



The Oaks, Ottawa

# 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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**ONPhA**

ONTARIO NON-PROFIT  
HOUSING ASSOCIATION

## Summary:

- **The innovation:** Enabling homeless alcoholics and people with serious physical and mental health challenges to stay housed and to rebuild their health and their lives
- **Lead and partners:**
  - Shepherds of Good Hope – building owner and program operator
  - Ottawa Inner City Health – health service provider, referrals
  - Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) – referrals
- **People served:** Homeless men and women with serious alcohol addictions and/or complex mental or physical health issues
- **Funding:** Federal-Provincial Affordable Housing Program – capital; City of Ottawa’s Resident Services Homes (domiciliary hostel) – subsidies; Champlain Local Health Integration Network (LHIN) – health services and supports; Grants, program funding and donations from multiple sources



The Oaks was built on the success of a Managed Alcohol Program (MAP) developed for a homeless shelter operated by the Shepherds of Good Hope. The program enabled shelter residents to continue to drink with less harm to themselves and fewer demands upon emergency services such as police, emergency rooms or hospitals.

When the partners asked MAP participants what they would like to see next, they talked about wanting to live in a regular home. The City of Ottawa also saw the benefits of an expanded program. A 10-year evaluation of the MAP program found per-person alcohol consumption decreased by two-thirds and mental health and physical health improved. Other research demonstrated that the public saved \$3+ for every dollar spent on the program, with dramatically reduced policing and emergency room costs.

**LISTENING TO RESIDENTS.** They wanted a safe, quiet home and a chance to contribute, learn new things and be part of a community.

**COLLABORATION.** Bringing organizations together gives the best value to residents.

**HARM REDUCTION.** This meant recognizing the continuing role alcohol may play in residents’ lives while ensuring residents have a stable home, good food, medical care, community and dignity.

**CREATING OPPORTUNITIES FOR A “HAPPIER LIFE.”** The Oaks offers ways to break with demons from the past and create new, positive memories.

**RECOVERY FROM HOMELESSNESS.** It takes time to overcome the broken relationships, exclusion from society and a lost sense of oneself that prolonged homelessness can entail.

**GO THROUGH THE FRONT DOOR, NOT THE BASEMENT WINDOW.** The Oaks promotes transparency in relationships with local businesses and residents.

**RESEARCH AND EVALUATION.** Cultivating strong relationships with the research community promotes learning and has resulted in studies that demonstrate the program’s effectiveness.





## DEVELOPMENT PROCESS



The Oaks is rooted in the Shepherds of Good Hope's three-decade history of serving Ottawa's most vulnerable residents. It operates supportive housing, shelters, a Transitional Emergency Shelter Program and Women's Special Care Unit, and other services for people who are homeless or at-risk of homelessness.

The Shepherds of Good Hope was also a founding member of Ottawa Inner City Health, a "corporation of corporations" among homeless-serving agencies created in 2001 to provide health services and promote collaborative and innovative solutions to complex problems. The corporate model allows Inner City Health to pool money, form partnerships and share risks.

Building on the success of its managed alcohol partnership with Inner City Health, the team sought and obtained City of Ottawa approval for Affordable Housing Program funds to purchase a former hotel, along with per diem operating funding. The team then approached CMHA, another long-standing partner, to include residents who could live autonomously in an unstaffed building but who would benefit from the medical services offered by Inner City Health.

In the meantime, Inner City Health applied to the LHIN for Aging at Home funding to provide services. Although the fund was originally intended to help seniors stay in their homes, the partners argued that homeless seniors might not have a home, but deserved one.

The development depended on successfully meeting a number of challenges:

- Gaining acceptance for the managed alcohol concept through credible research
- Having a good relationship with local businesses and residents: as soon as capital funding for the project was approved, team outreach included meeting with city councillors, hosting town forums, knocking on doors and partnering with a local university to survey local residents to identify concerns
- Obtaining program funds from multiple sources and managing multiple reporting requirements for those funds
- Promoting a harmonious community by building on the clients' own desires for a quiet, gentle, safe environment



### THE BUILDINGS:

- Renovated hotel with 36 units plus offices, dining area and lounge, billiard room, TV room, laundry, garden, outdoor smoking area and wine-making room
- Next door, a 19-unit building with self-contained bachelor apartments
- Security features including a gated courtyard and cameras in both buildings

