

Housing First, Not Housing Only: The Life Skills Project

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Abstract : Homelessness in Canada is a persistent problem. It has been widely argued that the best tactic for eradicating homelessness is to approach social issues from a Housing First perspective—an approach that centers on quickly moving people into permanent and independent housing and then providing them additional support and services as needed. It is recognized that life skills training is both necessary and an effective way to reduce cyclical homelessness; however, there is a scarcity of research on effective ways to teach life skills; this problem was exacerbated in a pandemic context, where in-person delivery was severely restricted or no longer possible. Very little attention has been paid to the diverse cultural needs of clients in a multicultural context and the need to foster cultural knowledge/awareness in individuals to successfully contribute to the cultural safety of communities. This research attempts to fill these gaps in the literature and in practice by employing a community-engaged research (CER) approach. Academic, government, funders, front-line staff, and clients at 15 not-for-profits from across the Greater Toronto Area in Ontario, Canada, collaborated to co-create a virtual, client-centric, equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) informed life skill learning management system. We employed a triangulation methodology for this research. An environmental scan was conducted for best practices. Two separate Creative Problem Solving Sessions were held with over 100 front-line workers, managers, and executive directors who work with homeless populations. Quantitative and open-ended surveys were completed by over 200 individuals with experience with homelessness. All sections of this research aimed to discover the areas of skills that individuals need to maintain housing and to ascertain what a more client-driven EDI approach to life skills training should include. This research will showcase which life skills are deemed essential for homeless and precariously housed individuals.

Keywords : homelessness, Housing First, life skills, community engaged research

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