



Musk Quat Transition House, Timmins

# INNOVATIONS IN HOUSING *stability*

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**Housing stability:** Everyone can find, and keep, a home that meets their needs.

**Innovation:** A novel solution that achieves benefits not possible through current practices in the current context.

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**ONP***h***A**

ONTARIO NON-PROFIT  
HOUSING ASSOCIATION

## Summary:

- **The innovation:** Providing Timmins women fleeing violence with up to a year to stabilize their lives in a secure affordable home, thanks to a unique partnership between the District Social Services Administration Board (DSSAB) and three women's organizations
- **Lead and partners:**
  - Cochrane District Social Services Administration Board (DSSAB) – building owner and funder
  - Timmins & Area Women in Crisis (TAWC) – project lead and support provider
  - Centre Passerelle pour Femmes (CPF) and Tranquility House Women's Shelter – Tri-Agency Violence against Women Collaboration Committee (Tri- Agency Committee) members
- **People served:** Women leaving violence who need additional time to heal beyond the typical six-week shelter stay; approximately 60 per cent of residents are Aboriginal women and their children
- **Funding:** Community Homelessness Partnership Initiative (CHPI) bridges the gap between market rent and what residents can afford to pay



### THE CATALYST



How can we offer women leaving violence a real chance to heal and address long-standing issues when shelters are designed for short-term stays, local rents for a two-bedroom apartment can reach \$1,200/month and services in Sudbury and North Bay are a three-and-a-half-hour drive away?

This was the challenge facing members of the Tri-Agency Committee– a coalition of violence against women (VAW) shelter and sexual assault centre staff in the Timmins area. They saw that women were making an average of seven attempts to leave an abuser before finding a home of their own, and many would benefit from an opportunity to change patterns that had prevented them from securing that home.

The Tri-Agency Committee was put in touch with Brian Marks, CAO of the Cochrane DSSAB. Victims of violence were a local priority in the Cochrane DSSAB's 10 Year Housing Plan. The DSSAB was looking for ways to improve the long-term tenancy success of women leaving shelters. The Cochrane DSSAB offered to build transitional housing with the security features women would need to feel safe and to provide start-up funding along with annual funding for a second-stage worker through the Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative (CHPI).

Musk Quat is the Ojibway word for “bear den.” The founders were inspired by “the image of the ‘mama bear’ as both a great provider and a fierce protector. The female bear enters a safe place of her choosing and makes it a home for herself and her little ones during the difficult winter months. It is a temporary refuge; it is in fact a transitional home.” - Musk Quat Transition House

TAWC is also informed by a robust set of values that inform all their work. (See Resources for details.)

For the Cochrane DSSAB, the guiding principle was the effective use of the DSSAB’s powers and funding to promote the economic and social well-being of the region. Partnerships are a key part of that strategy. Notes CAO Brian Marks, “When I came to this job, I thought [the DSSAB] should manage everything. Now I’m the opposite. I understand our role as risk manager: if a non-profit organization we fund fails, we are accountable. But if a provider can manage, why would we duplicate their efforts?”



Musk Quat was the first project of the Cochrane District Local Housing Corporation (CDLHC), a property development corporation formed to develop and invest in affordable housing.

The City of Timmins approached the Cochrane DSSAB with a derelict property in tax arrears. After the property’s tenants were successfully relocated to new housing – a marked improvement in their living conditions – the original structure was torn down.

Over a two-year period, the CDLHC worked closely with municipal planning and building departments to develop the site, consulted with the Tri-Agency Committee during the design phase, hired a contractor and oversaw construction. In the meantime, the Tri-Agency Committee used start-up funding from the DSSAB to develop policies and procedures, prepare a job description and advertise for and hire a staff member. The hiring of a staff person who already worked for TAWC led to that organization becoming the lead agency and the signatory to the lease.

Although TAWC had managed a shelter, it had little experience in rental management: filling units promptly, collecting rents, responding to fluctuating incomes and unexpected vacancies, and preparing units upon turnover. In the first months, some women were asked to leave the program, and some left without notice. Others lost their jobs after entering the program and could not afford the rent. Nine months after opening, the house was in a deficit position. It was then that the DSSAB stepped forward with CHPI funding to cover the accumulated deficit and then to continue covering unexpected costs based on a quarterly reconciliation.

Today, the sixplex operates at full capacity. Two women have graduated to homes they are proud of, and two others will soon be completing their one-year residence.

For the Tri-Agency Committee, the biggest issue was trust. Board members saw the benefits of the initiative, but also the risks of committing to the monthly costs of leasing the property.

The DSSAB’s acknowledgement of the Tri-Agency Committee’s expertise, and willingness to accept its direction on necessary security features for the building, went a long way to fostering a good relationship. Regular Tri-Agency Committee meetings also created opportunities for mutual support among member agencies.



