



An Analysis of CHOM's Supportive Housing

Andrew Totman

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Dear Reader,

Attached is a study on the effectiveness of supportive housing conducted by Andrew Totman, a student at the University of Pennsylvania, who was a summer intern at Community Housing of Maine.

Andrew conducted carefully constructed research on the effectiveness of supportive housing, quantifying the effect of CHOM's supportive housing on individuals' lives. He did this through analysis of responses to a series of research questions inquiring as to whether people had more connection to the community, whether they felt proud of their homes, whether there was any change in their ability to pursue goals, and how supportive housing affected plans for their future, personal stability, and access to new opportunities. Thirty-three residents were interviewed including homeless refugees, homeless adults with mental illness, homeless Veterans, and homeless victims of domestic violence.

Overall, the study found that 97% of respondents experienced an increase in stability, 91% were proud of their housing, 85% felt they had access to new opportunities, and 73% felt connected with the community as a result of being in their housing (note that this last percentage was significantly skewed downward by the population of victims of domestic violence whose housing locations are by design secret, confidential, and commonly in brand new areas of the state; other populations felt significantly more connected with their communities). This is the first quantitative study of CHOM's housing and the results are being shared widely to educate about the importance on a human/societal level of supportive housing. In the attached study, results were broken down by population. In addition to quantifying the results, very revealing quotes were noted throughout the report, which paints a picture of the true effect of supportive housing on people.

Community Housing of Maine is proud to work closely with nearly 30 different collaborative service provider partners across the state; in each case we provide and maintain the housing, but we strongly believe that it is the services that allow people to achieve success in that housing. This study reflects the combined effect, and results can likely be extrapolated to supportive housing for special needs populations in general. I hope you find this of value and that you will work with us to end homelessness, and to support vulnerable special needs populations in living successfully in the community.

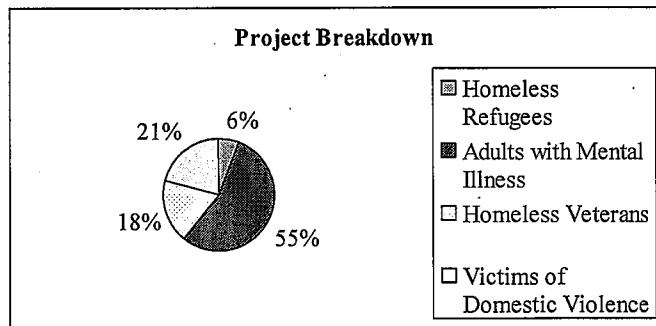
Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Cullen Ryan", is written over a horizontal line.

Cullen Ryan, Executive Director

Project Overview

Thirty three interviews were conducted with residents at Community Housing of Maine (CHOM) properties across the state. Twenty two of these interviews were conducted face-to-face while eleven were done over the phone. The interviewer asked a series of six questions probing the residents' feelings about the quality of their housing, personal stability, access to new opportunities, and goals and plans for the future. The interviewer intentionally targeted a wide range of CHOM's supportive housing projects in an attempt to gather information from as many different vulnerable populations as possible. Populations included in the study are homeless refugees, adults with mental illness and substance abuse treatment needs, homeless veterans, and victims of domestic violence.



Summary of Results

Data and stories gathered from the project indicate that supportive housing has had a transformative effect on the lives of an overwhelming majority of CHOM's residents. The quality of CHOM's supportive housing is reflected in the fact that thirty out of the thirty three residents indicated that they were proud of their housing. In addition, thirty two out of the thirty three residents interviewed stated that their housing had added stability to their lives. Twenty four of the thirty three residents reported that they felt like they were part of a community at their

Proud of housing	91%
Feel part of community	73%
Increase in stability	97%
Access to new opportunities	85%



supportive housing property. Finally, twenty eight of the thirty three residents noted that they had gained access to new opportunities as a result of having supportive housing.

Homeless Refugees

In coordination with the City of Portland Social Services, CHOM has developed two properties for homeless refugee

Proud of housing	100%
Feel part of community	100%
Increase in stability	100%
Access to new opportunities	100%

families. Two interviews with residents of CHOM’s Holly Street project in Portland provide insight on the effect this permanent housing has had on the previously-homeless refugee families who live there.

Both residents indicated that they were proud to call Holly Street home. One resident offered, “I love the place” and described the neighborhood as particularly suitable for raising a family.

Both residents stated that they felt like they were part of a community while living at Holly Street, and both added that their housing had improved the stability in their lives.

