

# Building Community Partnerships and Specialized Shelter Programs for 2SLGBTQIA+ Safety and Possibility



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# Agenda

Safe Emergency Shelter for  
2SLGBTQ+ Communities:  
Context & Challenges

Pacewood: Toronto's First  
Adult LGBTQ Shelter

Homes First and The 519:  
Consultation and Collaboration

What We've Accomplished

The Realities of Collaboration:  
Challenges & Points of Stress

Conclusion: Emergency Shelter  
for 2SLGBTQ+ Communities Now!

Q&A

# The Context

**Roughly 7300 People**

are currently experiencing homelessness in Toronto

**3.1 %**

of that total identify as trans or non-binary

**12%**

\*\*\*\*\*

**Less than 1 %**

Of all shelter beds are specifically designated for 2SLGBTQIA Populations

**What's On Offer**

- Only 5 emergency shelter beds for queer homeless youth
- 50 beds of transitional housing for queer homeless youth
- Until November 2022: Absolutely zero beds for queer adults!

# Why This Matters

**GREATER RISK OF DISCRIMINATION AND VIOLENCE  
FOR 2SLGBTQ+ SHELTER CLIENTS**

**DEVIL'S BARGAIN: ACCESS SHELTER, SURRENDER  
PERSONAL SAFETY OR IDENTITY**

**GENDER / SEXUAL OPPRESSION DURING INTAKE  
+ CASE MANAGEMENT DOCUMENTATION**





**DEVELOPING  
SUSTAINABLE & SAFE  
2SLGBTQ+ HOUSING  
MODELS**

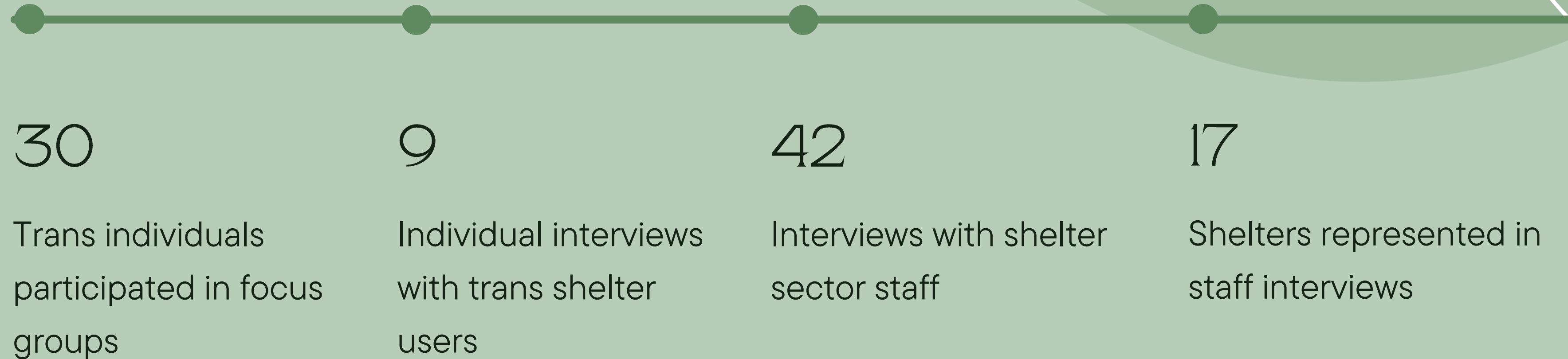
COMMUNITY CONSULTATION AND  
REVIEW - 1322 BLOOR STREET WEST

June 2022

**THE 519**

# Housing Advocacy at The 519: Urgent Pleas Falling on Deaf Ears

# 2002 Consultation



# 2022 Consultation



121

Individuals participated  
in focus groups

15

Key informant interviews

9+

Community partner agencies  
involved in the process



# Take-Aways/Recommendations

## Queer Strength

Building home and  
community in the space

## Queer Vulnerability

Lack of safe access for trans  
women

## Physical Design

No identifying  
signage/decoration outside,  
plenty inside. As much privacy  
as possible

