

Rising Stars

Project: Investigating the feasibility of a co-op housing project for people living with mental health challenges in Hamilton

Primary Contact: Lance Dingman (dingmanlance@gmail.com / 289-683-5175)

Secondary contacts: Jen Chivers (jen@hamiltonpoverty.ca); James Kemp (jamesmpkemp@hotmail.com)

Context:

Rising Stars is a cooperative housing project currently in the ideation and development phase. The project aims to develop a consumer-controlled housing co-op for people living with mental health challenges in Hamilton. This kind of communal housing project was explored in a feasibility assessment conducted in 2006 by the Centre for Research and Education in Human Services in partnership with the Hamilton Addiction and Mental Health Network. The feasibility assessment explored two aspects of the project: 1) the vision for this innovative approach to housing for consumers/survivors, and 2) clarification of the concept and implementation plans. The report concluded that gaps remain in housing choices for people with mental health issues, and that a consumer-run co-op model is one option for providing stable, affordable housing to a subset of consumers that supports their mental health recovery and management. The report also outlined recommendations for the housing co-op model and potential funding sources for the project. Despite these efforts, the Rising Stars vision was not realized due to a lack of funding and, subsequently, loss of stakeholder interest and capacity. Lance Dingman, who sat on a committee to inform the feasibility study, and who is a board member of the Mental Health Rights Coalition of Hamilton, is hoping to revive the idea and take next steps towards implementing the project.

Research needs:

Lance has outlined the need to secure funding and stakeholder buy-in for Rising Stars. As the feasibility study for the project was conducted in 2006, Lance requires up-to-date information to address anticipated barriers to the project. These potential barriers include:

- A changed political landscape from 2006 to now, including a shift in attitudes towards those with disabilities and obstruction of new social programs for people living with disabilities,

- Community NIMBYism towards social housing projects,
- The need for empirical data to convince stakeholders about the cost-effectiveness.

One way to gather up-to-date information on feasibility is to research community co-op housing projects attempted since 2006 to understand their success factors and challenges they faced. Researching failed cases can also shed light on some of the barriers Rising Stars will face and ways these barriers can be navigated.

Research Question(s):

1) What factors have enabled the successful development of housing co-ops in the last ~15 years? What were their challenges? Factors to consider:

- How, if at all, did the project champions create buy-in from municipal stakeholders?
- How, if at all, did the project champions navigate community NIMBYism?
- Did the project champions explore the cost effectiveness of the co-op model compared to other housing models? If so, what was their assessment of the cost effectiveness of the co-op model?

2) What factors led to the *unsuccessful* development of housing co-ops in the last ~15 years?

3) Where does co-op fit into the current housing landscape? What's the feasibility of co-op housing in general – why/why aren't they being built?

Research Activities:

This research will likely involve identifying and contacting co-op housing projects in Hamilton and comparative municipalities in the province and conducting in-depth qualitative interviews with representatives of the organizations. These findings will be compiled and synthesized into a set of "cases" that help answer the research questions.

Audience and use of the research:

The audience for this research is Lance Dingman, his supporters, and other community stakeholders and mobilizers. The practical value of this research rests on the assumption that Lance and other mobilizers will be taking the results of this work and using it to support strategic activities like community

dialogue/discourse, grant applications, and other forms of stakeholder engagement and advocacy.

Deliverable:

Plain language research reports with context, methods, findings, and discussion/conclusion.

Timeline:

Winter semester project (January to April 2023).

Community Partner Role:

The community partner(s) will help to refine the project scope, collaborate on a methodology, be available for consultation when needed, and review major project deliverables. They will be available for consultation as needed and meet regularly with the team according to a mutually agreed upon schedule.

Interest for Students:

This project will be of interest to students who are interested in social housing, cooperative living models, and mental health.