claimants consider THP a safe place to take stock and re-establish themselves in a new country, with regards to financial, mental, and physical health.

*"THP has been so good to me... now I'm integrating myself into the society more, I mean, into the Toronto community more, so I think I've gotten there. Not totally, but I think I'm on the right track..."*

*"...prior to me coming here, I wasn't sleeping, I couldn't sleep, cause one of my roommates was into drugs so I'm always like scared, what this guy will come and do at the middle of the night, I couldn't sleep."*

### Refugee claimants experience unique challenges

The experiences of refugee claimants indicate a unique set of challenges and barriers at both individual and structural level. These challenges also impact their housing experiences and their ability to re-integrate into the Canadian society. Participants (refugee claimants) expressed concerns about disclosure, safety, and isolation that stemmed from previous experiences of violence and trauma.

## Isolation and Re-integration

Isolation among refugee claimants was based on dislocation from family in their home country. Difficulties in re-integrating were based on experiences of fear and violence previously experienced, generally based on sexual orientation and/or HIV status. Reflecting on how the instability of housing impacted them and impeded their re-integration, a participant said:

*"...It feels very, very new to move into a new apartment...it feels a little bit of very much uncomfortable to get used to the new community, to the new people and get used to saying, "Ok this is where I live now" right, because even if the shelter was very bad, it was my first home in Canada, so I actually shed tears..."*

## Safety

Experiences of trauma in home country continue to exacerbate issues of safety for refugee claimants even in Canada.

*"I've been through a lot in my life... based on my sexual orientation from where I was coming from in Africa, I've always been hiding and I've been molested, I've had issues that I've kept to myself all my life and dealt with it..."*

## Disclosure

Fears of disclosure based on past experiences of violence that precipitated their abscondment also render them vulnerable and impedes their ability to trust the new system, in a new country.

*"When I attend workshops and I've been given pamphlets or whatever, I can't take them home... even if my doctor asked me to go on medication, I can't take it home because I was, I was scared that I didn't want anybody to know anything about me..."*

*"I never felt safe or comfortable because of my sexual orientation and due to the trauma that I experienced back home... I know I had a big problem that I'm thinking about which is my health and I can share it with nobody, there was nobody to talk about that..."*

## Conclusion

- THP is seen by refugee residents as a place of reprieve and a first step to reintegration.
- THP is seen as a segue to dealing with trauma and addressing related mental health concerns.
- Compared to other forms of housing, disclosure is a non-issue within THP, which gives refugee claimants a safe environment.
- Refugee claimants, due to experiences of loss, trauma or violence have a unique set of needs that require special focus in the transitional housing programs.

## Recommendations

- Develop and strengthen partnerships with community organizations with programs specific to refugee reintegration.
- Greater accessibility of counseling and other services specific to issues of loss, violence and trauma.
- Provide trainings to program staff specific to refugee issues.
- Incorporate a cultural sensitivity component in case management pertaining to issues of loss and trauma.
- Case management should incorporate referrals to Human Resource Development Canada skill building programs.
- Sensitivity orientation for all new residents should be included.

## Acknowledgements

We gratefully acknowledge the financial assistance and support provided by Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR). We are grateful to the research participants for their participation in this research. We acknowledge the contributions that the Peer Research Assistants (PRAs) have made to this study. We also acknowledge the support of Ontario HIV Treatment Network (OHTN) to this research study.