

# The Right Fit Pilot Project

## *Lessons from our second year*



### YEAR TWO KEY ACTIVITIES

- Hosting the Affordable Accessible Housing Roundtable. Brought together key local, provincial, and federal stakeholders around the table, including representatives from the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction (MSDPR), City of Vancouver, City of Surrey, Vancouver Coastal Health, several key housing organizations, and Shayne Ramsay, CEO of BC Housing. *(June 2018)*
- Applying our 2018 summer intern project, funded by a federal grant, to use our Accessibility Checklist to help non-profit housing providers more accurately document accessible units in their housing portfolio. *(Summer 2018)*
- Invited to second round of application process for CMHC Solutions Lab funding to advance proposed solutions to supply issues identified in the Housing Roundtable. We were not approved for the funding, but CMHC urged us to apply again in 2019. *(Fall 2018)*
- Presenting key lessons and potential solutions learned through the Right Fit Pilot Project (RFPP) to Minister of Housing, Hon. Selina Robinson and Minister of Social Development & Poverty Reduction, Hon. Shane Simpson. *(November 2018)*
- Eliciting support for RFPP succession program from Hon. Shane Simpson. *(November 2018)*
- Securing BC Housing rental supplements for 10 carefully selected RFPP candidates. Developed an appropriate framework for eligibility, administration, and evaluation to build the strongest case for continuing and/or expanding such a program. *(Fall 2018 – Winter 2019)*
- As of March 31, 2019, RFPP navigators have 87 active clients, 26 clients on waitlist for accessible housing, 9 successful matches (3 in progress), and 16 clients have left the project for various reasons. *(March 2019)*
- Documenting supply from the City of Vancouver Open Data project gave us a wealth of detailed information on the supply and low proportion of accessible units apart from seniors housing in existing and planned subsidized housing projects within the City of Vancouver.
- Building a robust case management system and review: organizing what we learned in Year 1 of program in one place, and analysis and documentation of case management process, protocols, activities, and requirements.



*Paul Gauthier (left), Executive Director of IFRC and RFPP Navigator, at Pos-Abilities event in Langley, BC on August 11, 2018*

- Launching quarterly project newsletter while continuing to build upon project’s website, social media presence, print materials, and branding. *(ongoing)*
- Navigators have made several key presentations, including at the CHF-BC Spring 2019 and Fall 2018 Education conferences, to front-line staff with Spinal Cord Injury BC, and to the Voice of Cerebral Palsy mentorship group. *(ongoing)*

### YEAR THREE KEY ACTIVITIES

- Planning and establishing RFPP succession program for April 2020.
- Implementing portable rental supplements from BC Housing for 10 predetermined clients of the project.
- Reapply for CMHC Solutions Lab funding to advance proposed solutions to supply gap issues identified in the Housing Roundtable.
- Further work on documenting and sharing information on accessible housing inventory, and supply and demand gaps.
- Implementing changes to RFPP eligibility criteria and updating all communications materials and intake forms accordingly.
- Ongoing outreach at events, with potential and current partners, with media, and online on website and social media.



*Navigators Dalton Finlay and Chris Hofley of IFRC doing RFPP project outreach at Rehab Equipment Expo – Assistive Technology Showcase on September 11, 2018*

## SUCSESSES

**Successful navigation and peer support:** Despite the extremely low supply and availability of accessible affordable units for indoor wheelchair users in Metro Vancouver, our navigators have continued to successfully match RFPP clients with homes. Here are two stories of clients who found a home through the project:

Sean Haffey, a stroke survivor and paralyzed on the left side of his body, had been searching for an affordable accessible unit for over two years. Navigators first connected Sean with a unit that was perfect for him, except it did not have a roll in shower. The housing provider felt a connection with Sean,



*Sean Haffey, an RFPP client, in his new accessible home in Metro Vancouver*

so we started the process of obtaining funding for a roll in shower renovation. The unit was properly renovated to accommodate Sean's needs and he moved in November 26, 2018.

Natasha, who suffered a spinal cord injury when she was younger, had also been looking for over two years for an accessible unit, struggling to find one with a roll in shower and lowered countertops. Natasha's efforts were fruitless until she connected with the Right Fit Pilot Project. A provider approached us with a vacancy in a brand-new building that was a perfect fit for her. Working with the provider and Natasha, we successfully connected her with the unit that is now her new home.

