



CANADA MORTGAGE AND HOUSING CORPORATION

PROJECT PROFILE

The Buffalo

Red Deer, Alberta



The Buffalo is an historic hotel in downtown Red Deer that now provides permanent homes for 40 formerly “hard to house” people. But it is precisely those people the Buffalo is designed to help.

By taking a “housing first” approach the partners in this project have been able to break the cycle of homelessness for a highly vulnerable group of tenants.

The Affordable Housing Solution

Re-developing the Buffalo as affordable housing was a joint venture of Potter’s

Highlights

To break the cycle of homelessness a renovated Red Deer hotel is giving priority to housing some of the city’s most vulnerable street people.

Client group: Homeless individuals with mental health diagnoses and/or addictions.

Developer: Potter’s Hands Development Ltd.

Form of tenure: Rental

Number of units: 40

Who was involved? Canadian Mental Health Association (Red Deer); Potter’s Hands Development Ltd.; CMHC; Alberta Housing and Urban Affairs; City of Red Deer.

Hands Development Ltd., which owns the building, and the Red Deer branch of the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA), which manages it and operates the related support programs. To get the project off the ground, CMHC provided an interest-free PDF loan which was used to help cover the costs of an environmental site assessment, property appraisal, architectural services, development permits, and legal services. Potter’s Hands bought the building for

\$1.3 million and received \$960,000 from CMHC’s Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program (RRAP) to renovate it for use by CMHA’s clients. Renovations to the Buffalo also included an on-site restaurant that can give tenants ready access to healthier nutritional choices. Tenants can subscribe to a monthly meal plan for a nominal fee, and starting in January 2010 the restaurant will also be used as a training facility.

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CMHA provides around the clock staffing at the Buffalo, and its annual program budget for the facility—about \$609,000—comes from funds provided to the City of Red Deer by the Alberta Department of Housing and Urban Affairs, and from the Central Alberta United Way. Rents are set at \$450 per month and additional subsidies are available on ten of the units for tenants facing extreme hardship. The rent includes free laundry, internet and local telephone services.

Red Deer's homeless/at risk population is estimated between 100 and 200 people, of which over 80 percent have a history of mental illness, addiction or both. The tenants of the Buffalo may have

CMHC Contact

Contact a representative of CMHC's Affordable Housing Centre
www.cmhc.ca/contactahc

experienced long periods of homelessness or frequent attempts in other housing settings. Since individuals may be coming from a prolonged period of living on the street, the role of staff is simply to engage and develop rapport with individuals, help them meet basic needs, and to ensure security of the building. However, tenants can access the on-site services of a psychiatrist and addictions counsellors, and it is cause for celebration when they approach staff voluntarily to request that help.

The housing first model used at the Buffalo recognizes stable accommodation as a necessary prerequisite to help formerly homeless people stabilize their lives and brings supports into the housing setting. It is a non-judgmental approach that reverses the priorities of the continuum model, screening in rather than screen out applicants with the most complex needs and providing immediate permanent housing to those most at risk.