

Safety First

Saint John Housing Alternatives, TRC, SJLE



The Safety First program: a collaboration with three well-established non-profit agencies in Saint John: Housing Alternatives (HA), the Teen Resource Centre (TRC), and the Saint John Learning Exchange (SJLE). Partnerships were also established with the Raft HF4Y program in Ontario and Threshold Housing First in British Columbia for mentorship, training, and advice. HOME-RL at the University of New Brunswick formally partnered with Safety First to provide guidance on quality data collection, advice on evaluation metrics, and to conduct formal, community-university partnered research.

Safety First case managers (CM) begin by assessing a housing situation and needs. Youth engage with them in a process to determine their housing goals, available options and supportive resources. Youth continue to receive case management support throughout their tenancies, and as they learn to live independently and maintain their housing. If housing loss occurs, the case managers work alongside the youth to re-evaluate their housing plan and determine additional supports to improve future housing outcomes.

Youth were provided supports for establishing and maintaining new tenancies. Case managers provide support with system navigation as youth stabilize and begin to explore other life goals. For example, the Saint John Learning Exchange (SJLE) offers Safety First participants access to educational skill building, and employment programs. TRC case managers assist youth with referrals to programs and services for mental health, food security, education, school reintegration, and social supports. The TRC also provides youth registered with Safety First with access to their inhouse youth mental health counselor.

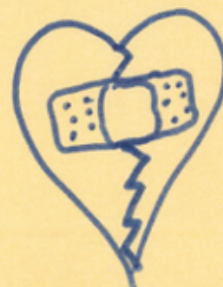
In addition to housing youth, HF4Y program often provide mentorship and guidance that youth would typically receive when they have supportive family members. Safety First realized that youth had a hard time maintaining housing when periods of economic instability occurred. While family-connected youth can sometimes ask parents for support when they encounter job loss, this is not the case for the youth in Safety First. The Social Innovation Fund enhanced the existing funding by providing temporary income supports.

Outcomes

- Through SIF, we have successfully housed 45 youth aged 16-25 years old.
- The average age of youth in program was 18 years old.
- Each youth receives a subsidy to make sure that their rent is no more than 30% of their income.
- Youth are housed in either one of the cohousing buildings located in the city's South End and in the Waterloo Village, or they are housed in independent units (bachelor, 1 bedroom, or 2 bedroom apartments) throughout the city.
- 37 of the 45 (82%) of the youth housed maintained their tenancies. These youth are stably housed and no longer experience homelessness.
- 8 of the 45 youth (18%) did not maintain their housing. Rationales tracked indicate that they moved out of Saint John, moved back in with a family member or were evicted due to guest management or mental health concerns.
- All youth (100%) have been able to work towards either an employment, education, or wellness goal after being securely housed 18 youth (40%) have secured and maintained employment.
- 26 youth (58%) have pursued education since being securely housed. Of these youth:
 - 12 graduated with a high school diploma;
 - 7 have enrolled in post-secondary education;
 - 1 graduated from a post-secondary institution.
 - The two most common wellness goals were establishing healthy relationships and self-care
- 28 youth (62%) focused on building healthy relationships with peers and family members, leading to stronger support networks. All youth accessed case managers for assistance with removing barriers to health and economic opportunities.
- 30 youth (67%) worked on self-care routines, positively influencing their ability to live independently and transition to adulthood.
- 21 youth requested transportation support.
- 34 youth requested food security support.
- 35 youth requested support with education and/or employment.
- 33 youth request support for mental health.



Youth depiction of how they felt before and after coming to the program. They said, "I felt like I was broken, and now I'm putting myself back together."



"I haven't felt so good in a long time and have never felt safer being where I am in my life currently!"
Youth describing how they felt after receiving housing

Safety First understands the importance of safe and stable housing as the first step towards youth stability and success in other areas of life, such as education, employment and interpersonal relationships. It applied a Housing First approach, which means that housing is not contingent on youth enrollment or achievement in specific programs (e.g., education, mental health, employment etc.). Rather, youth are provided with locational stability through subsidized housing, which meets the basic need of and human right to housing.

By the end of its SIF funding: Safety First has housed 45 youth between the ages of 16-25 who were struggling with homelessness and/or housing instability. Prior to being housed with the program, youth experienced multiple forms of housing precarity including sleeping rough, couch surfing, staying in emergency shelters or tent encampments, or living in other situations that were unsafe, unstable, and unsustainable.



Through engaging activities, youth build their interpersonal skills and explore interests