Both residents at Holly Street described how their housing had helped open up new opportunities—one resident secured employment at Maine Medical Center, easily accessible by bus from her apartment on Holly Street. The other resident explained how she had been unable to obtain any form of identification while she was living in a homeless shelter. Upon moving into Holly Street she was able to provide a street address, and, consequently, secure a valid ID and gain access to many opportunities requiring her to present identification that had not been previously available.



Adults with Mental Illness

Proud of housing	89%
Feel part of community	100%
Increase in stability	97%
Access to new opportunities	83%

CHOM has partnered with a host of social service agencies including Wabanaki Mental Health, the

Bangor Area Homeless Shelter, Acadia Hospital, Community Health and Counseling Services (CHCS), Common Ties, Kennebec Behavioral Health, and Counseling Services Inc. (CSI) to provide supportive housing to adults with mental illness (and in some cases their families). The majority of the interviews conducted for this study were with CHOM residents diagnosed with mental illness. Eighteen out of the thirty three total interviews conducted were with residents diagnosed with mental illness, and fourteen out of these eighteen residents had been dually diagnosed with mental illness and substance abuse treatment needs. The CHOM properties covered in this segment of the project included a mix of transitional and permanent supportive housing and a combination of apartments and single-room occupancies. Results from the interviews conducted with CHOM residents diagnosed with mental illness indicate that the housing they have received has made a measurable impact on the quality of their lives.

Sixteen of the eighteen residents interviewed for this portion of the project affirmed that they were proud of their housing. Specifically, two residents stated that their housing “felt like home” while another resident said that she was “honored” to call home her new apartment on Charles Street in Bangor.

Thirteen out of the eighteen residents indicated that they felt like they were part of a community while living at their CHOM property. One resident mentioned that he finally felt like he was “contributing to society” while living at CHOM’s Nye Street property in Saco. Two other

residents added that they felt like they were “part of a family” at Nye Street. One resident at Pleasant Avenue in Portland cited her “great neighbors” as a reason for feeling like part of a community and added that she “couldn’t have asked for a better neighborhood.”

All eighteen residents stated that their supportive housing had added stability to their lives. One resident of Nye Street asserted that her housing had provided security by giving her a “safe place to come” while another Nye Street resident reported much lower levels of anxiety since moving into the property. A Charles Street resident also cited the secure environment of his apartment, stating that his housing represented “a safe haven.” A resident at CHOM’s Flagg Street property in Augusta indicated that she had experienced much fewer health crises as a result of her supportive housing and had not been to the hospital in over a year—“I have come leaps and bounds since I moved in,” she affirmed. A Nye Street resident cited his supportive housing as critical in helping him live with depression and bipolar disorder, claiming that “otherwise (without the housing), I would be in a room hiding by myself all day.”

Fifteen of the eighteen residents interviewed mentioned that having their supportive housing had opened up additional opportunities to them that had not been available or accessible previously. Two Nye Street residents indicated that they had access to more Alcoholics Anonymous meetings in the Saco area as a result of living at the property, and one of these residents had found work as a part-time construction helper. A resident at CHOM’s Ohio Street property in Bangor cited the easier access to local festivals, restaurants, and the library as one of the primary benefits of his supportive housing. A resident at CHOM’s Main Street property in Fairfield

indicated that the stability and affordability of her housing had enabled her to enroll at Helping Hands Trade School.

Eleven of the eighteen residents reported having different goals and plans for the future as a result of living in one of CHOM’s supportive housing properties. One Nye Street resident acknowledged that maintaining sobriety had become a top priority while another resident declared, “I feel like I can achieve more.” Similarly, a resident at Main Street-Fairfield mentioned that she had higher expectations for herself, noting “I figure an opportunity like this doesn’t come often.” Additionally, a Flagg Street resident highlighted plans to start her own business as an animal photographer.

Homeless Veterans

In partnership with the Veterans Administration (VA), CHOM has developed three properties which house

Proud of housing	100%
Feel part of community	83%
Increase in stability	100%
Access to new opportunities	83%

homeless veterans: West Street in Biddeford (transitional housing), Pleasant Street in Waterville (permanent), and Flagg Street in Augusta (permanent). Six of the thirty three interviews conducted for this study were done with previously homeless veterans living at these three properties. The data and personal stories gathered from these interviews underscore the effectiveness of CHOM’s supportive housing programs for homeless veterans.

All six residents interviewed for this section of the project indicated that they were proud of their housing. Specifically, a Pleasant Street resident praised the “good setting and great

neighborhood” of the Waterville property. The other resident at Pleasant Street claimed, “I don’t think anyone could ask for anything more.”

