

IMOUTO HOUSING FOR YOUNG WOMEN

LOOKING BACK AT THE FIRST YEAR



Imouto Housing for Young Women is a supportive transitional housing program for women ages 16 to 24 owned by Aтира 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 on September 9, 2011. **As of October 1, 2012, there were 13 women residing at Imouto.** 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 year of operation.

MOVING IN & MOVING OUT

Since September 2011, 26 women have moved into Imouto and 13 have moved out.

“I LIKE HAVING MY OWN PLACE TO COME HOME TO.”

– Imouto resident, October 2012

- 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, Youth Detox (Family Services of Greater Vancouver) and other Aтира programs.
- Over the past year, the maximum number of residents reached was 15 women (Imouto has capacity for 16).
- The age range of past residents was 16-21 years old. Nine out of the 13 women identified as having First Nations, Métis and/or Inuit ancestry.
- The age range of current residents at Imouto is 19-23 years old.

Length of Stay	Current Residents (N=13)	Past Residents (N=13)
1 month or less	2	3
1-3 months	1	4
3-6 months	4	5
6-9 months	2	1
More than 9 months	4	0

“I THINK I’VE GOT MORE CONTROL OF MY ADDICTIONS STAYING AT IMOUTO. I’M DEFINITELY SLEEPING MORE AND SHOWERING MORE. AND DOING MY LAUNDRY MORE.”

– Imouto resident, September 2012

TRANSITIONS

- Of the 13 women who have moved out of Imouto, 3 women moved in with family; 1 moved overseas to go to school; 2 moved into other Atira housing programs; 1 found shared accommodation outside the Downtown Eastside with the financial support of the Watari Transitioning to Independence Program (TIP); 2 attended a residential addiction program; 1 attended a residential program for pregnant women; 3 women chose to leave Imouto either to move in with their boyfriends or without a clear housing transition plan.
- Living at Imouto has provided many women with the stability they need to explore options such as attending a pre-employment training program, attending detox and a recovery house, or re-establishing relationships with family members and considering living with family or in the communities they grew up in. While not all of these ventures have been successful, women report that they learned more about what they need and are ready for.



Since June 2012, there have been two computers with Internet access available for women to use. Residents have been using these computers frequently to connect with friends and family, learn about available resources, find recipes, and to take a break with a fun activity.

LIFE AT IMOUTO

- All residents at Imouto were either previously connected or have become connected to services and support in the community.
- Although the type and frequency of in-reach services has varied over the past year, approximately 1/3 to 1/2 of residents tend to participate in activities at Imouto.
- “Movie Night,” facilitated by Watari/VCH outreach workers, has run on alternate Tuesday nights since the fall of 2011. Attendance ranges from 3-10 women each night and women have requested that movie night be held every Tuesday night.
- Since April 2012, lunches have been delivered daily by Save-on-Meats. Imouto continues to receive food donations. Staff support women in grocery shopping, accessing services such as the Quest Food Exchange, making use of donated food items and developing their cooking skills.
- Since June 2012, house meetings have been held weekly. While attendance has been low, it has provided staff and residents with opportunities to discuss conflicts and ways of improving Imouto.
- Nexus outreach works have been offering trips to Britannia Community Centre on Friday mornings since June 2012.
- Over time, Imouto staff have developed a system in which they check-in weekly with residents. This has been part of finding a balance between staying informed on how they are doing and allowing women to indicate when they are ready for various supports and services.

“I’VE BEEN CONNECTED WITH A D&A COUNSELLOR SINCE I’VE BEEN STAYING AT IMOUTO WHICH I DIDN’T HAVE BEFORE. AND I MET HER CAUSE OF THE MOVIE NIGHTS THEY HAVE.”

– Imouto resident, September 2012

CONNECTIONS

- Imouto's visitor policy has evolved over the past year. Initially, guests were not allowed at Imouto. However, this meant that many women were isolated or were not spending as much time in the house as they would otherwise like. Days for visitors were initially trialed and then expanded to all days. In October 2012, staff are asking visitors to leave at 9pm. Visitors are screened by staff and must remain in common areas (i.e., kitchen and TV room). The visitor policy has evolved in response to considerations such as: safety, providing opportunities for women to develop relationships, supporting women to connect with their families, and making Imouto feel like 'home.'
- Imouto has made connections with other Atira programs, including the Stopping the Violence program, Enterprising Women Making Art (EWMA), and Yayem Digital Storytelling.
- Imouto has made connections with outreach workers at several organizations as well housing workers at Atira and other program partners.

“ [I LIKED] HAVING STAFF THERE TO LISTEN AND ALSO HELP MAKE POSITIVE DECISIONS/CHANGES.”

– Past Imouto resident, August 2012

“HAVING GROCERIES THERE [AT IMOUTO] WOULD BE MOTIVATION - INSTEAD OF GIRLS HAVING TO GET FOOD FROM OUTSIDE ALL THE TIME, IT WOULD SHOW THAT IT'S KIND OF NICE TO STAY HOME AND EAT.”

– Imouto resident, October 2012

OPTIONS FOR HEALTH

- Almost all residents, current and past, report substance use. Approximately 1/2 to 1/3 access addiction-specific services while at Imouto. (Almost all residents are connected with other community services and these often provide support around addiction issues).
- Staff have observed that many women reduce their substance use while living at Imouto; several residents have commented that they feel more in control of their substance use since coming to Imouto or have made steps towards addressing their substance use (e.g., changing who they spend time with, connecting with an addictions counsellor).
- Harm reduction remains a key part of the program philosophy. Condoms and needles are readily available and stock is regularly replenished.
- Three women have become pregnant over the past year. All three women report feeling supported in making the choices that were right for them.
- At the weekly house meetings and in individual interviews, all women have emphasized that healthy food is a priority for them. Recommendations for improving the food program at Imouto include: greater variety in lunches, more fruits and vegetables, ongoing availability of milk and other dairy products, and having the kitchen stocked with “basics” like salt and spices, pasta, soups, and cooking oil. While many women report feeling supported in developing their cooking skills and grocery shopping, other women report difficulties with budgeting for food over the course of the month and/or do not feel ready to address this particular life skill area. Women indicate that they appreciate the donations available, but that this means that many ‘basics’ are unavailable consistently and these tend to be non-perishable rather than fresh items.

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

