WEST CENTRAL WOMEN'S RESOURCE CENTRE

Collaborative Models for Afforable Housing : Insights from WCWRC'S Transitional Housing Project

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Affordable housing remains one of the most critical challenges facing urban centers today, particularly for populations excluded from or facing barriers to housing, such as households led by women and gender diversed individuals. The West Central Women's Resource Centre (WCWRC) has proactively addressed this challenge through its innovative transitional housing project. This initiative provides not only shelter but also a supportive environment that assists residents in their recovery from trauma and displacement.

Through collaborations and partnerships with local organizations, government bodies, and community stakeholders, the WCWRC's transitional housing project demonstrates how collaborative approaches to affordable housing can reshape the design and implementation of affordable housing solutions.

Thus, this case-in-point project explores the collaborative models for affordable housing, drawing insights from the WCWRC's experiences. It emphasizes that effective partnerships among stakeholders can transform the landscape of affordable housing, offering sustainable solutions that promote affordable, safe, and supportive living environments for those whom many cities' housing markets have failed.

Figure 1: Architectural design of the West Central Women's Resource Centre,

2.0 BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

The increasing challenge of housing affordability represents a significant social and economic issue across urban centres in Canada. As urban populations continue to rise, the demand for affordable housing frequently outstrips supply, resulting in increased rates of homelessness and housing insecurity. This situation is particularly dire for marginalized populations, including Indigenous households, single-parent families, women, and gender-diverse individuals (Carter et al., 2020). These groups often face systemic barriers such as discrimination, limited income opportunities, and the enduring impacts of intergenerational trauma, all of which exacerbate their difficulties in securing stable housing (Carter et al.,2020).

2.1 DEFINING COLLABORATIVE HOUSING MODELS

The decline of public housing options, stemming from federal cuts in the 1990s that have persisted under successive governments, coupled with the need for more affordable housing, has led to the emergence of collaborative housing models, often referred to as 'community delivery' models by the Manitoba government.

> COLLABORATION STANDS FOR A COORDINATED ACTION TOWARDS A COMMON PURPOSE
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> CZISCHKE ET AL., 2020, P.6

These models involve various strategies that bring together multiple stakeholders, including government entities, non-profit organizations, community-based groups, and private developers, in the planning, financing, and managing of affordable housing projects. Characterized by shared goals and active community participation, these collaborations often aim to maximize collective impact and create sustainable solutions that address the housing needs of a particular group or community.

While the collaborative housing model is not a new concept, it has become increasingly relevant in addressing the urgent needs for deep affordability and supportive housing (Whitzman, 2024). As governments shift away from public delivery of social services, including housing, and the private for-profit sector struggles to meet these critical demands, collaborative approaches have emerged as effective solutions (Whitzman, 2024).

By integrating community input and resources, these models promote inclusivity and responsiveness in housing strategies, filling the gaps left by traditional methods that often fail to adequately serve marginalized populations

The collaborative model for affordable housing emphasizes working together across various sectors (public, private, and non-profit) while actively engaging the community to create adequate housing solutions. By leveraging the strengths of each sector, this approach introduces financing and funding methods that distribute risk and responsibility among multiple stakeholders, reducing the burden on any single funder. This not only promotes sustainability in housing developments but also promotes the creation of effective housing solutions.For instance, in the WCWRC's transitional housing project, public funds served as a solid foundation to kickstart the initiative, supplemented by private donations and organizational support from various community groups.

Additionally, this collaborative process enables the pooling of resources, allowing each entity to contribute its expertise in funding, social services, or community engagement. This model thus enhances responsiveness to the specific needs of communities, ensuring that the design and programming of housing solutions or projects

are person-centered and less vulnerable to political changes than larger-scale public housing projects of previous decades

2.2 CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS

Despite the effectiveness and benefits of collaborative housing models, several challenges persist with this model. One significant barrier is the potential for conflict among stakeholders with differing priorities and objectives. Misalignment often leads to stalled projects and decreased trust among project participants.

Moreover, funding remains a persistent issue as collaborative housing projects often rely on a mix of public and private funding, which can be unpredictable and subject to shifts in political climate and economic conditions. This unpredictability can create financial instability, making it difficult to plan long-term strategies and inefficient at building the amount of housing needed to address the scale of the current need.

