



So Others Might Eat

www.some.org

Clean and Sober Housing: A Preferred Housing Choice for Many Seeking Housing

AN INDEPENDENT STUDY OF SOME'S
SINGLE ADULT AFFORDABLE HOUSING PROGRAMS



Sheri Chaney Jones, M.A.

Erin Gerbec, Ph.D.

Elizabeth Pafford, M.P.A.

Jay Seetharaman, B.S., B.A.

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Introduction

Washington, D.C. has the highest rates of homelessness compared to the U.S.'s major cities. There are 124 homeless people for every 10,000 residents, more than twice the national average.¹ SOME (So Others Might Eat) is an interfaith organization that is working towards reducing homelessness and improving the quality of life in Washington, D.C. through affordable housing and programming for single adults, families, and seniors. The goal of SOME's Affordable Housing for Single Adults is to provide safe, affordable, long-term housing with supportive services available for single adults (18 years of age or older), including the elderly and disabled, who have low incomes and/or have experienced homelessness. Programming includes a service component to encourage independent living while creating an atmosphere that fosters social interactions.

Housing experts agree homelessness rates are too high; yet there is often debate on the most effective housing model for a community. For example, Housing First, or permanent supportive housing, is an approach that prioritizes permanent, affordable housing as quickly as possible to people experiencing homelessness. Supportive services and connections to community-based programs and supports are then provided to prevent individuals from experiencing homelessness again. Housing First models often require few to no treatment or behavioral contingencies for individuals or families to remain housed, meaning clients receive housing regardless of employment, income, criminal record, or substance use. Studies show that Housing First leads to better outcomes for individuals, such as fewer health hospitalizations, increased housing stability, and increased harm reduction.² Housing First has been shown to reduce costs to the community because housed people are less likely to use emergency services. In one study, every \$10 invested in Housing First services resulted in an average savings of nearly \$22.³ Improvements in mental health and substance abuse, however, are inconclusive.⁴

In contrast, Sober Living Houses are alcohol and drug-free environments for those who wish to abstain from alcohol and drugs. Sober Living Houses often offer no formal treatment, though strongly encourage attendance in 12-step groups. Residents typically pay rent and utilities themselves.

A recent evaluation study of SOME's clean and sober housing model, conducted by independent research firm Measurement Resources Company, provides evidence that a clean and sober model is complementary to a Housing First model that is highly effective in achieving desired client and community outcomes for the homeless in Washington, D.C. SOME follows a unique permanent supportive housing model in which programs and services are delivered in a clean and sober environment. SOME operates nearly 500 units of Single Room Occupancy (SRO) and efficiency apartments across eight houses in which residents sign a lease and pay rent at a fixed percentage of their gross monthly income. SOME's Single Adult Housing program goal is to help residents find a way to live a better life. Longer term goals of the program are to see residents permanently set free from addictions, homelessness and emotional despair. Residents are encouraged to become physically and emotionally healthy; educationally equipped to participate in society and sustain housing; and develop the ability to create and sustain loving supportive relationships with others.

This report highlights the results of the evaluation study.

¹ The U.S. Conference of Mayors and National Alliance to End Homelessness to Release 2016 Hunger and Homelessness Survey

² National Alliance to End Homelessness. <http://www.endhomelessness.org>

³ Paula Goering, Scott Veldhuizen, Aimee Watson, Carol Adair, Brianna Kopp, Eric Latimer, Geoff Nelson, Eric MacNaughton, David Streiner & Tim Aubry (2014). National At Home/Chez Soi Final Report. Calgary, AB: Mental Health Commission of Canada. Retrieved from: <http://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca>

⁴ Carol Pearson, Gretchen Locke, Ann Elizabeth Montgomery & Larry Buron (2007). The Applicability of Housing First Models to Homeless Persons with Serious Mental Illness. U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Office of Policy Development and Research. Retrieved from: <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/publications/hsgfirst.pdf>

Examining the Impact of Clean and Sober Supportive Housing

SOME commissioned a study in Fall 2016 to assess the opinions, attitudes, and experiences of single adult residents as it relates to housing program activities, implementation, and program effectiveness. An independent research firm, Measurement Resources Company (MRC), assessed the effectiveness of SOME's clean and sober housing model. Single adult resident insights were gathered via a resident survey and focus groups to answer the following research questions:

- **What are the benefits of the supported housing model?**
- **What are the barriers to achieving goals and independence?**
- **What are the residents' attitudes towards clean and sober housing?**

Evaluation Overview



MRC utilized a mixed-method design to assess resident perceptions and attitudes towards SOME housing and the clean and sober housing model. A survey of all residents and focus groups with each of the eight single adult residences were conducted in October 2016.

