

IMOUTO HOUSING FOR YOUNG WOMEN

JUNE 2013



Imouto Housing for Young Women is a supportive transitional housing program for women ages 16 to 24 owned by Atira Women's Resource Society. Located in the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver, Imouto was created to provide a place of safety for young women in the community.

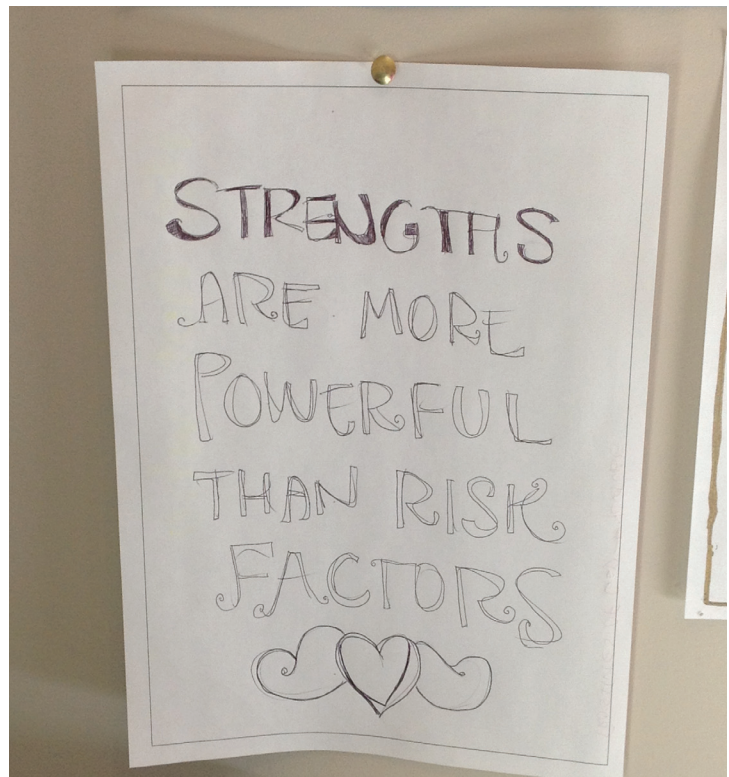
Between September 2011 and March 2013, 31 women were housed at Imouto. As of June 1, 2013, there were 14 young women living at Imouto.

Evaluation of program activities and outcomes has been ongoing since October 2011. This summary provides information on changes in women's housing status, young women's comments on the role of Imouto in their lives, and an overview of a new Intergenerational Mentorship Program.

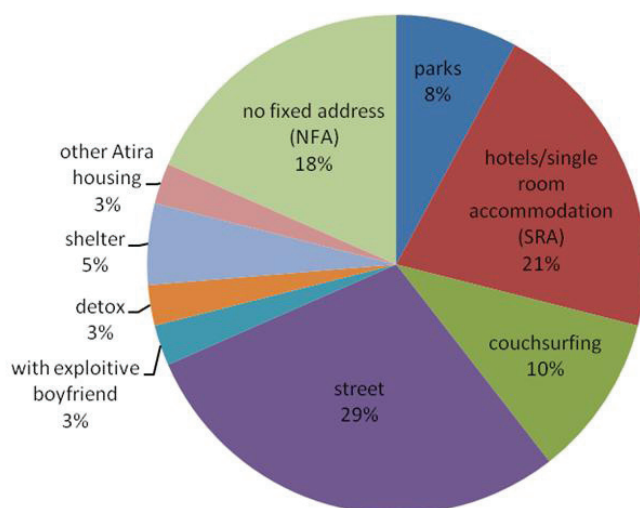
WHAT IS THE BACKGROUND OF YOUNG WOMEN WHO MOVE INTO IMOUTO?

Between September 2011 and April 2013, 31 young women were housed at Imouto.

- Over the first 18 months of operation, the age range of residents was between 16 and 23 years old. The average age was 20.
- The majority of women described unstable housing prior to coming to Imouto, such as couch surfing, living on the streets, staying at shelters or living with male partners in hotels or single room accommodations (SRAs).
- Approximately seven of the young women described chronic homelessness longer than four years, usually from a very young age.
- All of the residents self-identify as women, except one youth who did not want to specify gender (but was born female).
- 20 out of the 31 women who moved into Imouto (65%) identified as having First Nations, Métis and/or Inuit ancestry.
- Staff estimates that about three-quarters of the residents were currently or have been involved in survival sex work. Almost all young women report substance use.



WHERE DO YOUNG WOMEN LIVE BEFORE COMING TO IMOUTO?



HOW LONG DO WOMEN STAY AT IMOUTO?

Seventeen of the thirty-one young women who were housed at Imouto during the first eighteen months have moved on after an average stay of approximately four months. For women who have moved out, the length of stay has ranged from one month to eleven months. For the young women who were still in the house at the end of March 2013, the average length of residence was eight months.

“Before Imouto I was homeless. And I was also crashing at my boyfriend’s hotel which is one of the scummiest hotels in the Downtown Eastside. ... Whenever me and him would get into a fight I would be homeless pretty much and I’d try and find someplace else to couch-hop.”

“I was only supposed to stay at Imouto for two weeks. My boyfriend and I were living in [hotel]. He gave two week’s notice and moved up north. I was supposed to join him, but ended up staying at [shelter].”

“[Before Imouto] I was couchsurfing...I was living at [a hotel] for a little while. Before that I was homeless for a long time, like, three years. I spent the majority of my time...without my own stable place to live. I mean, I’ve had places to live but they haven’t been suitable for me to stay at, so I’ve been out wandering all night or, you know, staying with friends. It wasn’t really the safest place to be.”

