

Housing Supports Initiative Profile

The Housing Supports Initiative, a \$2.56m program funded by the Government of Manitoba and administered by the Manitoba Non-Profit Housing Association, is currently funding 19 unique projects that expand the capacity of organizations supporting people who are exiting or at risk of homelessness. The Initiative will run for two years, and is projected to improve the housing circumstances of around 450 individuals, and provide eviction prevention support to around 900 individuals.



The RentSmart program helps with eviction prevention and conflict resolution, and facilitates knowledge sharing within the non-profit housing sector

North End Community Renewal Corporation (NECRC) is using the Housing Supports Initiative (HSI) funding to increase the capacity of the RentSmart program within Manitoba. The RentSmart program, which enhances the ability of the non-profit sector to support vulnerable tenants through eviction prevention strategies and mentorship, is in high demand across the province. The HSI funding will be used to increase the program's capacity by training more certified educators, developing new learning opportunities for both tenants and landlords, and creating an MOU that would allow RentSmart certification to be recognized as a reference on housing applications.

The RentSmart program teaches prospective tenants a range of life skills, including the importance of a home and how to take care of it, how to apply for housing, tenant rights and responsibilities, communication and conflict resolution, and budgeting. Alana Ring-Woodard has been facilitating RentSmart across Manitoba for 5 years and has seen the positive impact the program has on both tenants and landlords. She says "these key life skills [taught through RentSmart] create successful tenancies and foster connection, a lot of people will panic when facing challenges in a tenancy, but the program encourages them to reach out to resolve conflict". The program also educates landlords on a range of topics, creating awareness of the different barriers tenants face.

Ring-Woodard says RentSmart certification is recognized within the sector and proves that an individual has gained a set of knowledge and life skills. Including RentSmart on a tenant's housing application increases the likelihood of acceptance, "and is especially valuable because it's a voluntary initiative". She uses the example of Kinew Housing, explaining that the program has improved their rate of acceptance of tenant applications that lack references or rental history. NECRC is working with Marcella Poirier, a Senior Development Consultant, to help develop an MOU that would allow RentSmart certification to be recognized as a reference on tenancy applications. Poirier is gathering research and will conduct a community consultation this spring to identify key priorities and needs.

In addition to empowering tenants and helping them foster healthy relationships with landlords, thereby lowering eviction rates and improving the likelihood of successful tenancies, Ring-Woodard says the program facilitates knowledge sharing and can help standardize education and orientation practices within the non-profit housing sector.