Resident Survey

Program Managers at all eight houses asked residents to complete a paper-and-pencil survey designed by MRC to measure residents' attitudes and perceptions of SOME housing. Specifically, the survey examined all residents' attitudes towards their housing community, the clean and sober housing model, program services, program success and the impact of their health status. A sufficient sample size (263 residents) produced high confidence in the results.

Focus Groups

A random selection of single adult residents in each of the eight SOME houses participated in focus groups in October 2016. The primary goals of the focus groups were to discuss in more detail the residents' preferences in a housing model, residents' goals, the perceived effectiveness of SOME program activities, and to provide qualitative support and context for the survey results. To encourage participation, focus group participants (66 residents) received \$20 at the end of the focus group.

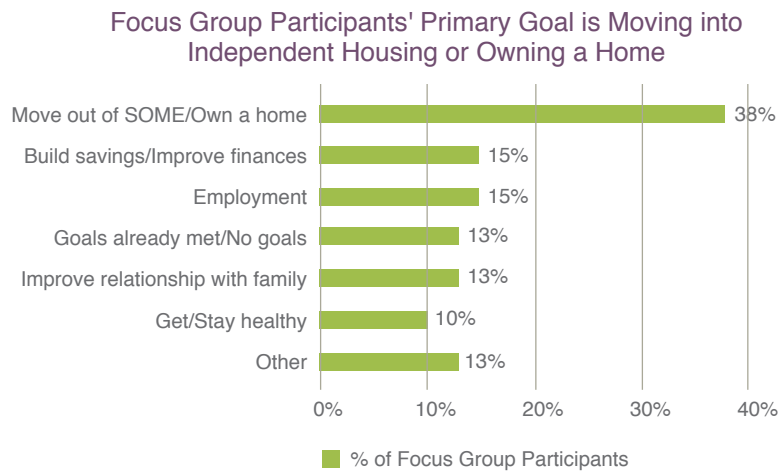
Single Adult Housing is More Than a Place to Live



Individuals enter SOME from different walks of life with a common need for affordable housing. Single adults enter SOME’s housing program through SOME drug and alcohol treatment programs or other referrals, such as homeless shelters. SOME provides affordable housing and supportive services to help residents address their needs and work towards individual goals. Ultimately, the goal for nearly all residents is to move out of SOME housing and successfully transition to independent living.

Moving into independent housing is the number one reported goal of residents

When asked to talk about their own goals, 38 percent of focus group participants said that moving out of supportive housing with shared spaces or owning their own home is the goal they are working towards. Building savings, improving finances, and gaining employment were other common goals residents were actively working on with SOME staff.



Benefits achieved by SOME’s housing model

SOME’s housing programs work with residents to develop the skills needed for a successful transition to permanent housing. SOME actively works with each resident to develop a life plan and set goals for personal, educational, social, financial growth, as well as connecting residents to services and opportunities to use their skills. Residents report that the traditional goals of supportive housing are important to the residents, and most are meeting at least half of their goals.



Key Benefits of a Supportive Housing Model

SOME services are important and helpful

SOME provides a range of supportive services to residents, including health and wellness, recovery support, emotional health, housing services coordination and linkages to other community services. SOME also provides opportunities for social activities and creating a life plan. In the survey, 84 percent of residents overall felt these services were important or very important and 77 percent of residents rated these services as helpful or very helpful.

SOME's Housing Program Supportive Services	% Very Important or Important	% Very Helpful or Helpful
Life Plan	87%	75%
Health and Wellness Program	86%	79%
Support from House Service Coordinator	86%	79%
Recovery Support Services	85%	79%
Emotional Health Services	84%	77%
Link to other Community Services	83%	76%
Social Activities	77%	76%

Health and Wellness Programs



The most useful, helpful programs to residents include:

- Healthy Eating Demonstrations
- Exercise
- Recovery Support Services



“[SOME staff] brought in healthy programs. She taught us how to eat healthy food.”

