



How is Medicine Hat using HelpSeeker to support preventing/ending homelessness & beyond?

Jaime Rogers is the Manager, Homeless & Housing Development for the Medicine Hat Community Housing Society. She led the city's effort to achieve and maintain Functional Zero – the first community in Canada to reach this status in 2015.

Medicine Hatters have challenged themselves to go beyond homelessness: under the THRIVE initiative, community leaders are connecting systems planning across social challenges including: poverty reduction, food security, child and family wellness, economic development and addictions and mental health.

In blog, Jaime reflects on the role of technology and the HelpSeeker.org platform to support Medicine Hat's efforts to transform the operations of their social safety net

Today is January 24: It has been one year since HelpSeeker launched in Medicine Hat.

Community-wide tools to connect individuals to prevention programs and services in the homeless-serving system (any social services, really!) are limited, at best. Paper-based help guides, calendars, and street survival guides are the status quo, go-to medium to share information with other providers and individuals seeking out services.



The use of technology to help connect people to the services that they may need, or as a point of entry to assistance, is the way forward. Other connecting points that use technology to connect individuals exist; however, success and uptake varies from one city to the next. The difference in utility with the HelpSeeker app is that it is designed not only for the individual seeking out and exploring services, but also for the organizations and systems designed to serve those individuals.

Prevention is an area that needs significant investment in community, and the work to re-evaluate current system health has been continuous. HelpSeeker's dashboard data and the ability to use system-level information for community planning, especially in the area of prevention, is exciting and will

revolutionize how we reorganize the system and the way in which we engage with it. It provides a platform and encourages us to re-think how prevention could most effectively be delivered – as a system that engages with individuals, or as a system that people engage with. Or both?

Medicine Hat has a robust system of care, and it is nowhere near perfect. When an individual is connected with the Coordinated Access System, they are by our definition entering a system and assessed for the level and type of service that best meets their identified need(s). What most current systems of care offer is a response-based intervention whereby people need to meet a threshold to be eligible for services under the purview of that system, or those that connect directly with that system. One of the most common complaints for those entering our system of care is that it seems they have to wait for services until their situation was “**bad enough**” to get help – that waiting feels like a punishment.



This is a flaw of the system. Imagine knowing you need assistance – and seeking out the type of assistance that you need – because who knows best than the person experiencing it? What HelpSeeker offers is the ability for individuals to **self-identify when they need assistance**, and seek out services that may fall beyond the scope of current systems or those programs that do not have touchpoints to that system.

The impact of technology on social challenges, where client-centred approaches, transparency, service delivery excellence, and accountability has been minimal at best. **What is lacking in system mapping and access to information and data is current, real-time, publicly available information on services and availability of program spaces.** The flexibility for individuals to decide if they want to pursue a number of options for support – if they are going to be waitlisted for services or may not be eligible for services – should *always* be a choice. Access to information and services when people identify they need them, and not limited to when the system identifies they are needed for/with the individuals will be a foundation of a prevention framework in community.



Medicine Hat is ready for the full-scale transformation of our systems of care into one that is truly human-centred and driven; technology along with community will, grit and innovation will help us get a step closer.

Connect with us if you'd like to find out more: helpseeker.org