

# Evaluation of HerWay Home:

Promising approaches and outcomes of an FASD Prevention program for substance using women with complex issues

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# HerWay Home's Origins & Overview



In 2013, HerWay Home (HWH) opened in Victoria, Canada after five years of planning.

**HerWay Home** offers:

a multi-service, holistic drop-in and outreach program for pregnant women and new mothers who use substances and who may also be affected by mental illness, trauma and/or violence.





# HerWay Home's Aims

- **Overarching goal** is to support women to:
  - have healthy births
  - decrease their problematic substance use, and
  - actively parent their children
  
- **Specific goals** are to help women and families experience:
  - Healthy outcomes through improved nutrition, housing, medical care, and social interactions
  - Increased parenting capacity and likelihood of retaining custody
  - Positive relationships regardless of custody

# HerWay Home's Philosophy:

**Relational** – focus on safe, respectful, non-judgemental relationships

**Women-centred** – women set their own goals for service

**Harm reduction** – focus on minimizing harm and promoting safety

**Recognizing the mother-child connection**



**Trauma informed** - appreciating that many women have experienced serious trauma

**Holistic & Outreach** - addressing women's and children's needs holistically

**Culturally grounded** – employing cultural approaches & appreciating impacts of colonization







# HerWay Home's Activities

- Group Support (3 groups)
- Outreach (engaging women; accompaniment)
- One to one support and counselling
- Practical Support (transport, lunches & food vouchers)
- Health supports
  - (access to PHN, NP; linkage with MD, midwife, dental hygienist)
- Advocacy + linking to community resources
  - (e.g., housing, child welfare, income assistance)



## Between opening in 2013 and May 2018:

- **220** women have accessed HWH
- **114** women and **95** babies were served in 2017
- **68** are actively engaged per month
- **41%** self-identify as being Indigenous





# HerWay Home Evaluation

## Key evaluation research questions:

- What are HerWay Home's philosophy, key activities, strengths and challenges?
- What has been HWH's progress in achieving outcomes for women & their child(ren) and for community partners?

## Evaluation Process:

- Interviews with clients, program staff & service partners
- Output data and document review
- Social return on investment (SROI)







# Evaluation Findings: Participants' Perspectives

- **96% - 100%** reported feeling safe, respected, and that they trusted staff at HerWay Home
- **100%** believed that their needs were met
- **100%** would – or had – recommended HWH to a friend
  
- What women liked most:
  - Groups and/or connecting with other women
  - Staff and their caring, non-judgemental approach



# Outcomes for HWH Participants

## “Most significant change”:

- Improved mental wellness
- Quitting or substantially reducing alcohol or drug use
- Feeling supported
- Retaining/regaining custody; improving mother-child connection
- Feeling strong, grounded, confident, hopeful

*When I was first pregnant and then had my son, I was new to being in the world without drugs and alcohol. I always thought I was below others. I have been empowered by HerWay Home. I know that I have people to support me no matter what I do.*





# In women's words:

## Improved wellness; Quitting or reducing substance use

*If I didn't have the HerWay Home classes and the baby, I'd still be drinking and smoking. I do cleanse myself periodically, but now it's total. And it's a great feeling – soberness – seeing things with a real set of eyes.*

## Regaining/regaining custody

*HerWay Home is the reason I have my son with me! I had support before the baby's birth and I have support now.*

## Feeling supported

*As a recovering alcohol and drug addict, it really helps to have supports to work through the triggers. I have been through so much growing up, and as a young adult and mother, it really helps to have someone to talk to.*

## Feeling strong, grounded confident, hopeful

*Since working with [HWH staff] I have been setting goals for myself and following through on them. Every day I'm feeling more confident and more hopeful and easier about my future. I'm having more courage facing the future.*



# Outcomes – by the numbers

- **100%** felt supported and less isolated
- **83%** quit or had reduced/safer substance use
- **80%** of women's children now live with them or their family
- **73%** of women had a healthy infant &
  - **82%** of infants were not substance-affected at birth





# Social Return on Investment

## Conservative analysis, based on 4 variables:

- Homelessness prevented
  - Healthy births; Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder avoided
  - Child removals avoided
  - Child(ren) returned from care
- **Social Return on Investment Ratio = \$1.00:\$4.45**  
Social value created on selected outcomes: **\$2.5M**





# Successes & Lessons learned

- Working with more women than anticipated
- Filling a critical niche in the community
- Approach is in keeping with philosophy
- Relational, non-judgemental approach is foundational
- Providing outreach, one-to-one support and groups is key
- Harm reduction is helping women achieve their goals





# Questions & Discussion



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