“I have a list of foods I should and should not eat.”

“SOME gives out fruits and vegetables. They encourage us to go to the dentist and use the medical services.”

–Focus Group participants

Recovery support services are highly regarded by single adult residents

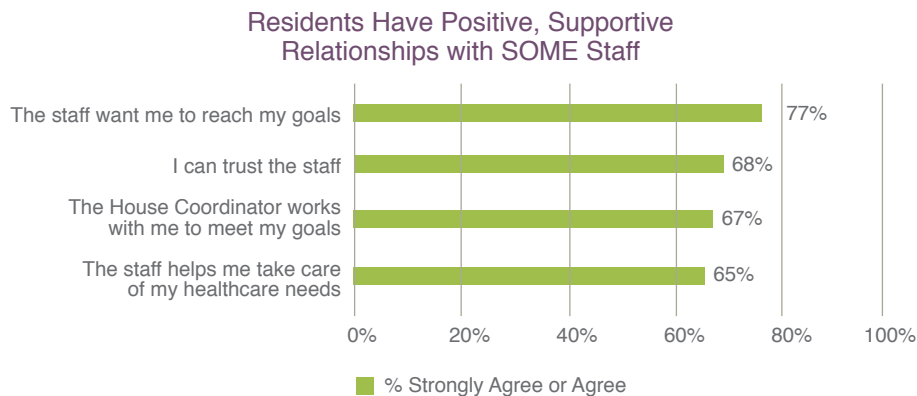
Residents talked positively about the life-changing experience of going through SOME's addiction treatment program and moving into transitional housing with a new frame of mind. Residents viewed this as critical before moving into SOME's housing programs to continue to learn how to live independently.

Referrals and linkages to community services are valued

Focus group participants discussed their experiences in being linked to services. Common themes from these discussions show that select staff provide or refer needed services to residents. Residents stated that help is always there if someone chooses to accept it.

Positive, supportive relationships with staff help residents achieve goals

In the survey, 79 percent said that the support of their House Service Coordinator was helpful or very helpful. Seventy-seven percent of residents agreed or strongly agreed the staff want residents to reach their life goals and two in three residents reported trusting SOME staff. In the focus groups, residents most often described staff as caring, good listeners, confidential with their personal information, and professional. Some residents reported having meaningful, helpful relationships with SOME staff and shared stories about staff going out of their way to help.



Residents are making healthier choices in their nutrition and finances

Residents reported that SOME's single adult housing program helps them make healthier choices. The top areas where the program helps are nutrition and finances. Focus group participants discussed how helpful it is to have charts in public areas, activities and other reinforcements about good eating habits. Regarding finances, residents said the program helps them establish their credit, learn how to budget and help build a savings account. Others feel that the program has helped them re-frame their mind to have the will and motivation to make good decisions. Three of the survey participants' top four areas of trouble – nutrition, exercise, and money management – align with the top three ways residents report the program helps them make healthy choices.



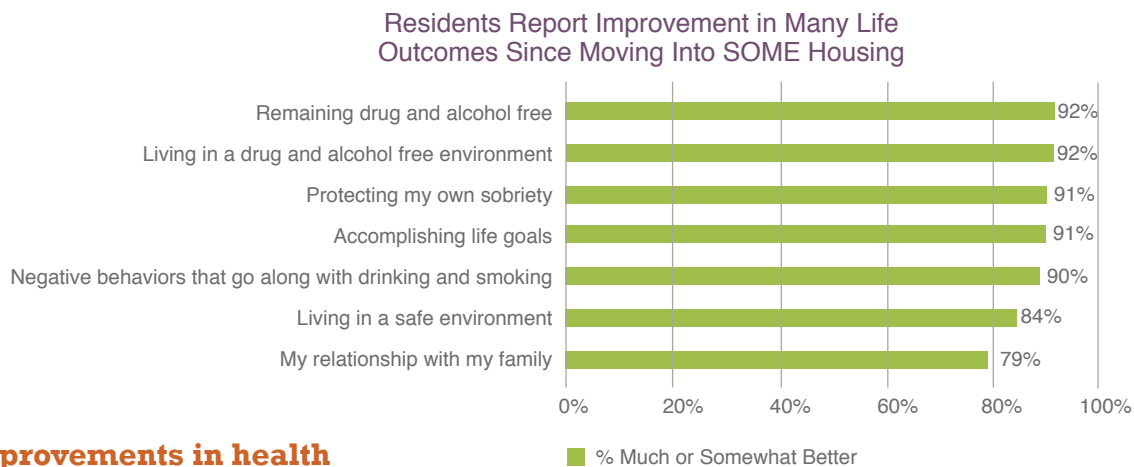
Residents are Experiencing Positive Outcomes