**Collaboration and opportunity with diverse stakeholders:** The Affordable Accessible Housing Roundtable in June 2018 was a pivotal achievement for the project. We brought together an exceptional



*Roundtable participants discussing how to move forward with the Right Fit Pilot Project*

group of key stakeholders around the table, including representatives from the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction, City of Vancouver, City of Surrey, Vancouver Coastal Health, several key housing organizations, and Shayne Ramsay, CEO of BC Housing. This group brought a high level of authority and expertise to the table, including federal and provincial government representatives, sharing their knowledge for the benefit of the Right Fit Pilot Project and affordable accessible housing in Metro Vancouver.

This discussion enabled us to set a course for the future of the project and beyond. A direct result of the roundtable was our meeting on these issues with the Minister of Housing, Hon. Selina Robinson and the Minister of Social Development and Poverty Reduction, Hon. Shane Simpson. Additionally, the opportunity to use invaluable BC Housing rental supplements for select RFPP clients and an application for the CMHC's Solutions Lab came out of the roundtable.

**Commitment from BC Housing:** A direct result of the roundtable was securing rare BC Housing rental supplements for 10 RFPP candidates to measure the effectiveness of the matching process and reducing

wait times due to the lack of supply and turnover in the existing subsidized housing inventory. BC Housing also gave RFPP an exclusive opportunity to find tenants for the new accessible units in the Cedar Place housing project in Burnaby, an innovative partnership between the province and private sector replacing an aging social housing development with new affordable housing. BC Housing, a key RFPP partner, demonstrated vital commitment to the project and their confidence in the navigation team.

## CHALLENGES

**Low supply, vacancies, and turnover of accessible, affordable subsidized units:** As an example, Affordable Housing Societies manages approximately 3,700 social housing units in Metro Vancouver, but



*Navigator Dalton Finlay (centre) with RFPP client (left) successfully matched with a new accessible home*

only had 2 accessible vacancies in 2017-2018. We are documenting the supply gap and building a deeper understanding of key factors, which we will use to inform advocacy and outreach in Year 3.

**Complexity of the navigation process:** In the beginning of the project, we had assumed that navigation would be a straightforward matching of people to housing opportunities, but the navigating team have found that people need more practical and emotional support than anticipated. This has made the navigation process a lengthier, more labour-intensive process, in which more encouragement has

been needed to teach clients the necessity of acting quickly in an extremely tight, competitive market. We have developed a robust case management system to better facilitate this support and reduce wait times throughout the process. However, we now know how much peer support is required for a successful navigation process. This learning will be a key factor in our plans for succession of the project - navigation is crucial and more resources are needed.

**Building relationships with housing providers:** We have put great effort into becoming the go-to resource for housing providers in Metro Vancouver. While the project has made significant inroads with co-ops due to the support of the Co-op Federation, we have yet to elicit similar enthusiastic support from the BC Non-Profit Housing Association. A goal of the last year of the project is to pave more meaningful inroads into the complex web of non-profit housing providers.



*(from left) Rick Campbell, the first wheelchair user who found a home through the RFPP, Paul Gauthier, and Christine Gordon of DABC at the Roundtable*

## KEY LEARNINGS

At the Roundtable, the facilitated dialogue explored why housing providers and wheelchair users still struggle to match supply and demand for affordable accessible housing in Metro Vancouver, and we were offered clear advice on how the RFPP partnership could advance solutions. We heard a clear consensus that priority issues were affordability and the very limited supply and turnover of accessible housing, particularly for wheelchair users in urban areas near transit who earn less than \$20,000 per year. We reached consensus on the three major streams for action: focus on affordability as a key barrier, better utilization of existing supply, and addressing the supply gap. This discussion and agreement enabled us to set a course for the future of the project and beyond.

We also heard a clear message that RFPP could play a valuable role in helping to advance a mix of short, medium, and long-term solutions. Current federal and provincial commitments promise longer-term investments in new supply, but we can play a role in advancing short- and mid-term measures. Other clear messages included the value of partnerships and the need for stronger data collection to quantify gaps and shape more effective, targeted solutions.

## LOOKING AHEAD

We are excited that our experiences in Year Two continue to affirm the importance of the key challenges that this project was designed to address. We are thrilled with the support from BC Housing and the Ministers of Housing, and Social Development and Poverty Reduction, respectively, because their buy-in and support will be essential for building upon our success through the final year of the Right Fit Pilot Project and building a succession program.

The project continues to unfold within an extreme housing and affordability crisis, which will continue to affect the pace at which we can find affordable accessible homes for indoor wheelchair users. However, by continuing to focus on learning and documenting these challenges, we are in a unique position to influence government decisions on the local, provincial, and federal level to address the crisis.