



**Current members of  
GMHSC:**

- AIDS Moncton Inc.
- Atlantic People's Housing Ltd.
- Blankets for Moncton
- BUILT Network Moncton Inc.
- CMHC
- Codiac RCMP
- Community Chaplaincy for Ex-Offenders
- Elizabeth Fry Society of NB
- John Howard Society of Southeastern NB Inc.
- MAGMA
- Maison Nazareth House
- Mobile One Community Services Inc.
- Moncton Youth Residences Inc.
- New Life Mission Inc.
- Salvus Clinic
- The Salvation Army
- YMCA
- YWCA

**MANDATE**

The Greater Moncton Homelessness Steering Committee is an inter-agency committee representing agencies in Greater Moncton that work with the homeless population and those at risk of becoming homeless.

Established in 2000, the GMHSC provides leadership and coordinates communication among stakeholders and service providers to ensure the implementation of the Greater Moncton Community Plan on Homelessness. It also works to create public awareness about issues surrounding homelessness, poverty and housing.

[www.monctonhomelessness.org](http://www.monctonhomelessness.org)

**SPECIAL ISSUE – FOCUS ON WOMEN & HOUSING**

**Homelessness and vulnerable housing issues  
in Mental Health and Addiction Services for women**

By: Bernie Goguen, Licensed Psychologist  
Program Manager, Community Mental Health Services  
Horizon Health Network – Moncton

A research report published in November 2010 by the Research Alliance for Canadian Homelessness, Housing and Health reported that for every one person in a homeless shelter, there were another 23 individuals who were housed in vulnerable situations. Although this research was conducted in Toronto, Vancouver and Ottawa, the situation is likely very similar in Moncton.

Over the course of a year, Horizon Health Network's Addiction and Mental Health Services provides assessment and treatment services to approximately 1,200 women. This includes women who access psychiatric services at the Moncton Hospital; the Detoxification Treatment Unit and the Methadone Maintenance Treatment Program at the Addiction Services building; and Community Addiction Treatment and the Assessment and Treatment Services at the Community Mental Health Centre. It is estimated that 20 per cent of women who access these services have experienced periods of homelessness or of being vulnerably housed in the past year.

Being vulnerably housed means: living in unsafe housing situations, such as homes with no smoke detectors or that have mould; living in housing situations where you are being abused or are at risk of being abused; living in rooming houses where you feel unsafe. Vulnerable housing also includes living with friends or acquaintances for short-term periods, or living in housing situations that are not affordable, leaving the woman at risk of having to move.

*“20 per cent of women who access these services [240 women] have experienced periods of homelessness or of being vulnerably housed in the past year.”*

During recent interviews with a small sample of women receiving services at the Moncton Detoxification Treatment Unit, it was found that 30 per cent of the women had gone to the Crossroads for Women safe house; 60 per cent had stayed in rooming houses where they had felt unsafe; 80 per cent had moved more than twice in the past year and 80 per cent reported that housing issues had made their addiction and/or mental health issues worse.

Homelessness and being vulnerably housed can have a negative impact on addiction and mental health treatment in several ways. First, it has an impact on being able to access the needed treatment services. For example, seeking help for depression or anxiety becomes less of a priority when a person is worrying about where they are going to sleep, (cont'd on page 3)

**The 4th Report Card on Homelessness in Greater Moncton will be launched Monday, March 28th at a Community Breakfast at St. George's Anglican Church**  
**51 Church St., Moncton**  
**7:30 – 9:00am**  
**3rd Provincial Report Card will be launched at the same time.**  
**FREE but you must reserve your place!**  
**[scalhoun@nbnet.nb.ca](mailto:scalhoun@nbnet.nb.ca)**  
**877-2343**

#### Violence against women and homelessness

### ***Making the connection***

Abuse is the leading cause of women's homelessness, according to a fact sheet released by YWCA Canada during its Rose Campaign to end violence against women and girls in December 2010. The campaign commemorates Canada's National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence against women, to increase public awareness and prevent violence before it starts. Some facts:

- Every year, violence and abuse drive over 100,000 women and children out of their homes and into emergency shelters.
- Many young women and women with mental health and addictions issues never make it to a shelter at all. They live on the streets of our cities, in poverty and vulnerable to sexual harassment, violence and murder.
- 600 Aboriginal women are missing or have been murdered. *"By failing, as a nation, to ensure no woman has to live on the street in Canada, we have left women vulnerable to murder."*

Transitional/supportive housing for women is now the GMHSC's number one priority.

Source: *Violence against women & women's homelessness: Making the connections*  
[www.saynotoviolence.org/join-say-no/rose-campaign-end-violence-against-women-and-girls](http://www.saynotoviolence.org/join-say-no/rose-campaign-end-violence-against-women-and-girls)

#### Women touched by homelessness

### ***From the ReConnect files ...***

YMCA of Greater Moncton's ReConnect Street Intervention Program provides short-term and long-term assistance through outreach to youth and adults who are homeless or at-risk of being homeless, in an effort to increase their knowledge of available resources (i.e. food, clothing, shelter, education, employment and counselling) and to provide support in accessing them. In the past year, ReConnect has seen a dramatic increase in the number of people, especially women, dropping in to seek help with housing. Here are their stories:

- A young mother, 23, of twin boys moved to Moncton in search of work. She was told she could stay in her sister's rooming house until she got on her feet; however, the landlord would not allow it so she ended up at Harvest House. With financial aid from the churches, ReConnect paid a stay in a bed and breakfast for five days. Staff called Social Development to arrange an emergency appointment, helped her search for an apartment, and paid \$150 on her damage deposit. Staff also contacted the food bank, the Salvation Army and Blankets for Moncton for food and furniture. A call went out to the community, and her apartment was fully furnished within two days.
- A young woman, 19, has been homeless on and off for three years, and is currently staying at the House of Nazareth. She has been in and out of abusive relationships, and suffers from drug addiction and mental health disorders. Given her age, she will only receive \$333 per month from social assistance, which does not give her enough money to live on. And she needs some form of identification before she can even qualify for SA.
- Female, 19, with eight-month-old child. On EI, leaving apartment because of poor living conditions. Heat cutting out and mould in walls. Called Rentalsman's office, and placed herself on a waiting list for NB housing. Outcome is unknown.
- Single mother with 14-year-old is evicted, and needs to be out at the end of the week because she was not able to pay her full rent. Is not receiving any income. Outcome is unknown.
- Female, 17, with 15-month-old. On social assistance and was living with friend. Her friend left with the rent money. Client's name was not on the lease; therefore she was evicted. Her mother's apartment will not allow children. No finances for another three weeks. Ended up getting a loan from a distant relative to move.
- Female, 18, with three-month-old boy (in temporary foster care). Being evicted because her boyfriend left, and did not pay the rent. Her baby will not be returned unless she has a place to stay. No income because she is waiting for her birth certificate to come in. Called church, and family will give her a room temporarily.
- Female, 17, with one-month-old. Her boyfriend is currently in college, doing on-the-job training. They were living with her parents, and were removed by child protection services. They are currently staying at a friend's and need to find housing within three days with no finances. Outcome unknown.

**Book review**

## **The Memory Palace**

By Mira Bartok [www.thememorypalace.com](http://www.thememorypalace.com)

Reviewed by Sue Calhoun

*The Memory Palace* is a gripping, if controversial, tale of a young Mira and her sister growing up with a mother who has schizophrenia. Her earliest memory was of her mother Norma in the livingroom of their small apartment, alternately babbling incoherently and laughing wickedly, brandishing a knife and circling a person seen only by her.

Norma was a gifted artist and musician, but as her disease progressed, she moved from benign neglect of her daughters to total intrusion into their lives: circling the school building on her bicycle, calling out their names while the grade-school daughters hid their faces in shame; later, showing up unannounced at their homes or workplaces, leaving a hundred messages a day on the phone: "Someone is going to try to murder you today. You have to call the police!"

As young adults, Mira and her sister tried many times to get help after their mother's delusional, sometimes violent episodes. Yet despite a number of hearings to have her mother declared incompetent, the court refused. She could buy her own cigarettes, manage a checking account, and cash her disability checks at the bank. According to the judge, those three acts proved she was competent.

Ultimately, to save their own lives, Mira and her sister changed their names, had phone numbers and addresses unlisted, and

swore their friends and colleagues to secrecy about their whereabouts. When Mira gave her mother a post office box number, "death was always circling the track – my mother sent me twenty-page letters at my post office box, threatening suicide if I didn't come home, rambling on about conspiracy theories and how the three of us were on a hit list to be killed ... I felt held hostage by her illness and by the backward mental health system that once again was incapable of helping our family in crisis. I longed to be far away, in a place where no one knew me, a place impossible to find." Left on her own, Norma became homeless.

Reunited 17 years later, with her mother on her deathbed, Mira contemplates writing her mother's obituary: "I think about what my mother's bio might read like: Norma Kurap Herr: Born into poverty during the Depression, child prodigy slated for Carnegie Hall, lost her mind when America dropped the bomb, wife of aspiring alcoholic writer, homeless schizophrenic for seventeen years, spent last years in a shelter for homeless women."

*The Memory Palace* offers a glimpse into the life of one family trying to deal with this brutal, heartless disease. A difficult story that is all too common.

Post-script: The women's shelter in Cleveland, Ohio, where Norma spent her final years, recently changed its name to the Norma Herr Women's Center to honour Norma, a long-time resident of the shelter "whose courage in the face of homelessness and mental illness served as an inspiration to other residents and to staff." [www.mhs-inc.org/CWS.asp](http://www.mhs-inc.org/CWS.asp)

(cont'd from page 1) how they are going to feed their family or whether they will be abused today. Also, with residential instability and frequent moves, it is often difficult or impossible to contact individuals when services become available or to schedule appointments.

Housing problems also have a negative impact on treatment progress and participation. Some clients have difficulty maintaining appointments due to housing instability; other clients see their symptoms worsen when they are living in housing situations that place them at risk for continued substance abuse or when they are at risk for experiencing violence or aggression. Being vulnerably housed or homeless also has a major impact on a woman's self-esteem, which can also become an obstacle to address in treatment and recovery. Because clinicians and services providers are also helping the client deal with housing issues and the periodic crises that may occur, the length of treatment services required is often increased.

Finally, experiencing periods of homelessness or being vulnerably housed increases the risk of relapse both in terms of substance abuse or a re-occurrence of various forms of mental health issues and symptoms.

On a daily basis, front line addiction and mental health professional (nurses, psychologists, social workers and human service counsellors) work with clients who are facing serious housing related issues – issues that negatively impact the client's ability to access services, their progress and participation in treatment and often increases their risk of relapse.

**WE WELCOME YOUR COMMENTS, IDEAS AND FEEDBACK.**

**SEND TO COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT OFFICER SUE CALHOUN [moncton.homelessness@gmail.com](mailto:moncton.homelessness@gmail.com)**

*If you have questions about the Homelessness Partnership Strategy,  
contact Mireille Roy at Service Canada 506-533-5882 or [mireille.roy@servicecanada.gc.ca](mailto:mireille.roy@servicecanada.gc.ca)*

**The 4th Report Card on Homelessness in Greater Moncton will soon be available at [www.moncton.homelessness.org](http://www.moncton.homelessness.org)**