Residents enrolled in the SOME's housing program experience many positive outcomes and key benefits of a supportive housing model. Survey and focus group results show that residents receive helpful supportive services, experience an array of positive personal outcomes and tools to make healthy choices, and have meaningful relationships with staff and a community of peers.

Residents report nearly unanimous improvements in sobriety and life choices

A large percentage of survey participants reported that since moving into SOME housing, they have seen their situation become somewhat or much better. Approximately nine in every ten residents reported that living in SOME's clean and sober supportive housing model resulted in improvements in remaining drug and alcohol free, living in a sober environment, one's ability to protect their own sobriety, accomplishing life goals, and a reduction in the negative behaviors that accompany drinking and smoking. When discussing the program's helpfulness to address their addiction, focus group participants most often lauded the program for providing a safe space to rebuild their lives and bond with others while in SOME's Sober Housing.



Improvements in health

Approximately 70 to 80 percent of residents reported experiencing improvements in health and well-being since moving into SOME housing. In addition, approximately half of residents reported having very good or excellent physical health, mobility, and emotional health at the time of the survey. Not as many residents rated themselves positively in making life choices.

In the focus groups, residents discussed having chronic conditions that they are learning to manage or physical disabilities that keep them from employment. SOME's housing program gives them an opportunity to focus on their health instead of worrying about maintaining housing. Mental health issues were also discussed by focus group participants. Through SOME's housing program and SOME clinic, residents can find emotional support and access emotional health services. One focus group participant said:

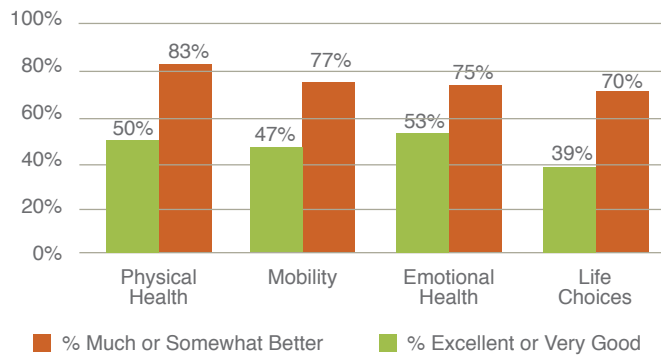


“I was doing consultation with ‘Miss T.’ for a year. It helped me get in touch with some things, my wife’s death and everything. It helped me a lot. It kept me in the program. I would have left without it.”

—Focus Group participant



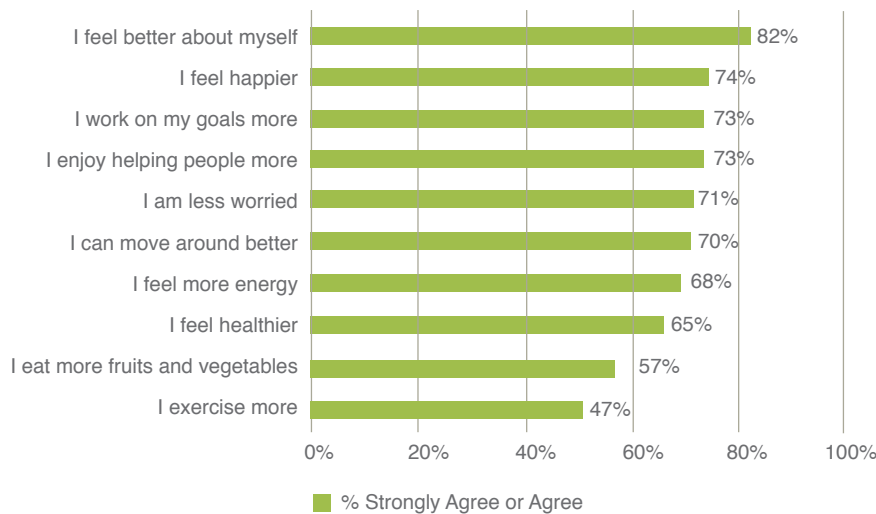
Residents Reported Health Improvement and Current Health Quality Since Moving into SOME Housing



