

IMOUTO HOUSING FOR YOUNG WOMEN

LOOKING BACK AT THE FIRST SIX MONTHS



Imouto Housing for Young Women is a housing resource for women ages 16 to 24 owned by Atira Women's Resource Society. Run in collaboration with a group of Program Partners, Imouto provides housing and in-reach services for young women who have been living in the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver and who are homeless.

Imouto opened in September 2011 and is continuing to adapt and revise its service delivery model to best serve the needs of young women. This information sheet describes some of the shifts in practice and policy over Imouto's first six months of operation.

COMMON NEEDS, DIFFERENT NEEDS

- When young women arrive at Imouto, sleep and food (and sometimes laundry) have been immediate priorities for all
- Shortly after their arrival, Imouto staff begin working with the women to identify their current support network and to connect them with other services for more intensive supports as they are ready
- Residents have requested support on a broad spectrum of issues ranging from addictions and mental health concerns, legal and financial issues, advocacy around child custody, and pregnancy and other health issues
- The development of a food program was identified as a priority in the first few weeks of operation. Many of the women struggle with limited finances and few life skills in the areas of cooking and grocery shopping. This program is continuing to evolve in response to donations and new funding sources.

24/7 STAFFING

- Imouto is transitioning from a "house mom" model towards 24/7 staffing by residential care workers
- As many women sleep throughout the day and require support in the evenings and at night, a night-time support worker has been hired
- Future in-reach programming and activities by volunteers/practicum students will be planned to coincide with the time of day that women are the most active and awake
- These staffing shifts have been supported by funding from the Homelessness Partnering Strategy through Human Resources and Skills Development Canada.

IMOUTO'S PROGRAM PRINCIPLES

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

BUILDING CONNECTIONS

- Imouto has been successful in supporting women in re-establishing relationships with their families. Several mothers have become regularly involved in supporting their daughters. Other women have made contact with their children who are in care or living with other family members.
- Watari's 'Hard Target' Initiative has provided case management support for all Imouto residents which has been important in ensuring broad-based community support for women
- The Imouto Advisory Committee, comprised of program partners, Imouto staff, and representatives from other community organizations, has met approximately every six weeks since the program began. The Advisory Committee has had an important role to play in identifying barriers to referral coordination, ensuring smooth communication between program partners, and informing program development.
- Imouto has been successful in recruiting volunteers and practicum students, but staff are still determining the best ways to take advantage of their skills and services (e.g., timing, frequency, and area of work)
- Imouto has previously had a 'no visitor' policy to help ensure safety. In order to support the healthy relationships that women are making, staff are now piloting 'visiting hours' on weekday afternoons.

IN-REACH AND OUTREACH

- Outreach workers through Imouto's program partners (e.g., Watari, Nexus - Boys and Girls Club Vancouver) connect with women at Imouto on a daily basis
- Outreach services have been the most successful in addressing women's immediate needs, including accessing counselling, detox, income assistance, advocacy, and transitioning to alternate housing programs
- Over the past 6 months, staff have experimented with the number and type of inreach services to provide on the Imouto premises
- In-reach services have included: a community kitchen, yoga, aikido, a movie night, cooking & crafts, and individual counselling by a Master's-level practicum student
- Participation in many of these programs has been low as most of Imouto's residents are not yet ready for physical activities or skill-building
- A nurse practitioner clinic has started in the past month and preliminary feedback suggests that this will be successful
- New inreach services to be trialed in the next few months include pow wow dancing, individual counselling through the Stopping the Violence program and a 16-Steps to Empowerment group

SUCCESSFUL OUTCOMES THROUGH RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

In early February, two young women at Imouto reported that they were pregnant. At the end of March, both young women had transitioned to alternate housing outside of the Downtown Eastside and made considerable shifts in other areas of their lives.

One young woman left an exploitive relationship, reduced her substance use, and is now working to re-connect with another child in care. The other woman chose to attend detox, made arrangements to move to a recovery house, and is being supported by her mother with whom she connected with while at Imouto.

These positive outcomes were supported by Imouto staff, outreach workers in partnering and other community organizations, and in-reach nurse practitioners.

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