## Programming

Health supports, food  
programming, skills training  
and employment support

## Staffing

Staff should reflect  
residents and be trauma-  
informed and aware of harm  
reduction best practice

## Thoughtful Protocols /

Warm and welcoming intake,  
community agreements and  
restorative justice



# Pacewood: Fast Facts and History

- A small emergency shelter with 20-bed capacity\*
- Owned and operated by Homes First in downtown Toronto
- Site is dedicated to LGBTQ+ newcomers, with 50% beds reserved for trans, non-binary, gender-diverse persons
- Two floors of beds arranged in open-dorm setting
- Kitchen, dining room and lower level common area on-site
- The 519 acts as referral agency and completes initial intake
- Warm referral, transfer is coordinated with Homes First staff
- Site is equipped with 24-hour frontline support

# Timeline

**The 519 launch Trans Hostel Access Project, recruiting diverse trans folks to deliver training to the shelter sector, started by Kyle Scanlon and others**

**City of Toronto support a trans community consultation - research led by Christina Strang and Monica Forrester**

2001

**Homes First purchase a small, formerly-mixed use building on Bloor West and renovate it to be run as the new home for Savards**

2002

2002



2020

**City of Toronto and Homes First management decide to shut down Savards, given that new COVID social distancing protocols make running the program impractical. Savards clients and staff team are both relocated to the Strathcona Hotel in downtown Toronto, which operates as a COVID emergency response shelter until April 2023**

# Timeline

2021

**The City's Shelter, Support and Housing Administration (SSHA) express interest in funding a new shelter program on the former site of Savards. Homes First management pitches the idea of an adult 2SLGBTQ+ shelter - which SSHA accepts.**

June 2022

**The 519 publishes report following community consultation commissioned by The City of Toronto**

October 2022

**The 519 receives funding to deliver Housing Supports and develop Sector Capacity Building training**

November 2022

**The 519 collaborates with Homes First Society in opening first 2SLGBTQ adult shelter space in Toronto**

# Strengths of the Program

## Addressing Queer Vulnerability

First of its kind in Toronto to be intentionally structured for LGBTQ+ safety  
Priority access for trans women addresses special vulnerabilities of this population.

## Warm Transfers / Thoughtful Protocols

- Careful transition with 519 staff assisting new Pacewood clients assisting with orientation to site
- 519's handling of intakes greatly lessens chances/frequency of gender-based oppression, transphobia, homophobia
- Warm and welcoming intake, community agreements and
- restorative justice

## Carefully-Tailored Supports

- Health supports, food programming, skills training and employment support, referrals to gender-affirming medical care and pharmacies
- The 519 and Homes First offer follow-up housing supports once clients move out into the community for clients to maintain their housing and build supports in their new neighbourhoods

## Deep, informed client engagement

- Individualized client case plans are created with the 519 when there is potential for a client to be discharged/relocated
- Low client to staff ratios allows for more engagement with the housing help worker and intensive case management staff to further support client's needs and goals

# Stats and Successes

32 out of 50+  
Referrals accommodated

75% exit shelter  
to preferred  
housing option

25% discharged to  
alternative shelter bed

50% beds  
reserved for  
TNBGD folks

Currently 11 residents  
identify as TNBGD

30+ countries of  
origin

Largest demographic -  
Afro-Caribbean, Middle  
Eastern, South Asian

11 residents  
placed in  
permanently  
housing!

Since November 2022



# Partnering: Challenges and Points of Stress

Organizational Size and  
Staffing Protocols

Shelter Provision vs. Advocacy

Navigating Different Roles and  
Relationships with Clients

Shelter Standards

# Conclusions/Wrapping Up

**WE NEED MORE SAFE 2SLGBTQIA+ SHELTERS NOW!**

**CHALLENGES ARE NO EXCUSE FOR INACTION**

**STRONG, INTENTIONAL PARTNERSHIPS ENSURE  
THAT 2SLGBTQIA+ SHELTER PROGRAMS EMBODY  
SHELTER & CULTURAL EXPERTISE**