Improvements in Healthy Behaviors and Attitudes

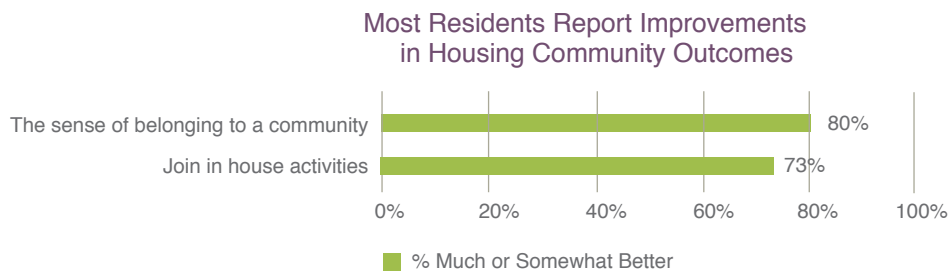
Survey participants reported improvements in healthy behaviors since moving into SOME housing. Of the survey questions, respondents agreed most on matters involving having more positive feelings about themselves. Working towards goals, enjoyment helping others and reduced worry were the next most commonly reported healthy behaviors. Fewer respondents reported eating more fruits and vegetables (57%) and exercising more (47%).

Survey Participants Report Increased Healthy Behaviors Since Moving into SOME Housing



Community living provides a support network

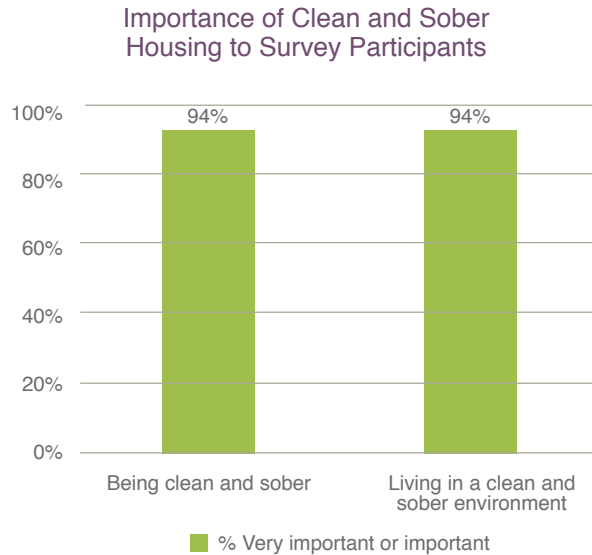
Residents reported making the best of things despite the common challenges of communal living with individuals from different walks of life. There is evidence from the surveys that SOME housing has resulted in an increased sense of community among residents. Seventy to eighty percent of residents reported an improvement in feeling a sense of belonging to a community and joining in activities since moving into SOME housing.



Attitudes Towards Clean and Sober Housing

Most residents prefer a clean and sober environment

Almost all (94%) of survey respondents reported that being clean and sober and living in a clean and sober environment is very important or important to them. Similarly, four in every five focus group participants (80%) prefer clean and sober housing.

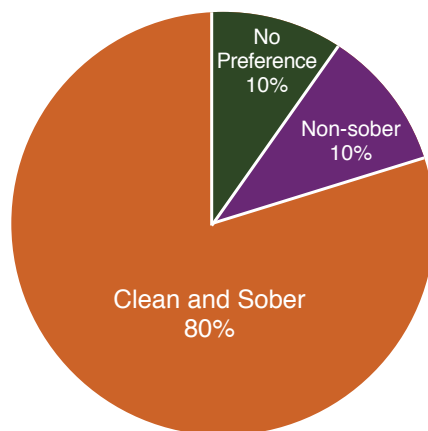


The majority of focus group participants concluded that an environment free of drugs and alcohol was most desirable for overall health and well-being. Residents’ attitudes towards clean and sober housing focused on the benefits of protecting sobriety and providing a health and safe environment.

