



Media advisory

Press release

For immediate release

Vista Centre Brain Injury Services announcing success of OTF-funded mobile housing support. Releasing a report to share results, learnings and recommendations.

No program participants had stable housing at the start of the program in 2021. Now 30 per cent have stable housing and support.

March 31, 2022 (Ottawa) — People with acquired brain injuries experience profound and long-term barriers to housing. These individuals also struggle to access medical and support services. Long-term homelessness, shelter stays, incarceration, and frequent hospitalization are commonplace, and are made more likely by the cognitive barrier.

A 2014 study published by St. Michael's Hospital found that more than 50% of Toronto's Homeless population had sustained a brain injury and 84% of these injuries happened before they became homeless. This creates costly social and economic strains on public health and social systems.

Report

Vista Centre Brain Injury Services is today releasing a report, [Evaluation of Homelessness Prevention Project](#). The report describes their project, results and findings for other service providers.

The Project

The Ontario Trillium Foundation (OTF) awarded a \$75,000 Seed grant to Vista Centre Brain Injury Services (VCBIS) in 2021. VCBIS undertook a project for people with suspected or diagnosed brain injuries experiencing cognitive impairment who have experienced long-term difficulties with addictions, homelessness, incarceration, hospitalization and/or isolation. The aim was to reduce poverty and increase housing access.

VCBIS created a mobile service offering support throughout the greater Ottawa area. During its first year, 22 people with brain injuries and cognitive barriers received support to manage their health, income, housing and/or basic personal needs. They were referred to the program from the VCBIS wait list (individuals who were in crisis and needed immediate support to maintain or locate safe, affordable accommodation), child and family services, medical clinics, the Canadian Mental Health Association, Veterans Affairs, members of the judicial system, other agencies and family members.

- Housing: VCBIS liaises with and advocates for clients to landlords, housing representatives and the Landlord and Tenant Board. Due to lack of understanding, many of these individuals were living in apartments that required upgrades and/or fumigation. VCBIS offered support in reaching out to landlords to have holes in the ceiling fixed, holes in walls repaired, paint jobs completed, old appliances

replaced, floors repaired, rat problems and/or bug infestations addressed, leaks fixed etc. VCBIS also met with Landlord and Tenant Board members to work together to ensure these individuals maintained their housing.

- Income: Most clients do not have access to technology and/or do not have the ability to complete paperwork or follow processes. The VCBIS mobile support makes sure individuals are receiving support to receive any income for which they are eligible. This may include OW, ODSP, CPP, CPPD, pensions, etc. These processes can be lengthy. Applications are nearly always initially denied before eventually being accepted.
- Health: Create medical connection and support to connect to health services.
- Basic personal needs: Address basic needs (e.g. food security) and navigate community services.

Additionally, VCBIS provides education to community partners and stakeholders about brain injury—to help the broader service community better support people with brain injuries.

The Results

At the start of the program, the 22 participants had the following housing status.

- 15% Unhoused (living on street)
- 10% Shelter
- 50% Insecurely Housed (at risk of homelessness)
- 10% Transitional housing
- 15% Hospital

One year later, their current housing status is:

- 5% Unhoused (living on street)
- 15% Shelter
- 20% Insecurely housed (at risk of homelessness)
- 0% Transitional housing
- 30% Stable Housing
- 15% Hospital
- 10% Parents
- 5% Unknown

90% of participants are still in the program. They are receiving support to maintain the housing they have (shelter, parents, etc) and stabilizing their life (education, employment, harm reduction, food securities, medical appointments, etc.) while awaiting stable housing.

Lessons learned and recommendations are outlined in the [Evaluation of Homelessness Prevention Project](#) report.

Quotes

“Vista Centre Brain Injury Services does essential work supporting adults living with the effects of brain injury through community based rehabilitation,” said Ottawa Centre MPP Joel Harden. “Last year their services and



support reached 221 individuals. I'm excited for their service model to assist people with brain injuries to retain and sustain access to safe and affordable housing—work that is supported by the Ontario Trillium Foundation.”

“Given the length of the housing waiting list, helping someone keep their housing is significant,” said Shannon Lebrun, Homelessness Prevention Coordinator with Vista Centre Brain Injury Services. “The mobile service allows us to ensure that people who might otherwise fall through the cracks can instead receive the support they need to maintain housing, stabilize their income and have ongoing support. If you start by solving the housing issue, then you can work on other issues affecting their lives.”

Available for Interview

- Shannon Lebrun, Homelessness Prevention Coordinator with Vista Centre Brain Injury Services.
- Jason, an Ottawa resident who was at risk of eviction and was able to keep his housing thanks to support from this project.

About Vista Centre Brain Injury Services

VCBIS works collaboratively with persons whose lives have been affected by Acquired Brain Injury through community-based support, service, and education toward maximizing their life potential. Learn more: vistacentre.ca.

About the Ontario Trillium Foundation

The Ontario Trillium Foundation (OTF) is an agency of the Government of Ontario, and one of Canada’s leading granting foundations. Last year, nearly \$112M was invested into 1,384 community projects and partnerships to build healthy and vibrant communities and strengthen the impact of Ontario’s non-profit sector. In 2020/21, OTF supported Ontario’s economic recovery by helping non-profit organizations rebuild and recover from the impacts of COVID-19. Visit otf.ca to learn more.

Media Contact

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Jason, has housing.

Key messages

One (values): Every person deserves access to safe and affordable housing.

Two: People with acquired brain injuries experience profound and long-term barriers to housing. These individuals also struggle to access medical and support services. Long-term homelessness, shelter stays,



incarceration, and frequent hospitalization are commonplace, and are made more likely by the cognitive barrier.

Proof points: A 2014 study published by St. Michael's Hospital found that more than 50% of Toronto's Homeless population had sustained a brain injury and 84% of these injuries happened before they became homeless. This creates costly social and economic strains on public health and social systems.

Three: VCBIS undertook a project for people with suspected or diagnosed brain injuries experiencing cognitive impairment who have experienced long-term difficulties with addictions, homelessness, incarceration, hospitalization and/or isolation. Vista Centre Brain Injury Services created a mobile service offering support throughout the greater Ottawa area.

Four (result): During its first year, 22 people with brain injuries and cognitive barriers received support to manage their health, income, housing and/or basic personal needs. Zero people had stable housing and now 30% (4-5 people) do. The support and/or living situation for every person in the project improved.

Questions and answers

Is the project over?

The project will continue. The funding from Trillium was for a year, but Vista Centre Brain Injury Service is committed to continuing and are actively looking to secure permanent funding. Shannon will stay in her role.

What do you recommend?

- Improve the housing situation
- Meeting people where they are at, for example if they have addiction, provide stable housing and support, then support them to manage their addiction.
- Don't have consequences for missed appointments. Acquired brain injury is a lifelong battle.
- Take a person-centred approach. We make decisions with clients, not for them. We work together so they are empowered to make decisions impacting their lives.