



CITY OF
Lethbridge



Media Release – February 18, 2010

Bringing Lethbridge Home requires a unique approach: 'Housing First'

Mayor Tarleck, members of City Council, agency Board members and over 60 service providers in Lethbridge are the recipients of intensive training in a unique approach that will significantly reduce homelessness in Lethbridge and across the province. **'Housing First' is an approach that results in homeless people receiving what they want most...housing.**

"Homelessness is not an acceptable way to live in Lethbridge. City Council is proud to have unanimously approved the recent 5 year Plan to End Homelessness in Lethbridge 'Bringing Lethbridge Home' as presented by Social Housing in Action (SHIA), the Community Advisory Board just a short 6 months ago. Not only is the Housing First approach the cornerstone of our plan but is supported by the provincial 10 Year Plan "states Mayor Tarleck. "It is bold and aggressive but we are confident Lethbridge is up to the challenge, especially with the support of Council and strong community partnerships with SHIA and service providers."

Moving this philosophy from a concept to reality requires a significant commitment on the part of the Government of Alberta, the City of Lethbridge, SHIA and the support service people that make it happen. "We are committed to moving from a traditional approach of just managing homelessness to ending it in Lethbridge. SHIA and our partner agencies are well positioned to make this happen. Building more shelter spaces is not the answer....getting people off the street and into housing is all part of our plan to Bring Lethbridge Home "says Dr. Gary Bowie, Chair, SHIA.

"This transition cannot happen unless a community based system is designed to embrace this philosophy and make it happen. Lethbridge is clearly demonstrating strong leadership, a willingness to learn and the ability to apply new thinking to ensure people's basic right to housing is met" states Iain DeJong, an international leader and consultant in Housing First . Iain is facilitating professional and leadership development and is providing the expertise required to support people to sustain permanent housing. "This requires a coordinated support system in the community and specialized teams to provide the supports necessary for people to be successful in securing and sustaining permanent housing. I am very impressed with the vision, leadership and the programs that are making a significant difference in people's lives in Lethbridge."

And it is working in Lethbridge. Over 600 people have been successfully housed....some for the first time in years. The follow-up success rate is impressive. Over 94% of the people housed using a Housing First approach has remained housed within a secure tenancy....and the benefits are researched based. They include an improved quality of life including a reduced utilization of emergency services, improved health status, reduced substance use and an ability to participate in community life and meaningful activity. These have a significant economic and social benefit in our community.



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Background

Homelessness

Emergency shelters are not a long term housing option. Adopting a Housing First model means that permanent housing is provided along with needed support services. Support services may include intensive medical, psychiatric and case management services including life skills training, landlord liaison assistance and addictions counseling. Addressing these needs through support services helps people maintain their housing over the long term.

Social Housing in Action (SHIA)

SHIA is the Lethbridge community based organization dedicated to ending homelessness through a 'Housing First' approach. SHIA includes a healthy and collaborative cross-section of community leaders and organizations. With a mandate to oversee the implementation of the 5 year Plan to end homelessness in Lethbridge, minimize the impact of homelessness and to prevent homelessness in Lethbridge, SHIA works in partnership with the City of Lethbridge to address the needs in our community through *Bringing Lethbridge Home*.

Provincial Secretariat for Action on Homelessness

"Premier Ed Stelmach established the Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness in January 2008. The 12 member group worked closely with municipalities and non-profit organizations to explore the best practices and successful programs from across North America. The Secretariat fulfilled its initial mandate by developing a 10 year plan to end homelessness in 2008. The plan that was accepted and released by the Government of Alberta on March 16, 2009, identifies specific actions and immediate priorities to support the creation of permanent, safe housing for the homeless and outlines the associated services needed to break the cycle of homelessness. The provincial strategy aligns with, and supports, municipal plans to end homelessness. The plan adopts a "Housing First" approach of providing immediate housing along with client-centered support services such as mental health services, addictions counseling, employment training and other tailored supports as needed to assist the homeless to move toward self-reliance. The Secretariat will continue to monitor the implementation of the plan through consultation with Alberta communities and provide advice to the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs on revisions of the plan as required to ensure success of the plan."

Provincial 10 Year Plan: http://www.housing.alberta.ca/documents/PlanForAB_Secretariat_final.pdf



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If you have any questions or comments about the 10-year plan to address homelessness, please contact the Secretariat by e-mail at secretariat@gov.ab.ca