

IMOUTO HOUSING FOR YOUNG WOMEN

ADAPTING TO MEET WOMEN'S NEEDS - JUNE 2012



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. Run in collaboration with a group of Program Partners, Imouto provides housing and in-reach services for women who are homeless and have been living in the Downtown Eastside.

Imouto opened in September 2011. As of May 31, 2012, there were 14 women residing at Imouto (2 spaces remaining). This summary is from the ongoing evaluation component of the program. It provides an overview of program activities and describes some of the shifts in practice and policy over Imouto's first nine months of operation.

MOVING IN & MOVING OUT

Since September 2011, 21 women have moved into Imouto and seven have moved out.

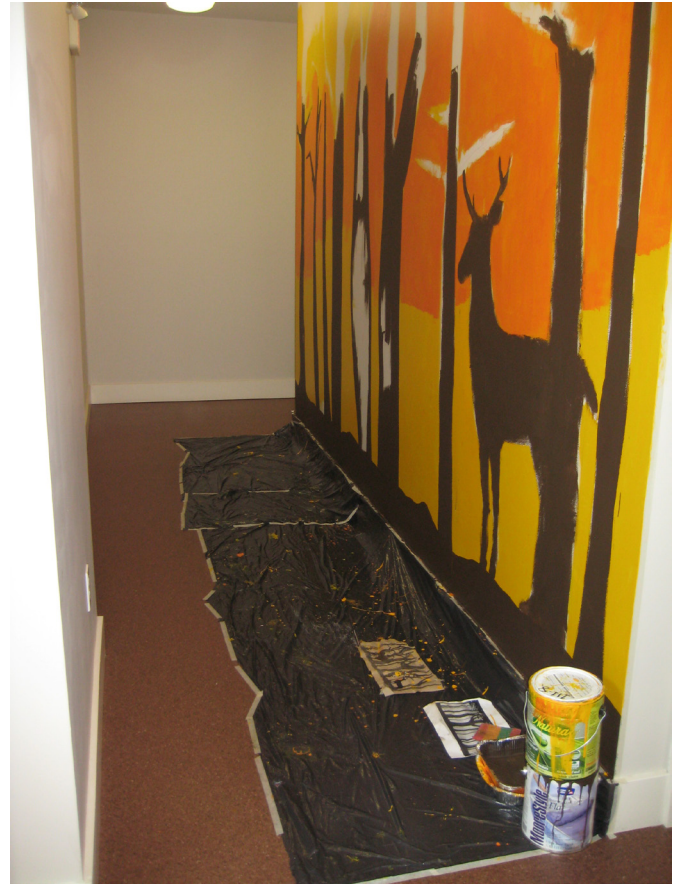
- Referrals have come from Program Partners and a wide range of community organizations, including: Insite, Raincity Housing, Watari, John Howard Society, Vancouver Coastal Health (Adolescent Mental Health Outreach), Urban Native Youth Association, Drug and Alcohol Meeting Support for Women (DAMS), Carnegie Outreach, Aboriginal Front Door, and other Atira programs
- Of the seven women who have moved out: two women left to live with family outside of Vancouver; one woman chose to attend detox and made arrangements to move into a recovery house outside of the Downtown Eastside; one (pregnant) woman transitioned to the Aboriginal Mother Centre (newly opened in December 2011); two moved into the Dominion Hotel (operated by Atira); one woman chose to move in with her boyfriend.
- The age range of past residents was 16-21 years old. Two of the residents were under the age of 19. Five out of the seven women identified as having First Nations, Métis and/or Inuit ancestry.
- Length of stay at Imouto for the seven women who have moved out ranged from 1 month to 4 months.
- The age range of current residents at Imouto is 18-22 years old. There are two residents under the age of 19. The median age is 21 years old.
- Length of stay for current residents at Imouto ranges from less than 1 month to 8 months (i.e., since Imouto's opening in September 2011). Eight of the residents have been at Imouto for less than 3 months while the other six residents have been at Imouto for more than 5 months (see table below).

Length of Stay	Current Residents (N=14)	Past Residents (N=7)
1 month or less	4	1
1-2 months	2	2
2-3 months	2	0
3-4 months	0	3
4-5 months	0	1
5-6 months	2	0
More than 6 months	4	0

A FULL HOUSE

Since April, there has been a lot more activity and energy at Imouto.

- In April 2012, Imouto shifted from a “house mom” program model to having 24/7 staffing by a program manager and team of support workers. As well, six new residents moved in during April and May.
- In April, Imouto revised its previous “no guests” policy to allowing guests in the common areas during the day. This shift in guest policy has been a huge success. Three of the residents who were frequently out of the house for long stretches of time have begun to spend more time at Imouto.
- Three of the residents have had visits from their mothers. (Mothers were previously allowed but on a case-by-case basis).
- Residents are having guests over for social activities (e.g., watching TV) as well as support like having a friend cut their hair.
- Staff are monitoring guests closely to ensure that male guests are age-appropriate and to ensure that everyone in the house feels comfortable with the visitors.
- The mother of one resident came to visit her daughter and spent several hours talking at the kitchen table. As she was leaving, she told staff that she likes that there are more staff at Imouto and that the place feels “homier.”
- Women who moved into Imouto in Fall 2011 also report liking the energy of more people in the house.



This mural on the second floor was designed and painted by two residents and a staff member. Residents have contributed suggestions for future murals.