### THE BUILDING:

- One three-bedroom, three two-bedroom and two one-bedroom apartments in a low-rise sixplex.
- Security features include monitored cameras, double security doors and panic buttons in all apartments.

### OPERATIONS:

- TAWC leases the property from the Cochrane DSSAB for market rent.
- TAWC fills vacancies in consultation with local agencies. When there is a vacancy, TAWC emails community partners to identify women who need immediate housing and would meet the program guidelines. An advisory committee comprised of five community agencies reviews applications, with identifying information removed, and chooses who will fill the vacancy.
- Residents stay for up to a year and pay rent set above the full Ontario Works (OW)/Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) shelter allowance or, if they are working, up to market rent. After quarterly reconciliation, any shortfall in the rents is met through CHPI funding.
- The program does not offer rental housing under the Residential Tenancies Act. Women may be asked to leave one year after entering the program or at any time if they do not comply with program guidelines.

### THE SUPPORTS:

- TAWC provides one full-time, second-stage housing worker using yearly funding from the Cochrane DSSAB.
- Individualized supports focus on preparing for independent living, such as prioritizing rent payments, living within a budget and managing through unexpected difficulties.
- Staff also host monthly house meetings and weekly individual check-ins to provide information workshops on issues such as building a resumé. However, the aim is to encourage women to build relationships with services outside of the house that will continue after they move out.

- Similar projects must be led by a VAW agency. That's where the expertise is. There is a deep analysis needed in doing this type of work.
- Partners have to work on trusting each other. Trust is the key. You need a good, progressive Board willing to try new things.
- Using a design-build approach for construction is vital.
- A clear system for addressing rent shortfalls and vacancy loss at the outset is necessary. This may also reduce the Board's concerns.



**FOR RESIDENTS:**

- Access to their own furnished apartment in a seamless transition from their previous shelter, regardless of their income or credit rating
- Supports tailored to their individual needs, and access to a wide array of services from partner agencies

- An opportunity to develop habits needed to manage on one's own
- A community of women with shared experiences who will look out for one another
- Assistance finding a permanent home and a "number to call" after they leave the house

**FOR TIMMINS & AREA WOMEN IN CRISIS AND OTHER LOCAL AGENCIES:**

- Access to six purpose-built apartments at market rent
- Building-wide purchase of utilities, cable and phone services to reduce costs and to enable access for women with poor or no credit rating
- Custom security features to provide survivors safe housing with no on-site staff
- A property manager sensitive to the security and confidentiality needs of residents
- Tailored access when vacancies arise, with the advisory committee choosing the right match at the right time
- Funding for a second-stage housing worker through the DSSAB
- Start-up costs and the risks of vacancy loss or extraordinary costs assumed by the DSSAB
- A strong network of service agencies committed to survivors of violence

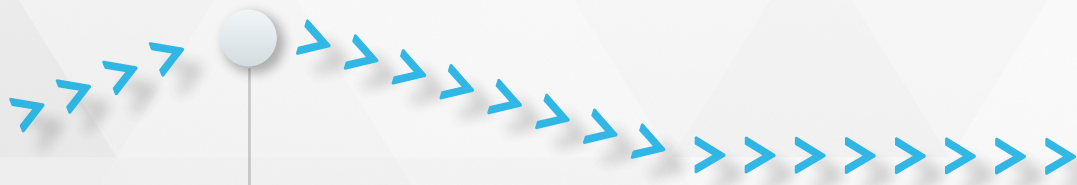
**FOR COCHRANE DSSAB:**

- Fewer women return to homelessness
- Victims of violence transition successfully into permanent rent-geared-to-income housing
- Lower costs to support women once they move to permanent housing



*“I’d like northern Ontario to be an incubator of new ideas. Our needs are different – it forces us to try new things.”* – Brian Marks, CAO, Cochrane DSSAB

*“Our agencies put a lot of faith in each other. We had to put our faith in the DSSAB and believe they had our best interest at heart. And the DSSAB had to trust our Violence Against Women (VAW) experience and expertise to develop the program.”*  
– Julie Norbert Demarchi, Timmins & Area Women in Crisis



- Timmins & Area Women in Crisis (TAWC)  
[www.tawc.ca](http://www.tawc.ca)
- Musk Quat: Tranquility House Women’s Shelter  
<https://cmhact.ca/programs-services/violence-against-womenprograms/tranquility-house-womens-shelter/>
- Musk Quat: Cochrane District Social Services Administration Board (DSSAB)  
[www.cdssab.on.ca/english/main.html](http://www.cdssab.on.ca/english/main.html)
- [Mission, Vision, Values](#)