Clean and sober housing protects sobriety for those who struggle with addiction

The presence of alcohol and drugs and the behavior of people under the influence of alcohol and drugs are triggers for some residents who struggle with addiction. The clean and sober model provides structure and motivation to abstain from substance use, even when others might be using. Focus group participants clearly stated that the sobriety requirement cuts down on the number of people who are relapsing. Residents’ primary perceived benefit of living in SOME’s clean and sober supportive housing is the protection of their sobriety.

Focus Group Participants’ Housing Preference

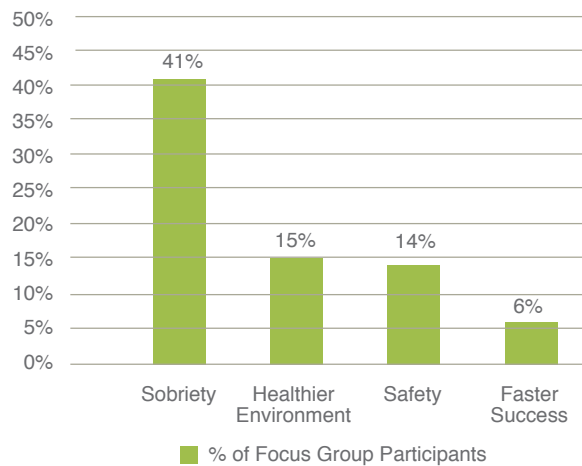




Clean and sober housing provides a healthy and safe environment for individuals to work on other areas of life

In focus groups, residents explained that they prefer sober housing because it fosters a healthier and more stable environment. Residents perceive it to be a healthier environment for making better decisions and being in a more emotionally stable atmosphere. Focus group participants specifically discussed that living in clean and sober housing helps them avoid the bad or risky behaviors that go along with drugs and alcohol and the threat to personal safety and theft.

Single Adult Residents' Perceived Benefits of Clean and Sober Housing





Barriers to Achieving Goals and Independence



In general, residents view SOME's clean and sober supportive housing as a stepping-stone to independence, but many are unable to move on. Examining and addressing the systemic and program-specific barriers to goal achievement and independence may increase the rate individuals achieve self-sufficiency.

Limited space in efficiency units and non-transferable vouchers stop the process towards independent living

When entering SOME, residents anticipate they are going to be placed in a long-term temporary housing unit, often a private room with shared kitchen and bath, receive services to get them back on their feet, then move into a fair-market or publicly subsidized apartment. Their experience, however, is that there are not enough efficiency units operated by SOME for those who wish to move into one and the District of Columbia Housing Authority does not allow the residents' SOME voucher to transfer to other, non-SOME properties in the city. Furthermore, other housing programs are not willing to place SOME residents because SOME residents are considered housed in a permanent place and no longer homeless.

Residents' Perceptions of the Reason They Cannot Achieve Independence

- Vouchers are not transferable
- SOME residents are considered permanently housed
- Concerned about additional expenses of living on one's own
- Do not understand the process to move out
- Discrimination/competition for vouchers with other programs and/or priority populations



“You have to have a budget, especially when you're on a fixed income.”

“Will power... there's nothing holding you back, except you.”

—Focus Group participants

Conclusion

Clean and sober housing, such as services provided by SOME, provides an effective permanent supportive housing model for the single adult residents. SOME's clean and sober supportive housing model provides a safe and healthy environment for individuals to focus on improving their lives and achieving their goals. Key services are viewed positively and many residents are experiencing positive outcomes, improved health and mobility, and a sense of community. Most residents prefer the current clean and sober housing model and those who struggle with addiction are more likely to be concerned that shifting to a non-sober model will jeopardize their recovery.

Through SOME, residents are experiencing the benefits of rapid-placement permanent supportive housing in a clean and sober environment that enables them to work towards a better life.





71 'O' Street, NW
Washington, DC 20001

Tel: 202.797.8806
Email: web@some.org
Web: www.some.org

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EIN# 23-7098123
UW# 8189
CFC# 74405