WHAT YOUNG WOMEN SAY

In May 2012, as part of the program evaluation, residents were asked to share their experiences about what was going well for them at Imouto and suggestions for change. Six women participated in these “kitchen table check-ins.”

- Overall, women were overwhelmingly positive about their experiences at Imouto. They reported no difficulties with intake and moving in, they liked their rooms, and found that living at Imouto was helping them to make changes or think about the future.
- Women said they liked having more staff around.
- Suggested changes included a computer with Internet access (coming soon) and more variety in lunches (currently provided by Save-on-Meat).
- Women reported minor complaints, mostly related to aspects of communal living (e.g., activities of other residents, laundry).
- None of the women made specific requests for new programming but seemed happy with what was available.
- At the end of May, regular house meetings were started. While initial turnout has been low, staff are exploring strategies for more engagement.

“I’M NOT ON THE STREETS ANYMORE AND I’M NOT WORKING AS MUCH.”

– Imouto resident, May 2012

SUPPORTS....

- A support worker is on-site 24/7. Shifts are 8am-4pm; 4pm-12am; 12am-8am.
- Workers provide a breadth of supports, including: weekly check-ins, helping women find information (e.g., a phone number for Daytox), helping women to access community voicemail or to get ID, cooking and cleaning, conflict resolution, managing health issues (e.g., reminding women to take their meds, checking on women who have been using substances & managing emergencies), coordinating appointments, providing emotional support, helping women fill out applications, printing a safety plan requested by women, waking women up for appointments, monitoring guests and household activities
- Imouto staff have initiated a number of House activities, including a yoga class on the weekends, mural painting, a newsletter, and gardening (kale, radishes, basil, and sunflowers so far).
- Staff are supporting women around their safety in different ways. Many of the women are struggling with difficult relationships and are asking staff for support and information about how to handle conflicts. Some women have asked to staff to not allow certain men to follow them into the house and are becoming more assertive about their safety.

....AND SERVICES

- All 14 women are connected with community services.
- 6 of the 14 women are using inreach services at Imouto. These include Movie Night (hosted by Watari every second Tuesday), Nurse Practitioners' Clinic (Friday afternoons), UNYA healing circle (Thursday evenings), and Beauty Night.
- Beginning in June, Nexus outreach workers will be taking interested women to Britannia Community Centre for fitness/swim/skate drop-in on Friday mornings.
- Five women are interested in alternate housing options. Three women are on the waitlist for Watari's Transitioning to Independence Program (TIP) while two women are exploring returning to the communities they grew up in.
- A practicum student (Child and Youth program, UCFV) started at Imouto in May 2012. She will be at Imouto on weekends and every other Friday until the fall.

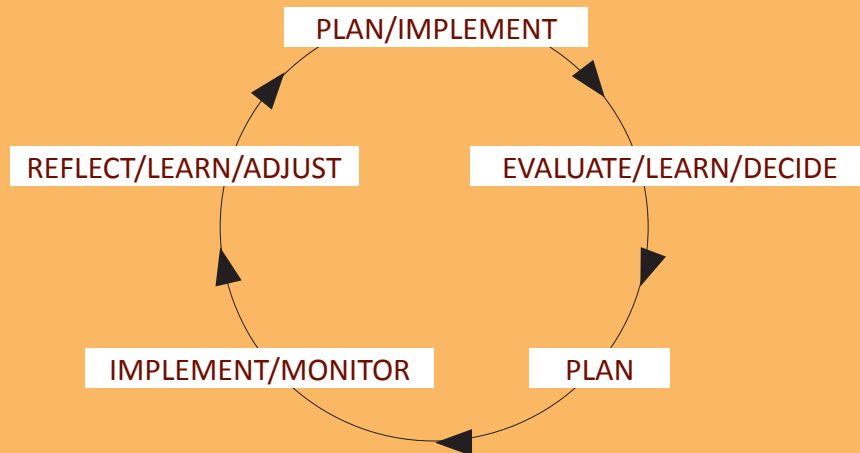
To learn more about Imouto's service delivery model, visit <http://atira.bc.ca/Imouto/>

IN THE KITCHEN

The kitchen has become a hub of activity at Imouto. Many women are cooking regularly. Imouto staff are supporting women in accessing food bags through Watari and have organized shopping trips to Quest on Cheque Day. One resident taught a staff member how to make bannock and this has evolved into the organization of a recipe collection. Staff would like to start a regular communal meal if there is sufficient interest. Lunches are delivered daily from Save-on-Meats and staff are able to support women around preparing other meals. A practicum student is starting a pancake brunch on Saturdays. Several women are quite skilled in the kitchen and are supporting other residents by cooking for them or showing them how to prepare food. One woman prepared a roast with mashed potatoes for the whole house from food donations.



IMOUTO'S PROGRAM EVALUATION



Ideally, program evaluation is ongoing and contributes to a program's cycle of planning, implementing, learning and adjusting. In this model, evaluation is not an 'addendum' to a program, but is a key part of programming that allows organizations to continually develop and respond to the changing needs of program participants.

With funds from the Vancouver Foundation and the Homelessness Partnering Strategy (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada), an evaluation plan was developed prior to program opening and has been ongoing since September 2011. The evaluation is focused on monitoring program activities and changes in service delivery as well as outcomes for program participants.



On the kitchen window sill. All sorts of things are growing at Imouto. If you visit the garden, you'll find kale, radishes, basil, and sunflowers.

