



HerWay Home:

Lessons Learned and Promising Practices for Supporting Perinatal Substance Using Women in Community



Amanda Seymour & Deborah Rutman

Healthy Mothers and Healthy Babies conference
March 2, 2018





Presentation objectives

Learning objectives

- Share *HerWay Home Evaluation* highlights &
- Facilitate reflection about emerging practice issues and promising approaches





HerWay Home's Origins & Overview

- **In 2013, HerWay Home (HWH)** opened in Victoria, BC 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 or have used substances and who may also be affected by mental illness, trauma and/or violence.

I figured... well, what's the point? So I just used and used and used. The more depressed I got, the more I used. I figured I was going to wind up dead on the street somewhere OD'd. I did twice, but they brought me back.





HerWay Home's Aims

- **HWH's overarching goal** is to support women with high-risk pregnancies 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

- **HWH's philosophical 'pillars'** include being:
 - Relationship-based
 - Harm reducing
 - Trauma-informed and culturally safe
 - Women-centred
 - Wholistic
 - Outreach-based
 - Recognizing the mother-child connection



HerWay Home's Activities

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



HerWay Home Participants

Between opening in 2013 and December 31 2016:

- **164** women have accessed HerWay Home (as of Sept 30 2017, the # is 195)
- **100** women and **95** babies were served in 2016/17
- **59** are actively engaged in program per month
- **44%** self-identify as being Indigenous





HerWay Home Participants

At intake:

- **59%** were in the 1st or 2nd trimester
- **25%** were engaged in problematic substance use
- **30%** were new to recovery (3 months or less)
- Majority lived in inadequate housing; some were homeless
- Many had had negative experiences with health services





HerWay Home Evaluation

➤ Two Phase evaluation

- Phase 1: Process evaluation
- Phase 2: Summative evaluation

➤ Key evaluation research questions:

- What are HerWay Home's:
 - Philosophy and approaches
 - Key activities
 - Strengths, challenges and lessons learned &
- What has been HWH's progress in achieving outcomes for women & their child(ren) and for community partners?



Evaluation Process



- Mixed methods design:
 - Interviews, focus group, output data and document review
- A total of **60** people participated:
 - 28** HWH participants
 - 6** HWH staff, and
 - 26** community partners.
- Social return on investment (SROI)



Evaluation Findings: Participants' Perspectives

- **Between 96% and 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

I don't have family or friends in my life. I'm pretty isolated, so having the program and support makes a difference.

I've been able to turn my life around and stop using drugs daily. And it's because of HerWay Home and [HWH staff] saying, “You're not going to get your son back unless you get your shit together.”





Outcomes for HWH Participants

➤ “Most significant change”:

- Retaining/regaining custody; having healthy baby; improving mother-child connection
- Feeling strong, grounded, confident, hopeful



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



Outcomes for HWH Participants

➤ In women's words:

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. It makes staying on the recovery path easier.

I am going to have my children returned – they've been in care for two years and I couldn't get many visits, but that changed when I started going to HerWay Home and being consistent about it. Now I am seeing my kids five days per week.

I have an anxiety disorder...that makes it difficult for me to socialize. So it was positive for me to be involved with the



HerWay Home Outcomes – by the numbers

- 73% healthy births/healthy infant & 82% of babies not substance affected at birth

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.

- 83% of women quit using substances or had reduced/safer 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.

- 80% of women's children now live with them or their family

I had my baby and was able to keep it. MCFD had threatened to remove the baby unless I pulled myself together very quickly. HerWay Home staff were advocates for me and gave good feedback about me. It was the strong support



Social Return on Investment

Social Value Calculation – 81 women (2015 – 2016 new intakes) Program Investment for 2015/16 \$550,000

| | | |
|---|--|------------------------|
| Homelessness prevented | \$65,102 x 13 ¹ women | \$846,326 |
| NICU mitigated | \$12,315 x 30 ² women | \$369,450 |
| FASD avoided | \$25,618 x 13 ³ women | \$333,034 ⁴ |
| Child removals avoided | \$31,172 x 20 ⁵ infants not apprehended | \$623,440 |
| Child(ren) returned from care | \$31,172 x 9 ⁶ families w/older children returned | \$280,548 |
| Social value created on selected outcomes | | \$2,452,798 |
| Social return on investment ratio | | 1:4.45 |



HerWay Home Collaborations

- Community partners and collaborations are key – helps ensure seamless support

HWH works with women who are still using or involved, and that is really helpful. They can refer the young women to our program once they meet our criteria, and we can refer women to them when they don't meet our criteria.

- Formal partnership provides access to housing

It is seamless between HWH and us. For example, one of us will start a housing application with a woman; she may not be able to complete it with us, but then when she gets more information, she can complete it with someone from HWH.



Outcomes for Community Partners

➤ Fulfils a unique role in the community

Only HerWay Home works with the high-risk moms who may still be active in their addiction. There isn't anywhere else for these women to go.

➤ Helps prevent apprehensions/return of children

I've seen children come out of foster care and/or the strengthening of family connections, because of HerWay Home... HerWay Home allows for strengthening of bonds and gives women some hope.

➤ Clearer understanding of harm reduction



Strengths & Successes



- Working with more women than anticipated
- Filling a critical niche in the community
- Approach is in keeping with philosophy
- Outcomes are very strong



Promising Approaches & Lessons Learned

- Relational, non-judgemental approach is foundational
- Harm reduction is helping women achieve their goals
- Providing both outreach/one-to-one support & groups is key
- Having excellent staff is critical
- Relationship-building between HWH staff and community partners is essential
- HerWay Home is well situated to provide leadership



Questions & Discussion





For more info...

Deb Rutman
Drutman@uvic.ca

Amanda Seymour
Amanda.Seymour@viha.ca

