

# SAINT JOHN'S PREVENTION PROGRAM

April 2021

*As we reduce chronic homelessness in Saint John, we have used data to determine the next steps. One key aspect of Saint John's Coordinated Access System is the Prevention Program operated out of Fresh Start Services.*

## The Backstory: Developing the Prevention Program



Fresh Start is an institution in the Saint John homeless serving sector –since 2009, the powerhouse agency has been working to reduce barriers for women experiencing homelessness. Advocating for people at risk of eviction, standing up for people navigating the social security network and assisting folks in accessing emergency food options are a few of the activities Fresh Start does best. You are in good hands when the women at Fresh Start have your back.

While they continue to provide ongoing support to people in need, the new Prevention Program acts as an integral component to Saint John's homeless serving system by reducing homeless inflow onto the By-Names List (BNL) and addressing the situational, episodic, or chronic challenges that result in homelessness. The program's purpose is to maintain or improve people's current living situations to keep them where they are instead of attempting to re-house them in an over-priced rental market.

## Why Prevention?



There are three primary approaches to addressing homelessness<sup>[1]</sup>:

- **Prevention** - Stopping people from becoming homeless in the first place.
- **Emergency Response** - Providing emergency supports like shelter, food, and day programs while someone is homeless.
- **Housing, Accommodation, and Supports** - The provision of housing and ongoing supports as a means of moving people out of homelessness.

While Saint John's Coordinated Access System addresses homelessness by assisting people in moving off the BNL through housing, accommodation and support, **Prevention** targets homelessness by stopping people from being added to the BNL in the first place.

If we can strategically target homelessness from both ends of the spectrum, we are well on our way to ending chronic homelessness in our community. Fresh Start provides Prevention support while other agencies in the Coordinated System such as shelters (Emergency Response) and housing programs (Housing, Accommodation and Supports) make up the other pieces of the system. All components work to manage the inflow and outflow of homelessness.

## **Fresh Start Prevention: A Three-Tiered Approach**

The Fresh Start Prevention Program takes a strategic three-tiered approach to homelessness prevention. The first tier of support involves providing emergency funds (Emergency Homeless Prevention Fund - EHPF) to mitigate the risk of homelessness. The second tier involves light-touch advocacy and mediation services for those at risk of homelessness - this tier focuses on resolving single challenges to prevent housing loss. The third tier is for individuals who require more intensive case management involving complex behaviours or ongoing difficulties related to housing loss. All three levels of assistance involve consideration for the EHPF financial support. Individuals 19+ who are at risk of homelessness or in their first month of homelessness may be eligible for support through Fresh Start's Prevention Program.

## **Kristen: Saint John's Prevention Program Manager**

"I can't always fix someone's situation, but I can improve their day." Kristen, Saint John's Prevention Lead, approaches homelessness prevention collaboratively alongside her clients, "We take those little steps forward together and help them move beyond their current situation." Kristen has been working in the field of homelessness for three years. Before that, she worked in the non-profit housing field in group homes, emergency crisis intervention and youth observation - she brings years of expertise to the table.



The Prevention Program's role is to address the situational, episodic or chronic challenges that result in homelessness. "If we can intervene at that point, we can make sure that people do not become chronically homeless," Kristen says.

Kristen recognizes that not every prevention effort will be successful, but connecting people to the Coordinated Access system can help support prevention efforts. Currently, Fresh Start sees 110 prevention clients monthly, and they have seen an 83% success rate - numbers that demonstrate both the need for and efficacy of the program.

## The Public's Role in Prevention

The public plays a significant role in the prevention program's success, especially with the increasingly competitive rental market. "Everyone out there is either a tenant or a landlord," Kristen says that she appreciates the people in the community who are willing to work with Fresh Start to address chronic homelessness and prevent inflow into the system. She is impressed by the response from landlords, the community, and tenants. "They're the ones who make it work."

Landlords often need a sounding board to discuss the unique challenges of owning property and housing people. Kristen works closely with property owners to address problems that arise and mitigate issues before they bubble to the surface. She says a key to collaboration is to avoid sugar-coating anything, "Landlords appreciate honesty." Much of Kristen's role is to act as a mediator between landlords and their tenants, using her communication skills to break down barriers.

Kristen sees the Prevention Program as a long-term effort towards addressing generational homelessness and poverty. The program works with individuals and families to educate them and provide them with the skills to avoid becoming homeless in the future. "If we can improve their socio-economic status and skills now, we will see fewer individuals entering homelessness in the future."

For more on **Saint John's Prevention Program** and **Fresh Start Services**, visit their website: <http://www.sjfreshstart.org/>.

## References:

[1] Homelesshub.ca. 2021. *Prevention / The Homeless Hub*. [online] Available at: <<https://homelesshub.ca/solutions/prevention>> [Accessed 19 April 2021].