

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.

Brandon Neighbourhood Renewal Corporation: Ask Auntie Project

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The Ask Auntie Project was developed at the Brandon Neighbourhood Renewal Corporation (BNRC) during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, in March 2021, as a response to a lack of resources amidst widespread closures across the city. These closures left vulnerable and homeless populations quite literally out in the cold, and Ask Auntie stepped in to fill the gaps, with a focus on providing support to Indigenous people.

Ask Auntie provides an array of supports to individuals in need of everything from a hot coffee and access to hygiene supplies to a community mailbox. Program Coordinator Florence Halcrow explains that the community mailbox allows the vulnerable and homeless population in Brandon to make copies of their ID and keep the originals safe.

The Blue Door project, another branch of Ask Auntie, solved the problem of major resource gaps created by Covid-19 by providing a space to eat meals provided by shelters and food banks, a place to use washrooms and access hygiene supplies, and somewhere to fill out applications for housing, income assistance, or identification, all while adhering to social distancing practices.

Ask Auntie currently has four staff members, two working out of BNRC and two at the Blue Door, as well as volunteers and practicum students. By establishing relationships with precariously housed individuals and working with them to create pathways through colonial structures, Ask Auntie is helping protect tenancies and create access to housing. The grassroots model the project follows means that the Ask Aunties work is broad and varied, and they meet program participants where they are at.

Halcrow says “It takes a good network and community to make something like this happen. We wouldn’t be able to do it on our own.”