3.0 FACTS OF THE CASE

The West Central Women's Resource Centre is a non-profit organization based in Winnipeg, Manitoba, dedicated to supporting women and gender-diverse individuals. The organization originated from a collaborative initiative known as the Women's Empowerment Project, which was formed to identify and address the specific needs of women in the West Central community of Winnipeg, Manitoba. Through a series of community planning processes, local service agencies and West central community women came together to formulate strategies aimed at empowering individuals and promoting well-being.

Figure 2: West Central Women's Resource Centre

Officially opening its doors in 2001, WCWRC has grown into a vital non-profit organization dedicated to supporting both women and gender-diverse individuals.The organization places a strong emphasis on providing transitional housing and empowering those affected by gender-based violence. They specifically targets women and gender-diverse individuals who have experienced various forms of violence and instability.

West Central Women's Resource Centre also pays particular attention to the unique challenges faced by Indigenous women and newcomer populations, ensuring that its services are tailored to meet their specific needs. Through its comprehensive support programs such as the More Than 4 Walls Housing First program, employment and education initiatives,

Figure 3: Architectural design of the West Central Women's Resource Centre,

and settlement services for newcomer women (WCWRC 2021/2022), the West Central Women's Resource Centre actively addresses the diverse needs of those experiencing housing insecurity and promotes pathways to stability and self-sufficiency

3.1 THE TRANSIONAL HOUSING PROJECT

The Transitional Housing Project initiated by WCWRC arose from a recognized critical need for safe, affordable housing for women and gender-diverse individuals who have experienced domestic violence(WCWRC 2021/2022). The initiative served as a direct response to the high rates of intimate partner violence in Winnipeg, coupled with the significant barriers these individuals face in accessing stable housing (Streilein, 2022)

The concept for the project was developed based on over 20 years of experience the WCWRC has had in providing community support, which highlighted the urgent need for longer term transitional solutions rather than solely temporary shelters. The organization understood that individuals escaping violent relationships often suffer from profound isolation and lack of support networks. Thus, the transitional housing model offers not only physical shelter but also wrap-around services that include emotional support, education and skills training, promoting a holistic approach to healing and recovery (WCWRC 2021/2022)

To bring this project to fruition, WCWRC secured essential funding through the Federal Government's Rapid Housing Initiative (RHI), part of the National Housing Strategy which was delivered by the City of Winnipeg, which selected the project based on the recognition of the unique housing and safety needs of women and gender-diverse populations in Winnipeg. Significant additional funding from the province and other donors facilitated the purchase and planned refurbishment of a vacant three-story apartment building located at 590 Victor Street. The transformation of this building resulted in a facility hosting a mix of 16 affordable units with 34 beds, specifically designed to accommodate women, gender-diverse individuals, and their children (UWCRC, 2025). The arrangement includes six three-bedroom units, six two-bedroom units, and four one-bedroom units

The design of the facility incorporates features that foster

community and ensure safety for residents, such as child-friendly spaces and a rooftop green area. This model is strategically designed to build confidence and strengthen community ties among residents, facilitating their transition to long-term independent living.

Integral to the success of this project was the advocacy of the Executive Director of WCWRC, who tirelessly engaged with government funders to secure financial support and pursued further fundraising efforts to cover the costs of these spaces which might initially have appeared unnecessary to those lacking expertise in recognizing how important community connection is for residents. By effectively communicating these needs, the Executive Director ensured that resources were allocated to create a nurturing environment which adequately supports the well-being of residents in the facility.

4.0 LESSONS LEARNED

The West Central Women's Resource Centre transitional housing initiative exemplifies the potential of collaborative models in addressing affordable housing challenges. The project's success demonstrates that collaborative housing models can be a powerful tool for combating homelessness and housing insecurity, especially for marginalized populations. Thus, the most significant takeaways from the project are;

4.1 THE POWER OF COLLABORATIVE PATNERSHIP IN AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Pooling of Resources: The WCWRC Transitional Housing project powerfully illustrates the important role that collaboration plays in addressing the pressing issue of housing insecurity. From its inception, the West Central Women's Resource Centre (WCWRC) established foundational partnerships that were crucial for its success. A key component of this collaborative effort has been the partnership with the Federal government through the Rapid Housing Initiative, alongside vital support from the Province of Manitoba. This backing provided funding that laid the groundwork for the project. In addition to government support, the initiative benefited from various contributors, notably non-profit organizations, private donors and private unions, such as Unifor's Social Justice Fund. The pooling of financial resources in this project thus ensured that the project was both feasible and impactful.