### THE PROGRAMS:

- 30 units for graduates of the Good Shepherd's shelter-based Managed Alcohol Program
- 15 units for seniors with physical, mental or alcoholism issues
- 10 units for adults with mental health and medical issues referred by CMHA

### RESIDENT SELECTION:

- Program partners identify residents who would benefit from 24/7 supports and health services
- Most have complex physical and health needs
- MAP participants selected from participants in the shelter-based MAP

### THE MANAGED ALCOHOL PROGRAM:

- Alcohol treated as medication with each participant offered a specific amount of alcohol tailored to his or her needs
- Alcohol dispensed hourly throughout the day by a trained staff person (participants free to skip servings if they choose)
- Wine made on-site to reduce costs

### OTHER PROGRAMS AND SERVICES:

- On-site nurse to co-ordinate resident care
- Two on-site Client Care Workers
- Access to a mental health nurse, psychiatrist, internist and nurse practitioner offering primary care
- Visiting services such as foot care, haircutting and co-ordination with external services such as dental care
- Three meals per day, with residents preparing their own snacks
- Community activities and excursions

### OPERATING FUNDING:

- City of Ottawa per diem of \$49.66 /resident and additional services funded through Inner City Health, a LHIN transfer agency, with residents paying no rent



- Seamless integration among residents in all three programs, with a full range of services available to all residents
- For residents: improved health, dignity and mutual support, helping many residents reconnect with family and past pursuits
- For CMHA: the opportunity for tenants to live autonomously, but with health services and 24-hour supports available next door, if needed
- For participants in the shelter-based MAP program: the opportunity to advance to a new stage while making room for others to enter the shelter program
- For the City: reduced policing and emergency room use
- A local Business Improvement Area (BIA) and neighbours who believe the neighbourhood is better and safer as a result of The Oaks' work
- A body of research and experiential learning
- A model that can be adapted in other jurisdictions



- Don't do it alone. Bring everyone to the table. If you don't have buy-in from all the stakeholders, you won't be successful.
- Start with a pilot project. It's less of a risk to start with a time-limited project. Then when the stats show the impact on participants and the return on investment for the community, everyone will want to continue the initiative.
- Recognize the power of alcohol. It does the most damage to the body – much more than other drugs – and is the hardest to treat long-term.
- Create the space where someone knows your name. Something magical happens when you are among people who “get you.”
- Don't expect people to move on. Most residents succeed because of the environment created by The Oaks, and do not necessarily do well when they leave.
- Looking at the bigger picture. Consider the benefits of Inner City Health's “corporation of corporations.” Says Inner City Health's Wendy Muckle: “No matter what is needed, someone at the table is an expert. When new funding is available, programs can be up and running within weeks. It does take time to build trust and ways of working together, but once you do, it's amazing and energizing. You can't underestimate the value of having fun together.
- Call Shepherds of Good Hope. They are happy to share their findings, so you don't have to reinvent the wheel.



*“[In the shelter] I was drinking way too much. I almost died three times ... I’m decreasing my drinking here and thinking of stopping drinking altogether ... I never used to draw before. My drawings are mostly arctic animals. When I started doing these drawings, I’m at home.”*

– Elijah, resident in *The Oaks*

*“Our success has always come from our clients telling us what they need and want.”* – Wendy Muckle,  
Ottawa Inner City Health

*“Collaboration is crucial. You can’t do it by yourself.”*  
– Stephen Bartolo, Shepherds of Good Hope

- The Oaks: Shepherds of Good Hope  
[www.shepherdsforgoodhope.com/the-oaks](http://www.shepherdsforgoodhope.com/the-oaks)
- The Oaks: Ottawa Inner City Health  
[www.ottawainnercityhealth.ca/Home](http://www.ottawainnercityhealth.ca/Home)
- The Oaks: Canadian Mental Health Association  
[www.ottawa.cmha.ca](http://www.ottawa.cmha.ca)
- Managed Alcohol: 10 Years of Learning
- MAP - Ottawa’s Managed Alcohol Program Introductory Video
- MAP - Trajectory of Service

## RESOURCES



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