IMOUTO’S PROGRAM PRINCIPLES

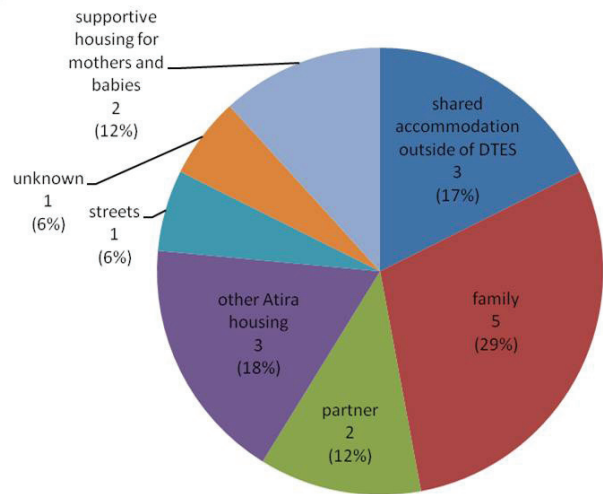
- Girl- and Women-Centred
- Trauma-informed
- Harm reduction
- Low barrier
- Anti-oppression
- Relationship building
- Safety first



To learn more about Imouto’s service delivery model, visit <http://atira.bc.ca/Imouto/>

WHERE DO YOUNG WOMEN GO WHEN THEY LEAVE IMOUTO?

Fifteen of the seventeen young women (88%) who left in the first eighteen months of operation transitioned to other housing options, typically outside of the Downtown Eastside. The most frequent place young women went upon leaving Imouto was going to live with family (5 out of 17), followed by shared accommodation outside of the DTES (some with the support of Watari's TIPS funding) and other Atira housing programs (three each). Two young women gave birth and went to live in supportive housing for mothers and their infants. Two of the young women attended residential treatment on their way to one of these more permanent locations. Two women moved in with their partners. One young woman returned to the streets and one young woman left without a clear housing plan.



"The majority of the staff are pretty chilling. They have their own perspective on stuff... you get to talk to people for who they are. Not like "I am staff, I'm here, working here in a residence. [It's] 'you're a person, I'm a person.' "

"I like the fact that everything's included....food, laundry, 'added help' if you need help."

"I know a few people who, if they were in need of housing, this could be a good spot....Targeted at the age group that it is, like, using. Like situations where they don't have anywhere to go."

"I have been notified every time the nurse practitioners are there. Imouto's really good at letting us know what's going on... Imouto's pretty great, if I feel like I need something I just talk to the staff and they'll try their best to find somebody who can help me out with it."

"Because [my boyfriend]...was pretty psycho when he was angry...there'd be huge tantrums and physical stuff I didn't want to deal with, so I wanted to go to a place where if I wanted to get away from him he could not get me. Couch-hopping at other friends' places was no fun because he could just come and kick down the door at some SRO and that wasn't safe. But at Imouto, I love it because they [the staff] get right on it. He has pulled that shit a few times where he's outside and yelling and trying to get inside and see me and whoever was working was like 'No, you can't come in here, she does not want to see you.'"

FAMILY CONNECTIONS

Since Imouto opened, staff have observed that stable housing has allowed a number of young women to initiate contact with their families after long periods of disconnection.

- Eight of the seventeen young women who moved out in the first eighteen months (47%) had improved relationships with their families of origin attributable to staying at Imouto.
- Five of the seventeen young women (29%) returned to live with their immediate or extended families.

“Three things that have changed for me since coming to Imouto: 1. Schooling 2. No drug use 3. Closer to family.”

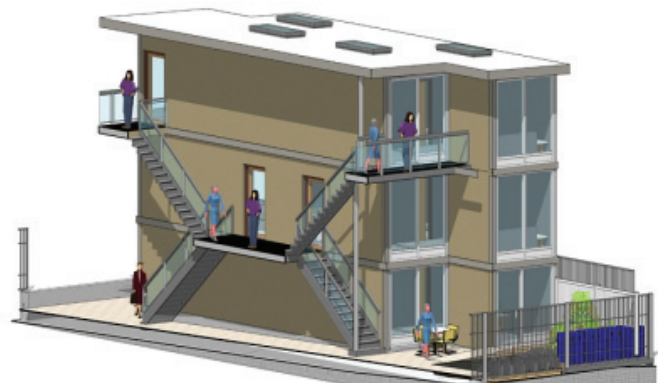
INNOVATIONS: SOCIAL HOUSING FROM RECYCLED SHIPPING CONTAINERS

Atira Women's Resource Society is currently constructing Canada's first social housing built from shipping containers in the lot next door to Imouto. This housing will include 12 self-contained 320 sq. ft living units, each with a private bathroom, kitchen, and in-suite laundry. Floor-to-ceiling windows are at each end and each floor is linked by an external staircase. The housing is scheduled to be completed at the end of July 2013.

CREATING AN INTERGENERATIONAL MENTORSHIP PROGRAM

Six of the units in the new container housing are intended for women who are over the age of 55 while the other six units are for younger women. In spring 2013, funding was received from the Community Action Initiative to develop an intergenerational mentorship program between the older women moving into the new housing units and the young women living at Imouto.

Over the past few months, a newly hired program coordinator has been consulting with young women at Imouto, community partners, and older women in the community to develop a program model. Program activities will include community-building activities like communal dinners, arts and crafts activities, workshops, and group outings. The program will begin in August 2013.



To learn more about the Imouto Recycled Shipping Container Project, visit <http://www.atira.bc.ca/imouto-container>