Figure 4: Image of the old apartment complex and design of the new Transitional Housing

Leveraging Expertise:
Collaborative housing models enable each partner to contribute their unique strengths. Government bodies not only provided funding but also offered policy guidance, setting the stage for effective implementation. Meanwhile, the WCWRC delivers essential wrap-around services, ensuring that residents receive comprehensive support beyond just housing. By harnessing the expertise of various stakeholders, the WCWRC transitional housing project demonstrates that effectively tackling housing insecurity requires a diverse approach that encompasses not just financial investment but also social support and services.

Strengthening Networks:
Moreover, ongoing collaboration with sister organizations like the North End Women's Centre, Ikwe-Widdjiitiwin Inc., Willow Place, and Wahbung Abinoonjiag extends the support network for residents. These partnerships enhance the overall effectiveness of the WCWRC by creating a comprehensive support framework that addresses the diverse needs of women and gender-diverse individuals in the community. This network exemplifies how strategic collaborations can strengthen the housing solution landscape, facilitating a more cohesive response to the challenges faced by marginalized populations. By pooling together the strengths of all involved, the WCWRC transitional housing project positions itself as a great example in demonstrating the power of collective action in the fight against housing insecurity.

4.2 ADDRESSING SYSTEMIC BARRIERS THROUGH COLLABORATION

The WCWRC Transitional Housing Project serves as a compelling illustration of the urgent need for innovative housing models that respond not only to the immediate housing crises faced by marginalized groups but also to the underlying factors contributing to their homelessness. It shows how collaboration enhances the housing framework by addressing systemic barriers and integrating diverse solutions. This can be seen from the wrap-around services such as emotional support, educational opportunities, and employment skills training. integrated into the overall housing framwork. This approach thus addresses deeper issues linked to homelessness and gender-based violence, moving beyond the mere provision of shelter. By recognizing and tackling these root causes, the model offers a personalized solution that empowers individuals as they navigate their journey toward

Figure 5: Roftop space

Figure 6: Child-friendly spaces

stability and independence.

Moreover, collaborative input from the community, other non-profit and advocay group plays a critical role in ensuring that housing initiatives are responsive to the unique challenges faced by marginalized groups, including domestic violence survivors and gender-diverse individuals. This tailored approach not only enhances the effectiveness of housing initiatives but also affirms a commitment to understanding and addressing the complexities of homelessness

4.3 COLLABORATION IS BUILT ON SHARED GOALS AND VALUES AMONG STAKEHOLDERS

Another foundational lesson learned from the collaborative model that led to the development of the transitional housing project is the importance of establishing shared goals and values among all stakeholders involved. Success in affordable housing projects is greatly enhanced when diverse entities such as government agencies, non-profit organizations, community groups, and private developers come together with aligned objectives and principles.

For instance, the development of the WCWRC transitional housing project was made possible when the City of Winnipeg acknowledged the specific housing and safety needs of women and gender-diverse populations. This recognition led to the allocation of funding through the Rapid Housing Initiative, which played an important role in bringing the project to fruition. Through these goals, there was the development of a cohesive partnership that eventually supported the successful implementation of the transitional housing initiative.

5.0 FINAL THOUGHTS

The insights from the West Central Women's Resource Centre (WCWRC) transitional housing project emphasize that long-term solutions to affordable housing must prioritize collaboration. The WCWRC transitional housing project has demonstrated how effective partnerships among community organizations, government bodies, and the non-private sectors can foster a more inclusive approach to housing solutions. The Transitional Housing Initiative serves as a valuable reminder that combating homelessness is a collective responsibility, requiring the engagement of all stakeholders.

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FIGURES

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