Five of the six residents interviewed stated that they felt like part of a community while living at one of CHOM’s supportive housing properties for homeless veterans. One resident at Pleasant Street asserted that he felt like part of a community within the housing complex as well as part of the Waterville community. A West Street resident noted a sense of collective responsibility and ownership that he believed characterized the project, noting that “the guys all pitch in and help” as part of a joint effort. He added, “It takes a bunch (of people) to make things work.” Another West Street resident described the property as a “good, positive environment,” adding, “it feels secure (and) feels like home.”

All six of the residents affirmed that their supportive housing had added stability to their lives. Specifically, one resident at Pleasant Street stated that having this housing had allowed him to get back on his feet financially. In addition, a West Street resident mentioned that having one central location from which he could prepare meals, do laundry, search for jobs, and sleep had made his life much more stable than when he had lived in a homeless shelter in Portland and had to travel to multiple locations to accomplish even the most basic of tasks.

Five of the six residents interviewed indicated that their housing had opened up new opportunities to them. West Street residents were able to use a computer at the property to conduct job searches. One resident at West Street secured employment at Sure Winner Foods and described the pride he now takes in being able to provide for his daughter. Both Pleasant



Street residents stated that they were now able to maintain regular contact with their respective families as a result of having supportive housing, and one had obtained a vehicle since moving into the property.

Four of the six residents indicated that their goals and plans for the future had changed after living in one of CHOM’s supportive housing properties. One resident at West Street declared that he had become much more optimistic as a result of having this housing and added that while he did not have many goals before he moved in, he now is focused on buying a car and finding a new apartment or home after he leaves the transitional housing at West Street. A Pleasant Street resident asserted that maintaining sobriety became and continues to be his top priority after moving into the property. Furthermore, the two residents who indicated that their goals had not changed as a result of having supportive housing both stated that they felt they could more easily pursue their goals as a result of the housing. One West Street resident declared, “I have the same goals, but I see them as reachable now.” He continued, “If someone wants to help (himself), this is the right place to be.” Another resident of West Street mentioned that his job search seemed much less daunting after moving into the property than when he was living in a homeless shelter. He related a story of contracting a sinus infection as a result of living in such cramped quarters in the shelter and explained how he had to halt his job search while recovering from the illness. He asserted, “It is much easier to stay well (at West Street).”

Victims of Domestic Violence

Seven of the thirty three interviews conducted for this project were done with residents at CHOM properties (both

Proud of housing	86%
Feel part of community	57%
Increase in stability	86%
Access to new opportunities	86%

transitional and permanent) that house victims of domestic violence. The information gathered from these interviews highlights CHOM's effectiveness at providing high-quality, secure supportive housing for individuals and families fleeing from domestic violence.

Six of the seven residents interviewed for this part of the study indicated that they were proud of their housing. One resident declared, "I love my apartment...I don't have two complaints." Another resident stated, "I feel safe and have a good support system around me." One of the residents praised the "nice, beautiful neighborhood" where she lived while another resident at the same property described the neighborhood as "a beautiful place to raise children in a safe, healthy environment." The same resident added, "I would recommend (this housing) to anyone looking for change."

Four of the seven residents indicated that they felt like part of a community at their supportive housing property. One resident noted that in addition to sharing a close bond with each other, all of the residents at her complex enjoyed a strong relationship with one of the neighbors who added to the security of the housing by keeping a watchful eye over the property.

Six of the seven residents noted that their supportive housing had added stability to their lives. Two residents mentioned that their housing had proven particularly helpful for their children. One commented, "My daughter is thriving," while the other resident stated that for the first time her children could wake up in the morning without worrying about moving (the family had lived in eleven different states). One resident asserted, "Now I feel good enough about myself that I have gone back to school," while another acknowledged, "I am a better person and make better

decisions” after moving into her supportive housing. Additionally, one resident commented that her housing had “motivated her to do good without a feeling of fear” and cited the peace and serenity of her new environment as critical in providing this motivation.

Six of the seven residents interviewed also stated that their housing had opened up new opportunities to them that had not been available in their previous living situation. One resident commended the moral support services offered as part of her supportive housing program. Another resident reported that she could walk to the local library and easily access public transportation from her apartment. In addition, one resident noted, “I can now move forward now that I have my living status in order.”

Two of the residents revealed that their goals and future plans had changed as a result of having their supportive housing. Both of these residents had decided to enroll in post-secondary education programs after moving into one of CHOM’s properties. One will be attending a program at the University of Maine in Augusta and University College of Bangor through the Women’s Independence Scholarship. The other resident attended a college transition school and will begin training to become a substance abuse counselor. She summarized the personal transformation made possible by her supportive housing: “I have started taking care of myself instead of having someone take care of me.” Furthermore, two residents noted that while their goals had not changed, they now felt they could more freely pursue their goals as a result of having supportive housing. One of these residents proudly declared, “I have accomplished so much in so little time.”